



*Reformation*  
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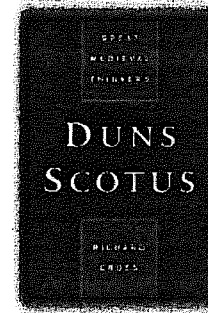
**SPIRITUAL  
FORMATION**

*A Quarterly for Church Renewal*

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## BOOK REVIEWS



*DUNS SCOTUS*  
(*GREAT MEDIEVAL THINKERS SERIES*)

Richard Cross

New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

250 pages, paper, \$25.00

Richard Cross is Official Fellow and Tutor in Theology, Oriel College, Oxford, and University Lecturer in Theology at the University of Oxford. In this volume, Cross provides a comprehensive introduction to Duns Scotus, one of the greatest and most influential philosopher-theologians of the thirteenth century. Cross's book is a contribution to the Oxford series on "Great Medieval Thinkers."

Scotus is an important thinker for several reasons. For Protestant theology, Scotus is important because Luther stood in the Scotist tradition of theology. Heiko Obermann's great study of the background of Luther's theology, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, makes this very clear. One particular feature of Scotus's theology, a feature accented even more by William of Occam, is the distinction between God's two powers, God's *potentia absoluta* and God's *potentia ordinata*. In his absolute power, God can present to his choice an infinite number of logically coherent worlds. In his ordained power, God chooses one of these possibilities to actualize. This distinction has remarkable implications for the meaning of human freedom, for the authority of the Bible and the Church's magisterium and for the meaning of faith. We cannot fully understand Luther's notion of forensic justification or Luther's treatment of the authority of the Bible apart from this distinction which Scotus and Occam did not originate but which they made very prominent.

Scotus is very important also for emphasizing a feature of

Franciscan theology, i.e., the stress that this medieval theological tradition gave to God's will. It may not be overstressing the imagination to look for the earliest forerunners in modern voluntaristic philosophy, in Nietzsche, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Rorty and Foucault, in the Franciscan theology and philosophy of Scotus and Occam.

Scotus is especially important for his view of divine and human freedom. For Scotus, in contrast to Thomas Aquinas, with whom Scotus disagreed on my points, freedom means the capacity to choose opposites in any given situation. This radical notion of freedom—which Scotus ascribed to God and to human beings—comes closer to the modern notion of freedom as autonomy than, say, Augustine's or Thomas's notion of freedom as capacity to choose the end or goal which truly befits human beings as rational beings.

Cross' purpose is to provide the reader with an introduction to Scotus, which includes both Scotus' philosophical and his theological ideas. Thereby, Cross avoids the mistake of separating Scotus, the philosopher, from Scotus, the theologian. This separation is made, for example, by Frederick Coplestone, in his *History of Philosophy* and by Etienne Gilson in his *La Philosophie du Moyen Age* in their treatments of Scotus, and other scholastic theologians. Cross' commitment to treat Scotus as philosopher and as theologian is valid, because Scotus, like Thomas Aquinas or William of Occam or Bonaventura, did their philosophy in the framework of their theological vocation. Granted, Thomas, Scotus and the others asked what could human reason, apart from revelation, know about God? But even this question was motivated by theological commitments. So the attempt to treat Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Scotus as philosophers, in distinction from being theologians, is artificial and misleading. A merit of Cross's book is that he avoids this false separation.

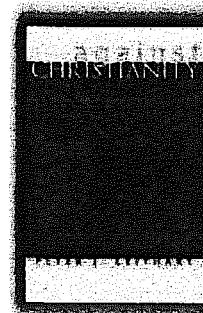
Cross carries out his goal of a comprehensive overview of Scotus in eleven chapters, which range over a wide array of philosophical and theological topics. These topics include God's existence, God's unicity and simplicity; God's perfection and infinity; God's knowledge and agency; God the Trinity;

Humanity: Body and Soul; Human Freedom, Ethics and Sin; Predestination, Merit and Grace; Jesus as God and Man; and the Sacraments. In each of these chapters Cross seeks to combine accuracy and substance with accessibility for the non-professional philosopher and theologian. On the whole, I think he succeeds, although the subtle, complex nature of Scotus' theology has always challenged the best minds. Scotus was not given the title, *Doctor Subtilis*, for nothing.

This volume can be commended for its comprehensiveness, its clarity and its mastery of Scotus' thought to serious students of the history of theology and philosophy—especially those interested in Scotus himself as a theologian and for his contribution to later theology and philosophy.

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*AGAINST CHRISTIANITY*

Peter Leithart

Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, (2003)

143 pages, paper, \$13.00

Unlike the *Good News for Modern Man*, Peter Leithart's book *Against Christianity* doesn't have any pictures in it. But outside the window of this Columbia coffee house there are pictures aplenty to illustrate what's going on inside Leithart's book. A team of construction workers is making all sorts of racket remodeling the historic, brick building across the street. They are stirring up dust and annoying the once-comfortable patrons who sip their Sinless Pastry gourmet coffee. The sound of power-tools boring a hole in brick has muffled the sound of the Soggy Bottom Boys singing, "I Am a

Man of Constant Sorrow." Despite the commotion, the reward is in sight. The coffee shop patrons will once again tap their toes to the sound of a smooth baritone. The building's tenants will soon have new windows where once they had only walls.

Keep that picture in mind. *Against Christianity* is a rip saw, a crowbar, a jackhammer. Leithart's book cuts through the facade of "Christianity," aiming to let in some gospel light. Similar in form to Pascal's *Pensees* and Hammarskjold's *Markings*, similar in mood to Kierkegaard's *Attack on Christendom*, Leithart's small book sets its drill bit firmly into the brick of some wrong-headed notions that obscure the Church's identity and mission. Much of the work, then, is aimed at negation. The early chapter titles read, "Against Christianity," "Against Theology," "Against Sacraments," "Against Ethics"—scary titles indeed. At first glance one fears Peter Leithart is a new pen name for Bishop Spong or the Danish Lutheran pastor who denied the existence of God but affirmed a desire to keep getting paid by his church. But Leithart is Leithart, a Presbyterian minister working within the orthodox, confessional tradition. He is not a companion to the renegade hobbyists and their power tools. His wall-knocking and noise-making are aimed at increasing the property value of the church and the gospel. When the work is done, here is some of what you will find:

Against a merely privatized faith for pious individuals, Leithart asserts the social character of the gospel. He writes, "Salvation must take a social form, and the church is that social form of salvation. . . . The Church is salvation" (32).

Against a Christianity confined exclusively to the head and the heart, Leithart asserts the public and externalized nature of the church (36-38).

Against theology as an abstract system of timeless doctrines and truths which keep the things to be believed both clean and safe, Leithart asserts the storied, historicized message of the Bible as God's Word to the real world of our human experience (46-47).

Against a naive conflation of the kingdom of Jesus and the kingdom of America, Leithart asserts the "need to disentangle

the American story from the Christian story and to insist on the preeminence of the later" (64).

Against viewing worship as an escape from the real stuff of the world, Leithart argues that worship is the real world. Worship is history class, language class, political science class and psychology class. In the church's worship we are narrating God's historic acts, naming the world in the grammar of the Bible, denouncing and dethroning false political rivals and giving words to our human experience (65-67).

Against the constant push to contextualize the gospel in the world, Leithart argues that the world should be contextualized in the story of the gospel.

Against the modern aversion to ritual and festivity, Leithart asserts the value of a liturgical choreography which trains the soul by "posture and movement" (82) and keeping of festivals (baptism and the Lord's Supper) which ritualize the new story of Jesus (86-94).

Against the historians' disdain for the Constantinian project, Leithart argues that "forming Christian culture in the wider society is inherent to the Church's mission" (125).

Against an unthinking concession to the reigning mythology of the separation of church and state, Leithart asserts a counter-claim: being the church is itself political activism. The church is a body politic, a civil society, an assertion of the way things ought to be (136-139).

The book can be read in one sitting easily enough. But it will likely bring you back for more. There is too much good stuff in here to leave it at one read. It will also send you elsewhere, to the other writers and thinkers who show up as Leithart's literary dinner guests: Wright, Hauerwas, Yoder, Clapp. I highly recommend the book. Each chapter opens up a window to some fresh proposals for understanding who we are as the church and what we it means to live out the gospel in the power of the Spirit.

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*BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE: EVANGELICAL MISSION  
ENTERING THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY*

Jonathan J. Bonk, editor

Evangelical Missiological Society Series Number 10

William Carey Library, Pasadena,  
California (2003)

271 pages, paper, \$14.99

Who makes the decisions about how the dollars allocated to missions are spent? Who decides how many missionaries are sent to Chicago and how many to Riyadh? How are such decisions made? What is the relationship between the planting church and the planted church in missions? What is the relationship between God's work, what we must understand to be ultimately God's mission, and the "dismayingly human instrumentality of Christian missions"?

*Between Past and Future* takes a look at this "dismayingly human instrumentality" in the history of evangelical missions, and looks ahead to see how we can implement policies and strategies that will better reflect the continuation of the New Testament missionary age. What lessons are we to learn from the past, especially the century that just ended?

The opening of the twentieth century saw Western Christianity drunk with the enlightenment expectation that history was marching onward and upward to a glorious future and that the church was invited to come along for the ride. The missionary zeal of the times was to be the kindly big brother to other societies as we "civilize and Christianize" the world. And the fulfillment of these twin goals seemed to be just around the corner.

Such understanding flows from a Christendom view of the church, one in which the affluent West is equated with Christianity and mission necessarily "flows from the West to the rest." As we consider how this confusion has guided thousands of missionaries, we could follow many others in decrying Christian missions as being a colonial tool, or we could ignore the ramifications of destroying cultures and societies as we march roughshod around the world. *Between Past and*

*Future* takes the high road and both mourns the damage done and seeks to eliminate such damage, but also sees the wonder of all that God has done through such "dismayingly human instrumentality." For it is partly the astounding success that God granted to missionaries and evangelists who operated under such a mistaken model that has caused the gravitational center of Christianity to shift away from the West to the South and the East.

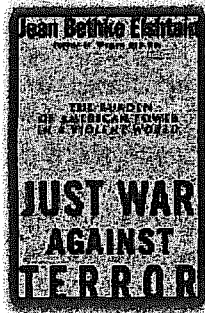
Written by the leaders of evangelical missions, those who train, motivate and equip missionaries and missions planners, it is interesting to notice that the ideal held up throughout the book is not the professional missionary. Rather it portrays God working both through and aside from our agendas and laments that "the overt stress continues to be, in sharp contrast to the Scriptures, on how and where and how much . . . on technique and results rather than on person and character." "It is increasingly evident that where the Gospel moves forward, it does so via the humble channels of more incarnational catechists and evangelists rather than the salaried professionals that we have come to recognize as missionaries."

Far from a simple history, we are given an analysis of the theological motivators and results from the different logistic focuses prevalent at different times, and these can be complex. For example the fervent missionary passions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a new longing for the church as a whole to be able to present to the world a unified front, a longing sprung from the realization that our sectarianism was inhibiting the spread of the gospel. This is a right and Godly desire. To effect this unity, ecumenical societies and coalitions were built. But the result of the massive organism of the ecumenical society was a dilution of passion for missions and a loss of flexibility for the individual missionary. Many denominations disbanded their own mission agencies and missions became just "one program among many." Within less than one generation, that which had been formed to facilitate missions had begun choking the missionary movement.

In *Between Past and Future* every decision regarding missions is quickly seen to be a theological question. When ten

mission societies are fighting for "market share" in one small mission field, the resolution must stem from our theology. And our theology is often formed by the structures in which we dwell as much as by the Bible. For instance, the existence of a missions team in a local congregation, of missionaries and mission societies, all tend to set the groundwork for our understanding of missions as a specialization to be engaged in by those who are called, sent and paid. Alternative models of the church and of its mission become difficult to conceptualize, and we begin to assume in our theology that which we see in our practice. *Between Past and Future* will be, for many of us, a peering into many questions the answers of which we had always assumed.

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**JUST WAR AGAINST TERROR: THE  
BURDEN OF AMERICAN POWER IN A  
VIOLENT WORLD**

Jean Bethke Elshtain  
New York: Basic Books (2003)  
240 pages, cloth, \$23.00

Perhaps the most important political and moral question of our present age is: "What are we to do to combat and defeat the reign of global terrorism?" More particularly, "What is America to do, as the world's greatest military and economic power, in light of the events of 9/11?" Jean Bethke Elshtain's reasoned and timely book answers these questions with courage, theological insight, and persuasive clarity.

Shortly after 9/11 most Americans, and even a good number of others, were outraged and saddened by the spineless attacks of terrorists upon innocent civilians. When the initial shock and dismay of those tragic days wore off, some, especially noteworthy celebrities and intellectuals, began to ques-

tion our efforts to defeat terrorism, especially militarily. Many Christians soon joined this chorus, especially from the usual liberal centers of power. These voices, seen in the media now almost daily, have consistently questioned American resolve to fight in defense of liberty. The roots of this opposition, in reality, go back to the turbulent 1960s and the Vietnam era. The anti-war, anti-establishment arguments that have dominated these circles of influence for over four decades have now adopted the position that the actions of the Bush administration are immoral and indefensible. The general direction of this type of thinking has been called "blame America first." America certainly is not a paragon of virtue and moral consistency (witness the Civil War, slavery, Jim Crow laws, etc.), but neither is it the wicked, duplicitous nation of moral misfits that many conclude. Before you are drawn into these types of arguments you owe it to yourself to read this weighty, readable and compelling argument for "just war" in the present crisis.

Christians have always been divided over the issue of "bearing arms" in defense of a nation-state. Both the church and the state have long acknowledged a genuine and thoughtful pacifism. Elshtain has no quarrel with genuine pacifism. Her argument is with those who defend terrorists on the basis of "root causes" such as poverty, political conflict, and the infringement of Western values on Islamic culture. By such a defense well-intentioned people actually minimize the personal responsibility of terrorists and terror networks. Elshtain sees this appeal to "root causes" as a fundamental misunderstanding of the Judeo-Christian ethic of just war and peace. In the place of such arguments she develops an ethic of personal and national responsibility that forces the reader to ask some hard questions about the fallen nature of mankind and the impact of this truth upon terrorism. She concludes that we have no choice in the end but to fight the war on terrorism to defend who we are, what we believe, and the democratic values we represent in the modern world. Before you write off these arguments as simplistic and inane, you owe it to yourself to read a first-rate political and religious argument for the

use of force to defend our nation and way of life. Elshtain frequently cites St. Augustine and his development of just war doctrine to buttress her arguments. She believes the great doctor of the church got it right when he said, "Now when victory goes to those who were fighting for the juster cause, can anyone doubt that the victory is a matter for rejoicing and the resulting peace is something to be desired?" In this case the war against terrorism represents "the juster cause" in the present conflict.

It is important that Christians, and Americans in general, make important distinctions when discussing the moral propriety of just war and the fight against terrorism. Elshtain writes:

The designation of terrorism becomes contested because terrorists and their apologists would prefer not to be depicted accurately. It is important to distinguish between two cases here. In some hotly contested political situations, it may be in the interest of one side to try to label its opponents as "terrorists" rather than "combatants" or "soldiers" or "fighters." We must ask who such men (and women) are attacking. Do they target soldiers at outposts or in the field? Do they try to disable military equipment, killing soldiers in the process? As they carry out such operations, are they open to negotiation and diplomacy at the same time? If so, it seems reasonable to resist any blanket label of "terrorism" for what they are up to (19).

Terrorist and terrorism entered our English usage rather recently. The terms refer to "specific phenomenon: killing directed against all ideological enemies indiscriminately and outside the context of a war between combatants. According to the logic of terrorism, enemies can be legitimately killed no matter what they are doing, where they are, or how old they are" (18).

Because a "robust politics of democratic argument turns on making the right distinctions," Elshtain believes "distinction-obliterators" (20) confuse our clear moral reasoning in the present time. The moral argument against such terrorism and

terrorists is never revenge, but justice. President Bush, in his now famous speech to the nation on September 20, 2001, specifically called for justice, not revenge. This distinction has been missed by many who oppose his present actions on moral grounds.

Elshtain develops her answer regarding what response is appropriate by discussing the separation of church and state in the West, especially in America. She shows how profoundly religion, Christianity in particular, has shaped our national awareness of moral issues and proper response to attacks. Her comparison with the culture and politics of Islam is central to the argument she then develops. On the whole she gets it right.

Following a clear discussion of "just war" she asks, "Is the war against terrorism just?" Her conclusion to chapter four is worth quoting in full.

The just war tradition of moral argument affords criteria for determining whether a resort to force is justified. Just war thinking provides guidance as to how a war should be fought and offers a framework of deliberation, evaluation, criticism, and moral challenge. Particularly useful is the tough-minded moral and political realism of just war thinking—not a Machiavellian "anything goes" realism, but an Augustinian realism that resists sentimentalism and insists on ethical restraint. Estrangement, conflict, and tragedy are constant features of the human condition, and just war thinking laced with Augustinian realism offers no assurances that we can ever make the world entirely safe. Augustinianism is skeptical about the exercise of power even as it recognizes the inescapability of power. Augustinian realists are not crusaders, but they do insist that we are called upon to act in a mode of realistic hope with a hardheaded recognition of the limits to action. You do not yourself have to be an Augustinian to recognize the abiding truths and strengths of this position (70).

From this response to "just war" realism she shows how our intellectual and religious life has abandoned this way of

thinking about the moral issues of war and peace. As a result we often have a rootless response to the present war against our nation. Elshtain cites the theological reflections of both Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr to demonstrate that twentieth-century thinkers did not repudiate this tradition but rather worked it out more particularly in terms of the developing world situation. Niebuhr is an extremely beneficial theological voice at this point.

Finally Elshtain argues that American power brings greater responsibility. To use that power in service of freedom and justice is right. To use it selfishly and pragmatically is wrong. The national discussion needs to more openly center upon what is right about our way of life and why we should defend it.

Included in the appendix is "A Letter from America," a document produced by a number of academic and cultural leaders who lay out what they believe to be America's core values and the reasons for defending these against modern terrorism. The goal of this statement is justice and stopping unmitigated evil. It provides a model basis for Christian and Muslim dialogue regarding the present political upheavals in our world.

Jean Bethke Elshtain is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at The University of Chicago. She has authored more than four hundred essays in scholarly journals and periodicals of civic opinion, as well as more than one hundred and seventy-five published book reviews. She is the author of twelve previous books and the editor of five more. Her work is representative of a Christian realism desperately needed in the present confusion regarding our national role in world politics.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG  
Editor-in-Chief



**THE CHANGING SHAPE OF CHURCH HISTORY**

Justo L. Gonzalez

St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press (2002)

159 pages, paper, \$19.99

Most readers will recognize the name Justo Gonzalez from his well-known books, *The Story of Christianity* and *A History of Christian Thought*. That Gonzalez is an undisputed authority on the Christian *past* should convince readers to carefully consider his thoughts on Christianity's *future*. Gonzalez's latest book, divided into sections on "The Changing Geography of Church History" and "The Changing History of Church History," consists of lectures delivered at various institutions during the 1990s. Gonzalez helpfully uses cartographic images to describe changes that have occurred throughout Christian history and confidently asserts that "the map of Christianity on which we operated a few decades ago is no longer operational" (9). The center of Christianity has shifted—from Europe and North America—and now occupies several centers including Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Gonzalez describes this new map as "polycentric" (14) and keenly points out that while North America will remain the supplier of immense resources for an emerging global Christianity, the centers of "vitality, missionary and evangelistic zeal, and even theological creativity" (14) occupy geographical space in the southern hemisphere.

What factors precipitated the changing shape of church history? For one, Gonzalez carefully posits that postmodern thought undercut modernity's claim of objective knowledge. While Gonzalez admits postmodernity has its liabilities, he argues that it opens the door for newer conversations and makes room for voices long suppressed. Conversant with contemporary intellectual trends, historians are asking different

questions and thus narratives of the history (or histories) of Christianity now routinely include the experiences of those of color, of developing regions, and of women—variations of what scholars term “lived religion” (as opposed to intellectual or doctrinal history). The experiences of previously marginalized groups, Gonzalez maintains, help to define new conceptions of the Christian past that can become catalysts for a renewed faith. For a sterling example of history written this way, readers may wish to consult Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg, *A Global History of Christians: How Everyday Believers Experienced Their World* (Baker, 1994).

Other explanatory factors for the changing shape of church history, at which Gonzalez hints, are statistics that indicate waning numbers of Christians in North America as prosperity, affluence, and materialism abound, and increasing numbers of Christians in developing areas as oppression, persecution, and poverty continue.

Yet, Gonzalez expertly observes, the moment of which we are a part is similar to the closing years of the Hellenistic period. Put another way, Gonzalez highlights important similarities between the cultural context of the early church and the contemporary setting. In the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great came wide Greek linguistic saturation and cultural influence. Traditional forms of culture in Mesopotamia, Persia, Palestine, and Egypt, for example, were modified if not replaced by Hellenistic cultural forms. In time, the “antiquity” of cultures overtaken by Hellenistic influences began to reassert itself. This resurgence took the form of armed resistance, as in the case of the Maccabean revolt, and as rebirth of tradition, as in the renewal of Zoroastrianism in Persia and with the cults of Isis and Osiris in Egypt, to cite just three examples. Gonzalez carefully points out that agitation at direct efforts to suppress “Oriental” culture existed, but that an outright rejection of Hellenism did not always occur. An important function of this ironic renewal, both the resistance to Hellenism *and* the rebirth of traditional cultural forms, was the representation of these traditional forms “under a new garb” (68). In other words, to be intelligible traditional forms

of culture had to be spoken in contemporary language and understood in contemporary categories. Here Gonzalez cites Christianity as a “newer version” of traditional Yahwism because it “broke the ethnic boundaries of the ancient religion, no longer connecting national origin with religious affiliation . . . [but] emphasize[d] instead personal decision and initiation” (68).

Also part of this moment of renewal, Gonzalez observes, were the possibilities of syncretism and sectarianism, exemplified best by Gnosticism. Gnostics infused Greek philosophy with Christian belief and touted the particularity of their convictions; to such syncretism and sectarianism the church replied with canon, episcopal authority, and creed.

The postmodern moment of which we are a part is similar to the context of the early church because, Gonzalez engagingly concludes, sectarianism is one menace of modernity and syncretism is a shallow by-product of the tyranny of objectivity. If the context of the early church is instructive for the precariousness of our current setting, as Gonzalez optimistically suggests, then the prescription for our contemporary situation comes from the early church as well. And Gonzalez finds the answer to our current predicament in a turn to the canon of Scripture and cites the Reformation categories of *ecclesia reformata* and *ecclesia reformanda* “according to the word of God” (76, emphasis his). Christians will do well to remember, Gonzalez instructively observes, that “[b]y including four *different* gospels in its canon, as a multiform witness to the single gospel of Jesus Christ, the early church, the early [catholic] church, taught us what postmodernity is also saying: perspective is always a part of truth—at least of truth as seen from the human side” (76). Gonzalez then cites other examples from Scripture (e.g. dual creation account in Genesis) and claims that “the written word of God, by its very structure and composition, calls us to [catholicity], to listen to what other interpreters from other perspectives find in the text and in the story” (77). This shows that the canon “can bind the irreducible contributions of various perspectives in an indissoluble unity” (77). Thus the unity within the diversity of the

scriptural witness itself models what the church should embody in all of its faithful multiplicity.

The second half of Gonzalez's book chronicles important moments of the interpretation of church history and highlights the assumptions and implications of the various shades of meaning and understanding. From Eusebius to Augustine and from Gregory of Tours to Venerable Bede in antiquity and late antiquity; from the contested visions of the *Magdeburg Centuries* to Baronius' *Ecclesiastical Annals* during the Reformation; and with Adolf von Harnack (among others) in the modern era, the story of Christianity's past is profoundly shaped by the writer's context and the writer's past, yet always with an eye to the future. In short, "[h]istory studies the past, but whoever studies history is in the present and reads the past from the present moment and from an expected future" (91).

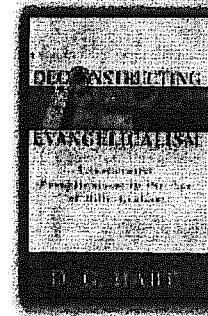
"From what future do we read the past?" asks Gonzalez, and "what practical benefit comes from the 'changing shape of church history?'" Gonzalez offers three proposals. First, he suggests eliminating the distinction between "church history" and the "history of missions" (149). Removing this division will tell the larger story of the Christian past while examining contemporary trends and also will tend toward more of a *global* perspective. Second, Gonzalez contends, this outlook will include perspectives that traverse cultural, economic, gender, and racial boundaries and will necessitate more of a catholic outlook, prompting Christians to find unity *within* the diversity of the church. Thus the new and emerging story/history of Christianity will be a project of collaboration, one of "constant dialogue and mutual correction" (151). Finally, Gonzalez argues that Christians will be most effective while occupying the margins of society, as "incarnate marginality" (153) can lead the way to true effectiveness.

Gonzalez is one of a growing number of scholarly and pastoral voices pleading with Western Christians to return to authentic scriptural norms and embrace a broader global Christian vision. On this score readers may wish to consult, among others, Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Com-*

*ing of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Eerdmans, 2003); and Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Orbis, 2002).

While collections of essays sometimes seem unhinged, Gonzalez's remarks form a cohesive and unified whole. His words are carefully chosen, his ideas clearly articulated, and his passion for both history *and* ministry conveyed at every point. Gonzalez makes a compelling case for Christians to transcend denominational labels and ecumenical boundaries in order to embrace societal and cultural marginality in order to be the humble servants Christ desires.

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**DECONSTRUCTING EVANGELICALISM:  
CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANTISM IN THE  
AGE OF BILLY GRAHAM**

D. G. Hart  
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker (2004)  
224 pages, cloth, \$21.99

For many Protestants in North America, the term *evangelical* is familiar and a cherished religious identity. Yet, what constitutes the meaning of evangelical? Further still, what is *evangelicalism*? Are precise definitions of these terms even possible? In his provocative and stimulating *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, D. G. Hart argues that evangelicalism does not exist and therefore should be expunged from public discourse and refashioned as a scholarly category.

Hart contends that the Neo-Evangelicals of the 1940s (e.g. Harold John Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry)—those he defines as conservative Christians weary of fundamentalism but opposed to the modernist impulse of mainline Protestantism—laid the

foundation for evangelicalism. In the wake of the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial and walking the middle ground between reactionary conservatism and mainline liberalism, Neo-Evangelicals defined a faith that subsequent historians, pollsters, and sociologists considered by the 1990s *the* brand of conservative Protestantism. Thus, according to Hart, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, evangelicalism encompasses such a wide group of adherents and practitioners that the label "Evangelical" fails to accurately account for the diversity within the ranks of conservative Protestantism. For this reason, Hart insists that evangelicalism must be "deconstructed" (19).

The first part of Hart's book, "The Making of Evangelicalism," explains concisely how evangelicalism became a scholarly category. Henry May's 1965 article, "The Recovery of American Religious History," provided the insight and renewed the quest to explore the essence of Protestant Christianity in America. Subsequently, scholars like Timothy L. Smith, Sidney Mead, Winthrop Hudson, and William McLoughlin intimately linked evangelicalism with revivalism. A shift occurred about 1980, Hart effectively contends, when Evangelicals (given a wider voice in 1976 by Newsweek's "Year of the Evangelical") attached themselves to the political right and became a powerful voice in the American electorate. On the heels of Evangelicals' political turn, a number of scholars founded in 1982 the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals. Several projects commissioned at Institute conferences added important texture to evangelical historiography. For instance, George Marsden, David Bebbington, and Mark Noll offered more exact yet expansive definitions of evangelicalism (biblicism; the centrality of Christ's atonement; the necessity of a renewed life; and the importance of missions and evangelism). Around the same time, work carried out by sociologists (e.g. James Davison Hunter and Lyman Kellstedt), political scientists (e.g. James M. Penning and Corwin Smidt) and pollsters (e.g. George Gallup and George Barna) confirmed the conservative voting habits and opinions about culture that historians previously identified. Evangelical identities, thus constructed by "neo-evangelical

spokesmen" (55), underwent "categorization by the religious history guild" (56). Hart's comments reflect the observation of Yale historian Jon Butler who in 1992 identified a wider "evangelical thesis" (36) in American religious historiography. From this evidence, Hart clearly concludes, the scholarly definition of evangelicalism has become so vast and so wide that it escapes coherent definition.

After showing how historians, social scientists, and pollsters adopted and built upon the neo-evangelical definition of evangelicalism, in "The Unmaking of Evangelicalism," Hart identifies three areas in which evangelicalism made possible its own deconstruction. First, parachurch organizations now rival denominational distinction and organization. Initially spurred by the National Association of Evangelicals and to some degree the American Council of Christian Churches, these organizations (founded, respectively, in 1942 and 1941) provided the impetus and the energy to unite scores of organizations to collectively "lead America back to Christ" (112). Evangelical Bible institutes, radio programs, and ministries formed around cults of personality soon followed and instilled within lay Christians the desire for "foreign missions, urban evangelism, and Christian education" (115). Sociologists like Robert Wunthow, Hart carefully shows, confirm this course of events through tests and statistics by demonstrating how special purpose groups (i.e., parachurch organizations) inject vibrant spiritual energy into American evangelicalism. Hart's larger point about parachurch organizations is that cults of personality constitute the essence of the organization and thrive by turning seekers into consumers and Jesus into a marketable product.

Inerrancy disputes, Hart steadily observes, provide further insight into evangelicalism's deconstruction. In an effort to define themselves against mainline liberals and gain scholarly credibility, Hart argues that apologists of inerrancy tried "to make one doctrine, isolated from a broader theology of revelation and the rest of Christian dogma" the defining element of evangelical identity. In the process, "evangelical scholarship proved to be ineffective in challenging the course of American

intellectual life" (151). Thus "without a substantial creed to shape the movement," Hart concludes, "evangelicalism itself could not avoid fracturing" (151).

Hart also examines CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) and PW (Praise and Worship Music). A key part of evangelicalism's history, popular Christian music serves as an important window into contemporary evangelical identity. Beginning with the neo-evangelical efforts in the 1940s, Hart contends, evangelical worship followed the musical spirit of the age and keenly aimed to rouse "seekers to walk the isle and believers to ratchet up their devotion" (174). CCM and PW thus became big business—most effectively employed by church growth gurus like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels—and for many continue to define the essence of evangelical worship.

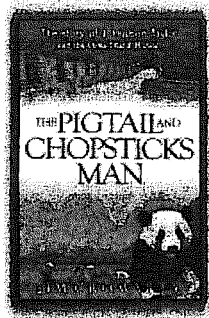
Animated by "lowest common denominator theology" (196), Hart argues, evangelicalism "lacks an institutional center, intellectual coherence, and devotional direction" (176). Evangelicalism is a messy movement with elastic boundaries at best. In one sense, therefore, Hart's *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* is an essay in hyperbole. After all, Hart avers in *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Ivan R. Dee, 2002) that evangelicalism is actually a thriving, visible and complex movement that has a massive and ever-expanding historiography to accompany it. Yet, in subsequent meditations Hart poignantly questions whether evangelical is an "adequate label for either what the Neo-Evangelicals had in mind or for explaining the kind of religious diversity religion scholars study and interpret" (195). So if Hart is correct—if evangelicalism is a construct dating to the 1940s and 50s, an entrenched scholarly dogma, and now a deconstructed wing of Christianity—what alternatives exist?

Hart identifies several directions. For some, like scholar Thomas Howard, the transient nature of evangelicalism and its lack of institutional formulae led to Roman Catholicism. For others, like former Campus Crusade minister Peter Gillquist, similar criticisms led to Eastern Orthodoxy. Yet for

others like Baptist minister and patristic scholar D. H. Williams (whom Hart incorrectly affiliated with Loyola University; Williams is now at Baylor University), the answer to evangelical malaise is to remain evangelical and adopt a wider catholic outlook that embraces and employs elements of ancient Christianity. While Hart most favors Williams's proposal, he questions whether "it is possible to pour tradition into a vessel such as modern American evangelicalism, which is designed to hold only liquids that are traditionless" (183). Hart finds a more probable solution from Alasdair MacIntyre (as cited by Williams), who argues that "tradition as argument" (184) allows one to retain fidelity to the Bible while drawing on the rich traditions of the early church.

As thoughtful as Hart's proposal is, it seems frustratingly vague. By touting "tradition" is Hart suggesting a return to denominational and/or confessional distinctives, as he suggests and implies in *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (with John R. Muether; Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition* (Baker, 2003) and *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002)? Or, perhaps, has Hart's agitation with evangelicalism led him to consider following Thomas Howard into Roman Catholicism or Peter Gillquist into Eastern Orthodoxy? While answers to these questions remain hidden, one thing is clear: Hart's critical tone, bibliographic knowledge, engaging prose, and razor sharp intellect compliment a heart for authentic Christianity. *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* takes the discussion of evangelical history and identity in new directions and deserves careful and thoughtful consideration.

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***THE PIGTAIL AND CHOPSTICKS MAN:  
THE STORY OF J. HUDSON TAYLOR AND  
THE CHINA INLAND MISSION***

Jim Cromarty

Auburn, Massachusetts and Darlington,  
England: Evangelical Press (2002)  
206 pages, paperback \$14.99

In the second half of the nineteenth century a group of missionaries from England and the United States evangelized parts of inland China. Their goal was to bring the Christian gospel to parts of China not served by the Church Missionary Society and other major Protestant missionary societies, who generally remained stationed on the eastern coast. The leader of what came to be known as the "China Inland Mission" was J. Hudson Taylor. As a young man, Taylor dedicated himself to service as a missionary to China. He obtained training as a physician, primarily as a strategy for gaining acceptance from the Chinese in order to promote evangelization.

Distinctive about Hudson's missionary activities and those of his fellow workers is not only their goal of bringing the Christian gospel into the interior of China but their willingness to identify with the Chinese people by wearing Chinese clothing and, for the men, to wear a pigtail. In retrospect, one of the most lasting of Taylor's and the China Inland Mission's achievements was witnessing to the gospel among many of China's minority peoples, e.g. in China's southwest Yunan Province. Today, many of China's Christians are found among that country's minority peoples.

Taylor and his fellow-workers, like most Christian missionaries in China during the second half of the nineteenth century, faced enormous challenges. The heat and unsanitary conditions brought sickness and death. Hudson and his wife, Maria, lost a child to illness. Maria also died of illness, while pregnant, in China.

Jim Cromarty, retired Presbyterian minister in Australia,

tells the story of the China Inland Mission primarily by focusing on its leader, J. Hudson Taylor. Cromarty recounts in thirty, brief chapters facets of Taylor's upbringing, the development of his sense of call, his preparation for missionary work in England, and his many decades of work and family life in China itself.

Cromarty tells this story in simple English and concludes each chapter with three or four questions for discussion. Cromarty's Forward implies that he envisions a believing parent reading these chapters to his or her children and discussing the contents using the questions Cromarty provides. Cromarty's purpose is not to provide a critical or academically rigorous biography and history but rather to inspire and edify the reader in a manner that will seem to most college-educated American readers as uncritical and simplistic. Cromarty does not inform the reader about where he obtained his information about Hudson and the China Inland Mission. The author recounts many specific events and tells the readers of Hudson's inner thoughts and feelings. Perhaps Cromarty obtained this information from diaries Hudson kept or letters Hudson wrote that have been collected. Cromarty refers in passing to one book authored by Hudson himself, which may have been a source.

Cromarty refers often to the fear and hostility that many in government and the circles of the educated Chinese directed toward all Westerners, and to which the workers in China Inland Mission were particularly victim. Usually Cromarty states that the cause of this fear and hostility was the hatred of the Christian gospel from the unbelieving Chinese. At several points, e.g. on page 148, Cromarty does mention the opium trade forced on China by western nations, especially England. But Cromarty never acknowledges that Christian missionaries were implicated in anything wrong done by Europeans to the Chinese.

A more critical account of nineteenth-century Christian missionary work in China, including that of the China Inland Mission, would have to address at least two themes. One is the relation between Christian missionary work in the nineteenth

century in China and the actions of European Nations toward China, especially England, France and the U.S., from where most foreign missionaries came. A second issue is the missionary theology which informed the missionary work of the nineteenth century, and particularly that of the leaders of the China Inland Mission.

Regarding the first, it would be fairer to the historical facts had Cromarty acknowledged that permission to enter the interior of the country and to receive whatever protection from hostile Chinese foreigners did receive was extorted from the Chinese by the threat of military attack from European nations. Cromarty, in his questions following his chapters does not ask the reader how an Englishman might react if the Chinese government used superior military capability to require the English population and government of England to receive and protect Chinese Buddhist missionaries in England.

Before Taylor began his missionary work in 1854 the British started the First Opium War (1839-1842) and forced upon the Chinese Government the Treaty of Nanjing. In this Treaty, England appropriated Hong Kong and required the Chinese government to open five cities for foreign trade, including the opium trade. In 1876, the British demanded, in the "Chefoo Convention," that the Chinese grant free access to any foreigner in any part of China. This was the England from which Taylor and most of his fellow-workers came.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when Taylor and other missionaries were most active in China, France went to war against China in 1870; Russia went to war against China in 1874; and Japan went to war against China in 1894. After each of these wars China was forced to relinquish more and more of its sovereignty to European powers. In 1900 the Chinese, humiliated by the European powers for sixty years, instigated attacks against foreigners in China. This so-called Boxer Rebellion was crushed by an expeditionary force composed of Russians, French, British, German, American and Japanese soldiers, who massacred the Boxers and others, not involved in the "Rebellion." These western powers then forced

on China the "Peace of Peking" which required China to pay an indemnity of 330 million dollars. Thus, the evangelizing work by European missionaries, like Taylor, occurred in the context of and was in part enabled by European, especially British, military aggression against the Chinese. Had Cromarty written a historically more accurate and critical account of the China Inland Mission, he would have had to make this link between European military aggression against China and Western Christian missionary work in China clearer.

A second issue in a critical account would be the theology that helped motivate and inform Taylor's evangelization efforts. Cromarty informs the reader often that Taylor believed that anyone who did not make an adult confession to Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior was doomed to suffer eternally in Hell. This conviction, as Cromarty reports the story, gave Taylor and other CIM missionaries the sense of urgency that enabled them to face their hardships. Cromarty reports that great Chinese hostility to China Inland Mission missionaries arose when one of the CIM missionaries insisted that Confucius, the sixth-century B.C. teacher most revered by Chinese people, was suffering in Hell and would stay there forever. So central was this conviction as a motivating factor to the culture of the CIM that one officer of the China Inland Mission felt he had to step down from his post when he began to doubt this doctrine.

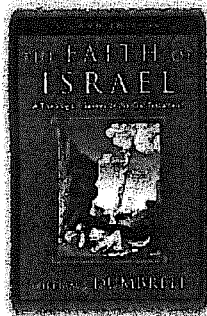
Cromarty, in his end-of-chapter questions, does not ask the reader to reflect on the soundness of this teaching. Should Christians teach that the God and Father of Jesus Christ eternally punish anyone who does not in their earthly life confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior even if they died centuries before Jesus Christ lived? Indeed, should Christians teach that God condemns to hell anyone who does not confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior even if he lives after the Christian era, but has never heard the gospel? Taylor seems to have held both teachings. A more critical account of the story of the China Inland Mission would have to deal with these questions.

However, Cromarty's purpose is to inspire and edify his

reader by describing Taylor as a Christian hero. He does so by highlighting the single-minded dedication Taylor and others brought to their missionary endeavors, especially Taylor's unwavering confidence that God would provide for the needs of the missionary work. He does so also by highlighting the sacrifices and losses—spouses, children, and health—which these missionaries accepted as the cost for the privilege of proclaiming Christ. He does so by highlighting the enormous physical, administrative, spiritual and personal burdens that Taylor assumed in his work. He does so by not describing in any detail objections some raised to Taylor's leadership, and by not addressing the historical and theological issues mentioned above.

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***THE FAITH OF ISRAEL: A THEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT***

William J. Dumbrell  
Grand Rapids: Baker, Second Edition  
(2002)  
352 pages, paper, \$25.99

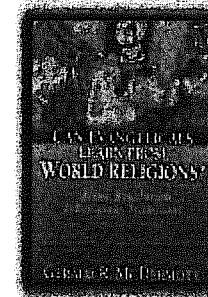
Dr. Peter Gentry, who teaches at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, regards this volume by William S. Dumbrell, the well-respected Old Testament scholar, as "the best survey of the Old Testament, bar none" (back cover blurb). And it is easy to see why.

With scholarly expertise and panache Dumbrell deftly summarizes the contents of each of the Old Testament books, elucidating their central themes and structures. He does this with an eye to their respective places in the Old Testament

Canon. He thus produces a book that presents a theology of the old covenant that is firmly rooted in the covenantal text.

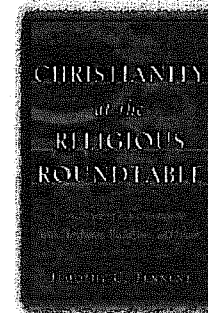
There is an enormous amount of wisdom packed into these pages. Pastors preaching through an Old Testament book would do well to have this work as a constant source of reference.

**MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN**  
Ontario, Canada



***CAN EVANGELICALS LEARN FROM WORLD RELIGIONS? JESUS, REVELATION AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS***

Gerald R. McDermott  
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press  
(2000)  
233 pages, paper, \$15.00



***CHRISTIANITY AT THE RELIGIOUS ROUNDTABLE: EVANGELICALISM IN CONVERSATION WITH HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, AND ISLAM***

Timothy C. Tennent  
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic (2002)  
270 pages, paper, \$19.99

These two books are evidence of increasingly serious attention among younger scholars to an evangelical theology of religions. Both authors open up new territory for Evangelicals as well as raise questions for the future of dialogues between Christianity and other world religions. Each book is capable of addressing more than one audience, and each has its own set of strengths and weaknesses.

Students or interested laity should begin with McDermott's

book. The title seems slightly condescending, as if all Evangelicals are either learning-challenged or too arrogant to consider that God's truth might reside in other religions. But McDermott himself is a committed Evangelical—he uses the phrase “we Evangelicals” throughout—and has a special sense of “learning” in mind.

He wants to explore “what Christians can learn [from other religions] without sacrificing . . . the finality of Christ.” He warns his readers about the dangers of exploring other religions, particularly if one attempts an uncommitted neutrality, or if one is not well-grounded in one's own faith. Given these caveats, he claims that Christians can actually learn “new things about God's revelation in Christ” by encountering other religious traditions.

Before proceeding to explore Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and Islam, McDermott provides an introductory chapter defining what he means by Evangelicalism. He differentiates it from other Christian traditions, especially Fundamentalism, and then situates it in the contemporary discussion of world religions. He gives a very helpful treatment of the recent collapse of the inclusivist-pluralist-exclusivist typology and calls for Evangelicals to go further in the exploration of the possibility of revelation in other religions. This chapter is itself worth the price of the book and particularly helpful to beginning seminarians as well as laity who are trying to sort out Christian loyalties and schools of thought.

Chapters 2 through 4 summarize the biblical and theological concepts necessary to making his case, particularly the concept of revelation and the question whether there is biblical evidence of revelation outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Chapter 5 explores how Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin all “learn[ed] from pagans in order to comprehend God's Word.” He shows how the “old pattern” of “plundering the Egyptians” was used by major theologians and thus allowed them to “take lessons from non-biblical traditions.” Finally, chapters 6 through 9 present a case study from each of four world religions.

While it is clear that McDermott is not promoting

syncretism or simplistic borrowing from other religions, his references are frequently to secondary sources. He seems barely aware of apophatic theology and has to learn it from Aquinas, medieval scholastics and Buddhists. He claims that “Asian religious thinking, in which mysticism is more common and central, may help us Evangelicals better understand Jesus, Paul and other biblical subjects.” It may just as easily lead Evangelicals astray. Much of what McDermott says Buddhists can teach us might better be mediated through the spirituality of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

The chapter on Islam is the most contemporary of the case studies. Even though written before the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, it provides a helpful historical context for readers who now feel the need to understand more about Islam.

While McDermott makes interesting comparisons between religious ideas, the book by Tennent takes us more deeply into encounters with representatives of other religious traditions. McDermott insists on the uniqueness of certain Christian teachings and practices and how they may be seen in a new light in comparison with other religions. Tennent actually structures conversations between Christians and Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims where they explain key teachings to each other and mutual objections are made.

Perhaps the context out of which the two authors write helps explain the difference in their approaches. McDermott, who teaches in a liberal arts college, is trying to explain to American Evangelicals how their faith may be enhanced by comparing it with other religions. Tennent teaches world missions at Gordon-Conwell Seminary as well as at a theological college in India where he helps prepare indigenous Christians to be church planters. The missiological focus of Tennent gives a more urgent and realistic tone to his book.

His first chapter is a review of contemporary interreligious dialogue from an evangelical perspective. He gives an energetic critique of certain liberal forms of dialogue in which central claims of historic Christianity are muted or surrendered. He quotes a practicing Buddhist scholar who asks

about such dialogues, "If they [i.e., Christians] were so taken by Buddhism, why did they hang on to Christianity?"

He also criticizes throughout the book the religious strategy (first articulated by Karl Rahner) of identifying others as "anonymous Christians." He regards this as unfruitful for dialogue which wants to discover the real boundaries between two religions. Authentic dialogue, he claims, "should never be a path to sweep major differences under the rug of pluralism."

Tennent's book seeks to provide a model for such dialogue by constructing dialogues based on conversations he has had with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. He also wants to challenge Evangelicals and conservative Christians to move beyond their superficial attempts so far and prepare themselves for "far more intentional, serious engagements" with representatives of other religions.

Chapters 2 through 7 are carefully constructed dialogues. Each begins with a summary of the doctrine or issue to be discussed, and then a "religious roundtable" follows with representatives of the other religion. Specific objections are clearly stated and responded to by all participants. What makes the dialogues so inviting and exciting to read is that they are neither simplistic nor staged apologetic triumphs over "straw men." Tennent has two Hindus, two Buddhists, and four Muslims—all representing different "schools" or "theologies" within their tradition. Further, he begins the dialogue sections by pointing out the places where the dialogue-partners are in agreement. These comments are always gracious, helpful, and clarifying.

The dialogue with Islam is especially helpful and will be relevant to pastors and congregations who encounter local Islamic populations. Tennent's discussion of Christian and Islamic views of the Trinity and Christology are significant for two reasons. First, his dialogue will help many Christians identify their own misunderstandings of the Trinity and the person of Christ as well as those of Muslims. Second, he raises the intriguing and timely questions: "Could Islam serve as a massive *preparatio evangelica* for the gospel? Rather than opposing Islam, should we be thankful to God for it and

merely try to complete what is lacking in that faith?"

In addition to the dialogues, Tennent provides three historical case studies at the end of his book based on the work of four Christians in church history who attempted in creative ways to relate Christian faith to the challenge of a non-Christian environment. They include: Justin Martyr, a second-century apologist from Syria; a Hindu convert to Christianity, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907); A. G. Hogg, a missionary to India in the early twentieth century; and Kwame Bediako, a contemporary theologian in Ghana. Each case study is followed by a helpful list of questions for discussion and reflection.

Although the concepts in this book are sometimes quite difficult, making this a book best suited for seminarians and graduate students, the author provides a helpful glossary of difficult terms as well as a subject and Scripture index. It would not be too difficult for a pastor or adult Sunday school teacher to use selections from Tennent's dialogues in a class on Christianity and other religions.

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