

## Reviews of Books

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*1 & 2 Samuel*, David G. Firth. Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2009. 614 pages, £24.99, ISBN: 978-1-84474-368-1

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Many conservative evangelical readers of the books of Samuel will be able to place the rise and fall of the monarchy into the wider context of redemptive history. They are, moreover, mightily relieved by the move away from sterile critical debates towards reading the Former Prophets as coherent, skilfully crafted, theologically motivated, historical narratives. So far so good. Now ask the average biblically literate believer to interpret, in the context of Samuel and of the whole Bible, the story of Rizpah watching over the corpses of her family, or of the wise woman of Tekoa, or even of the promise of a new priestly house, and silence is likely to follow. The stories are barely known, let alone understood. Moreover, it is one thing to say that literary artistry matters, but quite another to explain how the artistry works, and harder still to do so without stifling the story itself or silencing its theological voice.

Firth's Apollos commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel achieves the rare feat of sustaining a detailed literary study for over 500 pages in such a way that we emerge more, rather than less, appreciative of the book's overall narrative flow and how each episode fits in. As Firth himself puts it, 'Like a succession of Russian dolls inserted inside each other, from smallest to largest, each level of the story is understood on its own terms and then integrated into the larger narrative' (448).

In the Introduction, having acknowledged that Samuel is the work of 'a creative author working with earlier sources' (24), he adopts conservative views of the relation of the Former Prophets to each other and Deuteronomy (following McConville), and of the basic historicity of Samuel (citing Provan, Long and Longman). In his view, although the MT should not be given 'quasi-canonical status', it is 'the

basic vehicle for recovery of the text', and relatively rarely requires emendation (42). The three central themes of the book, he then suggests, are:

- 'The reign of God' (shown in the reversal-of-fortunes theme, in Yahweh's advance provision for human monarchy, and in Yahweh's continuing authority over David)
- 'Kingship' (viewed positively if, and only if, submissive to divine authority)
- 'Prophetic authority' (particularly as exerted by Samuel)

As Firth admits, much has already been written about 'the skill with which the story is told' in Samuel (26), but he particularly directs our attention to some of the less familiar techniques such as 'narrative chronology' and 'repetition' (32–37).

For instance, whole episodes or groups of episodes may be 'dischronologised' (i.e. related out of chronological sequence). If Firth is right that dischronologisation accounts for the apparent redundant information and anomalies in 1 Samuel 16–17 (the Apollos format does not give him sufficient space, or access to the Hebrew, to establish a watertight case here), this sheds new light not only on 'what really happened' but also on what the author wants to foreground. Similarly, the dischronologisation in the Samuel Conclusion (2 Samuel 21–24) sets these episodes, with the psalms which they enclose, apart from the main narrative in a block that interprets the book as a whole. The Rizpah story, which opens this Conclusion, is therefore important!

'Repetition' operates at every level from word play, through parallelism (occasionally in prose as well as in verse), to repeated motifs and patterns between episodes, and is often used ironically. Thus the Joab-sent 'wisdom' parable of the woman of Tekoa echoes the heaven-sent wisdom parable of Nathan. Like the wise 'maidservant' Abigail, this Tekoan 'maidservant' pleads for David to show mercy. Yet instead of averting violence, she catalyses the violent judgment Nathan pronounced (443–4).

One of the strengths of Firth's commentary is that he sticks to what the text says, without attempting to resolve every ambiguity or fill in all the gaps. Especially in dialogue, the dramatic force often depends on our not knowing exactly what the characters – or the narrator – are thinking or feeling. Was David wise (because gracious) or foolish

(because unjustly indulgent) to take the advice of the wise woman of Tekoa? We are left to ponder how, as Yahweh works both grace and justice in the post-Uriah world, David receives the dubious counsel of Joab while Ahitophel's common sense is offered treacherously, but uselessly, to Absalom. The story of the wise woman of Tekoa is tightly woven into the book in a way that invites reading and re-reading.

Unlike Dale Ralph Davis's rightly acclaimed two volumes in the *Focus on the Bible* series, Firth is cautious of laying out chiasms and grand structures. This leaves us free to infer structure from the narrative rather than vice versa, and preserves the flow of the story; Davis's chiasms are frequently helpful but sometimes tend to obscure continuity between sections. Compared with Davis, Firth also says little about application, yet his reticence provides the raw materials for continued reflection and teaching. These commentaries should be viewed as complementary rather than competing.

Although more formal than Davis, Firth adapts the conventional format for scholarly commentaries (translation, textual notes, form, comment and explanation) for a non-specialist reader and for a post-critical mindset. The textual notes are more selective than, for instance, those in Klein's and Anderson's Word commentaries, but have the advantage of intelligible English explanations. The 'Form' section then focuses on the final continuous text, and therefore highlights links between sections rather than just the form and origin of the individual pericope. Discussion of genre, where relevant, is usually postponed to the 'Comment' section, while source and form critical debates are, unless highly pertinent, summarised rather than laid out in detail.

It is mainly in the Explanation section that this commentary falls short of the claims of its dust-jacket. To be sure, 'the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament' is never in doubt, but the publishers also promise 'a *full* exposition of the theological message within the framework of biblical theology' (italics mine). It is not just that Firth omits (on the whole) to derive propositional teaching from passages in the way that Davis does; in some ways, this is an advantage, because what we have is a story not a theological treatise, and Firth's Explanation sections do recapitulate the main thrust of the story in its context. It is rather that the preceding Comment sections have

provided far richer food for biblical theological reflection than an Explanation section of this length could ever do justice to.

Take, for instance, the promise of a new priestly house (1 Samuel 2:35). In the Comment section, Firth discusses the various competing interpretations and opts for a 'succession of priests, each of whom is required to be faithful', a succession that 'begins with Samuel, but reaches its climax with Zadok' (71). The Explanation adds nothing further, even though Firth has noted the similarity of this promise to the more famous promise in 2 Samuel 7:11. If the promise of kingship climaxes in the high-priestly King of Hebrews, can the promise of priesthood really climax in Zadok? What are we to make of David's occasional priestly activity (and Saul's disastrous grasp at priesthood)? The book of Samuel starts with a prophecy of kingship and a promise of priesthood; it closes with the king offering to take the nation's punishment on his own family and then, in obedience to God's prophet and emphatically at his own cost, making an atoning sacrifice which stops the plague short of Jerusalem.

The problem is with the publishers' dust jacket, not with Firth's commentary. No commentary can answer all our questions on the text. No commentary can hope to exhaust the biblical theological significance of a biblical book. This is a commentary worth buying precisely because every question it answers provokes more questions and more meditation. It gives the reader building blocks and tools rather than attempting to finish the building. I picked the commentary up not as an expert in Samuel, but because we were working through the early chapters of 1 Samuel in a small group Bible study. I put the commentary down eager to spend much more time in the Former Prophets.

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*Exploring Exodus: Literary, Theological and Contemporary Approaches*, Brian S. Rosner and Paul R. Williamson, eds. Nottingham: Apollos, 2008. 234 pages, £14.99, ISBN: 978-1-84474-313-1

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This volume, based as it is on their 2007 School of Theology, exhibits

many of the strengths one has come to expect from Moore College. Throughout we are treated to an emphasis on biblical theology and therefore a resultant focus on the sense in which Exodus speaks of the gospel, which in turn makes straight the path to contemporary application.

The introduction by the editors places the volume in the context of a recent resurgence in theological interpretations of Exodus, then briefly surveys the content of each subsequent chapter. This is followed by Greg Clarke's chapter on Exodus in culture, which surveys a range of recent uses of Exodus in the arts as a 'source of storytelling, myth-making and artistic appropriation' (19). Far from being resigned to the past, Exodus continues to have relevance and resonance for contemporary western culture. This, Clarke suggests, presents Christians with three challenges – to preach the full, mysterious doctrine of God as found in Exodus, to build to a fuller explanation of the gospel in Exodus from people's resonances with the text, and finally to engage with the way in which God's morality in Exodus 'is seen as juvenile and unfair' (28) by the 'new atheists' in particular.

Chapter Two sees George Athas consider the cosmic significance of Exodus. Athas seeks to interpret Exodus within the context of the ancient world of the earliest readers, for which his primary tool is what the rest of the OT shows us of ancient Israelite civilisation, though he also briefly looks at other ANE literature considered relevant. Israel's liberation reveals the identity of Yahweh, which in turn gives Israel a particular identity as his covenant people. One of the most useful features of this chapter is that Athas passes on some of the better insights from Fretheim's excellent (and at times frustrating) commentary in the Interpretation series. The exodus event is about the creation of Israel - Yahweh bringing order out of chaos much like in the creation account of Genesis 1 (and as in ANE creation myths). Athas argues that these creation themes allow us to place Exodus within the broader biblical narrative of God's purposes for his world.

Michael Raiter's chapter critiques liberation theologians for their mishandling of the text, whilst acknowledging that such a critique 'is fraught with risk and presumption for those of us who live in affluent, democratic societies, relatively free from the curse of human

bondage' (61) and that at a basic level the book of Exodus is 'vitaly concerned with the liberation of slaves' (62). He sees Exodus as providing a paradigm for the theme of liberation in subsequent redemption history. Although genuinely a socio-political event, the exodus was primarily about the battle between Yahweh and Pharaoh, with the goal not liberation *per se*, but rather worship. Similarly, while Yahweh acts in response to the groaning of the people this is set in the context of the promises made to the patriarchs and Yahweh's concern for his glory rather than mere preference for the poor. The chapter contains an overview of various liberation theologies which might prove useful for those unfamiliar with the movement. However, an otherwise excellent chapter is finally undermined as Raiter attempts an inevitably brief discussion of an issue requiring more space – the relationship between social issues and evangelism in mission. Raiter's treatment, because of its brevity, will frustrate those who have engaged in sustained theological reflection on the issue, and be of negligible use for those seeking seriously to study it.

The fourth chapter is Paul Williamson on covenant and law. He covers the material in Exodus 19-24, as the book moves from redemption to the making of the covenant at Sinai. He gives a largely chronological reading of the material (over against much source criticism) that underlines Moses' role as Mediator. This is followed by Andrew Cameron on 'the logic of law in Exodus and beyond' (123). There are some good elements to this chapter, like Cameron's thoughtful material connecting the giving of the law with Yahweh's provision for Israel's thirst and hunger in the wilderness – Yahweh's word satisfying the judicial needs of Israel as a new society. Likewise there is some insightful material on the way in which the law regulates desire. However, Cameron's survey of approaches to the application of the law and outline of his 'modest proposal' (142) are amongst the volume's weaker moments. In particular, Cameron's use of the language of law as 'wisdom' rather than 'direct command' is potentially confusing. At times this is simply a call for a Christological interpretation that recognises that the law of Moses is not the final word in scripture on moral order. As such, Cameron's proposal could hardly be faulted. However, if the section on the usefulness of the law to modern legislators is indicative, it seems viewing the law as wisdom is dangerously close to viewing it as vague advice, since the

most potent application Cameron makes is based on the law's brevity. Moreover, Cameron's handling of alternative viewpoints on the law to his own, both historical and contemporary, is somewhat mixed. For example, Theonomist Reconstructionism is summarily dismissed in a paragraph, as is Covenantal Nomism, with the Jubilee Centre's Relationalism faring only slightly better. Cameron commends the threefold distinction of the law for ruling out an OT-style theocracy, and yet doesn't give any discussion to how a reformed second use of the law might involve using applications of the law for civil legislature. The result is that much of what Cameron affirms in the chapter is a helpful contribution to Christian study of the law, whilst his denials appear as simplistic treatments of complex theological and historical discussions.

By contrast, Barry Webb's chapter on the tabernacle in the OT is a highlight of the volume. Webb's treatment of what can be learned from the literary structure of the tabernacle material is particularly useful, including some excellent material tying the tabernacle's historical symbolism (typology) together with its vertical symbolism as based on the heavenly design Moses witnessed. Like Athas in chapter 2, Webb makes the findings of several scholars (such as insights from ANE literature, connections to creation themes) available to a wider audience. The only worthwhile quibble with Webb's chapter comes when he chides commentators for failing to give the attention due to the tabernacle given its prominence in the text of Exodus, but then falls himself for a similar error by downplaying the interpretive significance of the fine details in the text of the tabernacle's design and construction.

Constantine Campbell's chapter follows by looking at the question of the contemporary significance of the tabernacle, and does so by examining the way the temple and the tabernacle are treated similarly and distinctly at different points in the NT. While Campbell's conclusions hold little that is new, his treatment of the NT material is a more than adequate overview for anyone unfamiliar with this strand of biblical theology.

In the final chapter Richard Gibson examines various popular proposals for the essence of the book in order to explore what it means to preach Exodus. Unfortunately, another largely strong chapter is slightly undermined by under-developing important issues

that are raised. Gibson quotes extensively from Fretheim on the questions Exodus raises for classic and reformed understandings of God's sovereignty, but other than making the worthwhile point that preachers must not domesticate Exodus, he leaves the matters entirely unresolved. Given the pastoral and doctrinal importance of these questions (and the dangers of Open Theism, to which some of Fretheim's statements tend), this is inadequate. The chapter recovers from that point onwards as Gibson fairly persuasively argues for the central importance of the naming of God in Exodus, and in particular for the significance of the name described in 34:6-7 and (Gibson argues) integrated by the name 'Jealous' in 34:14. Ezekiel is then presented as an example of an OT prophet effectively 'preaching Exodus.' Gibson concludes by suggesting that it is vitally important that preachers of Exodus 'feel the very jealousy of God as we preach his name' (221).

It is difficult to give an overall assessment of a book with a range of contributors. Nevertheless, this volume does hold together remarkably well. As a whole it provides a resource that will give assistance to those preaching through Exodus, though those pastors who are already familiar with the biblical theology that has come to be associated with Moore will want to supplement this book with a wider range of material, for which the bibliographies at the end of each chapter provide some fruitful suggestions.

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*Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*, Robin Routledge. Nottingham: Apollos 2008. 384 pages, £16.99, ISBN 978-1-84474-268-8

*New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, Thomas R. Schreiner. Nottingham: Apollos 2008. 990 pages, £24.99, ISBN 978-1-84474-309-4

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Although these two books deal with different Testaments, they share a number of characteristics, not just in terms of place and time of

publication, but also in that both approach their subject matter thematically. Therefore it has seemed appropriate to review them together.

Routledge has written his *Old Testament Theology* out of a teaching context, for students and ministers (9-10). He aims to provide neither too much information nor too little, but to write a 'substantial overview of the main issues' (9). The book has ten chapters. The first deals with approaches to Old Testament theology, tracing the influence of historical and systematic theology, of Von Rad and Eichrodt and of the biblical theology movement. There are helpful sections on typology and an interesting note on Greimas's narrative structure, before a large section on recent approaches shows, intentionally or otherwise, the great diversity of approaches to Old Testament theology that exist. Finally, Routledge details his own approach, founded on exegesis, understanding the Old Testament in its own context, but then seeking to understand the theological implications of the text, described as being able to 'draw correspondences between the OT narrative and the narrative of our own relationship with God'. (76)

After his introductory chapter, the book deals with God and the gods (chapter 2), God and creation (chapter 3), God and his people (chapters 4 to 8), God and the future (chapter 9) and God and the nations (chapter 10). The structure is thematic, but from chapter 3 the chapters roughly follow the plotline of the Old Testament, from creation, through the call of Israel, the provisions of the Sinaitic covenant, kingship and into eschatology and God's universal mission to the nations. This gives a helpful sense of progress as one reads the book, and helps Routledge to build logically on earlier material.

There are points where the comparative brevity of the book (a third the length of Schreiner, whilst dealing with more primary material) can be frustrating. Routledge's decision generally to assume exegetical work means that some key theological issues are passed over very quickly. For example, in discussing male and female relationships in Genesis 1 and 2, he asserts that 'the relationship [between men and women] is harmonious: there is no sense of a hierarchy, with male superior to female' (141). The setting of harmony in opposition to hierarchy is not explained, nor is material from Genesis 3 included in the discussion. There are of course issues of

selection in any book, but this is an example of an area where I would have liked Routledge to engage in more detail with how the relationship between men and women in Genesis 1-3 is understood.

However, there is no doubt that the thematic approach bears much fruit. Being able, in discussing Yahweh and Monotheism, to see the relationship between Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 40-55 (85-101), or to see the relationship between sacrifice in the Pentateuch and *hesed* in Psalm 51 and other Psalms (187-204), is helpful and enlightening. Routledge draws together material on different types of wisdom (215-224) and on questioning God's activity (250-260) into helpful summaries that stand as useful and careful introductions to these subjects. There are other examples of this in the book as well.

There are extensive footnotes, particularly at the beginning of chapters and sections. These footnotes point the reader to other relevant texts and this is a helpful feature of the book, and would make it very useful in a seminary or theological college context. From here, one can access a wide range of secondary literature.

Turning to Schreiner, we see again a book written for pastors and students, and 'perhaps scholars' (9). Notably, Schreiner completed three drafts of the work without consulting secondary sources in an attempt to be anchored to the text, not to the thoughts of others, and this shows throughout the book, as Schreiner demonstrates his detailed understanding of what each book says. This work does not, however, exist in a vacuum, as the detailed engagement in the text and in footnotes shows.

After the preface, there is an introductory chapter summarising New Testament Theology. It is 'God-focused, Christ-centred and Spirit-saturated' (23), within a salvation-historical framework that takes account of inauguration, fulfilment and consummation. This is an effective summary of the book as a whole, also captured in the subtitle: 'Magnifying God in Christ'.

In the first part, Schreiner deals with the already and the not yet, demonstrating through an examination of kingdom in the synoptic gospels, eternal life in John and two ages and new creation language elsewhere, how NT eschatology deals with that which is inaugurated not consummated. This section is foundational for the book, as Schreiner frequently returns to the importance of reading the New Testament in salvation-historical terms, which takes seriously God's

unfolding plan.

This is followed by the longest section of the book (nearly 400 pages) dealing with the saving work of Father, Son and Spirit. There is a chapter on the centrality of God (chapter 4) and on the Holy Spirit (chapter 13), but the bulk of the material here deals with the person and work of Jesus. These chapters underline the centrality, divinity and lordship of Christ, through a variety of titles and descriptions, and show how Soteriology and Christology belong together, as Jesus' divinity and lordship are seen in the context of the cross and resurrection. Schreiner is sensitive to the different emphases, terminology and purposes of the NT authors, but shows how the NT as a whole has a high Christology, and how the relationship between Jesus and his Father, and then the coming of the Spirit, lay the groundwork for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Part three of the book deals with experiencing the promise. Schreiner examines the NT understanding of sin, and the close relationship between faith and obedience, highlighting that faith cannot be separated from repentance and transformation whether in Paul, James or elsewhere in the NT. Similarly, his chapter on the law and salvation history (chapter 16) show how continuity and discontinuity – and complexity – mark every NT author's approach to the OT law.

Finally, part four deals with the people and future of the promise. It is here that Schreiner deals with material relating to the church, and issues such as church leaders, prayer, spiritual gifts, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Schreiner highlights the eschatological outlook of God's people in discussing issues such as government, slavery, wealth, women, marriage, divorce and children – relationship to God is more important than social position. The final chapter (chapter 19) deals with the return of Jesus, judgment and reward, before a summary epilogue and an appendix, which deals with some issues in doing NT Theology.

As one would expect from a book of this length, Schreiner's treatment is detailed. He frequently engages in exegesis of significant or disputed passages, and again and again there are helpful insights – such as God's sovereignty shown in the deliverance of Peter and death of James in Acts (141), or from dealing with the warning passages in Hebrews as a whole (585-597). As a preacher, I have

found much in this book to which I will return, both in terms of the overall thematic sections on topics such as the Son of Man (213-231), or on election in Paul (343-7), but also to the exegetical comments on various verses and passages – for which the extensive scripture index will be essential.

The book is well organised, with sensible chapter subdivisions, and clear summary conclusions. There is a full bibliography, and name, scripture and subject indexes. As well as being a good read, this book will therefore also function as an excellent reference on various New Testament topics.

Looking at both books together, it is interesting to compare the thematic approach of the two books. Routledge organises his material by theme – so for example his chapter on Kingship in Israel (chapter 7) deals with God as King from the Psalms, the institution of the monarchy from Judges and 1 Samuel 8-12, and then the Davidic covenant from Psalms 78 and 79 and 2 Samuel 7, with a cross reference to Jeremiah 33 (225-236). Schreiner is also thematic, but traces each theme through the New Testament canon, dealing usually with Matthew and Mark, then Luke (sometimes with Acts), John's gospel, Pauline literature, and then into the General Letters and Revelation. There is an element of repetition about Schreiner's method, but ultimately it yields a book which takes seriously both NT theology as a whole, and the individual contribution of the NT writers.

There is also considerable overlap in subject matter between the two books. So, both deal in their different ways with the character of God, whilst the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord and the Son of Man in the OT are examined in both books, highlighting the importance of these themes. However, both have their own concerns. Christology understandably dominates Schreiner's work, whilst the covenantal relationship between God and Israel drives the central chapters of Routledge's work.

The books also approach exegesis and secondary literature differently. Schreiner's work is much longer, and so he has time to engage in some detailed exegesis of particular passages. Routledge avoids this, and is therefore more dependent on referencing secondary sources in order to establish disputed points – but then his book is a third the length of Schreiner's. Routledge also tends to be

more concerned to deal with critical issues such as sources in the Pentateuch, ANE creation accounts or the development of worship in Israel. Although he is convinced of the fundamental unity of the Old Testament and the authority of it as Christian scripture, he tends to be less conservative on some issues, such as dating; for example Daniel is dated to around 165BC. Schreiner deals with Pauline authorship briefly, attributing all thirteen letters to Paul, a general reflection of his more conservative stance.

It has certainly been instructive to read them together, and to see the differing and overlapping concerns of Old and New Testament theology. Both books have much to recommend them, and would make good additions to a minister's library. I would recommend Old Testament Theology as it is a helpful, ordered and thought provoking book. I would wholeheartedly recommend New Testament Theology to anyone with an interest in gaining further insight into the purposes of God in Christ, and would think that wise scholars would take note of it.

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*We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, G. K. Beale. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Nottingham: Apollos, 2008. 342 pages, £14.99, ISBN: 978-184474-314-8

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Sin as idolatry has always been part of a Reformed understanding of human depravity, but recently it has received greater attention, due to its potential in communicating the gospel to contemporary society and usefulness in pastoring believers. Beale's book is 'primarily an attempt to trace one particular aspect of idolatry as it is sometimes developed in Scripture', namely 'what people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration' (16). The argument is that the identical description of idols and their worshippers indicates that 'rather than experiencing an expected life-giving blessing, [the worshipper] has received a curse by becoming as spiritually inanimate, empty, rebellious or shameful as the idol is depicted to be' (21). The author has chosen this particular area because, although others have

explored contemporary expressions of idolatry, there has been little sustained treatment of the biblical evidence for the theme of becoming like what one worships. This book, then, fills this gap.

By 'A Biblical Theology of Idolatry', Beale means an intertextual approach, involving the 'tracing [of] the development of earlier biblical passages dealing with this theme and how later portions of scripture interpret and develop these passages' (16). A brief justification of this method is given, with important controls acknowledged and potential pitfalls highlighted. Beale helpfully states that he is a 'maximalist' who is open to exploring more intertextual connections than other commentators (24).

Beale's foundational text is Isaiah 6:1-13 in which Israel's essential sin is idolatry. He argues that this is what the 'sensory-organ-malfunction language' of vv.9-10 is referring to and that God's judgment upon an unrepentant people through the prophet is that they will become like what they worship. Two subsequent chapters explore other Old Testament passages supporting this theme, in particular Psalm 115:4-5, Deuteronomy 29:4, Exodus 32-34, Psalm 106:20, Hosea 4:7 and Jeremiah 2:11-13. The allusions between these texts are patiently examined together with the related issues of glory and image and the origins of idolatry in Genesis 1-3.

A chapter on intertestamental Judaism and idolatry acts as a bridge into the Gospels where Beale focuses most of his attention on the use of Isaiah 6 and 29 by the different writers. He contends that while there may be no explicit references to idol worship as there were in the Old Testament, the concept is still present through the use of Old Testament texts whose original context had idolatry in view (163). The idol Jesus judged among his contemporaries was human tradition.

Beale then moves through the remainder of the New Testament. A shorter chapter on idolatry in Acts leads into a detailed treatment of Paul's epistles, especially Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Corinthians 10:7-22 and the related issues of the golden calf incident, demons, and fellowship. At this point, Beale argues the idolater is not just reflecting 'the same evil or dead spiritual attributes as the idols (which are inanimate wood or stone)' but also 'the destructive and deceptive character of the demons that stand behind the idols to which they passionately commit themselves' (224). Chapter Nine

examines the phrase 'he who has ears to hear let him hear' in the book of Revelation together with the mark of the beast in Revelation 13 and the 'warnings' of Revelation 9.

The book is completed with a chapter on 'The Reversal from Reflecting the Image of Idols to Reflecting God's Image' (268) and a conclusion on idolatry and eschatology, idolatry and contemporary life (private and church) and idolatry, sociology and religion.

G. K. Beale is a distinguished and highly respected New Testament scholar and *We Become What We Worship* is a stimulating and fascinating book. By focusing on the transformative nature of idolatry, it is also sobering and challenging, causing the reader to ponder again the idols of their own heart, God's judgment upon them, and the life changing power of the gospel. However, as is often the case, the book's strengths are also its weaknesses. The thesis is thoroughly and rigorously argued with detailed examination of the relevant texts and frequent use of the original languages. Unfortunately, this means it is heavy and repetitive in places. The intertextual method is illuminating and rewarding, drawing the reader back to scripture to explore an allusion and then causing him or her to step back to reflect on its validity. Yet, it does lead Beale to overstate some of his conclusions. Underlying both of these criticisms is the fact that the author has written a substantial book on what is actually quite a minor biblical theme and seems throughout to be justifying his choice and its importance. While *We Become What We Worship* is very good, the book's usefulness and potential influence could have been enhanced had it been more concise.

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*The Lord's Supper*, Malcolm Maclean. Fearn: Mentor Christian Focus, 2009. 272 pages, £10.99, ISBN: 978-1-845500-428-1

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Malcolm Maclean's useful study of the Lord's Supper contains much food for thought as well as a welcome invitation to feed afresh on Christ in the Supper. The book's main emphases would do much

to alleviate the neglect of the Supper by some evangelicals.

Maclean, a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, describes the work as an expression of his search for his spiritual roots in Scottish Highland Evangelical Presbyterianism. He comments that,

... one feature of the Lord's Supper that has been written on my heart as a result of this study ... is that we should be more focused on what the Lord Jesus, as the Head of his church, is doing at each celebration of the Lord's Supper. I suspect that many believers, including myself, are more concerned with what *we* are doing. Obviously, our state of heart is very important, but sometimes we can be so occupied with ourselves that we fail to observe the activities of Jesus. Thankfully, his activities are not dependent on our observations (10).

Maclean also recognises that the early Christians seem to have celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly and calls for its frequent observance. He argues that our use of the Supper is often too individualistic and sombre whereas it ought to involve communal joy.

No reader will agree with everything here, but there is plenty of food for thought. To take one example, Robert Dabney and Robert Shaw regarded it as essential for the pastor to break the bread at the Supper, although Maclean disagrees. This short book could not hope to be exhaustive. More could have been said, for example, about the Lord's Supper in relation to the sacraments of the Old Covenant, but a helpful introduction is provided. The study is divided into three sections, considering the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, in Scottish Church History and today.

Commenting on the significance of remembrance in the New Testament, Maclean writes,

When Jesus instructed his disciples to remember him by means of the Lord's Supper he was not asking them to shut their eyes and engage in mental imagination in order to recall his death (which is a common response today at the Lord's Table). Rather he asked them to use the symbols of bread and wine as signs pointing to his death. In doing so, he arranged for the Lord's Supper to be a visual, as well as a verbal, reminder in a similar way to how the Passover was a visible reminder to Israelites' (19).

The work of Max Thurian and Joachim Jeremias suggesting that God

is the primary object of the Eucharistic memorial is not discussed.

Something that makes this work distinctive is the considerable central section devoted to the Lord's Supper in Scottish Church History (five out of thirteen chapters, pages 43-168). Those who do not belong to such a constituency might wonder what this material is doing there and it might reduce the study's appeal to the general reader. (Robert Letham's *The Lord's Supper* might provide a suitable alternative.) However, there are treasures to be found in Robert Bruce and James Durham's doctrines of the Supper, and some of the historical details are fascinating: it is remarkable that in the parish of Loch Broom, the Lord's Supper was only administered once in seven years; at Fodderty, once in twelve; and at Glenurquhart not once in twenty-four.

Maclean presents and defends a moderately Calvinistic interpretation of the Supper, without pressing every detail. Those who wish to study Calvin's doctrine of the Supper further, or indeed, the doctrine of the Supper itself, might consult Keith Mathison's *Given For You*. Like Mathison's study of English Puritanism, considering the theology of the Supper in the Scottish lowlands, Maclean charts a Calvinist consensus moving towards increased Zwinglianism. His criticisms of the Highland communion sessions (the fewness of occasions when the Lord's Supper was held, the lack of emphasis on the local congregation and the lack of assurance found among Highland Christians) are undoubtedly well made. Many people would not receive the sacrament for at least ten months of the year and never from their own pastor. Maclean is right that in self-examination, if one is to question one's own faith, one is looking only for genuine faith, not strong faith, since even the weakest true faith in a great Saviour is surely saving.

Writing on positive aspects of the Highlands Communion sessions, Maclean refers to them as a means of discipline. He narrates that when Thomas Hog became minister of Kiltarn, Ross-shire the ignorance of his parishioners was so great that he delayed Communion for four years. However, not everyone would regard this as wise pastoral practice. Likewise, it is a strange sign of spiritual mindedness that after Alexander Macleod of Uig had delayed the Supper, only six people communicated, although he was convinced that many more were truly converted. If the Lord's Supper is food for

the hungry and medicine for the sick, Macleod's apparent pleasure in this neglect of the Supper seems somewhat perverse. More generally, it seems Scottish Reformed Christianity in this period, and indeed, Reformed Christianity in general, has had far too great an emphasis on introspective self-examination as a prelude to participation in the Supper, or, as often seems to have been the case, to self-excommunication.

One is also tempted to think that the 'revivals' that accompanied some communion sessions may have been indicative of a deficient regular diet of spirituality. If the proper place for the Lord's Supper is in each weekly Lord's Day service of covenant renewal, communion sessions where huge numbers (sometimes an estimated ten thousand) travelled from a fifty mile radius or more once a year are out of place. One might compare the sermon tourism of Puritan England.

The final section turns to the Lord's Supper today. The inclusion of a chapter on the Lord's Supper and liturgy was a pleasant surprise. Maclean suggests that the placing of the Supper after the sermon suggests it 'is a secondary aspect of the service' (172). Whilst it is possible to think of the Supper as a dispensable appendix, it is better to view it as the climax of the Lord's Day Service of covenant renewal. Maclean's suggestion that the Supper may not be given sufficient time is a challenge to the way some Christians are accustomed to think. In his circles, the sermon may last an hour whereas the Supper might be over more quickly than the minister's prayer.

Maclean also considers a number of practical aspects of the Supper, though not without theological perspectives. I cannot agree with Donald Macleod that if each communicant receives the bread and the wine from a minister rather than from his companions, it necessarily follows that 'we are encouraging priestcraft and superstition' (178). We could equally be tending to maintain good order, church discipline or the unity of word and sacrament. Neither is it necessary that when a fixed liturgy is used there is 'the danger of familiarity reducing a sense of expectation' (180), unless it is the expectation of surprise.

Although Maclean's treatment of children at the Lord's Table is little more than three pages long, he makes a very good case for paedocommunion, which he then backs away from on the basis that

children should be able to evidence self-examination and understanding of remembering Jesus' death before they may communicate. Rather than setting a minimum age, Maclean argues that baptised children of believers should be allowed to participate in the Supper 'at a young age' if they 'can give a coherent expression of faith' (191) and that church rulers should be guided by parents about their children's evidence of conversion and understanding. To my mind this is a great improvement on much contemporary practice, but fails to take account of the arguments made by Greg Strawbridge *et al.* in *The Case For Covenant Communion* and Tim Gallant in *Feed My Lambs* that baptism admits children to the Lord's Table. Maclean seems to require a type of self-examination which does not take into account the context which 1 Corinthians 11 addresses. I would agree that if children are getting drunk, despising the poor or being greedy at the Supper, they ought to be subject to church discipline!

Despite these criticisms, Maclean's study deserves to be celebrated for its positive contribution to valuing the meal Jesus gave us.

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*If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him: Radically Re-thinking Priestly Ministry*, Justin Lewis-Anthony. London: Mowbray, 2009. 248 pages, £14.99, ISBN: 978-1-9062-8617-0

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Neither the book's title nor its subtitle are designed to endear it to readers of *Ecclesia Reformanda*, who might nevertheless benefit greatly from it. In fact, 'priestly ministry' does not carry any connotations here to which Reformed ministers must object. Its link to the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the church as a whole has the advantage of reminding us that ordained ministers, certainly in the Church of England, are not only shepherds (pastors) of a gathered flock or teachers of a congregation. Clergy are also the place where the unchurched community meets 'the church' most visibly and tangibly which brings with it its own stresses. (Admittedly,

evangelical ministers who do not wear clerical dress may avoid some of these stresses.)

It is no secret that many incumbents find their ministry not just hard but well-nigh impossible. The contention of this book is that the source of this is a romanticised ideal of what it means to be a parish minister. The name of that ideal is 'George Herbert'. The name does not refer to the real-life incumbent of 17th century Bemerton, whose story the author tells winsomely, nor to the poet, whose hymns Lewis-Anthony seems to love as much as anyone, but to the picture which emerges from Herbert's *The Country Parson*, as read in church folklore, not least among 'High Church' circles. Herbert's appropriation by the 'High Church' party is ironic, a point which Lewis-Anthony does not fail to note, but the 'George Herbert' ideal has currency in 'Low Church' circles as well.

Radically re-thinking priestly ministry means tackling the problem at its root which is identified here as the false and unrealistic pattern of omnipresent and omniscient ministry embodied in 'George Herbert.' A deftly written and illuminating first part of the book recounts the real life and ministry of George Herbert and the changes in status and function of English parish clergy from then until now. This section offers a weapon for killing the 'George Herbert' myth. Like all good history writing it can help us to question our unspoken assumptions, as we look at ministry today from the perspective of the past. A chapter on 'the Cult of Nice', which notes that an automaton with a permanent smile on its face, uttering a small range of platitudes, could stand in for a priest on most occasions, and one on clergy burnout paint a picture of what it is like to be a priest for many today.

The second part of the book seeks to sketch out an alternative way of being a priest which is not governed by false memories of George Herbert. It feels slightly more disjointed, but maybe inevitably so, as the author offers perspectives and ingredients for ordained ministry in place of a one-size-fits-all package. Being a Christian priest begins and ends in worship. Three images inspired by a Rowan Williams lecture suggest ways in which this works out in ministry. As *Witness* the priest has particular responsibility for calling the community to its foundation in Christ, as *Watchman* the priest is a discerner and interpreter of culture, and as *Weaver* the priest helps people to make

sense to and of each other and to encounter Christ which 'means encountering not only the healing and absolving Jesus, but also the judging and dying Jesus' (142). These themes are traced in the teaching and lives of diverse Christian leaders of the recent past.

Such a model needs to be fleshed out in a methodology. Lewis-Anthony develops this in the shape of five interconnected pillars to support self-knowledge, parish-knowledge, skills-knowledge, and, not acknowledged explicitly but present nevertheless, knowledge of Christ. The first pillar is having a personal *rule* of life, the second knowing one's *role*, the third recognising one's *responsibility* in context, the fourth knowing how to make decisions (*reckoning*, to preserve the alliteration), the fifth how to manage conflict (*reconciling*). Each of these gets a chapter packed with practical wisdom, introducing among other things Wink's areas of study for identifying the 'angel' (spirit) of a community, Lehr's list of co-dependent roles, and Allen's five-stage system for 'getting things done'. The appendix offers a framework for a personal rule of life based on the four pillars of the Dominican constitution (prayer, study, community, ministry).

The book is well written, witty, and thought-provoking. It should prove useful to all clergy and those preparing for ordination. I commend it also to church members who are not called to the ordained ministry because the better we understand the particular responsibilities, pleasures and pressures of our vocations, the better we can help each other. I am hoping to read the book again before long, maybe together with other members of my home church.

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*Transforming the World? The Gospel and Social Responsibility*, Jamie Grant and Dewi A. Hughes, eds. Nottingham Apollos; IVP, 2009. 288 pages, £16.99, ISBN 978-1-84474-374-2

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Arriving late at a party in full swing can be fun, but is often tinged

with regret. As one takes off one's coat, one asks 'Why didn't I get here earlier?' While plenty of Christians who call themselves evangelicals have been grappling with issues of social justice and poverty relief for many years, others feel like latecomers to this particular party. The likes of Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo in the USA as well as Tearfund in the UK have been ploughing on and seizing the initiative. The Salvation Army have been doing it for even longer. Conservative evangelicals, then, have a lot of catching up to do. This book is a welcome attempt to redress the balance of material available.

As one would expect from a book that is a collection of essays written by fourteen different authors, we have a mixed bag of styles and angles. Some chapters are very academic in tone, comparing and contrasting the views of other theologians at length, such as Tim Chester's 'Eschatology and the Transformation of the World' which carefully examines Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. In this chapter, Chester asks the valuable question of whether our attempts at social justice last into eternity.

Other chapters are more impassioned, but occasionally lacking in evidence either biblical or statistical, such as C. Rene Padilla's chapter on 'The Biblical Basis for Social Ethics' and Peter S. Heslam's, 'An Appeal to Moral Imagination and Commercial Acumen'. Heslam takes Niebuhr's five perspectives on 'Christ and Culture' and replaces 'Culture' with 'Business', which is an interesting exercise, but does not quite come together in a way that convinces. Even this reviewer, who needs little persuasion that business has much to offer in the Christian's fight against poverty, was unpersuaded by what he read here.

Perhaps the disappointment of some later chapters is heightened by the fact that the first chapter, by David L. Baker, is so good. In it, Baker looks at how the Law in the Torah was designed to include outsiders, help the weak and support the family. It is a very helpful summary for those unfamiliar with the material. In the next chapter, M. Daniel Carroll R. does an equally good job with the Old Testament's prophetic writings. There is a return to form in David W. Smith's useful historical survey, 'Evangelicals and Society: An On-off Relationship'.

There follow at least six more chapters which show how Christians

have an obligation to look after the poor, speak up for the marginalized and campaign for social justice. The authors provide lots of biblical justification for all of the above, but I feel most of us don't require persuading on that point. Although it is good to dot the i's and cross the t's on our theological foundations, two or three chapters would have sufficed here. This would have made room to deal with some of the other issues raised elsewhere in the book. For example, David W. Smith critiques Wilberforce who, at times, sought to cement social divisions, raising the question of whether social mobility is really as desirable as modern politicians like to say. After all, is it not the duty of Christians both to give out of wealth, and be content in all situations?

Smith also points out in his chapter that in 1849, Karl Marx and William Booth both arrived in London, with wildly differing views on how to deal with poverty and social injustice. This could have led into a useful, and longer, discussion of that fact that, in Britain, Christians need to recognise the fact that the vast majority of healthcare, poor relief and counseling is performed by the state. In some quarters, Christian involvement is seen as an intrusion. How does an individual, a church or a parachurch movement attempt to bring about social change and the alleviation of poverty when our taxes are being given to secular technocrats to do just that? Moreover, social responsibility must surely involve not just helping the poor that one does not regularly encounter, but the old and frail in one's own home – except we have placed our elders in special homes for old people and outsourced their care to private companies and local councils, so we can be free from the burden and go out to earn the money to pay for everything. This may be economically viable, but is this socially responsible?

International aid and development is just as fraught with difficulty. How can Western Christians provide aid and relief in foreign countries – with different laws, religions and social mores – without causing unnecessary offence, making matters worse, or vindicating corrupt regimes? Many, even in the secular realm, are questioning the value of international aid, especially on a macro-economic level, as Heslam hints in his chapter. How do Christians find a way through to help the poor and the oppressed abroad in a way that honours Christ all the way along the line? A book that

begins to answers some of these questions would be well worth the £16.99 ticket price.

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