

Book Reviews

THE LETTERS TO THE COLOSSIANS AND TO PHILEMON

Douglas Moo

Nottingham: Apollos, 2008 471 pp £29.99hb ISBN: 9781844743414

So what does Moo make of Colossians? It *was* written by Paul (contra c. 60% of New Testament scholars). Good start! Following Clinton Arnold, Moo thinks (tentatively, we can't be completely sure) that the false teaching in Colossae was a syncretistic mix of local folk belief, local folk Judaism, and false notions of Christianity; not a pure form of any particular identifiable philosophy, but a blend of different elements. Persuasive. He has some excellent observations on the text: the deliberate parallels between the thanksgiving section of chapter 1 and the prayer; Paul's use of thanksgiving, convinced that 'true gratitude for God's grace is an important "offensive" measure against the false teaching'; a good discussion of the intractable problem of what 'the elements of the world' means in 2:8; why the realised eschatology in 2:12 does not imply non-Pauline authorship; why the most difficult verse in the book (2:18) is about worship offered *to* angels not *by* angels. 2:6–7 is confirmed as the heart and hinge of the book as a whole.

One oft-repeated comment Moo makes is that there is no direct reference to the Old Testament Law in Colossians. I don't think I was quite convinced by this given the references to circumcision in the letter (which he claims are 'very incidental') and the 'questions of food and drink...a festival or a new moon or a sabbath' in 2:16, which is *almost* entirely explained away here on the basis that there is no direct reference to the Mosaic Law in Colossians so this can't be one (though it does indicate Jewish influence apparently). I was a bit confused by this. I was also confused by some of the contortions on 3:18 concerning marriage, especially regarding the word 'be subject' (i.e. wives to your husbands), since more time seems to be spent here justifying Moo's view that men 'will often "submit" to their [wife's] needs, desires, and wishes,' which he (erroneously in my view) bases on Ephesians 5:21. Though he shows that the Greek word here is used to describe 'putting oneself under authority' in the case of believers and God, humans and the government, slaves and masters, children and parents, and says that husbands rightly exhibit some leadership in marriage, he seems more concerned to promote the view that Paul 'sets a trajectory that leads to a more equal sharing of all dimensions of the marriage

relationship.’ He rightly critiques *The Message* translation of ‘understand and support your husbands,’ as too weak, but I was left wondering whether he had not in fact reversed the meaning of the text in his own exposition of it, or at least moved along that ‘trajectory.’

Slavery, says Prof. Moo, ‘is ultimately incompatible with consistent biblical teaching, and it is to the church’s great discredit that it took so long to recognize that fact.’ There is an interesting discussion of this in the Philemon section, where he concludes that even though Paul does not say so, we can draw the inference from what he says that it is not right to own slaves. The influence of W. J. Webb’s book *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* is apparent here. Ultimately, however, he is clear that the book is not actually about slavery and its abolition, but more about fellowship in the gospel. He also makes a case that Philemon 6 is not about evangelism (despite the way it is translated in the NIV, ESV, RSV, and NRSV).

Professor Carson tells us in the Preface to expect ‘transparent hints as to the bearing of the biblical texts on today’s church.’ I confess to being a little disappointed that there are not more of these to help the preacher. Though perhaps I just didn’t get the hints. Still, this is a worthy shelf-mate for the classics on Colossians by F. F. Bruce and P. T. O’Brien.

LEE GATISS

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COLOSSIANS & PHILEMON: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 12.

Robert W. Wall

Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993/2010 225pp £9.99pb ISBN: 9780830840120

The purpose of the IVP New Testament Commentary Series is to provide readable and yet reliable biblical commentary to aid pastors and others as they minister in the context of the local church (note: the volume reviewed here is a new release in paperback of the 1993 hardback original). Volumes in this series are designed to include enough scholarly information to be helpful to preachers in their exegesis, while at the same time remaining accessible to users

who do not have formal theological training. These commentaries also provide contemporary applications of the biblical text.

Much of Wall's commentary is helpful, particularly his general introductions to the different sections of the letters. His treatments of certain details touching on controversial issues are, however, somewhat ambiguous and potentially confusing. Some examples include: first, in the introduction Wall defends briefly but helpfully the traditional position of Pauline authorship for Colossians. In a footnote, however, he seeks to relativize the authorship debate by affirming that what counts is not whether or not Paul wrote the letter, but rather the apostolic nature of its content. This statement could apply if Colossians were anonymous, but it is not. It must be questioned if a letter making such specific claims to authorship (Col 1:1; 4:18) can be taken seriously as canonical and authoritative if it is in fact pseudonymous.

Second, in the body of the commentary Wall draws the reader's attention to a few covenantal themes that appear in Colossians. Some of these references are helpful and are often missed by other commentators. Wall makes some confusing remarks, however, when he compares the Christian's covenantal relationship with God to that of Israel under Moses. Wall says that in both cases 'gracious initiatives' and 'obedient responses' secure salvation. This language sounds like the 'get in by grace, stay in by works' (covenantal nomism) mentality Paul is opposing. Wall, in fact, maintains that Paul is indeed arguing against this type of construct, and (happily) construes the 'obedient response' of the believer as dependence on Christ, sufficient for getting and staying in. Yet, it would have been better to recognize that in terms of securing salvation, the believer's covenantal relationship with God is precisely *not* like that of Israel under Moses (Col 2:11–15; cf., Gal 3:10–18).

Third, commenting on Col 3:18–19, Wall states that a wife ought to submit to her husband in a way analogous to Christ's submission to God. But a few paragraphs later he suggests that Paul's 'rhetoric of the old order' (i.e., 'hierarchal language') is due more to his missional attempt to accommodate his message to his first century hearers than to his own ethic. The reader is left unclear as to what Wall thinks Paul really meant once the supposed missional rhetoric is accounted for.

Fourth, Wall does not say that Paul explicitly promoted the overturn of slavery, but his interpretation of Philemon might lead the reader to think otherwise.

All in all, this volume provides a useful ‘entry point’ into Colossians and Philemon, but I would recommend using it alongside O’Brien’s commentary on the same letters, which is more consistent in the details.

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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: Witnesses to Him to the Ends of the Earth

Bruce Milne

Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2010 535pp £11.99pb
ISBN: 9781845505073

There are many excellent commentaries on the text of the Acts of the Apostles and several great resources to help pastor-teachers teach the text effectively. This commentary deserves to be read alongside those works as it will not only give the reader a renewed enthusiasm to study and teach the Acts of the Apostles but will also reignite a passion for the God who is at work through his witnesses from the first century to the present day.

Milne’s stated aim is a desire to see other people engage with the text and be changed by it. He achieves that aim by focusing the introduction on the issues that impact the reading of the text: Luke’s purpose in writing, the timeline of the events described by Luke, and the contemporary relevance of the text. The commentary does not ignore the scholarly debates which have developed around the text but addresses them in separate appendices at the end of the book for those who wish to explore those issues further.

The strength of this commentary is Milne’s combination of theological reflection and pastoral insight on the text of Acts. The theological reflection comes through in the sections where events occur in the narrative of Acts that are unique to that moment in salvation-history. Milne demonstrates how to understand the theology of what is happening from the context of the verse, chapter, and the

book as a whole. The pastoral insight of the author is demonstrated at the end of the introduction where he warns his readers to acknowledge the life-changing impact that the Acts of the Apostles has had on the church since it was written and to be ready for that challenge. The pastoral comments continue throughout the commentary in the illustrations Milne uses and the applications he suggests.

I think this would be a great companion commentary for a preacher to use in gaining an overview of the book before doing further detailed sermon preparation with the technical commentaries. I also think this would be a helpful commentary to recommend to Bible study leaders during a teaching series on Acts. Most of all I think this is a commentary to recommend to any Christian who wants to read the Acts of the Apostles, to be encouraged by what God is doing in the world and to go on being a witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth.

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1–2 TIMOTHY & TITUS

Philip H. Towner

Leicester: IVP Academic, 2010 271pp £9.99hb ISBN: 9781844744640

The IVP New Testament Commentary Series reckons uniqueness in moving from solid biblical exposition text to apposite contemporary relevance. As such, Towner's contribution on the Pastoral Epistles fares very well.

In a way that is characteristic of the whole book, he gives a helpful, crisp summary of the arguments for pseudonymity. He responds to these point by point, and suggests a positive scenario for Pauline authorship. This is within a thorough but concise introduction, in which he seeks to draw out the uniting themes across all three letters. He identifies false teaching as the main burden of Paul's writing, and keeps this in view in all the detailed comment.

The book begins with a bid for the relevance of the pastoral letters in the church in the present day. This pattern is consistent through the book, with few exceptions. At the introduction to each new section Towner sets the scene for

application in the modern church. With that purpose in mind he delves into the text in its original context.

Overall, the commentary gives precise exegesis with a great deal of sensitivity to the original setting. Towner is not afraid to speculate on the possible scenarios behind Paul's instructions. Though this is clearly based on thorough research, sometimes the evidence is thin. For the most part he does not give more weight to the speculation than the text. In the case of disputed texts he provides a concise summary of the main proposals, and this again is clearly founded on a rigorous understanding of the original text.

An interesting case in point is his comment on 1 Timothy 2:9–15. He sets out an elegant, accessible summary of two opposing views on interpretation: a permanent creation order or a temporary restraining order. His stance is that it is at least a temporary restraining order. He works out a very intricate scenario, but seems to imply that we cannot fully know the original context in order to apply it in our context. Thus he takes his understanding of the motivation of the restraining order—curbing false teaching—as the main application.

A real highlight is the application of 2 Timothy 1:8. Ministry is suffering, but it is not suffering endured alone in one's own strength. Christian fellowship is suffering together, and not in human strength but by the power of God. True teaching is worth the suffering, but true teaching is identified with suffering.

The section on Titus probably succeeds in capturing the spirit of the series best. Contextual exegesis is carried out with a sharp edge towards contemporary application. For example in the case of hospitality in 1:5–9, the issue is quickly broadened out beyond the overseer.

The book is very helpful both for reflection on ministry and for teaching the church.

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INTERPRETING ISAIAH: Issues and Approaches

David G. Firth & H. G. M. Williamson, eds.

Nottingham: Apollos, 2009 288pp £18.99pb ISBN: 9781844743827

This collection of essays about Isaiah is intended to ‘bridge the gap’ in Isaiah studies between ‘introductions aimed at beginning students’ and specialist collections of ‘highly learned articles, often focusing on the minutiae that contribute to scholarship.’ The editors note in the introduction that, ‘although all the contributors are united in their commitment to the authority of Scripture and the importance of faithful interpretation, we have consciously sought to include a range of different approaches to Isaiah reflecting different perspectives.’

Williamson’s opening essay provides a survey of recent issues in Isaiah scholarship. While scholarly debate since the 19th century has chiefly centred around the authorship of Isaiah, between those who divide the book into three main sections and those who argue for one author of the whole, recent scholarship has begun to shift toward examining the book of Isaiah as a whole, without ignoring issues of composition, editing, and historical context. The other component essays address different topics, including the thematic roles of monotheism, faith, politics, and wisdom; the reception of Isaiah in the New Testament; and exegetical treatments of 9:1–7, 42:1–9, and 61:1–3.

As with all collected volumes, different essays will resonate with different readers. ‘Nationalism and Universalism in Isaiah’ by R. Schultz stood out for its clear organisational structure. His conclusion reveals how complicated the study might have been without careful attention: ‘Within the canonical book of Isaiah, particular election, which brings Israel divine blessing and restoration following judgment and exile, is presented as the primary—but not exclusive—means of extending a future universal offer of salvation to the nations that unfolds gradually.’

‘The Text of Isaiah at Qumran’ by D. Swanson was the reviewer’s favourite. Isaiah was one of the most copied biblical books found at Qumran; there are fragments of 21 different manuscripts, ranging from a complete copy to fragments of only a few lines, in addition to fragments of six commentaries. Swanson traces the development of the text of Isaiah toward a form closely resembling the (medieval) Masoretic Text by the end of the Hasmonean era. The

‘stable text tradition for the Cave 4 Isaiah manuscripts at an earlier stage [than other biblical texts] suggests...that the text of Isaiah had gained authoritative status at an earlier stage in the Second Temple period.’

This book will appeal most to those who want to delve into the scholarly world surrounding the book of Isaiah. Though the articles are relatively accessible and readable (compared to much scholarly work), readers with relatively little exposure to Old Testament scholarship may find the initial learning curve a bit steep. This is not a breezy, quick read that one would take along on holiday (aside from doctoral students, perhaps), but readers with some exposure to Old Testament scholarship should have little difficulty gaining valuable new insights about the book of Isaiah.

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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF EXTENDED COMMUNION

Phillip Tovey

Farnham: Ashgate, 2009 196pp £55hb ISBN: 9780754666844

‘Holy Communion by extension’ is the distribution of bread and wine (previously ‘consecrated’ by a ‘priest’) to a congregation by a layperson or deacon. Unlike communion for the sick, which usually takes place in someone’s home, communion by extension usually takes place in church and looks to the uninitiated much like a regular communion service. The lay leader or deacon stands in place of the presbyter and leads the liturgy, only without the ‘narrative of institution’ or ‘consecration prayer,’ before the people receive communion. This novel practice has been authorized in the Church of England since 2001, as part of the multifarious provisions of *Common Worship*. Some during General Synod debate mocked the practice as ‘eucharistic meals on wheels’ and ‘hosts through the post.’ Others prefer the more celebratory wedding-cake analogy, likening it to the distribution of pieces of cake to guests unable to attend the actual wedding. Evangelicals firmly resisted the introduction of this new liturgical provision, because it separates word from sacrament and places the emphasis upon semi-magical words said by a priest (perhaps even said in private, on a previous day, by someone unknown to the congregation)

rather than upon the right reception of the sacrament by faith in the hearts of the gathered believers. As Phillip Tovey reveals, the very phrase ‘extended communion’ was adopted by its advocates as a ‘political manoeuvre’ (p. 105), in an attempt to capture the middle ground, though we might call it a Trojan Horse. This new liturgy would more accurately be entitled ‘communion from the reserved sacrament.’

Phillip Tovey, a liturgical specialist, has published widely on extended communion and in this helpful monograph he examines how it is working in practice, through a study of six parishes in Oxford diocese. His major conclusion is that this innovative service inevitably shapes how local congregations understand the Lord’s Supper, especially the role of eucharistic consecration and priestly authority, far out of step with evangelical perspectives. The performance of this liturgy is slowly altering what Anglicans believe, no matter what the Liturgical Commission might say to the contrary. Extended communion is only permitted, in theory, in exceptional circumstances, but Tovey demonstrates that it is becoming common practice during interregnums, clergy holidays and even for regular mid-week services. Instead of this wrong-headed lurch by the Church of England in an Anglo-Catholic direction, it would be far better to grapple seriously with how to teach our congregations a biblical attitude towards sacraments and ministry. Thorough-going ‘lay presidency’ or ‘lay administration’ has much more to commend it.

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JUST THE TWO OF US

Eleanor Margesson and Sue McGowan

UK: IVP, 2010 191pp £7.99pb ISBN: 9781844744756

The best adjective to describe this book is ‘honest.’ Although you will find some bracing exhortations and biblical reminders of what we are to set our hearts on, these come from two women, their husbands, and a host of contributors who have walked the painful path of infertility, disappointment, struggle, and grief.

The book is clearly structured around questions that people may have. At the end of each section there are suggestions for reading, reflection, and discussion. These are key to the reader who wants to ‘do’ something with the material. The authors encourage the reader to skip parts or read them later if these aren’t the questions they have in mind.

The target readership are couples facing this painful issue of involuntary childlessness. The issue is put in a wider context and acknowledges the pain of childlessness for single people and parents of childless couples.

The stated purpose is that the ‘book restores your hope in a sovereign God who orders everything for good.’ Does it achieve this aim? I think it does. I also think it achieves it in a non trite, non suppressive way. True grief and pain are acknowledged, shared, and supported but true biblical revelation is also brought into the pain and grief. The reader is never *forced* to swallow it though, there and then. The journey is valued.

To me a highlight was the section in chapter 3 where the example of Abraham and Sarah is expounded. Their childlessness is not there to give us hope of having a child but to show God’s faithfulness to his promise of providing the Child, the Christ, that each of us who trust him can become part of his family. This right understanding of the story brings hope and life rather than false belief and frustration.

The chapter at the other end of the book, on adoption, seemed to me a very thorough and balanced look at the subject through the eyes of someone who has gone down that path.

I hope, with the authors, that this book will be a great help and encouragement to those facing infertility, and a resource to those who aren’t but want to have greater empathy with their friends who are. The unanswered question for me is how to ask the question when couples aren’t having children in a way that is loving and not intrusive, and opens the door to give support rather than inflicting more pain.

HELEN WILLCOX

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YOU CAN CHANGE: God's Transforming Power for our Sinful Behaviour and Negative Emotions

Tim Chester

Nottingham: IVP, 2008 204pp £9.99pb ISBN: 9781844743032

CAPTURED BY A BETTER VISION: Living Porn Free

Tim Chester

Nottingham: IVP, 2010 176pp £8.99pb ISBN: 9781844744350

These are not good books to read. But they are excellent books to engage with and soak up and use. They are not for light entertainment. As Tim Chester rightly says, 'For us, holiness consists not in heroic acts, but in a thousand small decisions,' and these are the sorts of books which help develop habits of good decision making. *You Can Change* (a brilliant title!) looks at ten basic questions about changing and growing in holiness as a Christian, from 'What would you like to change?' to 'When do you struggle?' to 'How can we support one another in changing?'

The chapters are fairly packed theologically, biblically, and with illustrations and quotes (the Reformed and Evangelical traditions have been well mined for illustrative and doctrinal material). And each one ends with work to do on one's own 'change project,' using the author's questions and reflective exercises (sometimes as much as five pages worth). These are very good tools, and help consolidate the reading and turn it into real life sanctification, though I think it might have been helpful if the chapters were not so dense and long, so I could have reflected on a smaller amount of material in more depth without feeling rushed. It is tempting to defer the actual engagement aspect until another day, and my sinful nature doesn't need much of an excuse to avoid spending time with a difficult heart-exposing question.

There are also too many quotes in the book, giving it a rather jagged and derivative feel at times, especially when one wants to know where the reference is and has to go to the endnotes to find out. Jonathan Edwards rubs shoulders with Walter Marshall, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Sinclair Ferguson, C.S. Lewis, John Newton, the Psalmist, and Paul—and that's just pages 86 and 87 (keeping a digit in page 199 for the endnotes). It's all good stuff, however, so worth spending time chewing on. I found Chester's approach especially helpful when

he was talking about idolatry, a fashionable category these days when discussing sanctification. While there is some very useful diagnostic material here for us to examine our hearts, Chester is also careful to add that, 'It's not necessarily wise to go on an idol hunt all the time, or explore every motive. That might lead to unhealthy introspection. Our focus should be on God's liberating truth.' He links deep and endless introspection to Sigmund Freud's idea that everything lies hidden in our subconscious, and counters it by saying 'Introspection assumes I'm what matters in sanctification. But it's God who changes us.' This is a helpful corrective for when a useful theological tool is in danger of being taken too far.

When I first picked up *Captured by a Better Vision: Living Porn Free*, also by Tim Chester, I was expecting a repeat performance, just with a more narrowly defined target. But it is much more than that, a completely fresh work tackling the issue of the struggle with pornography specifically and head on. This has become an increasingly urgent pastoral issue in churches, as any minister in touch with the pews can testify. It could well be the most significant moral issue facing churches in our generation, undermining countless marriages and holding back thousands of Christians from growing spiritually and being bold in evangelism. A survey in 2006 found that 50% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women are addicted to pornography. That's every third person in our congregations, and things are probably far worse than such statistics suggest (after all, not every Christian would admit such an addiction to a survey, and the increasing roll-out of broadband has made access to explicit material online even easier in the last 6 years).

Chester's approach to dealing with this exceptionally serious issue is fivefold. He aims to create an abhorrence of porn (not just the shame it brings), an adoration of God, an assurance of grace, avoidance of temptation, and accountability to others. The book is generally well-written, with some startling phrases to arrest the attention, though there is also some explicit language intended to shock, which means it should come with a health warning and possibly not be given to teenagers. Used wisely, however, I think this book could help to achieve all the things it sets out to do, and help protect people from the dangers of porn and the lust which creates the desire for it.

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EMBRACING THE TRINITY: Life with God in the Gospel**Fred Sanders**

Leicester: IVP, 2010

256pp

£9.99pb

ISBN: 9781844744831

Fred Sanders' aim in this book is to show evangelicals that the doctrine of the Trinity is inherent to the biblical gospel.

Many today would argue that the best path for the recovery of the Trinity is through attention to historical theology, particularly patristic and medieval. Alternatively, some would say that a return to historic liturgies with their Trinitarian creeds and prayers is the best way to inculcate a Trinitarian faith. Sanders pursues neither option. First, since he is writing for an evangelical audience, he chooses mainly to quote evangelical authors, not because the church fathers or the medievals have nothing to teach us, but because he wants to show that evangelicalism at its best *is* self-consciously Trinitarian. Second, he argues that the best way to understand and know God is by digging deeper into the *gospel*. Rather than staying on the surface, focusing only on its benefits, we must sink deep roots to know the God who offers himself to us in the gospel.

Sanders argues that, because we know the gospel, we already have a tacit knowledge of the Trinity—we know God as our Father, rejoice in our redemption through the Son, and experience the Spirit's work in our regeneration and sanctification. Thus, the task of a gospel-centered Trinitarian theology is simply to make us more deeply aware of what, on some level, we already know.

However, while we would affirm the same gospel truths as our forefathers, our grasp of them is neither so deep nor so coherent, because we have by and large divorced them from the context in which they cohere—their foundation in the life of the Trinity. Sanders draws a comparison with classical and decadent cultures. In a classical culture, all the parts of a community's life cohere and make intuitive sense. In a decadent period, things fall apart: people have a sense of living among the ruins, living from scraps of their cultural inheritance. The point is that historic evangelicalism with its strong Trinitarian roots was a classical period; today, having (unconsciously) divorced the Trinity from the gospel, we know the truth in a correspondingly fragmented and shallow way.

In seven chapters, he explores the Trinitarian structure of the gospel, showing us the depth of God's love for us in Christ. He shows the eternal foundation for the economy of salvation within God's eternal immanent life—which he calls, in a lovely phrase, 'The Happy Land of the Trinity.' He outlines a Trinitarian account of the shape of salvation and our experience of it. And, finally, he explores what the experiences of reading Scripture and prayer look like when understood within a deep and rich Trinitarian account of the gospel.

Sanders writes simply but not simplistically, leading us to a richer understanding of the evangelical gospel, and a clearer vision of the glorious God of the gospel and our life with him.

MATTHEW MASON

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PILGRIMS, WARRIORS, AND SERVANTS: Puritan Wisdom for Today's Church, St. Antholin's Lectures, Vol. 1: 1991–2000,
Lee Gatiss ed.

London: Latimer Trust, 2010 272pp £8.99pb and £12hb
ISBN: 9780946307777

The essays in this volume were originally delivered as the annual St Antholin's Lectures. Thus, they represent the recent resurrection of a Reformation institution: the endowed lectureship which allowed Puritan Anglicans to edify their flocks with a little more freedom than might otherwise have been the case. Indeed, to set the scene, Lee Gatiss introduces the collection with the first part of an extended essay on the history of the St Antholin's lecture. Part Two is to be found in the second volume of the lectures series.

The lecturers represent something of a Who's Who of modern Anglican evangelical scholarship. Alister McGrath, for example, deals with the need for an evangelical spirituality. Bruce Winter engages Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as a useful means of critiquing contemporary evangelical piety. Gavin McGrath uses John Owen to highlight the importance of the cross to preaching. James Packer is the only lecturer to have more than one entry (three), a just reflection of his singular influence in reviving interest in the Puritans among Anglicans in

the twentieth century. He offers a very helpful summary of Richard Baxter as a ministerial role model; a fine introduction to the life and significance of William Perkins; and a fascinating reflection on the significance of John Bunyan. Peter Jensen uses, albeit critically, William Perkins and company in addressing some of the excesses of the modern charismatic movement. Peter Adam writes with great power on the Puritan struggles for the reform of the church.

Ashley Null, in the most scholarly of the lectures, gives a rousing defence of Thomas Cranmer, putting to death the stock criticisms of him as little more than a vacillating coward. In brief compass, he delineates Cranmer's intellectual development and also demonstrates how the imperative to love one's neighbour shaped not only the Archbishop's thought and liturgy but also some of the more notorious actions in his life. This one essay is worth the price of the volume, although Packer on Baxter and Bunyan run a close joint second.

For me, the most contentious essay is that by Geoffrey Cox, who is ostensibly addressing the issue of the local church but uses the opportunity to take the Puritan idea of the Regulative Principle to task, primarily as a means of making the case for remaining Anglican. It is doubtful that any adherent of the RP would need to break sweat in responding to the arguments which do not address the sophisticated forms of the RP as expressed by the great Puritan minds of the seventeenth century. Admittedly, Cox was writing before the major shift in seventeenth century studies which took place in the late 90s; but even so the presentation of the RP is such that it would be difficult to explain how any intelligent person ever believed it. That they did so should immediately raise questions about its presentation here. It would also be interesting, some twenty years on, to know if the arguments he offers are still persuasive to Anglicans, despite all the evidence to the contrary. His vision for the church seems to be a kind of hybrid of congregationalism and Anglicanism, happily saving its adherents from the pesky issue of separation and corporate responsibility beyond the congregational level; but the renewal of the Church of England by faithful local churches seems surely further away today than it did in 1992, let alone 1662.

Still, setting aside such a predictable non-conformist criticism, this is a thoroughly enjoyable volume: competent scholarship expressed in an accessible

manner which brings to bear the great events of the past on the issues and challenges of the present. I look forward to volume two.

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PREACHER, Keep yourself from Idols

Derek Tidball

Nottingham: IVP, 2011 204pp £8.99pb ISBN: 9781844744961

Tidball's book is neither radical nor novel; it will not teach you anything you didn't already know nor will it take you long to read. However, unlike other books on idolatry, this one is targeted. It is like a laser-guided missile that strikes right at a minister's heart. And for that reason alone, it is worthy of every preacher's time.

We all know that idolatry is a root issue in our hearts—plenty of other writers have made the Bible's teaching on that crystal clear. Tidball has taken that important subject and applied it directly and insightfully to the life and work of a preacher.

In 12 short chapters (originally lectures delivered at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), this experienced preacher explores particular idols that preachers need to face up to. He groups these chapters into four distinct categories—idols of the self, idols of the age, idols of the task and idols of the ministry.

I particularly enjoyed (if that is the right word!) the chapter on the idol of popularity which becomes an extended review of the writings of John Chrysostom and made me want to go and dust down my Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers once more, not just deal with the idol itself. Moreover every new preacher (and every old one!) should read and re-read the chapter on the idol of novelty where Tidball says some of the most helpful things in the whole book.

This is a book I shall need to go back to again and again, perhaps a chapter at a time, on a regular basis. I know idolatry is an issue in my heart: 'Preachers are

very unlikely to bow down in worship to hand carved idols of stone, but they are very vulnerable to serving idols of a more subtle kind.'

As with many IVP books, the volume is tightly edited, a real bonus in these days of quantity over quality. A minor quibble is that the cover is disappointing for a notable publisher. Google 'preacher' and 'bible' and you will find a top result is the same stock shot that has been used to adorn Tidball's excellent tome (I've used the same picture myself).

In conclusion, this is a short book, but no less useful for that. I don't suppose it will tell you anything about God that you didn't already know (and given the chapter on novelty, that is no bad thing!). But it may tell you something about yourself; something you need to hear and correct. I certainly found that to be the case and Derek Tidball has done the world of preaching an enormous good with his excellent little volume.

ADRIAN REYNOLDS

Director of Ministry, The Proclamation Trust

A CHRISTIAN'S POCKET GUIDE TO JUSTIFICATION: Being made right with God?

Guy Waters

Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2010

96pp

£3.99pb

ISBN: 9781845506155

This little book sets out to cover much ground in less than a hundred pages. In three chapters Waters defines justification, applies it to the life of the Christian and seeks to refute some of the central arguments of the New Perspective on Paul, with specific reference to N. T. Wright.

Throughout, Waters' argument is rooted in Scripture and his conclusions could not be more orthodox in their expression of Reformed Evangelical doctrine. For a short book, his handling of the relevant Bible texts is surprisingly thorough. Although the New Perspective is a many-faced beast, Waters' succinct engagement with some of N. T. Wright's writings helped me to have a far better grasp of the issues, whilst offering a persuasive critique.

I feel the weakness of this book lies in its comprehensiveness. It is more of a suet pudding than a soufflé and therefore, I wonder if it falls between two stools; neither, being light enough to be a simple introduction to the doctrine of justification for the young Christian, nor being rigorous enough in content for the keen student wanting to delve deeper. I fear that this is because of the two sources from which Waters' material comes: two lectures to the Church Society conference in 2006 and lectures before the Grace Presbytery of the PCA in 2008. The audience on both these occasions would have largely been pastors for whom Waters' language and style would have been entirely appropriate. However, there are many theological terms used in the book which need further explanation if it is to be accessible to a wider audience.

I would recommend this as a brief overview of justification to be given to the mature home group leader, but I wouldn't use it with undergraduate students in the UK.

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IDOLS: God's Battle for our Hearts

Julian Hardyman

Nottingham: IVP, 2010 214pp £8.99pb ISBN: 9781844744183

This book is a welcome addition to the continuing conversation on how to define, identify and counter idols in the Christian life. Julian Hardyman characterises idolatry as 'putting anything else in the place that is rightfully God's and his alone—and then suffering the consequences.' While some may see this discussion as irrelevant, perhaps relegated to some distant epoch buried in the Old Testament, the author claims that through careful meditation on the Scriptures and self-reflection it becomes obvious that 'idolatry explains us and our problems.' Moreover, given our recidivist tendencies, and how as 'idol factories' we constantly create new things to worship in God's place, Hardyman stresses the perpetual importance of understanding this topic as we strive to behold the Triune God and truly adore him alone above all else. From the outset, however, the focus is on God's relentless love towards us, which brings

him to engage ‘in a war to recapture your heart, tower by tower, from the idols you have invited to rule it.’

The structure and format of the book make it easy to read. Part One emphasizes how idols are alive and well, manifesting in distinct but real ways. Among the most telling examples is lust, which ‘makes sex into an idol that brings us comfort and perhaps even power’ but delivers only emptiness. Hardyman has an uncanny ability to challenge his readers gracefully in each of these chapters, while gently redirecting them toward the love of God. In Part Two, the author explains the consequences of idolatry. The problem of idolatry, a strange form of worship and glory swap for stupid things, is ‘essentially...about a choice: do we worship God or not?’ In the process idols transform us into their likeness, making us hollow. In the end, full-blown idolatry produces judgment and everlasting destruction. Part Three focuses on ‘busting idols.’ Here Hardyman stresses ‘repenting of our idolatrous sins, receiving his forgiveness, realising that we are God’s children, and living in the power of his Spirit.’ Hardyman repeats Isaiah 30:15 as a central verse, where repentance, rest and trust in God is our salvation instead of idols. Rather than present glib ‘self-help’ answers, Hardyman views idol busting as a decision and a lifelong process in which we depend on God’s grace day by day. While we struggle, God fights for us in this ongoing battle, helping to reorientate our heart, mind, and imagination toward his ‘supreme and satisfying love.’

The book is replete with other supplementary material, including grey boxes for relevant anecdotes, chapters that are broken up into various sections, small charts, as well as Scripture and questions at the end of each chapter for the reader’s active participation.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would highly recommend it to Christians at all stages of spiritual maturity. It is insightful, witty, emotionally real, compelling, bold and practical. As is his strength in the pulpit, Hardyman is refreshingly honest and down to earth. His personal and unguarded tone allows the reader the necessary space to come face to face with the idols brewing in his/her heart and to trust in God through the arduous process of battling against them.

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THE WRITING ON THE WALL: High Art, Popular Culture and the Bible**Maggi Dawn**

Hodder & Stoughton, 2010 261pp £16.99hb ISBN: 9780340980033

Maggi Dawn is the Anglican Chaplain at Robinson College, Cambridge University. She tells us that she was inspired to write *The Writing On The Wall* through conversations with Arts students at the University. They'd knock on her door asking her to explain various biblical allusions which they had come across in their studies. Her book weaves together the story of the Bible with accounts of the various cultural artefacts generated by the story.

Dawn tells the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. She does so with a light touch. It's not intended to be an exhaustive account but nonetheless she covers the main scenes. We're helped to see how the parts fit into the whole. She doesn't avoid critical issues but generally addresses them in an even handed manner. The only time my heart sank was when the question of the nature of the resurrection was left far too open for my comfort. However, the overall telling is lucid, winsome and engaging.

The unusual dimension of the book is its description of the cultural artefacts inspired by the Bible. Dawn integrates them into the telling of the big Bible story. They range from biblical phrases which have become proverbial ('he has feet of clay') through to paintings (Rembrandt to Craigie Aitchison), music (Palestrina to Steve Earle) and literature (Chaucer to Steinbeck). These elements are introduced in a natural, unforced manner. On occasions Dawn's insights are fresh and unexpected. Her comments on the theological and possibly political dimensions of Handel's *Messiah* were particularly stimulating.

The strength and weakness of the book is its personal nature. Dawn writes about what she knows. You get a sense that she is familiar with the various artefacts she describes and that she enjoys them. Her delight is infectious and makes the reader want to go and enjoy them too. However, sometimes I longed for a slightly broader selection. It seemed that twentieth century visual art was underrepresented. Also, a few more examples from non-mainstream twentieth century popular music would have helped me (What? Billy Idol but no Bonnie Prince Billy?). Alternative music of all kinds is full of biblical allusions as is

much urban music. I recognise that maybe I just wanted to read about my own interests and prejudices!

The book is an ideal way of introducing someone both to the big story of the Bible and to some of the Western culture it has inspired. The theological commentary is astute but not exhaustive or exhausting. It leaves plenty of room for further questions and exploration. The cultural commentary displays a similar character. It made me want to go to galleries and listen to music and read new poets. It would be hard to ask for more from a book of this kind.

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PHILIP PULLMAN'S JESUS

Gerald O'Collins

London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010 128pp £7.99pb

ISBN: 9780232528060

In *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, Philip Pullman draws the Jesus of the Gospels, the scepticism of a previous generation of liberal scholars, and his own distaste for organised religion together into a brilliantly told subversion of the Gospel accounts. It is the kind of book that all Christians, the present reviewer included, would like to see answered. *Philip Pullman's Jesus*, by Gerald O'Collins, is an attempt at such a rebuttal. It is not a success.

In its favour, *Philip Pullman's Jesus* is admirably succinct and readable. O'Collins works hard to represent the text of Pullman's book. He also reads the Gospels carefully. And a few of his blows land. In chapter seven he rightly observes that Pullman's sinister portrait of the early church (through the character of 'the stranger') sits uneasily with the willingness of early Christian leaders to suffer for others. Similarly, he is right to suggest that the desperate cries of Pullman's Jesus in Gethsemane sound far more like Philip Pullman than any plausible first century character.

However, the stand-out feature of this book is O'Collins' failure to understand Pullman. This stems from his identification of *The Good Man Jesus* as historical

fiction. Indeed, he likens it to the *Flashman* novels. As a result, O'Collins treats Pullman's book as if it were an attempt at a straightforward historical reconstruction. Every element of the plot is understood to contribute to Pullman's historical theory, his account of the development of early Christianity. For this reason, almost all O'Collins' arguments concern the historicity of *The Good Man Jesus*. The assumption throughout is that the case against Pullman can be made by pitting his reconstruction against the Gospels, and showing the latter to be more plausible.

This is a serious misreading of *The Good Man Jesus*. Pullman's work is simply not positing a historical theory in the terms in which O'Collins understands it. Although he is certainly a central character, 'Christ' is not intended to have existed. Pullman fully expects us to notice that he has tampered with the Gospel accounts. In other words, Pullman simply isn't writing historical fiction with the Gospels as his source material: O'Collins has misread the genre. Of course, Pullman makes a historical claim: that in the Gospels we see not the Jesus of history, but the Jesus of faith. However, he makes that claim through a tale that resembles one of Jesus' parables much more than it does a *Flashman* novel.

Precisely because Pullman is trading in history, it should be possible to write an effective rebuttal of his book. But *Philip Pullman's Jesus* is not it. Readers of Pullman will not find O'Collins illuminating. Very few of his arguments stick. Pullman himself would doubtless read with amusement. *The Good Man Jesus* is deeply flawed and ultimately wrong. It is also brilliant, manipulative, outrageous, and provocative. *Philip Pullman's Jesus* is not.

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