

Book Reviews

Wright, N.T., *Justification – God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (SPCK 2009 £10.99 pb) pp, 244 ISBN 9780281060900

Although the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ (NPP) theological conversation involves quite a few names, there are two vocal participants in the debate who have had an increasingly large audience within American Evangelical and Reformed circles. I am talking about, of course, John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, and N.T. Wright, former Anglican Bishop of Durham. This book of Wright’s is in large part a response to the book penned by Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (Crossway, 2007). In it, Wright attempts to answer objections that Piper raised, as well as provide a more definite statement of what he himself believes and is attempting to show, namely that there is more to justification than a mere ‘decision for Christ’.

The book is divided into two sections. The first provides an introductory overview on this whole NPP. Wright discusses the nature of the debate (what it is about, why does it matter, and so on), and provides a historical context in which he believes the New Testament writings of Paul should be read. The second section is where Wright delves into the writings of Paul, providing exegetical arguments from Galatians, Romans, Philipians, Corinthians and Ephesians, as to why his perspective on Paul is more accurate than the ‘Old Perspective on Paul’ (OPP).

Throughout the book, Wright frequently mentions *dikaiosune theou* which he translates as being ‘God’s covenant faithfulness’, or ‘God’s single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world’. Wright sees justification as becoming a member of the ‘covenant family’ of God, which is achieved by faith in Christ and, whereas membership was once restricted to the Israelites, and the sign of one’s membership was seen in the ‘badges’ of circumcision and Torah, membership is now open to those in every nation who believe in Christ.

Wright also places a lot of emphasis on the meta-narrative of Paul, which is about God’s plan that he had from the very beginning to save all of creation through Israel. This is complemented by Wright’s understanding of the Second Temple Judaism that existed in Paul’s day, which was not centred on the question of ‘What must I do to be saved’, but was instead coming from the angle of ‘How is God going to be faithful and stay true to his promises to Abraham?’

This book is a very good read. Not quite an introductory work and not quite a full-blown scholarly work.

Kevin Brown

Beckwith, Francis J., *Politics for Christians: Statecraft As Soulcraft* (Christian Worldview Integration), (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2010 £11.35 pb) pp. 175 ISBN 0830828141

Francis Beckwith's *Politics for Christians* is one book in the Christian Worldview Integration Series and is written as a substantive and very readable introduction to politics and the Christian's place in the realm of statecraft. Several major questions occupy Beckwith's attention in the book.

First and foremost Beckwith argues that Christians have a responsibility to participate in the political realm and that they can and should do so as Christians. In giving substance to this concern, Beckwith gives a competent and readable account of liberal democracy and the Christian citizen's place in it. He explores the notion of separation of Church and state, the idea that secular liberalism creates a neutral posture toward religion, and finally he gives an account of the necessity of God in any understanding of natural rights and natural moral law.

Beckwith rightly argues that secular liberalism is not neutral toward religious expression, but is indeed discriminatory as it insists that the only motivations that are valid in the public square are non-religious. It does not allow for the full participation of citizens who *are* religious. Moreover, Beckwith questions whether secularism can sustain the kind of liberalism that guarantees liberty and equality for all.

As much as I enjoyed this book, and recommend it, I have two significant points of disagreement. First, the typical account of the Christian and politics that Beckwith embraces is inadequate and does not exhaust the ways Christians can be politically engaged. Second, unlike Beckwith, I am not overly enamoured with the notions of natural law and natural rights. I will not go so far as to say that natural law does not exist, but after being involved in many discussions over the years where people have attempted to make a moral case for something based on natural law, I have concluded that if natural law does exist, it is so vague that it is completely unhelpful in moral discernment.

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Politics for Christians is definitely helpful, however, for those who want a solid introduction to politics and who are ready to ponder the believer's place in the rough-and-tumble world of statecraft.

Beckwith ends his book with the following:

To be sure, the world of politics is often messy and teeming with conflict. But that's true of so much of life that is worth engaging, whether it's family, church, school or workplace. Thus, it is my hope that the readers of this book will take seriously the wisdom of Ecclesiastes and discern the proper times for their engagement in the world of politics. (p. 165)

Alan R. Bevere

Ashland Theological Seminary Ohio

Cobb, Jr., John B., *Spiritual Bankruptcy: A Call to Prophetic Action* (Abingdon Press 2010 £18.00 pb) pp. 183 ISBN 9781426702952

Process theology's great advocate and innovator, John B Cobb Jr., is still writing the sort of theology which is designed to shake and offend the complacent theologian out of their staid traditional thinking. In this fascinating book, Cobb writes with the sort of blunt authority about the mindset and mentality of western Christianity that will assure him of publicity if not popularity. Whilst reserving most of his critique for those in the United States, much of what he has to say is definitely applicable to the Church in the UK too. His claim is that the systems of philosophy, education and economics employed by the West to determine their world-view are too infected with either secularism or religiousness to understand or deal with the world crisis which we face. His primary thesis is that people of faith (he does not confine himself to Christianity) must 'secularize' their tradition, by which he means embracing a practice of thought and behaviour that focuses on the real problems of this present world rather than on some otherworldly realm.

To support his thesis, Cobb draws on biblical arguments to demonstrate how both Jesus and Paul (for example) stood against and defied religiousness. What was important was the way in which a relationship with God transformed behaviour, not ritual practices. Cobb spends considerable time tracing how Christians have lost the ability or will to secularize the tradition. His critique of philosophical systems makes for interesting reading, if

you are familiar with the ideas he discusses. A theological reader without a solid grounding in philosophy will, however, flounder and even the most competent readers may lose track of Cobb's detailed argument in places. For the more willing reader, this book provides a rather good introduction to the interaction of philosophy, theology and secular practice.

Cobb concludes by drawing heavily on the work of Alfred North Whitehead to suggest and insist that a new direction for philosophy and hence Christian/religious action/practice is possible – albeit not easily achieved.

Spiritual Bankruptcy is a passionate call to action, which, unfortunately, is written in such a way that it is unlikely to inspire most practitioners. It is in many ways a pivotal work, which should be read by all those who can most influence the Christian agenda, certainly by all ministers of faith and all theological educators. It does, however, presume a great deal, Not least by insisting that such people are 'insane', but are nonetheless (presumably with a little help from his book), capable of rationalizing/secularizing their way to a solution to our global crisis of faith.

Angela Shier-Jones
New Malden

A. Gilmore, *A Concise Dictionary of Biblical Origins and Interpretation* (T&T Clark 2007 £19.00 pb) pp. 256 ISBN 0567030970

This second edition now includes almost one thousand entries. The author acknowledges that this kind of resource is bound to have its limitations, not least when it comes to defining interpretations. However, Alec Gilmore writes well, providing information which is easily accessible and pointing towards other sources for further research. This book, like all dictionaries, will mostly be used for dipping in and out of as the need arises, although reading at length in a single sitting is highly informative and engaging. It is particularly useful to keep close at hand for those times when a biblical commentary or theology book uses a term that is unknown or cannot be remembered.

Gilmore also provides additional information for some entries which is both helpful and interesting. The dictionary includes the provision of wider historical context for certain entries and ranges from discussions on specific Hebrew and Greek texts, particular biblical characters, church leaders and strands of theology, through to why some biblical texts appear to have a greater influence than others.

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This book is highly recommended as a resource tool for anyone who is engaged in biblical and theological studies and needs information and answers quickly and easily. It is particularly useful for individuals who want to understand more about the compilation of the Bible from the earliest writings, through to the myriad translations which are available today.

Chrissie Howe
Kings College London

Gaston, Ray, *A Heart Broken Open: Radical faith in an age of fear* (Wild Goose Publications 2009 £10.99 pb) pp. 202 ISBN 978 1 905010 61 5

Ray Gaston, an Anglican priest, is Inter Faith Tutor and Enabler for the Birmingham District of the Methodist Church and the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Education. The title of the book comes from a prayer of Mother Teresa: 'O God, break open my heart so that the whole world may fall in.' It is the story of his encounter with Islam as a religion and *islam* as a path of submission to God, in the context of his parish ministry in inner-city Leeds post 9/11.

Gaston's overall message is that in engaging with Islam his own Christian faith has been deepened. The book is divided into three sections. The first section, Solidarity, is autobiographical, describing encounters and relationships. For me the chapter describing his journey to Iraq in 2004 was both profound, moving and helpful in terms of his experience of Shi'a Islam. His courage and vulnerability were shown as being the only Christian priest in Karbala on Ashura day, the first time it was commemorated after the fall of Saddam, when over three million people were present. Theological reflections are scattered through the book, including looking at Christian jihad and five pillars of peace through Christ. However, it is the second section, Truth, which contains the bulk of the theological reflection, with a diary section describing his keeping of Ramadan. The final section, Dialogue, contains responses from two Muslims and a Christian.

In terms of Christians approaching Islam, Gaston encourages us always to keep in mind the log and the speck. He does not say we should not find fault with things in the Muslim world, but that any behaviour or attitude by Christians must not be a log in our eye as we seek to bear witness to Muslims about Jesus. This must be primary. His aim is that the Abrahamic faiths will be able to provide prophetic correctives upon each other.

It would be good to find out how, through his approach, one would ever be able to take the further step of providing that corrective, though, one of the Muslim respondents in the dialogue section did it by adopting a log and log approach in criticizing both Christian and Muslim empires through the ages.

This is a timely book. In my experience Islamophobia is both real and visceral. Gaston does overstate his case, however, when he argues that everyone is afraid of Muslims. I am comfortable with Gaston's christology and with his political points, though purely blaming Shi'a/Sunni sectarianism on imperialism fails to do justice to the multi-dimensional causes of the polarization. However, it is very rarely you read a book which makes you want to go further and deeper into an issue in your life and ministry; this book does that.

Noel Irwin

Superintendent of the Sheffield Mission Circuit and member of Sheffield Faiths Forum

Sugarman, Martin, *Fighting Back: British Jewry's Contribution in the Second World War* (Valentine Mitchell 2010 £18.95 pb) pp.464 ISBN 978 0 85303 910 5

Fighting Back details the considerable contribution that the British Jewish community, including the many Jews who lived in the Palestinian Mandate, made to the British war effort. The motivation for the book was, in part, a response to the myth that British Jewry lacked a fighting spirit and did not play their full part in the Second World War. Martin's carefully constructed case shows that Jews easily contributed well out of proportion to the rest of the population.

The book was written just in time to get verbal recollections from those who served. It is humbling to read the stories of ordinary people doing extra-ordinary things. Many British Jews fought in the same units as everyone else. There were Jews in the Battle of Britain, the North African desert and all other theatres of war.

Some of the most fascinating sections of Martin's book cover the contribution British and Palestinian Jews made to various special operations. Their language skills were particularly useful at places like Bletchley Park – I was astonished to find that one of my near neighbours in Hackney had worked there carefully interpreting German signals. Many Jewish men

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and women were parachuted into occupied Europe. Several were shot or eventually executed in concentration camps including the women.

The contribution becomes mind-blowing when Martin describes ‘SIG’ a special unit composed of German-speaking Jews who spoke, trained, drilled, ate and dressed as Nazis in order to penetrate German lines for reconnaissance and sabotage. They even recruited German NCO POWs to run a special German-speaking camp in the desert. This would make a brilliant film.

From a contemporary point of view Martin’s description of the fighting around Palestine reminds us that inter-communal violence against Palestinian Jews was incited by the pro-Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem. It was sad to read that a British officer refused to intervene to prevent the massacre of Baghdad’s historic Jewish community. It is easy to gloss over the events before Israel emerged as a fully fledged sovereign state recognized by the United Nations.

One of the saddest themes throughout the book seems to be the casual anti-Semitism which littered British attitudes at the time. However, when Jews joined up it soon evaporated after basic training as units pulled together, reminding us that the war was a great period of social change.

At a time when anti-Semitism is again rearing its ugly head in these islands, often in unexpected places, this book is a stark reminder of the strong bonds amongst the British people – Jew and non-Jew.

David Hallam
Birmingham

Calvin, John, *The Secret Providence of God*, edited by Paul Helm and translated by Keith Goad (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010, £12.99 pb) pp. 128 ISBN 1433507056

In 1558, John Calvin published *Calumniae nebulonis cuiusdam, quibus odio et invidia gravare conatus est doctrinam Ioh. Calvini de occulta Dei providentia. Joannis Calvinii ad easdem responsio*. It was a short work responding to Sebastian Castellio, who had anonymously collated a number of articles on divine providence, ostensibly drawn from Calvin’s writings, for the purpose of discrediting the Genevan Reformer. Calvin responds to every charge levelled against him, though whether he does so successfully is, of course, for the reader to decide.

In his enlightening introduction, Paul Helm explains the background to

The Secret Providence of God (its English title) and its translations into English. When I was researching Calvin on providence for my doctoral thesis a few years ago, the only English translation of *Secret Providence* I could find was located in Henry Cole's *Calvin's Calvinism* – a rather idiosyncratic volume, judging by Helm's comments.

This contemporary edition of *Secret Providence* is a worthy successor to Cole's text. Helm provides notes throughout, aiding the reader's understanding by providing not only details of the historical circumstances behind the debate, but also useful information about Calvin's quotations of, or allusions to, other writings, including those of Augustine and his own earlier publications. Keith Goad's translation captures effectively both Castellio's reasonableness in questioning Calvin's views, and Calvin's weary, often aggressive retorts. Another advantage of this edition of *Secret Providence* is the colour-coding that distinguishes Castellio's original collation from Calvin's response, making it easier to identify where Castellio ends and Calvin begins. That sounds very basic, but my reading of *Calvin's Calvinism* would have benefited from tricks like this, or even by including clear headings such as those that permeate Helm and Goad's effort.

It should come as no surprise that I am pleased to commend this edition of *The Secret Providence of God*. I only wish it had been available four years ago when I was researching Calvin at length.

Terry J. Wright
Spurgeon's College, London

Gavrilyuk, Paul, Koskela, Douglas, Vickers, Jason, (eds.), *Immersed in the life of God – the Healing Resources of the Christian Faith. Essays in honour of William J. Abraham* (Wm. B. Eerdmans 2010 £19.99 pb) pp. 208 ISBN 978 0 8028 6396 6

Initiation and formation, well-known names by now, denote entry into the Church via baptism and growth in Christian maturity. *Immersed in the life of God* comes with the welcome sense of being fully in it, enveloped by it, with no limiting horizons to the extent of it. The essays are in honour of William J. Abraham DD., a minister in the United Methodist Church, he is the Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at the Southern Methodist University, USA.

Written by 11 fellow theologians, historians and philosophers, the essays pick up the healing aspects of the Christian faith, focusing on rites such

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as baptism, confession, reconciliation, forgiveness, the use of Scripture, liturgy, theology, sacraments and much more, which Abraham calls the rich 'canonical heritage'.

The analysis is wide-ranging, and full of implications for the life of everyday Christians, the Churches, and society as a whole. Healing is seen in its widest sense. The authors take as their standpoint the importance of recognizing that, as Geoffrey Wainwright quotes from B.E.M, 'in a broken world, God calls the whole of humanity to become God's people', and is implicitly within all these resources offering healing, restorative grace.

The authors chart from early patristic days the development of the rites as reconciling healing agencies in which lie challenge, commitment and growth. Nor do they see all of this as being solely Church-centred. They also range beyond it, as one would expect. R.R. Reno looks at 'Confession', in the sense of 'confessing one's faith, one's belief in what one is', and analyzes it in terms of Nietzsche's anti-Christian beliefs laid out 'On the Genealogy of Morals', helping us see the strengths derived from critical belief. Ellen Charry looks at society and sees how civic and religious ceremonies have similar attributes in building up identity, commitment, a sense of worth and responsibility. She notes the complexities which are inherent in having a conjoint civic and religious identity, and seeks a path in which self-interest is always subordinated to God's redemptive healing life. Jerry Walls deals with 'outrageous evil' and its de-moralising effect.

Overall, a good read with much material to ponder and act on and an excellent bibliography.

Eric W. Murray
New Malden

Moltmann, Jürgen *Sun of Righteousness, Arise! God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (Fortress 2010 £25.00 pb) pp. 254 ISBN 0800696581

Moltmann has been accused of being everything from being a Patripassianist and a universalist, to teaching a pure liberation theology (which is true to an extent, though not according to some definitions of liberation theology I have seen).

He has been a prolific writer. This volume is comprised of 17 chapters which are divided into four sections:

- The Future of Christianity
- The God of Resurrection: Christ's Resurrection – The Resurrection of the Body – The Resurrection of Nature
- God is Righteousness and Justice
- God in Nature.

The first section contains two essays, which can be succinctly reduced to the following points: 'The future of Christianity is the church' and 'The future of the church is the kingdom of God'.

The second section consists of six essays which discuss the resurrection of Christ, the future resurrection of the righteous, the resurrection of nature, and the future of God's kingdom on earth. The following is one of my favourite lines from the book: 'With the raising of Jesus, God's own 'arising' has begun, and it will bring about justice for all the wretched and for the whole earth. With the raising of Jesus, God himself has arisen, to fulfil his promises to all those he has created.'

The third section contains six chapters which focus upon the nature of God, with specific chapters on Monotheism and Trinitarianism. In one chapter, after describing the 'Manichean idea about the end' which is prevalent in American evangelicalism (e.g. Hal Lindsay, Tim La Haye, et al.), Moltmann then discusses his own dialectical universalism. The final section of this book contains two chapters which address such modern-day issues as evolution and eugenics.

All in all (as Moltmann would say!) this latest volume of his is great! However, after reading this book, I could not shake the feeling that he intended it as his final major theological work. I hope I am wrong and that he contributes much more literature concerning his theology of hope, but if it is the climax of his life's work, then it is very fitting indeed.

The origin of the Christian faith is once and for all the victory of the divine life over death: the resurrection of Christ. 'Death is swallowed up in victory': that is the heart of the Christian gospel. It is the gospel of life . . . Jesus didn't found a new religion; he brings new life into the world, the modern world too. So we do not so much need interfaith dialogues, interesting though they are. What we need is a common struggle for life, for loved and loving life, for life that communicates itself and is shared, life that is human and natural – in short, life that is worth living in the fruitful living space of this earth. (pg. 77)

Kevin Brown

Wootton, Janet ed., *This is Our Song: Women's Hymn- Writing* (Epworth Press 2010 £35.00 pb) pp. 380, ISBN 978 0 7162 0655 2

I came to this book having not given much thought to women's hymn writing before. However, as this book arrived my curiosity was aroused in the light of the recent notice of motion at the Methodist Conference over women hymn writers (or the lack of them) in *Singing the Faith* and the subsequent letters in the *Methodist Recorder*.

In the first part of the book Janet Wootton traces the history and development of women's hymn writing from the beginnings of Christianity to the present day. In the second part we hear from contemporary women hymn writers about their own experience. A note of warning is sounded straight away in the introduction where Wootton bemoans the lack of contemporary female writers, especially voices from the Roman Catholic and black communities.

The author takes us through centuries of Christian tradition, showing how women's voices have had difficulty being accepted in a male hierarchy and how in hymnody their voices have been suppressed; from the early and medieval women writers of whose work very little survives; through reformation writers where reforms in theology and technology meant writing could be more widely distributed, yet still women had to work hard for their voice to be heard; to the explosion of hymn writing in the nineteenth century. Here for the first time women began to make more of an impact on hymnody, with some women seeing hymn writing as a specific ministry. I realized too that many of the 'popular hymns' I grew up with from this era were written by women. However, the twentieth century sees a demise in hymnody in general. Even when there is an explosion in new hymnody in the latter half of the century, Wootton notes her despair at the number of women writers in compilations of the 1960s to 80s, as much of it is male dominated.

The book is in part a celebration of women's hymn writing, their distinctive theology and emphasis, yet with recognition of what has been lost over the centuries. Wootton, though, sees hope for the future with the emergence of new women writers, though not necessarily with more large general compilations in the era of alternative ways of publishing and access to hymnody; and the second part of the book hears from contemporary women writers and their stories, such as Kathy Galloway of the Iona Community, Betty Carr Pulkingham of the Fisherfolk, as well as women such as Ruth Duck and Marian Collihole.

Wootton is obviously passionate about her subject matter and the book's scholarship and research are impressive. This book helps us to see the development of women's hymnody and its theology.

Anne Vautreay
Local preacher, Leeds North East Circuit

Kasper, Cardinal Walter, *Harvesting the Fruits of Ecumenism: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (Continuum 2009 £9.99 pb), pp. xv, 207 ISBN 978 1 4411 6272 4

It is 45 years since the close of the Second Vatican Council, and the first cohort of post-conciliar ecumenists has given way to a younger generation with no first-hand experience of its contribution to ecumenism. The Council's Decree on Ecumenism spectacularly signalled the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church on the ecumenical scene after years of remaining aloof. While hopes for a sudden breakthrough in ecumenical relations quickly faded, the enduring ecumenical legacy of the Council can be seen in the plethora of bilateral dialogues among the world communions, some of them going back as far as the late 1960s and early 70s. The current climate of ecumenical realism should not be allowed to obscure the significant degree of theological convergence stemming from these dialogues.

Harvesting the Fruits of Ecumenism is the outcome of a project by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to summarize the achievements of four longstanding bilateral dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion (from 1970); the Lutheran World Federation (from 1967); the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (from 1970); and the World Methodist Council (from 1967).

The result is a concise and insightful summary of the current state of ecumenical convergence in some 'basic aspects of Christian faith' among five of the major traditions in the western Church. The book focuses on core topics of ecumenical interest: 'Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity'; 'Salvation, Justification, Sanctification'; 'the Church'; 'the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist'.

Readable, informed and deftly written, this is an invaluable resource for theologians, students of ecumenism and the general reader interested to discover the current state of theological agreement among the churches concerned.

David M. Chapman
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Sookhdeo, Patrick, *The Challenge of Islam to the Church and its Mission* (Issac Publishing 2009 £9.99 pb) pp. 193 ISBN 978 09787141 5 4

There is a debate in contemporary Evangelicalism on the attitudes that should be taken towards inter-faith encounter and dialogue, particularly with Muslims. This book is a polemic for one side of this argument. As someone who is involved in friendships with Muslims this was not an easy book for me to read because Sookhdeo predominantly speaks of Muslims impersonally and negatively. The book, despite assertions to the contrary in the final paragraph, promotes fear and discourages people from taking the step of seeking dialogical relationships with Muslims. Prominent evangelical institutions and individuals who have sought to do so are criticized.

Sookhdeo claims to engage Islam as an advocate for the persecuted church in Muslim contexts. However, the book often reads more as an attempt to co-opt the vulnerability of the persecuted church for an agenda that appears heavily influenced by right-wing North American fundamentalist Christianity. There *is* a need to bring the experience of the persecuted church to the table of dialogue and through recent evangelical involvement in Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in the UK this has begun to happen with some success.

There is a powerful and noble evangelical missionary tradition of serious and loving Christian engagement and sharing with Islam and Muslims, that includes the likes of Constance Padwick and Kenneth Cragg. Little of this tradition is behind *The Challenge of Islam*, which appears to draw more upon Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis for its inspiration than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Anyone interested in how evangelical Christians might help contribute to responding positively and creatively to the challenge of Islam to the Church in the twenty-first century would do better to pick up Roland E. Miller's *Muslims and the Gospel* or Richard Sudworth's *Distinctly Welcoming*.

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