

BOOK REVIEWS

SONG OF SONGS: A Biblical-theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation

James R. Hamilton Jr.

Fearn: Christian Focus, 2015 154pp £8.99pb ISBN: 9781781915608

Over the years, I've spoken to many preachers about why they don't preach on the Song of Songs. Broadly speaking their answers fall into one of two camps: either they confess to being unsure what the Song is about; or they feel sure they know exactly what it's about but that's not something they want to talk about in the pulpit! James R Hamilton Jr's book is a collection of eight sermons on the Song, giving an excellent example of how one might go about preaching it in a way which is faithful to its multi-layered poetry and canonical status, and which is edifying, challenging, and heart-warming. His prose is at times as beautiful as the poetry he is describing: 'In the Song of Songs, Solomon sings a melody rich with reminiscent beauty, a beauty that resonates with us, a haunting beauty so sharp it sometimes cuts us open and lays us bare with a longing for what we do not now have.'

The introductory chapter identifies Hamilton's two primary interpretive criteria: that this is a Song, i.e. a single poetic unit, rather than an allegory; and that it is in the Bible, and so should be read within the context of the overall biblical narrative. More specific interpretive loci are identified: the setting, the plot, the hero, and the meaning. An obvious omission here is the Song's heroine. The female character in the Song dominates both in her voice and her presence and Hamilton's book fails to give due weight to this female focus of the Song throughout.

Each subsequent chapter is an expanded sermon on a single chapter of the Song. The comments are insightful, particularly in the allusions he notes to other biblical texts. At times the applications come across as trivial or trite, but this may simply be a function of writing for a general audience. They are useful starting points for preachers to consider more pointed application for their own congregations. Hamilton does make an attempt to apply the Song to single people as well as married couples, but more could be done to show how it applies in a wider range of circumstances. This would have been easier to achieve if more of the application had flowed from the Christological interpretation.

This is a slim volume and reflects the limitations of its origins as a sermon series. For detailed discussions of the text, readers must look

elsewhere. Nevertheless, Hamilton's love for the Song is infectious and his commentary will surely fulfil its aim of giving more preachers the confidence to tackle this often-overlooked book.

ROS CLARKE
Diocese of Lichfield

HONEST EVANGELISM: How to Talk About Jesus Even When It's Tough
Rico Tice, with Carl Laferton

Surrey: Good Book Company, 2015 105pp £6.79pb
ISBN: 9781909919396

I want everyone in my church family to read this book.

I want people who are terrified about evangelism to read it. They will be encouraged by the sovereignty of God, and the power of the gospel. They will be warned rightly that they will be 'hit,' but it's worth it. They will be encouraged to be the person God made them and so use that in the mission field. They will be encouraged that, even if they are not Bible teachers, they can be Bible sharers. They will be equipped to share the gospel clearly, succinctly, and with challenge.

I want people who don't see evangelism as their job to read it. They will be challenged that evangelism is our job as Christians. They will be sobered by how tough that will be, yet how rewarding, how brilliant it is to share the gospel.

Finally, I want the natural evangelists to read it. They will be encouraged to keep going. They will be acknowledged in having a hard, but totally worth it job. They will be encouraged to equip others, and be spurred on in their work.

I am not a natural evangelist. As well as a British sense of awkwardness, I hate conflict. I'm terrified of 'being hit' as Rico puts it. So this book has been brilliant in agreeing with me that I will get hit, and that's hard. Yet it has challenged me that the gospel is worth it. Because of the glory of Jesus, the guarantee of the new creation, and the grim reality of death and hell, it is worth sharing.

Rico writes a challenging thought: 'We must beware of living as functional atheists. Deep down I know hell is real and terrible...but Monday to Friday...I live as though it isn't true. I live as though they won't die, as though hell isn't where they're heading, and so I don't say anything.'

It has been described as ‘*Know and Tell the Gospel* for today.’ I think that’s right. It’s short, very easy and accessible. Many tips for gospel sharing abound. What I would have loved too would have been some tips on conversation starters and creating opportunities.

I want everyone in my church family to read this book!

ALED SEAGO

Oak Hill Theological College, London

THE COMMUNICANT’S SPIRITUAL COMPANION

Thomas Haweis

Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015 160pp £10pb
ISBN: 9781601783837

The publisher’s preface to this book relates how one senior pastor described it as ‘the most wonderful work he had ever read on the Lord’s Supper.’ Whilst that assessment might be a trifle too enthusiastic, there is no doubt that this little manual is a marvellously refreshing tonic, all the more thirst-slaking amidst the parched desert of writing on Reformed sacramental piety.

Thomas Haweis (the surname rhymes with ‘pause’) was a leading figure of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival within the Church of England, chaplain to the Countess of Huntingdon, and one of the founding fathers of the London Missionary Society. His book, written in 1764 but presented here in a sensitively-modernised style, was intended to be (as its subtitle declares), ‘an evangelical preparation for the Lord’s Supper.’ Haweis writes with the winsome clarity and heartfelt devotion of J.C. Ryle, taking the reader through a series of reflections on the Holy Communion which nicely integrate doctrinal rigour with practical advice. His book is extremely valuable to a modern twenty-first-century evangelical Anglican for three reasons.

Firstly, Haweis’ work reminds us that the Evangelical revival was a revival in the ministry of Word *and Sacrament*. A renewed passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified, was bound up with a renewed appreciation for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which commended visibly and tangibly that same good news of a crucified Saviour. To put it more bluntly still: Haweis took the Lord’s Supper immensely seriously. How many of our churches could say the same? A central role for Holy Communion in our Sunday meetings is not, in

other words, to fall away from our Reformed Anglican identity, but rather to present it in its fullness.

Secondly, Haweis' work emphasises the importance of spiritual preparation before coming to the Lord's Table. Again, this practice of deliberate personal self-examination before Communion, although a key part of the Prayer Book's teaching, has been almost entirely lost from our modern evangelical church culture. Do we warn our congregations of the dangers of coming to the Table unrepentant, or in public sin? Do we have time during corporate confession seriously to reflect on our sins, and bring them to the Lord? Do we clearly declare the gospel comfort of sins forgiven in Christ for all who truly repent?

Thirdly, Haweis' work shows how regular reception of the Lord's Supper is integrated within the communicant's daily walk with God. He ends with a series of meditations which powerfully bring home that continual communion with the Lord Jesus to which the Lord's Supper points, and so helps to ensure that our sacramental practice never becomes about mere externals, but is always rooted in a heart rejoicing in the benefits of Christ's passion.

I end with a taste of Haweis' own words:

Great and glorious are the privileges obtained by the precious blood of the Son of God. Do you not want pardon of sin? Is adoption a despicable blessing? Is spiritual joy a bland pleasure, or the gift of God's Spirit an unnecessary assistance? If not, then why do so many slight this ordinance of the Lord and neglect this great salvation?

MARK SMITH
Christ's College, Cambridge

THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus

Michael F. Bird

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014 424pp £19.99pb
ISBN: 9780802867766

Bird's book examining the history of the formation of Jesus' words and actions (the 'Jesus tradition') is useful for those wishing to orientate themselves within current and historical academic debates about how and why the Gospels came to exist in their uniquely plural and yet unified form.

Initially, Bird establishes that the early church had motive for preserving the Jesus tradition, and the resources to do so. Following Bauckham, Bird is positive about the possibility of faithful eyewitness testimony, though cautious of anachronism over what the early church would have considered 'accurate.' He goes on to critique various models of oral transmission, in order to identify how the church was able to recall the Jesus tradition. His argument relies on the central importance of the Jesus tradition to the early church's identity, making theories of divergent representations of Jesus formed in a vacuum highly unlikely.

Next, Bird looks at literary relationships between the Gospels, and provides a useful critique of source theories. He subscribes to an adaptation of the two/four-source theory, in which Luke incorporates Matthew, and argues that John had both independent sources and access to Synoptic tradition.

In order to shape his ideas about the purpose of a 'Gospel,' Bird then examines genres contemporary with the Gospels, again providing a helpful overview of current theories. He concludes that the Gospel genre represents a Christological adaptation of the Graeco-Roman biography. Finally, he analyses reception history to find out why the fourfold Gospel codex (as opposed to any other Gospel, or any other number of Gospels) came to be accepted as part of the canon. This section offers helpful apologetic arguments that are both historical and theological.

This book includes some useful excursions, such as a history of the word 'Gospel' in Graeco-Roman and Jewish usage, a critique of form criticism, a collection of patristic quotations on the order of the Gospels, and a summary of several 'other' Gospels and reasons why they were not included in the canon.

Key to his argument is an excursus on his own scholarly approach ('believing criticism'), in which he argues for the Gospels as 'interpreted history,' i.e. inherently biased because of the human processes used to construct them, although historically reliable overall. This is not an uncommon position for a confessing academic like Bird wanting to establish a hermeneutic of trust within a generally sceptical environment, and could be helpful for those wanting to take a similarly critical (in the best sense) approach. However, there are no explicit presuppositions in this book concerning the role of the Spirit in guiding and shaping the formation of the Gospels, which means that for the confessional reader

it will appear overly-focussed on anthropological solutions to the problems raised.

SOPHIE BANNISTER
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THE MESSAGE OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Robert Letham

Nottingham: IVP, 2013 261pp £11.99pb ISBN: 9781844749263

Robert Letham adds to his other stimulating volumes in the area of Christology with this entry in the BST Bible themes series. The series aims to address its themes from the point of view of Biblical Theology. For a systematic theologian like Letham this might not come naturally, but his treatment of how the Bible develops first the promise of a saviour and then its fulfilment in the incarnation provides a fresh angle on this topic.

Letham is clear that he has not said all he might have said in a work of greater scope, but he chooses a path through the Old Testament that focuses on the explicit promises made about the offspring of Eve, the seed of Abraham, the royal son of David, and the suffering servant. There are many helpful insights, though perhaps these are at the expense of seeing a wider view of how the whole narrative of the Old Testament points forward to Jesus. There is no discussion of the Exodus and Sinai, for example, nor beyond Abraham is there any reference to any covenantal framework for the Old Testament.

Letham is most at home in his subsequent discussion of the incarnation. Systematic conclusions on Jesus' humanity and deity arise naturally from the Biblical data. I found his engagement with N.T. Wright's assertion that Jesus 'did not know' that he was God most helpful. He has some useful discussion of the nature of Jesus' temptations, though without any acknowledgement of the possibility of a Spirit Christology that might arise from Luke's Gospel or elsewhere in the New Testament.

Jesus' sufferings are examined in the Gospels; here I was surprised that unlike elsewhere he stops short of systematic conclusions on the meaning of Jesus' death. He is stronger on the resurrection and ascension, both on the details (the angels at the tomb; the clouds at the ascension) and on the theology, including an excellent chapter on 1 Corinthians 15. The book concludes with an epilogue that briefly examines the church's subsequent reflection on Christology in the creeds and councils up to the

fifth ecumenical council in 553. This is better than the average survey that ends with Chalcedon, but it is a shame that it stops short of the discussion of Christ's person, nature, and will in the sixth council in 680.

Overall it is most likely the restrictions of the series that leave the reader wanting more. I was very heartened to read in the introduction of the promise of a systematic theology to come.

TOM WATTS

St Mary's, Chesham

LET THE EARTH HEAR HIS VOICE: Strategies for Overcoming Bottlenecks in Preaching God's Word

Greg R Scharf

Phillipsburg: P&R, 2015 240pp £11.95pb ISBN: 9781629950426

This is an outstanding book, which highlights all the essential ingredients for effective preaching. The author recognises that there are a number of significant obstacles or 'bottlenecks,' as he calls them, which stand in the way. He lists eight altogether. These are: little faith; the unqualified or disqualified preacher; faulty text selection; inadequate understanding of the preaching passage; inadequate contextualisation to the preaching situation; faulty organisation; inadequate or overused illustration and flawed delivery. At the end of each section there are practical exercises which hammer home the lessons.

It was good to read about a specific 'call' to the preaching ministry. This has been understated in some circles because of a concern about lapsing into subjectivism. However, as Scharf points out, this is a definite biblical component (see Acts 16:10). It was also pleasing to note the important distinction he makes between preaching and teaching. So often one hears evangelical ministers make statements like, 'I'm teaching Exodus at the moment,' as if they were delivering a series of academic lectures. But preaching is so much more than teaching. As our author puts it, preaching is 'teaching that is urged upon listeners, is embodied in the spokesman, and calls for a response.'

I liked the injunction—'if you are a married man, listen to your wife.' Wives tend to be more honest about their husband's preaching than members of the congregation! I also valued the encouragement of discipline with regard to rest, diet, and exercise. The chapter about delivery is timely. This aspect is often missed out of books about preaching.

However, you can have the most wonderful material in the world, but if it is delivered in a ponderous, dull, and monotonous way, then the impact will be completely lost.

To my mind, the most important bottleneck of all is what Scharf describes as ‘inadequate contextualization to the preaching situation’ – in other words, the need for relevant, specific application of the text to a particular congregation. This is where the rubber really hits the road, and this is the point at which so many sermons today fail to hit the target. One of the reasons why the Puritans were such effective preachers is because they laboured to apply the Scriptures with force and penetration to the mind, heart, will, and conscience of the hearer.

If I were asked to recommend books to budding preachers, this volume would be high on my list. As Dr Packer used to say many years ago; ‘sell your shirt to buy it!’

JOHN CHEESEMAM
Margate

WHO SHALL ASCEND THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus (NSBT 37)

L. Michael Morales

Nottingham: Apollos, 2015 352pp £16.99pb ISBN: 9781783593682

This is truly a Christmas pudding of a book: rich, satisfying, and stuffed with juicy morsels. Professor L. Michael Morales not only provides a detailed analysis of the structure and contents of Leviticus, but also persuasively integrates the fruits of that research within a wider Biblical narrative of man’s longing to dwell with God: *O when shall I behold thy face, thou Majesty divine?* In this way, he immediately endears himself both to the preacher (for whom the prospect of a sermon series on Leviticus can cause the knees to tremble), and to the theologian (for whom the details of Leviticus can often seem to have little to offer).

The most impressive aspect of Morales’ work is his foregrounding of the theme of how humanity might dwell in the divine Presence. Understood in this light, Leviticus becomes the central book of the Pentateuch not only in reading order, but also in terms of structural significance — with Lev. 16 (the Day of Atonement) standing as the capstone of the entire edifice. Genesis is thus the story of a deepening exile from the presence of God, and of a longing for the lost intimacy of Eden, whilst Exodus begins

to trace the God-given way back into the divine presence through the tabernacle *cultus*. Morales is particularly good at highlighting how the tabernacle functions as a return to Eden—it is the cosmos in miniature, and an architectural mountain of God, in which the high priest is the new cultic Adam, re-entering the Garden by making atonement. In one fascinating excursus, Morales retrojects these insights back onto Genesis 3, and muses on whether Adam's great transgression was in *not* offering himself up as an atonement for the sin of his bride (unlike, of course, the Last Adam). Morales then nicely traces the Levitical theme of man's hope of dwelling with God throughout the rest of the Bible, and finally offers an elegant and insightful account of Christ's redemptive activity within that context.

This is a dense and at times complex book, but it richly rewards the reader with the consistent depth of its insights. I was especially struck by the implications of Morales' account for Christian worship—for if man's ultimate end will be perfectly to dwell in God's presence, and worship him, then our corporate worship in this age becomes imbued with supreme significance. As Morales concludes (reflecting on Rev 21:27),

All who enter the new Jerusalem are those who have been redeemed—ransomed and purified—by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. The shed blood and veil of flesh through which the church enters the heavenly places in corporate worship is one and the same shed blood and veil of flesh through which the church enters the new Jerusalem—liturgy is the silhouette of redemption.

MARK SMITH

Christ's College, Cambridge

CALLED TO THE LIFE OF THE MIND: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars

Richard J. Mouw

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014 80pp £6.99pb ISBN: 9780802867667

Richard Mouw has written a warm-hearted, edifying, and refreshing book for Christians who want to serve Christ in the academic world. It is not aimed particularly at theologians or seminary professors, but Christian academics or aspirant academics in any discipline or any institution. Mouw writes gentle words of pastoral encouragement,

drawing on decades of experience as a Christian scholar. He recounts his own rejection of fundamentalist anti-intellectualism and reminds us of the value and necessity of intellectual ‘hard-graft.’ He discusses our fundamental need as humans to understand the natural world and behold the beauty found in art and culture. This means study and scholarship have value even when they seem to have little ‘practical application.’

Mouw offers wise pastoral counsel for the academic life: study and research flourish, even for scholars in secular institutions, in a context of godly Christian living, nurtured by corporate worship. He reminds readers of the guiding presence of Jesus in a world in which academic jobs and funding are frequently short-term and insecure. Perhaps Mouw’s most profound point is that Christian scholars are to be guided by both epistemic humility and epistemic hope: humility, because we are finite sinners who will always be bewildered by a complex world and a holy God; and hope because we know there is truth out there, since Christ is the truth. Even if our studies take us in disturbing directions, the truth has no power to harm us spiritually, because Jesus is the truth. It is in this spirit, he says, that Mouw rejected young-earth creationism.

The book is beautifully short and light (at 80 small pages, I finished it in two lunch hours and a dinner break!). Most of its target audience have too much to read already, but I could give Mouw to a busy graduate student (like myself!), realistically hoping they might read it. This is a useful, God-honouring book—do buy, read and give to young scholars in your church.

MICHAEL DORMANDY
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

GOD IS WATCHING YOU: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human

Dominic Johnson

Oxford: OUP, 2015 304pp £15.90hb ISBN: 9780199895632

This is a work of evolutionary biology, rather than theology. The author’s thesis is that an instinctive belief in supernatural reward and punishment (i.e. God/the gods/fate/karma will reward me if I’m good and punish me if I’m bad) is not peculiarly Western or Christian, but is a ubiquitous phenomenon of human nature. Our behaviour, Johnson argues, is strongly influenced by the anticipated supernatural consequences of our actions, and this in turn can help us to deter our

self-interested actions, and motivate us to perform acts of generosity and kindness. Moreover, this ingrained human tendency is at heart an evolutionary adaptation: 'god-fearing' people were better able to avoid raising the ire of their fellow man, and so increased the rewards of cooperation. The basic conviction that our actions have supernatural consequences, then, is not (as Dawkins would have it) an unfortunate relic from our crude religious past, but a very useful evolutionary predisposition, which lies at the root of a great deal of human altruism. Johnson finishes by reflecting that this religious impulse is showing no signs of going away, and that this is no bad thing, since it provides an unusually good means by which humans can find ways to cooperate and flourish.

Throughout, Johnson writes with verve and flashes of humour. For instance, to support his claim that 'many of us, even if we declare ourselves atheists, nevertheless display a range of bizarre rituals and beliefs about the causes of events that have no material basis whatsoever,' Johnson provides a litany of unusual examples. Jennifer Aniston must step right-footed onto a plane and tap the outside. Gun's N' Roses' singer Axl Rose would never play a concert in a town beginning with M (he thought the letter was cursed). John McCain always carried around his lucky compass from the Vietnam War (although one wonders why, since he was shot down and spent years as a prisoner of war!).

The Christian reader might well conclude that Johnson's findings are rather unsurprising. Since God has 'set eternity in the hearts of men', we should expect to find across all peoples and cultures a *sensus divinitatis*, however distorted that apprehension might be by the effects of fallen minds living in a fallen world. The Christian reader might also, however, want to point Johnson in the direction of the biblical texts, where he would discover a far richer and more compelling account of how a loving and just God might interact with the affairs of men, for their good, and for his glory.

MARK SMITH
Christ's College, Cambridge

THINKING ALOUD: Responding to the Contemporary Debate about Marriage, Sexuality and Reconciliation

Martin Davie

London: Latimer Trust, 2015 95pp £5.99pb ISBN: 9781906327347

In *Thinking Aloud* Davie brings together a ‘collection of papers and reviews [in order to] spell out the biblical foundations for thinking about Christian thinking about sexuality and to offer an incisive critique which can inform our response to this pressure.’ The papers included are the St Matthias Day Statement, a paper on the nature of marriage which was presented to the Rochester Diocesan Synod, a *Lutheran Forum* article on the relation between justification by faith alone and same sex marriage, and the St Andrew’s Day Statement (included as an appendix). The books reviewed are Alan Wilson’s *More Perfect Union*, Robert Song’s *Covenant and Calling*, and Groves and Jones’ *Living Reconciliation*.

Davie manages to bring together some of the key texts which are currently shaping the debate on sexuality within the Church of England, particularly those produced by its own Evangelical Council. These are produced without comment from the author, allowing them to speak for themselves.

In order to gain the perspective of both sides of the debate, the author offers an in-depth analysis of the three aforementioned books, which are written by authors who possess a more liberal view of sexuality. Davie is particularly stinging in his criticism of the work by Alan Wilson, and picks it apart strand by strand. The author is to be particularly commended for his consistent appeals to be grounded in scripture, particularly when he evaluates his opponents in the debate.

The author does not suggest any possible way forward for the Church of England, nor does he delve into the intricacies and nuances of the debate. However, neither of these were part of his stated aim.

This short work will be a useful tool for one who wishes to gain an overview of the current debate that is raging within the Church of England.

MICHAEL HAYDEN
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A HOUSE OF PRAISE PART TWO: Collected Hymns 2002–2013**Timothy Dudley-Smith**

Oxford: OUP, 2015 353pp £22.50pb ISBN: 9780193403772

BEYOND OUR DREAMING: 36 New Hymns Written Between 2008 & 2011**Timothy Dudley-Smith**

Oxford: OUP, 2012 110pp £11.25pb ISBN: 9780193380011

For anyone who has struggled to find ‘just the right song’ for a particular occasion, the collections of Timothy Dudley-Smith will be a welcome addition to the bookshelf.

Perhaps most well-known for his 1962 hymn ‘Tell out my soul’, Bishop Dudley-Smith has written over four hundred hymn texts, on a wide range of subjects and for different events and seasons of the church year.

He is a writer steeped in both Scripture and poetry, and in these texts there are lingering metaphors aplenty. This richness means that these texts will often be best served by more traditional tunes, and so be less suited to a church with exclusively contemporary music. These are words to enjoy and dwell upon, not race through.

‘Beyond our Dreaming’ contains thirty six new hymns written between 2008 and 2011, and is one of a number of smaller anthologies. The larger anthology ‘A House of Praise Part Two’ is the follow up to ‘A House of Praise’ and together these two contain all of Dudley-Smith’s published hymns, including all those in the smaller anthologies. This might make ‘Beyond our Dreaming’ seem redundant, but the introduction where Dudley-Smith explains his creative process is full of insight and deserves to be read.

‘A House of Praise Part Two’ has comprehensive indexes according to theme and scripture, as well as first lines. This makes it easy to search for an appropriate hymn for a particular occasion.

This is what makes this collection so useful. No church is likely to sing all or even half of these hymns, but they might find a few hymns that fill important gaps—whether on a particular subject, or for a special occasion or season of the church year.

The nature of these being texts only (without music) also makes them suitable for ‘occasional’ use. For each hymn there are one or more suggested tunes—but the nature of such metrical hymns (i.e. with standard line length and structure) is that many tunes may fit any one text, and so a church can choose a tune that is already known, even if the words are new.

A particular favourite of mine is the hymn for advent (perhaps an under-resourced season) based on 2 Peter 3:10–14 which begins:

‘All things shall be made new
on God’s appointed day;
this earth of ours and heaven too,
dissolve and pass away
When time itself shall cease
in God’s eternal reign
the long-awaited Prince of peace
in power shall come again.’

There are equally good texts for national occasions ‘Look Lord again in blessing on this land’ and for seasons of lament ‘O God the just enthroned on high’ that could be very useful for the church’s worship.

In addition to the tune suggestions, each hymn has a note with some comments on the origins of the hymn, as well as on meaning and structure. These notes reveal the depth of thought that has gone into words and phrases—highlighting allusions to both Scripture and wider literature that might have otherwise been missed—as well as helping the reader make an informed choice of the right hymn for a particular occasion.

The only real criticism of these collections is their format. It would be helpful to have the indexes readily searchable online, with links to the tunes (many of which can be listened to on YouTube.) This might make the collection more used and accessible. Sadly a number of these texts may remain unknown and unused, and so like Grey’s desert rose ‘waste [their] sweetness on the desert air.’

These books are well worth having on the shelf, both for consulting on occasions when a very specific hymn is needed but also reading—perhaps one a day as part of devotions—for the sheer pleasure of being pointed to the glories of our Christ in rich and poetic ways:

‘Consider Christ, as day by day
we strive to walk the narrow way
and, lest our love of Christ grow dim,
consider him, consider him.’

MATT SEARLES

Director of Training, South Central Gospel Partnership

BIBLICAL PROPHETS AND CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**Hilary Marlow**

Oxford: OUP, 2015 360pp £25pb ISBN: 9780198745105

This book highlights the importance of three-way interconnectivity—between God, humanity, and the non-human creation—both as a theme in the Old Testament prophets, and as a principle for contemporary environmental ethics.

Hilary Marlow has for many years been involved with the Christian conservation charity A Rocha, and is currently Course Director at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, and Director of Studies in Theology and Religious Studies at Girton College, Cambridge. This book, based on her 2007 PhD thesis, was first published in hardback in 2009.

The book is written in the language of academic biblical studies, but in a way that is accessible to non-specialists. Along with an extensive bibliography, the body of the book consists of seven chapters, of some 40 pages apiece.

The first two chapters are historical, and contain a survey of Christian theological attitudes to the non-human creation, from patristic to modern times. Quoting John Barton's foreword to the book, 'This is the most complete survey of such theological opinion to date, and it will prove very useful as a resource for future discussions.' Throughout, the influence of Greek thought is apparent, with its marginalisation of the natural world.

Chapter 3 is methodological, with a wide-ranging exploration of different approaches to ecological hermeneutics. It is important to read the Old Testament 'through the lenses of contemporary environmental concern,' but simultaneously 'to let the texts speak for themselves,' which many approaches fail to do.

Chapters 4–6 contain an in-depth exegesis of passages from Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah 1–39 (respectively) that discuss the non-human creation. Israel's relationship with God is intimately connected to both God's and Israel's relationships with the natural world.

Chapter 7 provides an introduction to contemporary environmental ethics and its connection with biblical studies. In contrast to secular approaches, a theocentric perspective makes it possible to avoid the polarisation between ecocentric and anthropocentric interests.

The connections between the historical, exegetical, and ethical chapters of the book are not as tight as one might have hoped. But there is a wealth of valuable material in this volume.

ANTHONY SMITH

Bebington, Wirral

JOHN KNOX

Jane Dawson

New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2015 384pp £14.99pb/£25hb
ISBN: 9780300219708/9780300114737

Prof Dawson's new biography of John Knox gives the sixteenth-century Scottish reformer a much-needed facelift. Although Knox's famed cantankerous manner is on display, Dawson also successfully portrays a deeply sensitive man by drawing on previously unseen primary material. In doing so she skilfully balances the Scot's private and public lives to reveal a man vulnerable to this world's trials, yet sustained by a steadfast trust in God.

As so often happens, Knox's fearless evangelism and expository preaching resulted in persecution. He endured three periods of exile, enslavement in the galley of a French ship, exclusion from Elizabethan England, and public ridicule from all quarters of society. This prolonged suffering was borne in the same confidence Knox took to his preaching: being led by the Holy Spirit, his sermons were rarely scripted before entering the pulpit. His ministry was equally driven by a godly concern for the welfare of his family, his friends, and his flock be they in Scotland, England, or Europe.

The narrative begins with the baptism of Knox's son in Geneva where the Scotsman weeps for joy in response to God's grace. It concludes with Knox reading his favourite passages of scripture on his deathbed (including John 17, affectionately referred to as 'my first anchor'). In between, Dawson shows us a minister who took the Bible seriously. It was Knox's dedication to the regulative principle of scripture that forced Archbishop Cranmer to insert the 'Black Rubric' into the 1552 Prayer Book as a late addition to the Communion Service. As a Marian exile in Frankfurt, then later in Geneva with Calvin, Knox continued to develop what he conceived was a biblical model for liturgical practice. Two works that Knox helped produce, the *Forme of Prayers* and the *Psalms of David*

in Metre, would lay the foundation for worship in the Reformed Church of Scotland and for the Presbyterian tradition. Knox's scholarly hand also contributed to the Geneva Bible: 'by far the most popular version for the people of Protestant Scotland, Elizabethan England and the early American colonies.'

This is a highly readable biography of an important figure in Reformation history. By following Knox's movements from St Andrew's through Berwick-upon-Tweed, London, Frankfurt, Geneva, Edinburgh and back to St Andrew's, Dawson provides an account of the Reformation that only John Knox could supply. It is an academic achievement that will engage readers with no previous knowledge of the Scotsman. This reader has two minor grievances. Citations and references are collated as endnotes at the end of the book instead of as footnotes at the bottom of each page. And instead of a full bibliography, each chapter has suggestions for further reading. These quibbles aside, *John Knox* is an excellent addition to one's library.

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APOLOGETICS: A Justification of Christian Belief

John M. Frame

Phillipsburg: P&R, 2015 327pp £13.99pb ISBN: 9781596389380

The present work purports to be an extensively redeveloped and expanded edition of Frame's earlier work on the topic (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*). In the course of the work, Frame exhibits his predilection for presuppositional apologetics, which is built upon, but not uncritically wedded to the Van Tilian model, as well as a high view of scripture, and an unashamedly reformed theology.

Frame posits a model that allows apologetics to be used as proof, defence, and offence. He deals with each of these in turn, showing the multi-faceted nature of the field. The work reads more as a handbook of presuppositional apologetics than (as the subtitle might suggest) a book that a non-Christian might pick up in order to learn more about the justification for Christianity.

The work demonstrates the high level of engagement with philosophy that one has come to expect from Frame, particularly in chapters seven and eight, when he deals with the problem of evil. The discussion has a

tendency towards the technical at times, such as when Frame makes use of formal logic principles. However, his extensive footnotes usually show his 'working out.' The technical discussions can be hard to follow at times, especially if this is the first time somebody has engaged with this field of study. Frame explains that his intended audience is the 'church worker or layman with some higher education' rather than the professional philosopher. If this is the case, one wonders whether it is pitched slightly too high at times. The helpful glossary in the appendices does go some way towards alleviating this.

Amidst the cerebralities, the author attempts to demonstrate the practical applications of his apologetic, most notably in chapter ten. This takes the form of an imaginary conversation between 'John' and his fellow passenger on an aeroplane. This is a useful exercise in showing how the whole system ties together, even if it does seem a little forced, and slightly naïve at times. One wonders whether a real life example might have been better.

All in all, this work serves as a good introduction to the field of presuppositional apologetics. It would be useful to read in order to get a feeling for the general arguments used by presuppositionalists before moving on to the more technical works of others such as Van Til and Bahnsen, if so desired.

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HIS LOVE ENDURES FOR EVER: Reflections on the Love of God

Garry J. Williams

Nottingham: IVP, 2015 192pp £11.99pb ISBN: 9781783592838

This is the most deeply enriching book, in its address both to the intellect and the soul, that I have read in a good while. It's relatively brief and also profound; learned and also lucid; doctrinal and also deeply applied to life. Williams keeps a consistent aim in view: to describe the love of God as we find it revealed to us in the Scriptures, and not (and this is something we fall into so easily) as a magnified projection of love as we experience it in this world. He offers the book, he says, as 'a form of inoculation that will protect you against mistaken accounts of God's love, accounts that flatten out the difference between divine love and human love.'

In addition, he is concerned that his material sink deep into the souls of his readers—something which he thinks super-abundant expository Bible ministry can inadvertently and ironically work against. To counteract this, he ends each chapter with a meditation and also a prayer, which he urges readers not to rush over. These are very well-judged, and might leave the reader wondering why more works of doctrine don't include something similar. Where the book becomes particularly unusual for a work of doctrine, and helpfully so, is that the meditations include direct pastoral questions and even pastoral exhortations. Thus at the end of a chapter on the need for us to leave retributive justice to God, Williams describes someone obsessing over a past injustice and nurturing a growing desire to vindicate themselves. He then asks, 'Are you such a person? Do you nurse a desire for revenge? Is it young? Have you harboured it for years?' And then on the next page, 'Consciously let God be God with your grievance in mind. Bless your enemies.' Here is doctrine applied very faithfully, and with 'under the skin' directness. Beyond any insights which may be gleaned into God's love, of which of course there are many, what will probably remain for longest with the reader who takes time over these questions is a reality of spiritual engagement with the God of love as he really is, not as we often imagine him to be.

The book opens with two methodological chapters on the pressing need for divine revelation. Although these are not specific to the topic of God's love, they are especially needful as an introduction here because of the constant tendency just noted to define God's love in light of human love as we experience it. The focus is on both the objective and subjective aspects of revelation. Objectively our exclusion from fellowship with God means that we need a gospel, and God has mercifully given us one in and through his Son, and has verbalised it in creaturely terms that we can understand. Subjectively we are spiritually blind and so need to be given the capacity to believe the gospel, and mercifully God has granted us that through the Spirit.

Then follow ten chapters, forming the bulk of the book, each addressing from Scripture a different aspect of God's love and setting it directly in contrast with human love. Here is a taster of a few: we often love something too much and turn it into an idol, but God's love is always 'rightly proportioned.' We love because we feel a lack within ourselves, but God has no such need and loves entirely out of his goodness. We are often captivated by the one we love, but God is always sovereign in his love. The strength of our love waxes and wanes, but God is eternally 'maximally alive' because the passion of his love never varies. We most

often love because we find something lovely in the beloved, but God loves the unlovely precisely in order to beautify them.

It will be evident from this that along the way a number of themes in the doctrine of God are dealt with that sometimes seem forbidding and of little spiritual use to the non-academic, such as God's simplicity, eternity, and impassibility. The genius of this work is that, in coming at these attributes from the overarching perspective of God's love, it shows that they are spiritually and pastorally vital.

This is therefore a book that will do good to the mind and especially to the soul of any reader disciplined enough not to skim but to linger. Anyone with pastoral oversight in the church will find, perhaps at surprising moments, flashes of insight into how rich doctrine can deepen everyday pastoring. And (given my day-job I might be expected to comment on this) anyone responsible for the preaching ministry of a local church will find here deep stimulation for spells of doctrinal preaching. Moreover, any pastor/preacher may find themselves prompted to ask whether explicit language of God's love is actually as central to our ministry as it is to God himself. But all this follows, of course, once the book has done its work in revealing to us how thin and puny our grasp on God's love can become.

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