

Book Reviews

Langford, Michael J., *Unblind Faith* (Parapress 2010 £7.99 pb) pp. 198
ISBN 978 1 898594 87 1

This title first appeared in 1982, published by SCM Press. It began as a series of lectures for an Anglican congregation. The present volume is a substantial revision. Langford is a retired Anglican priest and academic theologian. His aim is to explore the middle ground between 'blind faith' and 'rational faith'. It is too easy, Langford claims, to see these two positions as the only viable ones, and as mutually incompatible.

The first nine chapters set out the Essentials of the Christian Faith. Langford's approach to this challenge lies somewhere between systematic theology and philosophical theological, but he is always careful to aim for a language that takes seriously the questions that thoughtful non-Christians might ask. He provides some very helpful insights. He also offers good reasons for questioning some commonly-found misunderstandings among believers and non-believers alike, inviting reflection rather than imposing dogmas.

The remaining six chapters address the problematic context of Christian believing in the twenty-first century. Beginning with Evil and Suffering, Langford goes on to discuss the philosophical problem of Freedom, and helpfully clarifies some of the muddled thinking around this topic. He then turns to the Bible and how we read it, moving on to Christianity and other religions, and the Rational Defence of Christianity and, finally, Prayer and Work.

In a project of this kind the author has to be clear about its objective, its scope, its audience and the strategic plan of communication – how to deal with topics which must not be over-simplified, or those which demand fuller treatment than can be given in a modest book without giving the impression of 'copping out'. Langford's objective is clear, and his thinking incisive, but I do wonder how many people, among the large number he no doubt hopes to reach, will find his writing as enjoyable as did one of the reviewers of the first edition. It isn't an easily-digested read. It may be best to see this book not as a comprehensive treatment, but rather as a series of pointers to issues that can fruitfully be addressed – but only on the basis of wider reading.

John Ogden

Holdsworth, J., *Lies, Sex and Politicians: communicating the Old Testament in contemporary culture* (SCM Press 2010 £16.99 pb) pp. 178, ISBN 9780334043409

The title was probably dreamed up in a marketing brainstorming session and can be safely ignored. This is a brief, readable introduction to the Old Testament. It makes connections with the world in which we live, but does not attempt to analyze contemporary culture, preferring instead to encourage 'a conversation between the text and the circumstances of the reader'. Each chapter ends with some 'links and connections' to provoke further reflection.

Holdsworth follows much modern study in seeing the key historical event in the Jewish Scriptures as the Exile rather than the Exodus. 'Historical' books are shaped by this, as is the recounting of the foundational narratives of the Pentateuch. Brueggemann's perception that the Old Testament is in essence a response to the religious trauma of exile is pursued. Thereafter Holdsworth gives us an increasingly speedy journey through the Prophets, Ethics, Worship – I had the feeling at times that he was responding to deadlines from his publisher!

It is a highly readable book from a clearly gifted teacher. He has an easy, conversational style that made me wonder at points whether the text was dictated rather than written! We are spared footnotes and endnotes. Biblical texts are printed out for easy access (though without verses numbered which becomes difficult where such numbers are referred to in the commentary). It is 'pitched' for a lay readership, around AS level standard, which feels alienated or bored by Bible study. His 'connections' are often from 'red-tops' or the television and often provide the engagement and opportunity for further reflection for which he is aiming.

Someone wishing to introduce the Old Testament to a group prepared to do some further work with the group's immediate context could find this book a helpful and legitimate 'way in'. It is not quite so strong on the 'disconnections', those many places where the Old Testament world is very different from ours. But working to the connections rather than arguing over details of the text provides for a more helpful engagement with that world – and may enthuse people to dig deeper.

Geoff Cornell
Enfield

Forsyth, Peter and Wellings, Martin (eds.) *Methodism and History: Essays in honour of John Vickers* (Oxford, Applied Theology Press 2010 £15.45 pb) pp. xvi, 212, ISBN 978 1874677 11 6

This *Festschrift* brings together seven unrelated essays loosely around the subject of ‘the development of Methodist historiography in the second half of the twentieth century’ (p. xi). An editorial introduction, personal appreciation and bibliography of John Vickers’ writings complete the volume.

Clive Field’s essay on ‘Methodism and the Building Society Movement’ occupies almost a quarter of the volume. This aspect of Methodism has been ‘wholly ignored in Methodist historiography and is systematically studied here for the first time’ (p. 93). Field supplies bucketfuls of empirical evidence but does not investigate to what extent socially aspiring Methodists may have been a contributing cause or the product of the building society movement.

Kate Tiller surveys Methodism in the three counties of the Oxford diocese as revealed in the recently published returns for the 1851 census of religious buildings and attendance. The growing number of such publications emanating from county record offices provides a rich seam for research into the religious landscape of the mid-nineteenth century. What is sorely needed, however, is a sustainable thesis to account for how the host environment impacted on the development of Methodism.

For the benefit of amateur historians, Edward Royle cautions that ‘Writing the Local History of Methodism’ involves more than the uncritical paraphrasing of primary sources without reference to those wider issues that provide context and meaning to the story being told.

Richard Heitzenrater’s introductory essay on ‘Finding Wesley’ outlines some of the useful tools available to researchers intent on discovering the real John (and Charles) Wesley. It is disappointing, however, that such an eminent scholar as Heitzenrater was not asked to contribute a more substantial piece.

Altogether, this *Festschrift* reads like an extended issue of the Wesley Historical Society’s *Proceedings*. Devotees of that journal will find here plenty to satisfy their interest in the byways and minutiae of Methodist history.

David M. Chapman
Superintendent Minister, Central Sussex United Area

Lovell, George and Richardson, Neil G., *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching* (T and T Clark 2010 £65.00 hb, £19.99 pb) pp. 264 ISBN 13: 978 0 567 18141 1 (hb), 978 0 567 50785 3 (pb)

Sustaining Preachers and Preaching seeks to stimulate the challenge of preaching and support and retain preachers, be they recently accredited or experienced. It presents a welcome affirmation of formal training programmes with an emphasis on developing existing skills. We are led through a challenging overview which reflects on all aspects of our call to communicate the gospel effectively and guides us towards a greater understanding of how to engage with differing congregations and speak to individual worshippers.

The authors address the key elements of the art of preaching with sections covering 'effective preaching', 'the nature of congregations', 'constructing a sermon through engagement with scripture', 'interpersonal support and local development programmes' and 'sustaining preachers in a fast changing world'.

The task of expounding the biblical message is developed through practical advice/guidelines on various aspects of sermon writing, including vocal techniques and familiarization with the use of new technology. The effects of social change within communities are explored, as is the need for an awareness of contemporary work patterns, family pressures, emerging forms of church and cultural differences within which there will be differing traditions of Christian thought. Differing degrees of biblical knowledge and understanding are recognized, particularly where English is not people's first language.

This user-friendly, well-ordered book is a clear, accessible resource packed with realistic advice and an acknowledgement that preachers tend to be busy people. But it is not prescriptive. It explores options and I welcome the lightness of language and humour of the writing. 'Sustaining Preachers and Preaching' is impressive for its approach and content and I believe that it will resonate throughout with all who have heard the call to preach and prove to be a valuable asset in CLPD (Continuing Local Preacher Development) and with ordained preachers who are looking to enhance their skills.

Pam Vincent
Local Preacher in Kingston-Upon-Thames Circuit

Book Reviews

Gibson Tim, *Church and Countryside: Insights from Rural Theology* (SCM Press 2010 £16.99 pb) pp. 140, ISBN 978 0 334 04203 7

There is much that is fresh and stimulating about Tim Gibson's reflections on the place and purpose of the Church in the countryside. He is committed to the belief that the interaction of Christians with the world around them is significantly influenced by the habits that are formed in worship. He develops this theme to great effect.

Gibson first offers a 'primer in rural theology'. For him, rural theology is about the participation of Christians in the Eucharist which helps form the church community, not as an end in itself but as an agent of transformation in the world. The Eucharist, indeed, lies at the heart of Gibson's thinking and practice and he returns regularly to the theme, developing it in all aspects of his writing. From the serious and proper theological reflection there then flows a consideration of some of the practical issues facing those who live, work and play in the countryside.

It is particularly refreshing to see the motivation and mission of the Church being rooted in the heart of the Christian story. Gibson is enthusiastically Christian and theological, and passionate about the significant impact those formed by this narrative can have on the well-being of rural communities. His reflections are informed by his own considerable experience of living in the countryside. Gibson admits to having no expertise in economics, politics, agriculture or environmental science and it is to be hoped that those who are so equipped might use the theological tools provided here to inform their own contribution to the process of transformation.

Church and Countryside is very readable and accessible, and will be valued by all who are seeking to be the church in the countryside; instilling in many a renewed confidence and sense of purpose.

Graham Jones.

The National Rural Officer for the Methodist Church

Sell, Alan P.F, *Four Philosophical Anglicans* (Ashgate 2010 £65.00 hb) pp x, 327, ISBN 9781409400592

This book is a clear and sympathetic study of the thought of 'Four Philosophical Anglicans' of the twentieth century, namely W.G. De Burgh,

W.R. Matthews, O.C. Quick and H.A. Hodges. Each of them held eminent academic or ecclesiastical posts in their time, De Burgh and Hodges as Professors of Philosophy at Reading, Matthews as Dean of St. Paul's and Quick as Regius Chair of Divinity and Canon of Christchurch, Oxford. My difficulty with Professor Sell's book is that, as the cover endorsement from Mark Chapman acknowledges, it is a 'thoroughgoing and detailed discussion of four largely unread twentieth century theologians'.

I must confess that H.A. Hodges is the only one I had myself read before, and this not for his philosophical approach or Methodist background but rather because of his interest in the Welsh Methodist hymn writer, Ann Griffiths. However, I'm not sure that Professor Sell's study really makes a case for why they should still be read. He helpfully sets out their thought in the context of their times, predominantly the years before and after the Second World War, and shares what he finds particularly attractive in each of them, 'I like De Burgh for the range of his intellect, Matthews for his openness to new truth . . . Quick for the acuteness of his mind, and Hodges for his Christian humanism', and in what they share together, namely the 'quest of a reasonable faith' (p. 302). But without a clearer sense of what was distinctive and significant about their contribution to their own times, or what they might still have to say to a Christian faith facing a changing and global context in the early years of the twentieth century, then I fear that, despite Professor Sell's endeavours, they will remain as before, 'largely unread'.

Stephen Wigley
Cardiff

Harris, Geoffrey, *SCM Core Text: Paul* (SCM 2009 £19.99 pb) pp. xv, 267, ISBN 978 0 334 04206 8

Do we really need a new textbook on Paul? Yes, we do – for several reasons. Research and debate continue; new discoveries, fresh insights, new methodologies keep on enriching our understanding of the apostle. Some of the debates are vital for our understanding, not only of Paul's theology but also of the Christian faith itself.

In this new book Geoffrey Harris is very good on context and background, drawing effectively on rhetorical and social scientific criticism in particular. After an introduction outlining these approaches and the 'new perspective' on Paul, the author presents three chapters on Paul's Jew-

Book Reviews

ish background, conversion and mission strategy, before proceeding to the core of the book. This comprises six chapters on the undisputed letters, to which Harris adds 2 Thessalonians, Colossians and Ephesians. A final chapter explores Paul's significance for today.

The author deploys his wide reading to good effect, whilst being ready to offer his own assessments of complex, and still unsettled debates: for example, does *pistis Christou* mean 'faith in Christ' or 'the faithfulness of Christ' (pp. 34–35), and is Rom. 7 autobiographical (pp. 156–57)? This last discussion is one of many special studies – boxed for clarity – which occur throughout the book: on the Pharisees (p. 8), 'Paul as a Working Man' (p. 89), 'Household Codes' (pp. 207–8), and many more. Occasionally, there is a surprising omission: why no reference to Acts 13.9 in 'Saul – also Paul' (p. 5)? (The title of chapter one, 'From Saul to Paul' may perpetuate the notion that Saul *became* Paul at his conversion.) But these are mostly very well done: the notes on 1 Cor. 14.33b–36, ('Are women allowed to speak?' pp. 123–24) and on Rom. 8.28–30, ('election and predestination', p. 166) are outstanding.

The chapters on the letters also include two examples each of exegesis on important or difficult passages; full marks to the author for tackling not only the dense Christologies of Phil. 2.1–11 and Col. 1.15–20, but also 2 Thess. 2.1–12 and Rom. 1.18–32.

I felt that Luke the historian is let off a little too lightly here. Harris is right, I think, to prefer Hengel's less sceptical assessment of the historicity of Acts to that of Haenchen. But he doesn't always follow the principle he endorses of letting Paul himself be the main source, and using Acts 'as long as there are no really serious objections' to Luke (p. 3). He is not uncritical of Acts' accuracy, but it cannot be said that, according to Luke, Paul 'saw' the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road (p. 23) in the same way as Paul himself claims (1 Cor. 9.1, 15.3ff). Similarly, Harris makes no reference to the (ominous?) silence of Acts about Paul's Collection, or the puzzling absence of Titus from its narratives.

The occasional word or phrase jarred. In dealing with the Corinthians' differences over meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8.1–10) Paul is more than a 'true diplomat' (p. 110); 'democratic' (p. 113) seems the wrong word to describe the apostle's expectations of the Lord's Supper at Corinth, and 'another side of God' doesn't seem quite the right phrase to describe God's wrath. (It's where *we* stand, as Luther saw, which determines how we perceive and experience God.)

The author is keen to present the apostle in a more favourable light than Paul often appears in discussions today, whether inside or outside the

churches. He was a pastor, deeply committed to his churches, not the 'harsh and autocratic disciplinarian' he is often made out to be (p. 96). Here, too, Harris' familiarity with background and context – for example, the notes on 'Paul as a Working Man' (p. 89) and 'Letter-Writing in classical Times' (p. 92) – helps to give us a more rounded picture of the apostle.

The final chapter, on Paul's significance for today, is a little weaker than the rest. But here, too, there are good things, and the author's enthusiasm to communicate the relevance of Paul for today comes strongly through. I particularly liked the sentence 'the Christian experience is thus a strange combination of sharing in the death of Christ and participating in the resurrection of Christ' (p. 235). This is not easily understood, especially in our day. I welcomed, too, the author's statement that 'for Paul, as for Jesus, God's holiness did not mean "separation"' (p. 227); a pity that later, in the paragraph on Christian holiness ('set apart', p. 237), he appears to have forgotten this. But this is a minor blemish in a book which students will find both a valuable introduction to Paul's writings, and a reference book for the future.

Neil Richardson

Cooke, Richard, *SCM Core Text: New Testament* (SCM 2009 £30.00 pb) pp. viii, 499, ISBN 978 0 334 04060 6

In this substantial New Testament introduction, the approach of the author – an historian by training – is historical, rather than literary, (pp. 18–19). But this well-researched, very readable book is anything but 'old hat'. Not only is it an up-to-date introduction for new students, it can serve as a valuable 'refresher course' for more seasoned students as well.

Its most unusual feature is apparent almost at once. Cooke divides the NT writings into four apostolic groups: some select themselves, such as those writings which carry the name 'John', or 'Paul'. (And with Paul's letters Cooke groups Luke-Acts.) With 'Peter' are grouped Mark's Gospel – here Cooke inclines to the traditional view that Petrine eyewitness lies behind this Gospel – as well as 1 and 2 Peter, briefly discussed on pp. 132–33. The 'James' group of writings, however, seems a little contrived, including as it does not only the letter of James, but also Matthew and Hebrews. I wondered, too, whether the author has exaggerated the role of James in the Jerusalem church at the expense of Peter; was Peter 'never' (pp. 52–53) its leader?

Book Reviews

But, that said, Cooke covers most of the material thoroughly and well. The treatment of Matthew is the most patchy: good discussions of introductory questions, including Matthew's sources, and of the intriguing details of Matthew's opening genealogy, the wise men, and (briefly) the five teaching discourses seem to have left little space for the rest of the gospel. Philippians also gets rather short shrift (pp. 249–50).

But these are the exceptions. The chapter on Paul focuses mainly on historical questions: Paul's life and the context of his letters, with a positive, but not uncritical, view of Acts. Cooke is rightly ambivalent about the origin – Pauline or Lucan? – of the Athens speech (Acts 17.22–31), but *was* it a failure? Luke doesn't seem to have been in the habit of recording failures.

His 'John' section is particularly good, with a helpful discussion of Revelation – including the number of the beast (Rev. 13.18, pp. 309–10). The section on John's Gospel is better still, though not all scholars will share his view that the Johannine writings reflect a 'Christianity which has grown beyond its Jewish roots' (p. 306). The special note (one of many throughout the book) 'The Raising of Lazarus: Did It Happen?' recognizes the historical difficulties in the way of saying that it did, but Cooke, in the end, inclines to the view of Meier that there is 'a bedrock of fact' here, (pp. 354–57).

The author saves the best wine until last: chapter 10, 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Anyone who thinks there is nothing fresh to say about the life and ministry of Jesus should read this – unless they have read Sanders, Crossan, Dunn, Meier and many other scholars whose work enriches these pages. There are many good things here: Jesus' relationship – as a disciple – with John the Baptist; the significance and context of Galilee, (anticipated in the informative notes on its fishing industry in the chapter on Peter, (pp. 116–22); the kingdom of God, defined 'as a time as much as a place, '... where and when God's presence comes in a fuller way'(p. 406); the Parable of the Mustard Seed, 'a story about a weed' implies the kingdom is unwelcome as well as insignificant (pp. 428–29).

The final sections – on the crucifixion and resurrection – are as fresh and thought-provoking as the earlier ones. There is a positive assessment of the gospels' fundamental historicity here, alongside a recognition that the narratives also reflect the evangelists' creative use of their imagination. Cooke inclines to the view, held by Albert Schweitzer and others, that Jesus died in despair. As for the resurrection, he gives due weight to the impressive testimony that Jesus 'appeared' (1 Cor. 15.3–8, especially) to many people after his death. Such experiences need to be understood

against the background of contemporary expectations: 'Resurrection was understood wholly as a corporate idea', and therefore 'What no one seems to have bargained for, including Jesus himself, was that Jesus might return from the dead alone' (p. 469).

A few of the author's statements and conclusions are questionable. He exaggerates the 'adoptionist' language of Hebrews (p. 71), does not address the historical questions arising from his correct observation that James' argument at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts only works from the Septuagint (p. 163), and declares, of Mark's passion narrative, that 'there is little editorial work here', (p. 159) – but how does he know that? It is also a pity that the book has a subject index but not a biblical one – and, unless I missed one, no cross-references at all.

Nevertheless, these are small blemishes, in my view, in an otherwise fine achievement. Students looking for a good up-to-date historical introduction to the New Testament need look no further than this one.

Neil Richardson

Wigley, Stephen, *Balthasar's Trilogies: A Reader's Guide* (Continuum 2010 £12.99 pb) pp. 176, ISBN 978 0 567 03416 8

The growing interest in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar suggests that he is one of the most significant Catholic theologians of the later twentieth century, one who does not fit neatly into either the 'progressive' or 'conservative' trends in post-Vatican II Catholicism. This brilliant but maverick figure brought together a deep understanding of European, especially German, culture, a keen engagement with modern philosophy, a detailed knowledge of patristic and medieval sources and an intense, mystical spirituality. He died in 1988, only two days before he was to be made a cardinal. Since then interest in his theology has grown immensely across many sections of both Catholic and Protestant thought. Like Karl Barth, whose theology had a deep influence on him, Balthasar challenges his readers with a vast and complex output, within which the whole of Christian thought is discussed from a number of different angles. It may be that both these authors, by their refusal to conform to any particular philosophical framework, have had a special appeal to a post-modern generation of theologians.

All this makes heavy demands on the reader, so we should be grateful to Stephen Wigley (Chair of the Wales Synod of the Methodist Church); his

Book Reviews

book provides a succinct and accessible introduction to Balthasar's greatest work, the colossal trilogy that comprises *The Glory of the Lord*, *Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic*. Taken together, this series amounts to a daunting 15 volumes and about 10,000 pages. Wigley gives sufficient background to Balthasar's life and thought (drawing on his earlier work on Balthasar's relationship to Karl Barth) and enough of an exposition of each part of the trilogy to enable those who pick up one volume to make sense of it within its wider context.

Essentially, Balthasar's trilogy is an extended, and minutely annotated, plea for a renewed Christian interest in the beautiful, the good and the true. *The Glory of the Lord* (sub-titled *A Theological Aesthetics*) seeks to reintegrate concepts that modernity has conspired to keep apart: truth, revelation, experience and beauty. *Theo Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* explores 'the good' in terms of theatrical performance – God's and ours. The final part of the trilogy, *Theo-Logic*, asks about the nature of the truth revealed in God's gracious self-communication. A combination of philosophical and theological enquiry leads to a final discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding us into truth and witnessing to it.

As someone who has a limited knowledge of Balthasar and has read some volumes of the trilogy I was helped to see how the whole project came together and I was encouraged to give more time to further exploration of this fascinating labyrinth. Those for whom Balthasar is uncharted territory will find here a clear and reliable guide that will, I hope, embolden them to read at least parts of the trilogy for themselves.

Stephen Wigley has a gift for explaining the complex in ways that are understandable but not simplistic. It is heartening to know that a person in senior Church leadership is thinking and teaching in this way.

Richard Clutterbuck
Principal, Edgehill Theological College, Belfast

Stevens, Paul R. and Ung, Alvin, *Taking your Soul to Work: overcoming the nine deadly sins of the workplace* (Wm. B. Eerdmans 2010 £9.99 pb) pp. 216 ISBN 9780802865595

This is an exceptional and useful guide to being a Christian in the workplace. It is practical, offering a realistic and transferable framework to explore, with faith, those behavioural pitfalls in our workplaces which can hinder the following of Christ.

The book resulted from a conversation between the authors about the negative impact of work on their lives, especially on their prayer lives and their awareness of God's presence in the workplace. This conversational approach pervades the whole book, making it accessible and grounded in shared experience; the vocabulary is that of the everyday, whether describing the reality of working life or theological insights. Effective use is made of tables and action plans, as well as exercises to aid prayerful reflection and case-studies covering workplace situations. The overall style and layout of the book, therefore, is entirely consistent with documents used by workers in modern-day workplaces.

The heart of the book is a systematic framework for spiritual growth comprising three sequential stages, each approached in a prayerful and reflective way:

- identifying the nine soul-sapping, 'deadly sins' at work
- cultivating the fruit of the Holy Spirit which overcome them, and
- imagining the transformed, Spirit-led life at work.

The nine 'deadly sins' for workers are those widely accepted with the addition of 'restlessness' and 'boredom'. This does seem a little contrived (perhaps to develop a three-fold, Trinitarian, structure?) and results in 27 (three stages x nine deadly sins) brief and, to some extent, overlapping chapters.

The book's major shortcoming is the focus on paid, 'corporate' work in the 'business-community'. While many will find this relevant, many other workers who will feel excluded. Work is a life-long calling and is a way for all to grow in God's presence; it is a pity, therefore, that some may not read the valuable and highly-transferable framework offered in this book

Stephen Talbot
St Mary's University

Marohl, Matthew J., *Joseph's Dilemma: 'Honour Killing' in the Birth Narrative of Matthew* (James Clarke 2010 £13.50 pb) pp. 104, ISBN 9780227173268

In this slim volume Marohl challenges the majority view of Joseph's dilemma in Matt.1.18–19 which presents Joseph's choices as being between dismissing his betrothed publicly or privately. The idea of 'honour' often explored in this respect is that associated with Mary. If Joseph publicly

Book Reviews

exposes Mary he will bring ‘shame’ to her so the private discreet option is the choice of the ‘righteous’ man. This majority view rests to a large extent on the understanding that the actions prescribed in Deut. 22.20–21 were not practised in the first century. Marohl persuasively undermines this assumption and argues that family ‘honour’ was more likely to be the key consideration. The ‘honour killing’ of Mary would have been expected in order to restore the ‘honour’ of the family in the eyes of the community. Joseph’s dilemma was therefore between keeping Mary’s pregnancy a secret or exposing her to likely death. Marohl relates this thesis to the wider theme of ‘expected death giving way to unexpected new life’.

The most important element of Marohl’s work, however, is in his first and third chapters. These offer a social scientific description of the modern practice of ‘honour killing’ and the ancient practice of killing to restore ‘honour’. These descriptions and reflections allow the reader to move beyond a mere academic consideration of the context for interpretation. The reader is helped to identify with those women who through history have been subjected to violence and regarded as an asset to be traded. This work enables the reader to relate to Mary’s predicament and Joseph’s dilemma with a clearer sense of what was at stake as Joseph considered his options.

This is a valuable contribution to our thinking about the birth of Jesus in Matthew and to our understanding of the ongoing practice of ‘honour killing’.

Martin Ramsden

Kessler, Edward, *An Introduction to Jewish Christian Relations* (Cambridge University Press 2010 £17.99 pb) pp. 243, ISBN 978 0 521 70562 2

Despite predictions of an end to Methodist-Jewish relations, following the passage of the *Report on Justice for Palestine & Israel* at the Methodist Conference of 2010, much to everyone’s surprise there has been a mini renaissance of Methodist-Jewish encounter over the last year.

Those involved from the Methodist side would gain greatly from investing time and money in Ed Kessler’s excellent book. Kessler, who is the Jewish founder of a centre for Abrahamic dialogue in Cambridge, is a generous dialogue partner with a deep understanding and clear affection for Christianity. Easy to read, comprehensive in its sweep of the history of Jewish – Christian relations and nuanced in its presentation of conten-

tious issues, such as how to tackle the anti-Judaism of the New Testament and approaches to Zionism and the State of Israel, this book encourages a serious in-depth exploration of the issues involved, in an accessible and engaging style.

Split into 10 chapters that range from the New Testament context to the role of Jewish-Christian engagement in the wider inter-faith movement today, Kessler has provided a valuable study resource that could easily be adapted for group use, perhaps combining the reading of a chapter each session with some primary documentation from the period or issue in question. An excellent bibliography and Kessler's ability to summarize complex arguments simply and succinctly facilitate such an approach and enable further exploration.

For Christians who have not seriously engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue this is an excellent place to start. For those already involved, Kessler's presentation will refresh thoughts and re-engage enthusiasm for a dialogue that is crucial for the creative development of Christian self understanding in a post Holocaust world, and for constructive engagement with the cause of peace, justice and healing in the Middle East.

Ray Gaston

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Theological Education*