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Book reviews


This is an ambitious book and the author has approached her subject with energy and passion. In the preface we read that the aim of this book is to offer an answer to the moral challenge from Nietzsche, post-Christian feminists *et al.*, that confession of the authority of God is harmful to the human condition. This undertaking is either brave or foolhardy. If the concept of ‘the authority of God’ has a positive resonance for the reader, this book will offer interesting and reassuring arguments. I doubt, however, if post-Christian feminists, or indeed those who take the devastating critique of Nietzsche seriously, will persevere much beyond the first chapter. The working hypothesis is the authority of God, God as author of the heavens and the earth. We are repeatedly cautioned that the authority of God, as used here, refers primarily to God as author. Authority is not to be confused with authoritarianism, patriarchy and legalism, and the etymological defence is provided to legitimize this specific use. The concept of God as author reflects the influence of the Russian literary theorist and philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin. His theory of polyphony and the dialogic imagination applied to Christian ethics runs throughout the book. The relationship between author and main character (creator and created) is dynamic and Bakhtin considers the nature of the text as graced. The move from aesthetics to ethics is indeed theologically suggestive, and this has been sensitively and intelligently explored.

In the chapter on ‘Authority and the Church as Body of Christ’, the use of Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*, which explores the history of laughter, is very effective and imaginative. Bakhtin investigates the medieval culture of humour and suggests that the clowning and laughter in medieval church feasts allowed people to make fun of what he described as ‘the narrow-minded seriousness of spiritual pretence’. By learning to ‘clown wisely’ hypocrisy is exposed and the truth that is lasting is uncovered. Such is the ethical significance of feasting and fooling. The concept of the Church as carnival is marvellously evocative. Carnival provides a temporary transfer to a utopian world where everyone partakes of the celebration. It serves no direct utilitarian function and simply brings people together. Seen through that lens, the Church and the Eucharist come into focus. In fact the book has so much interesting material that it is regrettable to come across numerous examples of anti-Judaism based on the assumption that Christianity superseded Judaism. This is confirmed on p. 303. After intimating
that OT prophets are no longer very relevant in their original context, a quotation from Barth is used who wrote: ‘What makes their [OT prophets’] enquiries and declarations prophetic is that objectively and materially they are witnesses of Him who was still to come, i.e., of the grace now vouchsafed to Christians.’ And the author of this book comments: ‘Arguably, this is one criterion in the consideration of the Christian ethic that requires no modernisation.’ It is disturbing that a talented theologian writing about Christian ethics is not aware of post-Holocaust theology and the constraints that it puts on Christian triumphalism. Selective reading of the Hebrew bible to serve the dogmatic claims of the Church is outdated. This understanding of the ‘authority’ of God is harmful. If Christian ethics is to be life-affirming and life-giving it needs to rid itself of such teaching of contempt.

The quotation by Walter Brueggemann used elsewhere that ‘no interpretive institution, ecclesial or academic, can any longer sustain a hegemonic mode of interpretation’ has not been understood at all in this work. That is a great pity, because it systematically undermines what could have been an enduring piece of writing.

Margie Tolstoy
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In the Introduction the author tells us that this book is an attempt to describe the kind of theological statement the city makes today; that it is therefore an attempt at a Christian anthropology; that it is a study of the city as symbol; and that its central concern is an account of analogy and of analogical relations. Other ways of describing the central purpose are offered in the course of the book, and other ways besides these might be suggested. For example, it can also be construed as a subtle meditation on the significance of Augustine’s City of God or, even more importantly, as a profound theology of the body. Not all of these aims are fulfilled equally successfully, but the book is still a truly major achievement, the most sustained constructive piece of work by an Anglican theologian for many years. The book appears under the banner of Radical Orthodoxy, but unlike some productions from this group it is clearly and patiently written. Ward wants to be constructive, and he wants to communicate. His natural element is the stratosphere, and the argument frequently soars in that direction, but he is painstakingly careful to make his argument clear; he has eliminated the jargon of postmodernity; and he does his best to earth the argument in the lived world. Thus the book begins with Faith in the City,
and ends with homelessness. At the heart of the whole argument are two theses, one socio-political and the other theological. The former accepts the account of the Network society of Manuel Castells. According to this, the nature of the city is changed by the growth of information technology. It is thus cyberspace that has to be redeemed. The latter argues that Christian theology invites us to understand the complex analogical relations of physical, ecclesial, sacramental, social and political bodies. The bulk of the book is taken up with exploring these analogical possibilities, and here we have a profound analysis of desire, sexuality, gender and sacramentality.

The thesis is sometimes overstated: we do not, for example, ‘only negotiate the world metaphorically’ (95), for, as he has reminded us two pages previously, bodies are ‘always excessive to signs’. These four central chapters nevertheless take us further in our understanding of what we are doing celebrating sacraments than any contemporary writing I can think of. Particularly important are the reflections on gender and marriage. How long will it be, one wonders, before this theology enters the bloodstream of the institutional church?

This central section is framed by two chapters either side looking at the city, drawing fluently and illuminatingly on film and contemporary literature, as well as on Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa. The atomized nature of contemporary relations is what we need to be redeemed from, and for Ward the communitarianism of MacIntyre will not do. Theology, in Ward’s view, keeps alive a vision of a better and more just world and is uniquely placed to critique postmodernity and build bridges between the real places in which we live, on the one hand, and the ‘ahistorical space of flows’ of the network society on the other. Tellingly, David Harvey, one of the most incisive critics of postmodernity, is dismissed in one sentence as ‘determinist’. For my part Harvey’s description of the world, always closely tied to social and economic analysis, corresponds far more closely to my experience than the world Castells describes, and which Ward accepts. I therefore find other theological critiques of the contemporary world, such as those of Hinkelammert, more incisive and more hopeful than Ward does, and they seem to me to ground a far more cogent ecclesial practice than this theology does. Though this book is far less theologically imperialist than other volumes of radical orthodoxy, claims that theology alone can solve the world’s problems leave me sceptical, if for no other reason than that God’s Spirit works beyond us. Having said that, we have much to learn about the city in these four chapters, and in the book as a whole we have theological reflection of the highest order. A recent symposium on theological liberalism bemoaned the fact that British theology is not read abroad. It will not be possible to overlook this book, for it puts its author firmly on the
international stage, not as the voice of a party but as a truly creative and constructive thinker.

Tim Gorringe
University of Exeter


It is surely one of the signs of the vitality of any specialized subject of theological investigation that it is able to generate not only a fair quantity of original research but also, from time to time, synthetic works which present the results of original research in a form accessible to students and interested lay readers. The work before us is intended (in accordance with the goals set for the series in which it appears) to belong to the latter category. But its author is not always content with such modest attainments, and when he is not, he gets into trouble.

Gorringe, who is Professor of Theological Studies at the University of Exeter, has a twofold aim. On the one hand, he seeks to interpret Barth’s theology contextually, examining major (and many minor) writings against the backdrop of the social, cultural and political horizon within which they emerged. On the other, he would like to show that Barth’s doctrinal theology worked effectively as ‘political theology’ (e.g. 145) – and therein lies the rub. In relation to the first of these tasks, he is largely successful (though even on this front, it is necessary to raise a question or two). In relation to the second task, he is far less so. For fulfilment of the second task would require – to be convincing – systematic analysis and argumentation at a level far beyond what is possible in an introduction.

It is the first concern that is the dominant one where the method and structure of the book are concerned. The method may be loosely described as one of correlation. Gorringe moves chronologically through various of Barth’s theological writings, correlating the ones he treats with contemporary events in the political and cultural spheres. For the most part, the goal is not so much to demonstrate connections (which would require a detailed knowledge of what Barth knew and how he responded to each of the events treated) as it is simply to suggest possible connections. A ten-page Appendix sets forth in synoptic form the basis for the correlation to which Gorringe everywhere wants to call our attention.

This is a tried and true method and one that has been employed by numerous scholars prior to Gorringe – with, in some cases, interesting results. But it is a form of educated guesswork. And it is high time that we asked whether this approach has not already so exhausted its potential that new methods of research are called for. What is exciting about the recent
work of Eberhard Busch and his colleagues in Göttingen is that their research employs a more exacting historical method than has been possible heretofore. Busch has sifted through information found in state archives in his efforts to glean more information about Barth’s day-to-day involvement in political and state reaction to them; and he has searched through unpublished letters to establish in great detail Barth’s understanding of particular events and his strategies for addressing them. Busch’s massive book on Karl Barth and the Jews in the period 1933 to 1945 not only provides us with a plethora of new information; it also shows us the way beyond the simple methods of correlation employed in the past. It is much to be lamented that Gorringe has no knowledge of this work. It would have made his treatment of Barth’s struggle against fascism much more informed and important (in that he could then have shown that the widespread perception that Barth’s awakening to the threat posed to the Jews was late and that his resistance on this score was virtually non-existent is massively incorrect on both counts); he would also have been alerted to the possibility that more exact methods can now be (and are being!) employed.

In the absence of such exacting research, the temptation to exceed the bounds of merely suggesting possible connections is great. To give just one example, Gorringe claims that Barth’s turn to dogmatic theology in 1924 belonged to that ’quest for neue Sachlichkeit’ which at that time was sweeping aside expressionism in the German art world (95). I myself was once attracted to this possibility, but backed off from it when turning my dissertation into a book. The problem was that no direct evidence had ever surfaced that Barth took any interest in this development in the world of art or that he even had a knowledge of it. Nor is Gorringe now in a position to remedy this defect. What, then, is he to do? He could rest content with something like a subterranean connection; he could say that the longing for ‘objectivism’ was ‘in the air’, part of a cultural mood which Barth also participated in. But Gorringe is not content with such modest claims. He seeks to buttress the alleged connection with a further claim, viz. that Barth was seeking to develop ‘a new theological realism’ (ibid.). At this point, the bankruptcy of the entire proceeding becomes clear. The problem is that Barth was seeking to develop a new theological realism from 1915 on. This was not a tendency that first found expression in 1924, and it cannot be made to be a function of a shift in cultural mood at that later date. But this is the kind of difficulty into which one enters as soon as contentment with correlation gives way to a desire for real substantive connections.

The second aim of the book is to show that Barth’s doctrinal theology functioned as ’political theology’. This is an important claim and one that I think can be sustained – in a different sort of book. The right way to go
about it, in my view, would be to isolate the point in Barth’s theology at
which his thinking attains to its critical power and then to show how this
critical element is employed in the unfolding of particular doctrinal themes
which bear on specific political problems. A series of case studies would
have allowed room for the needed level of rigour in analysis. Such an
approach has been used to great effect by Bertold Klappert in his recent
collection of essays Versöhnung und Befreiung: Versuche, Karl Barth kontextuell zu
verstehen (1994) – another work whose relevance to Gorringe’s concerns is
obvious but which was not consulted.

But Gorringe is constrained by the limits inherent in his approach to
addressing the first of his aims. He is not able to enter as fully into
systematic questions as he needs to do. His treatment of natural theology
provides a good case in point. Gorringe knows that the source of the
political power resident in Barth’s theology has something to do with the
latter’s doctrine of revelation, but his unwillingness to follow Barth’s
rejection of natural theology (129±33, 160±3) shows that his understand-
ing of that doctrine is shaky at best.

Gorringe follows Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt in suggesting that
Barth’s vehement opposition to natural theology in the midst of the Church
Struggle of the 1930s was contextually but not materially necessary. That is
to say, there was no necessary connection between Barth’s most basic
theological commitments and this stance. It was effective in the situation,
but that is the most that can be said for it. To this, he adds James Barr’s
claim that Barth’s stance on this question is unbiblical, and he lets it go at
that. What he does not do is to enter fully into the question of the material
relation of Barth’s understanding of the mode of the divine self-revelation in
Jesus Christ to his stance on natural theology. Had he done so, he might
have realized that it is the non-givenness of God in the givenness of the humanity of Jesus
(the anhypostasia and enhypostasia of the humanity of Christ) that necessi-
tates his opposition to natural theology. If Jesus Christ is revelation, if he is
‘God in Person’ (as Barth always insisted) and revelation is, as a con-
sequence, structured in this way, then any other putative revelations which
would stand in an analogical relation to this one, as to the ostensibly
primary form, must conform to it at its most decisive point. That is to say,
other alleged revelations must conform to the primary form precisely at the
point at which it is affirmed that the creaturely medium of the revelation in
question has no capacity in itself to be a bearer of revelation and, therefore,
must be given this capacity by a special act of God (i.e. one not already built
into its createdness). Whatever we may think of Barr’s claim that Barth’s
stance is ‘unbiblical’ (and that is a subject for another time), what we
cannot do is to try to think of other possible sources of revelation which
would function on a basis other than the one that is given in this ‘primary’ form, which would function, that is, on the basis of an alleged capacity given in and with the createdness of the objects in question. Thus, you cannot have Barth’s doctrine of revelation without his position on natural theology. The problem this creates for Gorringe’s primary contention is obvious. Barth’s theology is able to function as ‘political theology’ because – and only because – his doctrine of revelation has the character just described. It is the fact that we humans can never obtain direct access to revelation, that we can never lay hold of it so as to bring it into play for purposes we set for it, that constitutes the basis for the ideology critique to which Barth constantly subjects not only theologies but political programmes as well.

In sum, this is a work that might have accomplished much more had it sought to accomplish less. Gorringe would have been well served had he kept his focus on his first aim and tried to reduce the scope of the whole in some meaningful way. Those who would write introductions would do well to remember two things. First, the courses in which their books might usefully be employed may be a semester in length (as is the case in the American system), but they may also only be a three- to four-week module in a year-long course (as is still the case in a fair number of British universities). A text that would introduce a particular theology ought to be useful within the bounds of the shorter course as well as the longer – and that argues for a briefer presentation. Second, as our distance from Karl Barth grows, both in time and in cultural location, students increasingly need to be introduced to the person before they are able to dive with some degree of enthusiasm into the Church Dogmatics. A selection of readings from Barth’s letters can do wonders as an introduction to the largeness of spirit that was Karl Barth; his keen sense of humour, his highly developed powers of observation, his enjoyment of widely differing kinds of people. Alongside this, it would be nice to have a brief outline of his political activities – which would give students a sense of the concreteness of his theological existence. But Gorringe’s book does not fill that need.

Bruce McCormack
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The thesis of this book is that both in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and in the new liturgical rites that flowed from it, the Roman Catholic bishops and theologians of Vatican II seriously misunderstood the importance of ritual and the human body, and merely reflected the passing
fashion of the 1960s. Torevell suggests that his work might be regarded as a kind of postmodern liturgical critique of the modern Roman Catholic liturgies that have given precedence to a cerebral approach (active participation = rational understanding), and elevated modernity’s preference for the mind over the body. Drawing on the studies of anthropologists and sociologists such as Durkheim, Weber, Turner, Tambiah and Rappaport, the author establishes the importance of ritual in religious formation, the importance of understanding the person as body and soul, or body and mind, and as being part of a wider social body. This, the study maintains, was perfectly expressed in late medieval Christendom, with its focus on the mass as a rite of mystery, where the elevation of the host spilled over in Corpus Christi processions, the guilds and medieval society, all as aspects of the ‘body of Christ’. Modernity, accelerated by the Enlightenment, elevated the individual over the collective, and the mind over the body. Zygmunt Bauman and Michel Foucault are invoked as postmodern liberators of a flawed modernity with its rationalism, extrapolation of broad theories, and teleology. The Roman Catholic scholars of Vatican II’s liturgical reforms had misunderstood the aims of the older liturgical movement pioneered by Gueranger, and the result has been a surrender of divine transcendence in favour of anthropocentricty, which even led in 1985 to permission for the celebrant at mass to add his own commentary and explanation as the rite proceeds. A new liturgical movement is called for in which the gains of Vatican II will be conserved, but where also the mistakes of modernity will be rectified.

Torevell’s basic conclusion is one with which many liturgical scholars will wholeheartedly agree. Indeed, as far back as 1977, in an article in Studia Liturgica entitled ‘Christian Worship or Cultural Incantations?’, the present writer indicted the liturgies of the 1960s and early 1970s – Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist – as having substituted modern culture for transcendence and eschatology. Since then, at least the Church of England has attempted to move beyond the modernity of the 1980 Alternative Service Book with Common Worship 2000, though whether it will be recognized as such posterity will have to judge. There has been a steadily growing number of voices within the Roman Catholic Church calling for the Vatican to look again at the present liturgy, but so far little of concrete value has emerged. Rome’s liturgy of modernity remains in place, and clerical liturgical banalities in celebrating its rites reduce worship to the level of bad entertainment. However, although this diagnosis is accurate, the means by which Torevell establishes it raise serious matters of methodology and scholarship.

To begin with, this book is almost wholly reliant on secondary material,
and is in the main an anthology of other people’s views. Appeal to a multiplicity of ‘authorities’ does not in itself prove the point. Next, in claiming to be a postmodern liturgical critique, Torevell attacks modernity, which he traces back to the Enlightenment and, ultimately, to the early modern period and the rise of Protestantism. The Protestant destruction of the pre-modern Catholic liturgy and ritual is seen as wholly negative, and here appeal is made to Bossy, Duffy and Pickstock (who had herself simply cited Bossy and Duffy). Yet there is a certain irony that in order to establish the social cohesion of pre-modern Catholic society, and the individualism and elevation of the mind in Protestantism, Torevell invokes the general theories of late modern scholars such as Durkheim and Weber, whose use of broad theorizing is what postmodernism so decries! Furthermore, there is a naive understanding of both Protestantism and ‘medieval’ Christianity. A reading of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divinity shows that Protestant concern with the conscience and mind has many parallels in Catholic literature — indeed, several devotional works by Catholic writers were plagiarized by Protestants! Furthermore, though Protestants abolished many ceremonies, they developed their own. The position of the minister for preaching, prayers, and for celebrating the Lord’s Supper at Zurich, for example, was highly allegorical. Although the elevation of the host was abolished, a most elaborate fraction and libation of wine was introduced in many of the Reformed traditions. Sitting at table for reception was regarded as expressive of the body of Christ. Divines such as Bullinger, Vermigli and Ursinus all stressed (pace Torevell’s claim of Protestantism) that the eucharist was mainly action. In addition to neglecting all of this, Torevell makes much of the now dated idea — still being peddled in some of the Radical Orthodoxy literature — of an unbridgeable chasm between the late pre-modern (fifteenth/sixteenth centuries) and the early modern period. The work of the St Andrews Reformation Studies Institute as well as the work commissioned by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, is currently showing the considerable continuity between the two periods. Equally unsatisfactory is the idea that the medieval period was homogeneous; there is a large difference between liturgical development and creativity from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, and the later systematizing and rationalizing of the fifteenth century. Torevell’s understanding of these complex centuries is a naively outdated modernist one. The discussion of the postmodern prophets Bauman and Foucault, like the authorities of modernity, is never given any rationale, and no concern is shown with any of the serious criticisms that have been made of their writings, which is particularly pertinent in the case of Foucault.

Karl Barth once wrote that when the Church undertakes revision of the

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hymnal, it usually consults every possible authority other than dogmatic theology. In Torevell’s case, he seems to have consulted every discipline other than dogmatics and liturgical scholarship. Liturgical scholars have made trenchant criticisms of the modern liturgies, both text and performance, but usually more directly than in this book, and without resorting to theories of development (surely modernist?) of cultural and religious history. To the author’s assessment of modern Roman Catholic liturgy we may give a sincere loud ‘Amen’, but to the means by which he establishes it, an equally loud ‘non placet’.

Bryan D. Spinks
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The first notice I saw of this volume was in Watkins’s catalogue under the heading ‘Christian Mysticism’, in the company of New Age materials. The publishers list it under ‘New Testament Studies’, while one of the promotional quotations on the cover suggests that ‘it reshapes our understanding of early Christianity, its literature and its liturgy’. All of which raises the proper and serious question as to what kind of book this is.

Margaret Barker’s path to this subject matter of the book of Revelation is well documented in her earlier works: The Older Testament (London, 1987); The Gate of Heaven (London, 1991); The Great Angel (London, 1992); On Earth as it is in Heaven (Edinburgh, 1995); and The Risen Lord (Edinburgh, 1996). In such works she has enriched our perception of the importance of post-Exilic Jewish themes. She identifies two significant moments in the development of her ideas about the book of Revelation: one was reading the text in a modern Hebrew version of the NT, and the other was encountering J. M. Ford’s commentary on Revelation in the Anchor Bible series (1975). As a result she argues that Greek (of whatever kind) was not the original language of Revelation, and she breathes fresh life into some of J. M. Ford’s neglected and idiosyncratic theories.

Revelation is Hebrew prophecy – the secret sayings of Jesus, inspired by the apocalyptic oracles of the Jerusalem temple, but preserved independently of the Gospel traditions. In the middle of the first century the followers of Christ waited, like the rest of Jerusalem, for the great high priest to return and complete the atonement at the end of the tenth Jubilee, an expectation which helped to fuel the revolt against Rome. When John escaped to Patmos, he compiled Revelation as the record of this first generation. For him, Josephus, who deserted to the side of Rome, was the
false prophet. The hope for the future, according to the teaching that John communicated, was that the Lord would return to his people in the Eucharistic liturgy.

There is no denying the importance of OT and Jewish perspectives on the book of Revelation. Ezekiel and other parts of the prophetic corpus are highly significant in this regard. The sense of continuity between the Hebrew bible and early Christian prophecy is vital, and the relationship of Jesus’ words to the work of early Christian prophets is a fascinating question. But a one-sided concentration on Jewish themes, to the exclusion of the Greco-Roman background of Revelation, is as problematic as early twentieth-century readings of the text exclusively in the light of Babylonian and Hellenistic astrology. Margaret Barker is correct in emphasizing the speculative aspects of a traditional location of Revelation within the persecutions, driven by the imperial cult, of Christians in Asia Minor at the end of the first century CE. But much of the structuring of chronology and history of ideas, to which she now transfers the text, is in turn highly speculative.

It is remarkable the extent to which this work depends on older scholarship, or uses it as a springboard. The critical edition of the Greek text used is that in H. B. Swete’s commentary of 1906. B. F. Westcott’s conservative scholarship on the Fourth Gospel (e.g.1894) is quoted in the frontispiece: ‘The crisis of the fall of Jerusalem explains the relation of the Apocalypse and the Gospel. In the Apocalypse, that “coming” of Christ was expected, and painted in figures: in the Gospel the “coming” is interpreted.’ Margaret Barker gives to these words a rather precise focus. She also quotes Ernst Käsemann’s famous description of apocalyptic as ‘the mother of all Christian theology’ (1960), again to give it a much more precisely historical spin. Such sharpened interpretations need to be justified by a debate in context. Even in recent commentaries on Revelation there is a sharp division between those who see the book as prophecy and those who appreciate it (or dismiss it) as apocalyptic; it is not easy to synthesize these views and with minimal discussion.

If these 400 pages were a commentary (in ‘New Testament Studies’) engaging in debate with existing positions in scholarship, then I would regard it as an important work. But instead it appears as a ‘my reading of the book of Revelation’, presented in a rather speculative and independent-minded way. As a ‘reading’ of Revelation, 400 pages strikes me as over-indulgent. A recent ‘reading’ by Alan Garrow in my Routledge New Testament Readings series occupied less than half that space. But perhaps this volume really does belong in the proper category of ‘Christian Mysticism’, in which case it offers a treasure-house of comparisons from Jewish Apocrypha and Kabbalah, as well as Gnostic texts, to a significant Christian
statement. And I have no quarrel with tracing the influence of the book of Revelation upon later Christian liturgies; indeed I have myself pressed the case for the connection with St John Chrysostom and Eastern Orthodoxy.

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David Coffey, Deus Trinitus: The Doctrine of the Triune God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. viii + 196. $35.00.

In this tightly written and impressively argued book David Coffey offers a reconstructed doctrine of the immanent Trinity grounded in a Lonerganian epistemology that moves from the data to be known (the biblical witness to the Trinity), to our understanding of that data within our intellectual milieu (the immanent Trinity), and finally to an affirmation that what has thus been appropriated is the case (the economic Trinity). Utilizing a ‘return model’ of the Trinity analogous to more recent Christologies from below to complement a ‘procession model’ that is analogous to Christologies from above, Coffey proposes to overcome Roger Haight’s agnosticism and the list of weaknesses he sees in the positions of Rahner, Barth, Congar, Jüngel, Lonergan, Moltmann, Mühlen and von Balthasar. These weaknesses stem mainly from their failure to construct a ‘return model’ of the Trinity.

This book represents a much needed counter-move to a number of celebrated recent presentations of the doctrine of the Trinity that have polemicized against a doctrine of the immanent Trinity and have floundered because of their failure to understand the importance of this doctrine. There is much that is of value in this work. But, in my view, a number of odd presuppositions and a failure to consider a wider variety of contemporary trinitarian perspectives lead Coffey to compromise some of the most important insights of trinitarian doctrine that he intends to uphold.

Coffey adopts what Colin Gunton has labelled Rahner’s ‘degree Christology’, i.e. ‘The theological anthropology at work here is that of Karl Rahner, according to which the divinity of Christ is the supreme actualization of humanity under grace . . .’ (162). Such thinking fails to distinguish Christ’s divinity and humanity and asserts both that ‘The uniqueness of Jesus’ Sonship is evident in the utter radicality of this [the Father’s] bestowal of the Holy Spirit . . .’ (37) and that our relation to the Father ‘is essentially the same as for Christ, except that it lacks the radicality present in his case’ (43, 82). From such thinking follow a docetic understanding of the atonement: Jesus’ alienation ‘remained for him at the level of psychological and spiritual experience, not at the level of actual reality’ (149), and a conditional view of salvation: ‘personal sins are not forgiven until they [people] repent’ (118). This is further compounded by Coffey’s belief that
it is through ordained ministers, who continue Christ’s ministry, that ‘believers are admitted to solidarity with Christ . . . and thus are admitted to trinitarian communion . . .’ (128–9). Do we need ordained ministers in order to participate in Christ’s new humanity through the Holy Spirit? Or does God freely work through these ministers, and yet may act in such a way that he not only does not need them, but also can freely work outside their ministry to draw people into communion with himself? Do we need to be admitted into this trinitarian communion or do grace, faith and revelation not freely draw us into it? Is our forgiveness of sins dependent on our repentance, or is our repentance not the result of our being forgiven already because of Christ’s act of atonement and the present activity of the Holy Spirit?

Despite Coffey’s explicit rejection of it (62), the appearance of adoptionism, which stems from Coffey’s insistence that there is no metaphysical incarnation in the NT (14), persists throughout: ‘In the synoptic theology the unique divine Sonship of Jesus is brought about by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on him by the Father’ (37), and ‘Jesus is brought into human existence as his (the Father’s) beloved Son’ (41); also ‘. . . the Father’s radical bestowal of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at the moment of his conception brings about his divine Sonship . . .’ (152); Coffey also believes that there is ‘a progressive realization of divine Sonship in Jesus . . .’ (138).

Coffey’s flawed exegesis, which insists there is only a ‘functional’ and not an ‘ontological’ conception of the incarnation in the NT, both separates and confuses the divinity and humanity of Christ. Hence, Coffey alleges, ‘John says that the Word became “flesh” rather than “human” because he thought of the Word as already and always a human’ (13); he believes Christ’s self-communication is his human love of neighbour and asserts in modalist fashion that ‘the Holy Spirit is Christ’s human love of the Father’ (64). He thus rejects Barth’s Christology, which opposes ascending Christology precisely because Barth begins by acknowledging Jesus’ uniqueness as the Word incarnate, and instead argues that ‘The “acknowledgement” of which Barth speaks must be at the same time an intellectual inference (without prejudice to the fact that it is also faith), and hence must represent a spiritual and intellectual ascent from the world to God, a fact that more than justifies the recent trend to ascending Christology’ (19). Yet for Barth such an ascent from the world to God exemplified in the Christology of Pannenberg and others compromises the very nature of faith, which includes our needy acknowledgement of Jesus himself as the one who enables our understanding in this matter through the Holy Spirit.

Showing limited understanding of Barth’s theology or of Protestant theology generally (except for his proper criticism of Moltmann and of
process theology for endangering God’s freedom), Coffey claims that Barth compromised God’s transcendence and espoused a form of Arian theology by introducing contingency into God. Coffey mistakenly believes that Barth held that the Son was generated only by the Father’s will and not by nature, whereas Barth argued that since God’s will was part of his nature, theologians could not play one off against the other in order to arrive at a proper understanding of God’s freedom.

Coffey’s concept of analogy causes most of the problems. He believes our analogical concepts are true ‘insofar as God is the transcendent cause of corresponding qualities in creatures’ (92). This thinking suggests that it is from our human experiences that God is understood and compromises the *analogia fidei*, namely, that Christ is the starting point and criterion for what is said about God and God’s relations with us. Thus, Coffey believes we should ‘expect divine persons to be subsistent relations because that is what human persons are’ (81); defines love of God by love of neighbour; and he understands God and Christ from his own assumptions about natural theology and scriptural exegesis and not exclusively from the economic trinitarian self-revelation.

Coffey believes that God’s ‘personhood’ is not to be found in his triunity. Rather, ‘Before that, in his simple unity, God is already person in the absolute sense recognized by St. Thomas’ (153, also 72). He thus distinguishes two stages of the Trinity, one in the process of becoming and the other already constituted, arguing that this is a merely formal distinction employed to establish that the Holy Spirit is the Father’s love for the Son. However, his suggestion (formal or not) that the Father’s self-love is not ‘his love for a Son who according to the taxis (and to put the matter crudely) does not yet exist’ (49) manifests an attempt to get behind revelation and separates the Father and the Son. Coffey thus suggests (contra Rahner) that ‘the Incarnation is the self-communication of the Father to Jesus . . . and not the expression of the Word’ (64). But the only way this could be true is if the *homoousion* is first replaced with an adoptionist perspective.

Coffey opts for a modified version of Palamas’s distinction between God’s essence and energies, proposing that the energies are not different from God himself acting *ad extra*. But he concludes, ‘God is nonrelational in his essence, relational in his energies’ (169). This insight compromises a proper doctrine of the immanent Trinity which affirms that God is relational in his essence and that because God’s being and act are one, we really meet and know God in his inner essence in Christ and the Spirit. Indeed it is because Coffey compromises a proper doctrine of the immanent Trinity in this way that he refuses ‘to situate the personhood of God precisely in the
divine triunity’ (153). But it is just this thinking that leads to a ‘renewed philosophy of being’ which Coffey believes can address questions raised by process theology about God’s immutability. His philosophy ‘allows God to be at the same time immutable in himself and mutable, and therefore personal, in his relations with creatures’ (153). Yet it is just this Rahnerian view of God’s relations ad extra that compromises God’s internal freedom to be mutable and personal in se without any need for creatures and without compromising God’s constancy.

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This fascinating book contains a detailed analysis of data on religious beliefs and moral values (and, to some extent, ‘moral practice’) among churchgoing and non-churchgoing adults in the United Kingdom. These data are mainly drawn from the British Household Panel Survey and the British Social Attitudes surveys, but the author makes illuminating cross-references to surveys in Europe and Australia, in addition to Leslie Francis and William Kay’s study of the beliefs and values of over 13,000 young teenagers.

Gill claims that statistical analysis reveals a ‘directionality’ within these data (‘a step-by-step increase in churchgoing is matched by a corresponding increase in beliefs/values’, 55). He is aware that disparities in age and gender between churchgoers and non-churchgoers have to be allowed for in this analysis, but argues that the directionality is often true across all age groups and among men as well as women (e.g. 46, 101; cf. 133).

Gill’s challenge to vague and idealized accounts of Christian communities, driven by theological presuppositions, is very welcome, as is his recognition of the value of a properly empirical focus within virtue ethics on actual communities, and in particular on the practice of churchgoing. He is unconvinced, however, by the three main theories of the relationship between churchgoing and Christian beliefs and values currently on offer, in which religious practice is treated either as (a) dependent on religious belief, whether in its decline (the secularization thesis) or its persistence, or (b) as separate and independent (‘believing without belonging’, where belonging is construed as practice rather than affiliation). Gill contends that the empirical data actually favour an alternative ‘cultural theory’ which claims that ‘the culture of churchgoing fosters and sustains beliefs/values’ (66). Support for this theory comes from three areas: (i) ‘a loss of these beliefs does seem to follow and not precede a decline in churchgoing’
(138); (ii) ‘the more regularly individuals go to church the more likely they are to share and practise distinctively Christian virtues’ (200); and (crucially) (iii) ‘compared with non-churchgoers who never went to church as children, those adult non-churchgoers who went regularly as children show twice the level of Christian belief . . . [and] are more likely to hold moral attitudes on personal honesty and sexuality which are closer to those of regular churchgoers’ (202). Thus churchgoing appears to operate as an independent variable.

Gill is not suggesting that Christian virtues are absent from the broader society, only that they are ‘found disproportionately amongst churchgoers and especially amongst the most regular churchgoers’ (200). Why should this be? In searching for an answer he highlights the role of worship, and particularly hymn-singing, in nurturing Christian identity. Such factors ‘sensitise and shape the beliefs and behaviour of regular churchgoers’ in aspects of Christian faith, hope and love (218, 226). Some readers will recognize this as the ‘enculturation’ or ‘faith community’ approach to Christian education. A praising and active church, in celebrating the character of the Christ-like God, creates a powerful hidden curriculum that forms its worshippers in corresponding attitudes, values, dispositions and cognitive perspectives. Robin Gill has provided a signal service to practical theology through his careful harnessing of, and intelligent reflection on, the empirical evidence that is pertinent to this thesis.

But what will the churches make of the claim that their worship might actually make a difference?

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Hagiography, an unlikely love of previous generations of Protestant historians and sympathizers, is now, thankfully, deemed out of date and unscholarly. So too the blind deconstruction of the heroes of the past has passed into the realms of bad history books. This collection of essays, edited by Roger Mason, has a detached, almost dispassionate view of that most passionate of men, John Knox. It is an intelligent and extremely readable book which has the advantage, over many other collections of its kind, of having a coherent and unified theme which does indeed tie the essays together fluently and clearly.

After an introduction by the editor and a chapter on Knox and the historians by James Kirk, the book is divided into three parts: the first being ‘Early Years and Exile’; the second, ‘Political and Theological Thought’; and
the third, ‘The Scottish Reformation’. This division demonstrates that the life of Knox is clearly the foundation of the book and the British Reformations are discussed only insofar as they relate to the man or his works.

In the first section essays by Edington, Cameron and Collinson give an impression of Knox’s personality and the influences on it. The Scottish rebels in the castle of St Andrews after the murder of Cardinal Beaton in 1546 are given their place alongside the English congregation of Frankfurt and the friendships of individual women, Mrs Bowes and Mrs Locke, who were to influence Knox’s personal development. The first section shows Knox change and develop. He accepted the call to preach in St Andrews and the call to write once abroad. It is clear that the man who left Scotland was as different from the confident radical who returned in 1560 as that confident and ascendant self-styled prophet was different from the tired and disappointed author who left his life’s work unfinished in both word and deed on his death, in November 1572.

The second section of the book is arguably the strongest. Wright and Burns give two masterly summaries of Knox’s scholarship, which previous generations of scholars, such as Ridley and Graves, mistakenly took for granted. Wright takes the view that although Knox did use the rallying cry ‘the express Word of God’ he did not, in fact, have a definition of ‘Scripture alone’ that excluded the fathers as examples of the once pure early Church. That having been said, in the two works in which Knox did use patristic sources he did so without having a first-hand knowledge of the texts, and even in his scriptural quotations he was remarkably inexact. It seems he used patristic sources mainly through the writings of others better educated than he.

Burns then turns his attention to the matter of Knox’s education. His training appears to have been legal rather than theological and, if he attended university at all, it was in St Andrews and not in Glasgow. This legal training was possibly more appropriate to the reactionary, trouble-making speechwriter that Knox was rather than to the theologian, which he was not. In short, Knox was not a scholar, and so never scholastic, in contrast to some of his companions who had trod the path to Protestantism via the religious orders.

Dawson and Mason then follow with a pair of articles concerning political resistance in Knox’s thought. These are followed by Hazlett, who brings to light a little studied aspect of Reformed practice, namely fasting. The use of the public fast was a plea to the divine but also a political tool of protest. Knox’s appeal to fasting was biblically based and very politically contemporary to the problems that beset the later years of his life and ministry in Edinburgh.
The third section, with the exception of an excellent warm and witty article by Wormald on Knox’s relationship with Mary Stewart, is the most disappointing of the book. The opportunity is missed to re-examine Knox’s role in the crisis of 1559-60 in the light of all the new data the previous essays have thrown up. Equally, the section title of the ‘Scottish Reformation’ is perhaps misleading in the sense that the focus of the section is on Knox’s later career, in which he happened to be domiciled in Scotland, rather than on the dynamic between the man, the actual Reformation crisis and its myths, which the reader might be led to expect.

In conclusion, whatever its omissions, this is a book well worth reading and it gives genuinely new insights into a man much written about and, clearly, much misunderstood. As with all historical figures, Knox is at the mercy of his reputation – as are those of us who are tired with the old clichés, whether they are of the ‘Great Man’ or the ‘Dour Presbyterian’. Such a measured approach as Mason’s essays provide is refreshing. Knox and his History cannot now be knocked from their long-acustomed perch, yet he does not sit there uncriticized, as he once was. As Wormald observed, ‘he has had rather more admiration as the architect of the Scottish Reformation than he deserves, although no doubt less than he felt that he merited’.

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Roger Haight’s Christology rests on two presuppositions. The first is that religious language is properly understood as symbolic rather than literal. The second is that theology is inherently apologetic. In line with these two convictions, his Christology takes the form of what he describes as a critical correlation of the Church’s claims about Jesus with the challenges posed by contemporary religious and cultural pluralism.

The methodological framework for this project is provided by the hermeneutical phenomenology of Gadamer and Ricoeur. Though serious questions have been raised about the coherence of categories like ‘common human experience’ upon which this tradition depends, Haight is apparently undeterred by these developments, steadfastly maintaining that the plausibility of Christian claims about Jesus rests on their ability to provide an answer to ‘the’ religious question in light of ‘the’ postmodern situation. Proposals that fail to meet these criteria are repeatedly denounced as being ‘incredible’ or ‘fantastic’ to ‘the thinking person’.

The list of claims that fail to make the cut are considerable, and are
generally attributed to a naively literal reading of biblical texts. Without reference to the work of Frei, Placher, Theimann, or other proponents of a descriptive and literal yet not fundamentalist reading of scripture, Haight simply proceeds on the assumption that symbolic interpretation is the only alternative to wooden literalism. Thus, we discover that Paul was not really claiming to have seen anything when he writes of having seen the risen Lord; he is merely giving voice to a ‘generally mediated conviction that Jesus is alive’. Haight claims to be charting a path between fundamentalism and Bultmannian existentialism here, but it is hard to see his effort as anything more than a reinscription of the same old debate.

The consequences of Haight’s symbolic exegesis are even more in evidence in his interpretation of Nicaea and Chalcedon. He inveighs against the Nicene tradition’s hypostatization of the Logos, arguing that its use in passages like the prologue to John’s Gospel should be understood as examples of personification. In line with this perspective, he argues that the Chalcedonian identification of Jesus’ personhood with the Logos is inconsistent with Jesus’ full humanity. While his stated aim in both cases is to recover the core of the classical tradition, he ends up with a Christology in which God’s presence in Jesus is ontologically indistinguishable from the divine presence in creation as a whole, except insofar as Jesus happens to be an instance where this presence is revealed.

This vision of divine immanence is further developed in Haight’s discussion of other religions. He argues that the knowledge of God Jesus mediates to Christians might in other religious contexts be communicated by means of ‘an event, a book, a teaching, a praxis’. Though he goes to some lengths to defend the importance of testing christological statements against the results of historical Jesus research, it is not clear what difference the facts of Jesus’ life make if the experience he mediates is fundamentally independent of them. Granted that the transcendent can only be experienced through concrete historical mediations, why wouldn’t a concrete story about a fictional Jesus be just as effective in mediating a saving experience of God as anything that might have been true about a genuinely historical Jesus?

Indeed, once it is conceded that Jesus ‘reveals God as already present and active in human existence’ – and thus that the content of what Jesus reveals is distinct from Jesus himself – it seems possible to claim normative status for Jesus only in a highly attenuated sense. In his own constructive proposals Haight attempts to defend Jesus’ normativity by arguing that he possessed God’s Spirit ‘in a superlative degree’. Yet it remains unclear what the effect of this move is. If, as Haight allows, genuine contradiction between different religious systems is possible, how does one decide...
between them? If Jesus is made the touchstone, then the claim that there are many, equally normative revelations of God is undercut; if some other criterion is invoked, then it is surely better to focus on that and leave Jesus to one side.

Though Haight is driven by a desire to challenge what he views as the inflexibility of the tradition, he winds up with a Christology in which Christian claims about Jesus are hemmed in by a set of existential, historical and hermeneutical conditions every bit as inflexible and arbitrary as anything he avoids. More significantly still, for all his emphasis on divine immanence, he leaves us with a rather abstract God whose fundamental property is singleness and of whom we experience ‘qualities’ which, while undoubtedly ‘elements’ or ‘dimensions’ of the divine being, nevertheless fall short of personal encounter. This picture of God is certainly coherent, but I am not persuaded it reflects what Christians mean when they call Jesus Emmanuel.

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