

BOOK REVIEWS

General:

Augustine of Hippo: A Life.

Henry Chadwick, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. xx + 177.

One rarely reads a book that can without exaggeration be called ‘magisterial,’ but this deceptively slender overview of the life and thought of Augustine of Hippo by the enormously learned Henry Chadwick (1920-2008) can justly be described in that way. Over half a century’s study has been distilled into this beautifully written and compulsively readable volume. Chadwick’s profound understanding of Augustine’s works is evident in the sureness with which he selects apposite examples from relatively obscure letters or sermons to illustrate basic points. He also draws with felicity from more famous treatises or commentaries. What is particularly satisfying is that Chadwick’s presentation of Augustine is in some instances quietly subversive of general assumptions. Two key examples of a revisionist perspective are the discussion of Augustine’s grasp of Greek and of Augustine’s monastic life. Respectively, Chadwick notes that Augustine had schoolboy Greek and demonstrated a willingness to work (with great difficulty, one imagines) through Christian Greek writings; and he stresses that Augustine’s relatively early experiments in cenobitic monasticism left lasting traces on his thinking. Throughout the book, Chadwick demonstrates how Augustine’s day-to-day life impacted upon his writings. As a result, the book ranges from the soil of North Africa to the heights of Heaven. The book also benefits from contributions by two other renowned scholars, in the form of an introduction by Peter Brown, suggestions for further reading by Gillian Clark. It is a superb introduction to Augustine and a joy to read. Oxford University Press and all who contributed to it are to be heartily congratulated for the posthumous publication of Chadwick’s gracious study.

Augustine Casiday

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Priesthood: A Life Open to Christ.

Daniel P. Cronin, London: St Paul Publications, 2009.

This year is in the Catholic Church the “Year for the Priest”, and so it seemed appropriate to notice this book in the columns of *Scripture Bulletin*, not least

since the President of the CBA is one of its contributors. There are 78 priestly pieces (and they are all short, happily), from 2 Popes, 8 cardinals, countless bishops, archbishops and mere priests, as well as one who is anonymous (because Cistercian), 5 Dominicans, 7 Benedictines, 2 Jesuits, and just one married man. Which pieces should you read? Inevitably in any such collection there are unevennesses, but everyone should read and reflect upon the contribution of Cyril Axelrod, and not simply because it comes first (the essays are set forth in alphabetical order of their author's surnames).

Perhaps it may be simpler to note the themes that emerge throughout the book: the importance of prayer (again and again); closeness to disability; the importance of loving; the gift of sharing other people's lives; happiness (the abiding impression is of a very *happy* group of men); the flawed side of our common humanity; the importance of ordinary people in a priest's life; the importance of grace over and above social work; the recognition of the faithful but hidden presence of Christ; the importance of vulnerability. Some are very moving, such as John Crowley's piece, or powerful, such as that by Gerry O'Collins; others seem too concerned to say "the right thing", while others again lapse into sentimentality.

Occasionally there are lapidary statements to make one stop and think, such as this: [priesthood] "is not a job I do, but the life I live", or (from Fr. Timothy Radcliffe) "I finally came to love my priesthood in the confessional box". What one misses here, though, is any response from the laity, and in particular the voice of the women, which would have given the collection a greater richness. If a churlish note is permissible, it is better not to attempt Greek (or any other language, come to that) if you are going to get it wrong. But this is a stimulating collection of thoughts on priesthood; it is an institution under attack at present, but it might be pointed out in its defence that if priesthood were as irrelevant as some of our detractors insist, then your lives would presumably be a good deal less occupied than is the case. Somehow or other, it all has to do (as these essays make clear) with the presence of God in people's living. Priests should mutter to themselves, several times a day, the mantra from the ordination service: *imitamini quod tractatis*.

Nicholas King SJ

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What is the Bible?

John Barton, London: SPCK 3rd edition 2009, pp. 159.

This is an updated version of a book originally published in 1991. It is aimed at a non-academic audience, both Christian and non-Christian, and is useful as an introduction to scholarly (and some non-scholarly) approaches to the Bible. It is intended as an introductory guide to reading the Bible, and encourages readers to turn to the biblical text.

Amongst scholarly approaches, there is a bias towards a historical-critical approach, although given the constraints of trying to write a short book, other approaches are not totally neglected. Topics covered include: the Bible as a collection of books as opposed to a single homogenous work, the historical reliability of the Bible, morality and the Bible, politics and the Bible, and Biblical inspiration/authority. This is a good, short introduction for the non-academic at whom it is aimed.

Seth Turner

Bath

Old Testament:

Let's Meet the Prophets: Speaking for God in Critical Times.

Richard Atherton. Chawton, UK: Redemptorist Publications, 2008. Pp. 131. Pbk.

Richard Atherton writes out of many years of ministerial experience, since he has served as principal Catholic chaplain to the English and Welsh prison service and as President of Ushaw College in Durham. He has also written helpful volumes introducing the psalms used in the church's liturgy.

In this paperback he provides a short handy guide to the Old Testament prophets, aimed at beginners. The brief introduction sets Old Testament prophecy in the context of New Testament understandings of prophecy. The prophets are then introduced (mostly individually) in the remaining eleven chapters. Section One deals with pre-exilic prophets (Amos, Hosea, First-Isaiah, Micah, and in one chapter Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk). Section Two covers three exilic prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second-Isaiah). Finally, Section Three has three chapters on the post-exilic prophets (Third-Isaiah, Haggai, First-Zechariah; then Second-Zechariah, Joel, Jonah, Malachi; and lastly Daniel). The volume concludes with a map of Israel and Judah in the monarchic period (only marking eleven cities) and a map of the ancient Near

East. There is no bibliography, though some pages include footnoted references in very small print.

As an example of Atherton's insightful writing, we may consider how he sets Ezekiel in the context of earlier prophets: "Like Amos, Ezekiel insisted on the need for justice. Like Hosea, he compared Israel to an unfaithful wife. Like Isaiah, he was awed by the ineffable holiness of God and deeply concerned for the Temple. Like Jeremiah, a slightly older contemporary, he came from a priestly family and taught that the future lay with the exiles, whom he saw as the nucleus of a renewed people of God" (p. 71).

At the end of each chapter Atherton steps back and considers the relevance of the prophetic book for Christian readers today. His reflection on Amos illustrates his approach: "Today's world is not so different from that which Amos knew: immense wealth and abundant food resources are found alongside extremes of hunger and poverty; the cry for justice for the poor is still raised; the danger of divorcing religious practice from daily living is as real as ever; and politicians sometimes behave as though their activities are exempt from the overriding demands of God's justice. The book of Amos is a tract for our times" (p. 21).

Being written in a readable and engaging style, this volume serves as an encouragement to us to read the biblical text, rather than as an exhaustive explanation of every question we might have. Inevitably in a short introduction, much needs to be omitted: hence there is no separate treatment of Obadiah, while Jonah receives less than a page. Here, however, in an area where the beginner can be overwhelmed by an excess of historical details, Atherton presents the essence of the prophets simply and clearly. This book will be helpful for anyone starting to read the Old Testament prophets.

Jeremy Corley

Ushaw College, Durham

A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural Memory, Communication and Being Human, London.

John W. Rogerson. London: SPCK, 2009.

This book offers a personal and individual approach to the theology of the Old Testament from the stance of a biblical scholar who is also a committed Christian leader. Rogerson comes from the school of biblical criticism which focused on historical-critical modes of reading text and is well aware of the

contrast between meanings deduced from that critical method and a perspective which seeks the over-arching theological message of a literary collection. Rogerson's answer is to take the term history to indicate cultural memory, a profile which suits both ancient and modern approaches to literary tradition. The historical-critical method highlights the variety of 'voices' which the OT gives evidence of within material compiled over a number of centuries and these may be engaged as voices which use cultural memory to bring about radical change or to endorse the status quo. In this approach Rogerson uses the work of Levi-Strauss with its 'hot' and 'cold' symbolic systems. The books of Chronicles, for example, use a status quo approach to David and Solomon and so are 'cold' works, whereas the Deuteronomistic material, with its subversive message regarding monarchy, acts as a 'hot' medium of cultural comment. Rogerson extends this metaphorical approach to reading creation accounts, inter-personal relationships and God-human relations. In each case the material which fits the category of 'hot' contains suggestions for a radical departure from the current norms. These changes of approach belong as much in the modern world as the ancient Near East. Thus the contrast between an ideal created order in Genesis 1 and the world order found after the Flood Narrative critiques our acceptance of violence and disharmony as a reality in nature. In human contexts prophetic texts express an unease with political and economic orders which promote the interests of an elite against the survival of the poorest and most vulnerable. In the God and humanity area, the use of Lament genres in Psalms and Job show not only the fear and desperation of human beings but also that there existed a lively sense that God existed and had a measure of control over difficult events. This challenges modern western audiences who have become passive atheists in the sense that they mostly live their lives without any live sense of God as part of their fields of activity, especially when affairs move smoothly forward.

Mary E Mills

Liverpool Hope University

Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space.

Mark K. George, Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Publication, 2009

This book is the second volume in the series Ancient Israel and its Literature. It aims to explore the social space of the wilderness tabernacle whose dimensions are recounted in Torah. As such it does not directly address matters of historical criticism but it does make use of parallels drawn both from the Ancient Near East and from more modern paradigms such as Shakespearean theatre. The

methodology is formed from an alignment of the work of Henri Lefebvre on Space and of Stephen Greenblatt on the New Historicism. George argues that the tabernacle narratives express a particular social configuration which he believes is that of the Priestly writers of the era of exile.

George sets out his reading tools in the first chapter where he adapts Lefebvre's three levels of spatiality – physical, intellectual (conceptual) and symbolic. Symbolic space is the most significant as it is where social meanings, values and signification operate. It is also the arena for affective qualities and is where multiple understandings of a common space meet and mingle, whether in harmony or through contestation and conflict. Social space emerges as a term to describe the activity of symbolic space, in line with Greenblatt's view that cultural spatiality deal with appropriation, purchase and symbolic acquisition. Social energy is channelled via symbolic spaces filled with myths, religious motifs and political systems, among other items. Human appropriation of the content of symbolic space transfers social energy from a previously held community view to a fresh approach.

The subject focus for the application of this methodology is the wilderness narratives of Exodus and especially those which deal with the setting up and operation of the portable tabernacle. George argues that a temple, like a house, has interior places which are full of artefacts which can be listed in inventories; the description of the tabernacle is like that of a person who walks through a house listing its spaces and their contents. These lists operate as taxonomies, setting up a hierarchy of power. The over-arching level of this is holiness, which is refined via concepts of congregation, descent, hereditary succession. Although the texts are leader-centred there is no place for the king here. The tabernacle so defined in terms of social and symbolic value is a fixed space, separate from the world but able to draw down into itself wider social energies. These energies circulate through the tabernacle site and link it ultimately to the divine creative energy.

The texts can be viewed as belonging to the genre of royal building inscriptions and to the building tablets deposited at the foundations of ancient monumental temples. By sharing that social role, situating the temple at the heart of the cosmos and producing a sacral identity for a people, the tabernacle texts bring Israel into alignment with creation as a whole. George concludes that this is a deliberate act on the part of the Priestly writers who re-use an older symbolic motif in a new age. If the tabernacle can be aligned with the four cardinal points

of the compass then, when it moves with the Assembly, the people are always in the presence of the deity and identity is maintained for an exilic age.

This is an innovative approach which repays close reading and which utilises existing historical- cultural knowledge and contemporary theory to comment on the function of text in the lived social world of a community.

Mary E. Mills

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Exile and Suffering.

Becking, B. and Dirk, H. (eds.), Papers read at 50th Anniversary Meeting of Old Testament Society of South Africa. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

This volume of edited papers intends to address issues of suffering which are important in the South African context but which have a much wider significance also. The papers are gathered under the section headings of TaNach: Torah, Prophets and Writings. In Pentateuch the first topic is that of the garden of Eden, which is examined from an exilic basis of loss of land and suffering caused but which also nuances the value of wisdom, The following paper on the role of DTR D suggests the value of intellectual endeavour both in ancient society and more widely in the African context both Christian North Africa and modern South Africa. It is through scribal reporting of a past history that hope for the future can be found. The third paper looks at the aniconism of Deuteronomy and suggests that the attacks on cult image come from a time when the original cult image of the Lord was lost and so the normal link between divine presence and a congregation is impossible. This argument is evidenced with material from Sippur and is used to argue that the biblical text was written specifically for the exilic pain of lost cultic artefacts.

The second section examines the paradox of liberator-God language in Isaiah and how this has been used in history to justify oppression of others, an argument which draws on philosophers such as Derrida and Levinas. The use of feminine imagery in Isaiah is taken to be a counterpoint to such language which mutes the male tradition and feeds into the image of the suffering servant. The second paper looks also at language matters – relating to the use of mythology in prophetic texts – and argues that this is not simply poetry but language which carries the anxieties of the exilic situation. The next paper here turns to prose sections of prophecy and to the death of Gedaliah, arguing the purpose of this material to be to show that the remnant left in the land would not be the source of the future. There follows a textual examination of comparative terms in the Masoretic text and LXX with regard to ‘servant’ and a chapter on Hosea 9, where the theme of return to Egypt is viewed as literal but also symbolic of

exile as YHWH's tool for ending an overly-human determined public cult. The last two papers in this section explore more widely the manner in which prophetic texts explore the emotions of exile, from the acceptability of satiric and derogatory attacks on people and situations to divine anger as an important concept with real energy within it. Can the contemporary world allow for such raw energies or will they be smoothed out in the investigation of how the text came to be composed?

Finally, the Writings section starts with an examination of Psalm 137 as one expressing real pain, set against the ANE evidence that the Judah exiles were well served for food and land in their captive status in Babylon. The function of the text is argued to be satirical, a challenge to those who want to go back to the past, hence its theme is that of alienation and ambivalence. The book of Lamentations takes up the subject of suffering loss, reflecting the pain of an actual siege, but moves beyond its time-limited origins to offer a stereotype of the unbearable pain which all humans seek to avoid. By distinction the Chronicler sets out a message of Sabbath rest, a profile which is evidence of its authorship's interest in the process of identity re-formation in changed socio-political circumstances. The conclusion emphasises that the concept of 'lament' is language for our times, as a tool for going forward, in South Africa especially

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New Testament:

Translating the New Testament: Text, Translation, Theology.

Stanley E. Porter and Mark J. Boda (eds.), Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009, pp. 360. Pbk.

This volume is a collection of papers originally presented at a Canadian Bible Society conference in May 2005. The main theme of the collection is translating the New Testament, but this includes some focus on the related issues of establishing the text of the NT and considering the interface between translation and theological perspective. The speakers at the conference were invited both to present a general paper, and then to bring their own particular expertise and viewpoint to bear upon a nominated NT text, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Lk. 16:19-31, to encourage the practical application of some of the theoretical frameworks presented and to foster dialogue amongst the

participants. These reflections are also included in the volume and give it an interesting dimension.

The first section of the book, on textual questions, opens with an account of the methods and goals of NT textual research by Barbara Aland, focussing especially on the work of the Munster Institute, with which she has been so closely associated. This is followed by a chapter from Maurice Robinson critiquing aspects of the Nestle-Aland approach, and arguing the case for greater priority to be accorded to the Byzantine text. There is then an interesting discussion of some of the most significant of the Greek papyri by Philip Comfort. The section on translation includes a useful overview by Stanley Porter of some of the newer approaches to translation theory, which necessitate a move away from an earlier tendency to posit a rather simplistic opposition between literal or formal equivalence and dynamic or functional equivalence. One key factor in these new perspectives is the increased attention being paid to investigating ancient rhetorical principles and the narrative structure of texts, so a chapter engaging with this in relation to Gal 1-2 is provided by Alain Gignac. This includes a fascinating introduction to a project in which he has been involved to translate the bible in to French in a manner which will challenge people to read it afresh, the *Bible, nouvelle traduction*. The final section of the book, on translation and theology, includes a chapter by Francis Watson on the contribution which the Septuagintal (as opposed to MT version) of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah made to the development of Christian theological reflection on the death of Jesus, and an illuminating reading by Elsa Tamez of Paul's critique of the law in Romans 7 from a Latin American experiential perspective. The concluding chapter is an overview by Richard Longenecker of the current situation in respect of the study of NT text and translation, reflecting on some of the most significant achievements of past scholarship in these fields, and identifying some important future challenges.

The contributions to this volume are all written in an accessible style, and are fully informed by the latest scholarship. For those interested in the issues of bible translation and textual criticism, this book is a valuable new resource, offering both new insights and useful surveys of the *status quaestionis*. It also serves as a valuable reminder of just how much work remains still to be done in these essential areas of biblical study.

Susan Docherty

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Starting New Testament Study: Learning and Doing.

Bruce Chilton and Deirdre Good, London: SPCK 2009, pp. ix+174

There is a rising demand, from many quarters, to know more about the New Testament, and especially what kind of thing it is, and what one may sensibly say about it. Here now is a perfectly sensible book to put in the hands of those who are starting the critical study of the NT, looking both at the 27 individual books and at their cumulative impact; the authors tell the story of how the New Testament developed, and exercises at the end of each chapter (the best part of the book, in this reviewer's judgement) help the neophyte reader appropriate the text; the great advantage of these is that they drive the reader back to the text and to other relevant ancient documents. Chapter 1 offers sensible accounts of Source Criticism, Social Scientific Criticism, Redaction- and Tradition-Criticism, as well as Reader-Response approaches, and it includes some helpful thoughts about dictionaries and concordances, and some 101-level reflections on theories of translation, as well as very helpful directions towards on-line dictionaries. Chapter 2 offers an intelligent outline of Jesus and his social world, and his several 'environments', although they are not all of equal weight, since they are listed as: rural Galilee, the Baptist movement, the towns visited by Jesus, Herod Antipas and the Temple in Jerusalem. Chapter 3 shows the authors as strikingly confident on Pauline chronology, without indicating the complexities of it, and put forward the interesting idea that in Colossians and Ephesians Timothy (the author, in case you had not guessed) preserves Paul's poetry which otherwise would have remained purely oral. Sadly, not a shred of evidence is offered for this very striking notion (although there are some useful indicators in the bibliography). Chapter 3 is good on the usefulness of the gospel genre, though once again assertion triumphs over argument built on evidence, though the authors do admit that 'scholars can and do differ on their findings'. They are also notably confident on the reconstruction (and early date) of Q. In general one would have to say that our authors are sound enough on the gospels, without ever giving the feeling that they *inhabit* them; it may be significant that they give to the Gospel of Thomas as many pages as they do to any of the canonical gospels. The bibliographical indicators in this chapter offer, however, a reasonably wide-ranging account of current approaches to the gospels. Chapter 4 is on the Catholic and apocalyptic writings, and was perhaps the best chapter in the book, very interesting on James (though too allusive in its conclusions), and decidedly helpful on the Synoptic Little Apocalypse, and they are correct to stress the disagreements within the NT about the details of the end-time. And the book ends with a helpful glossary.

So it is a helpful piece of work, and will do no harm if put into the hands of beginners in academic study of the New Testament; but in the end I found myself wondering why it was written. The excellent section on apocalypse needed more copy-editing to make its meaning(s) a bit clearer, and chapter 1 was sometimes needlessly obscure. In the end, the reader is left with a feeling of slight disappointment that two such well-known NT scholars should have written in (apparently) such a hurry, so that what might have been a distinguished book is less than it might have been. There is the occasional exaggerated claim, for example on John the Baptist and Merkabah mysticism (p. 30), and one or two claims that a newcomer to NT might regard as better founded than is in fact the case; probably the book will do no harm, but a beginner will not be aware how speculative are some of its claims.

Nicholas King SJ

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The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching Without Anti-Judaism.

Daniel J. Harrington, SJ. New York: Paulist Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 231.

Like its companion volume by George Smiga about the Gospel of John (Paulist Press, 2008), this is a Stimulus book: from an arm of Paulist Press that receives support from the Stimulus Foundation. According to its website (<http://www.stimulusfoundation.org>), the Foundation was established by ‘an erstwhile refugee from Nazi Germany’. Its aim is ‘to further the publication of scholarly books on Jewish and Christian topics that are of importance to Judaism and Christianity’, thereby improving communication between Jews and Christians.

After a very brief introductory chapter, the three main sections consider in turn the gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. In each case there is a summary presentation of the major features of introduction, the main themes, and the problems as regards Jewish-Christian relations posed by that gospel. There follow fifteen approximately three-page considerations of pericopes that are prescribed for Sunday reading in the three-year cycle in the Roman Lectionary, thus, Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B), and Luke (Year C). Harrington helpfully supplies three discussion questions for each pericope. The book concludes with a brief epilogue, a simple glossary, and suggestions for further study of each gospel, about a dozen books for each: standard commentaries that are, in the case of Matthew and Luke, supplemented by studies focusing on Jewish aspects of the gospel texts or the first-century context.

This is not just another small paperback about the gospels but a beautifully crafted masterpiece by one of the foremost Catholic biblical scholars of our time. Anyone with an interest in the Sunday liturgical readings who either dips into its free-standing chapters or reads straight through will find here countless valuable insights that arise from the author's lifelong commitment to research, teaching, preaching, and conversation with his peers and others. Although each chapter focuses on one pericope, frequent connections are made with other relevant New Testament texts, so that readers are drawn into the wider self-understanding of the first Christian communities and encouraged see familiar passages in new ways, in light of their own life experience.

Not surprisingly, a major aspect of the study is the fundamental and complex question of how the new Messianic group related to its parent body: Harrington pays especial attention to passages that present day Christians would probably (and rightly) find embarrassing if they heard them read aloud in the company of Jewish friends or relations. Equally significant is the frequent engagement with the Old Testament and with many other elements of Jewish life and culture in the first century and subsequently.

A feature that will increase the effectiveness of the book, at least among Christians, is that the awareness of the Jewish dimensions of text and interpretation come across as unforced. What their Jewish counterparts would take away from it is an interesting question, but they should at least be left in no doubt about the seriousness with which the author takes their tradition.

Although scholarly, this is not a book for scholars. It is, rather, an attractive and readily accessible introduction to aspects of New Testament scholarship for those who wish to deepen and enrich their lives as God's people. It would also be an excellent resource for undergraduate and seminary classes and for preachers in need of a refresher course.

Patricia M. McDonald, SHCJ

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The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Simon J. Gathercole, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, pp. xi +344.

There is today a broad consensus among Scripture scholars that the Synoptic evangelists, Mark, Matthew and Luke, exhibit a 'low' Christology, in contrast to the very 'high' Christology of John's gospel. Here is a book to challenge that consensus, defending the controversial thesis that the Synoptic gospels assume the pre-existence of Christ. Gathercole is entirely fair, it must be said, in

reporting and representing the current orthodoxy that he is criticising. However he takes the important step of setting against their Jewish background the relevant statements that the gospel-writers place on Jesus' lips. In particular, he makes an interesting, and, in my view, compelling case, based on the statements attributed to Jesus in the form of "I have come", followed by a purpose clause. These sayings, he argues, are clear evidence of what scholars call a "pre-existence Christology" in the Synoptics: Jesus is represented as a person who transcends the time of his earthly ministry. The author correctly adds to this argument the importance of the designation of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, Son of Man, and, finally, Son of God; so it is a cumulative argument, (and none the worse for that). Gathercole quite rightly insists on the inevitable influence on early Christian theology, including that of the Synoptic tradition, of Paul's hard-won insights into the nature of Jesus. And he stresses the contribution made by other individuals and communities (such as the author and addressees of the Letter to the Hebrews) who had arrived at a belief in Jesus' pre-existence before the all-important date of 70 AD, when the Temple was destroyed. So he argues that pre-existence is what you would expect as a part of the background of Synoptic Christology. (He makes the interesting suggestion that the Letter to the Hebrews uses the Old Testament as a kind of "dramatic script", with speaking parts for God, for the Son, and for Christian believers.)

Turning to the Synoptic evangelists, he makes the persuasive case, against the run of contemporary scholarship, that they see Jesus as a "transcendent, heavenly, divine figure", who knows what goes on in the heavenly court, is recognised by heavenly beings, and who bridges the gap between God and creation. Gathercole detects in the various things that Jesus does (such as forgiving sins) what he calls a "Christology of divine identity", but, importantly, not as one who exhausts the divine identity, nor as a second being who is to be worshipped in addition to God. As these remarks may indicate, this is not an easy book, but it is argued with some subtlety and thoughtfulness; and Gathercole gives full weight to scholarly objections to his position that "Matthew, Mark and Luke can be seen to share with John the idea of pre-existence". He is not claiming that the sayings to which he refers have pre-existence as their main emphasis, but that they uncontroversially presuppose it. The sayings are about the purpose of Jesus' ministry, that for which he "was sent". They do not necessarily entail a doctrine of pre-existence, but should be read that way.

The arguments here are always carefully managed, and difficulties with the case (such as Jesus' undeniably subordinate role in the divine economy) are at every point frankly acknowledged. He follows several recent scholars in resisting the seductive notion of "Wisdom Christology", arguing that Wisdom, in Jewish

thought, is an attribute of God, rather than a separate entity. On the title of “Messiah” he is very interesting indeed, in chapter 10, arguing that while there is no clear-cut reference to a pre-existent Messiah in the Synoptics, there are clear indications that the Messiah is seen as a heavenly secret, one who has come from heavenly pre-existence, and is “God’s son”, who existed “before the Morning Star”. Gathercole offers a similar treatment of the titles of “Lord” and “Son of God”, which do not necessarily imply a belief in Jesus’ pre-existence, but which carry implications about the “heavenly contours of Jesus’ identity as ‘Son of God’”. For the Synoptics, the Son of God is a “secret known to humanity only by divine revelation”, especially in the second half of Mark’s gospel; and there is the important, if paradoxical, caution, of which we must never lose sight, that Jesus’ identity as Son is known only in his death. The final chapter offers a perhaps too-brief glance at some of the theological difficulties involved in the idea of pre-existence, and then a conclusion sums up with admirable and practised briskness all that has gone before. This book will not, as I say, be an easy read, but it is worth the effort, and readers are forbidden to cheat by going straight to the conclusion to find out “whodunnit” without enjoying all the hard work on the way.

Nicholas King SJ

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The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel

Craig R Koester, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2008, pp.244. Pbk.

Craig Koester has made Johannine Scripture a major focus of his writing over the years and has written two other interesting and detailed books about this area: *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel and Revelation and the End of All Things* (both available from Eerdmans). The present work is a distillation of his insights into an extremely user-friendly introduction to John’s Gospel. He makes it quite clear at the very outset of the book that he is using a synchronic approach to the Gospel (see Preface page xi) rather than techniques that look at the background of John’s theological ideas in the Old Testament and other ancient texts. He does not concentrate in any great depth on questions about the formation of the text other than to comment on the fact that the Church that produced the Gospel was distinctive in its understanding of the work of the Spirit amongst them as a living force (pp. 7ff).

Starting from this understanding, his theological questionings are firmly founded on the notions that "...eternal life begins in this life..." because of the believer's relationship with Jesus Resurrected who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (14.6). Notice that he does not use jargon like "realized eschatology" and this non-technical and clear writing is a distinctive part of his style, making the book more accessible to the general reader.

The book is a very comprehensive study of various theological themes. Working with the narrative in its present form Koester focuses on God, the world and its people, Jesus and the Spirit and explores the theological dimensions of key events like crucifixion and resurrection. His explanation of the importance of the Christian hope of resurrection, over and against Greco-Roman notions of the immortality of the disembodied soul is particularly helpful as are his reflections, solidly based on the Gospel text, about discipleship and faith, Christian community and the challenge of following Christ in a pluralistic world. The book is very clearly set out in thematic structures, clearly labelled as chapter headings and section headings. This means that if one wants to use the book for opening up only one aspect of the Johannine Gospel's theology one can find one's way around very easily. Different theological opinions and approaches, ranging from the earliest Church Fathers to theologians such as John Hick are examined.

There is a good academic apparatus with twenty pages of notes and an extensive bibliography. Throughout the literary style is lucid and inviting to read. It would, for example, be an excellent introduction to any College or Seminary course. I consider this one of the most informative and attractive books I have ever read on John's Gospel and would thoroughly recommend it.

Colin Fortune

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Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology,

Udo Schnelle. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005, pp. 695.

Here is a remarkable new book on Paul, freshly translated into English; it is a model of German scholarship, and readers of Scripture Bulletin out of touch with that fresh stream of erudition, *unde semper aliquid novi*, will do well to give it careful attention. Not only is it in the highest tradition of German academic excellence; it also starts from a coherent theory of meaning, and ends with an apt and touching reflection on Paul's thought as "enduring meaning

formation”, a daring and inspiring plea for the human race once again to anchor its identity in its origin: in God, the “guarantor of human reality” (p. 602). The author has the gift of finding a way through difficult and controverted issues with careful scholarship and without raising his voice. Not all scholars will agree with all the conclusions at which he arrives, but they must argue with his formidable learning if they are to contest the positions that he adopts.

Schnelle tells the story of Paul, as one who narrates and interprets the Jesus Christ event, and so both writes history and constructs a new religious world, fed by the story of Jesus, of Judaism, and of Hellenism. Schnelle insists on outlining Paul’s life and theological thinking in chronological order. One may wonder whether he can possibly do it, but he certainly makes a valiant attempt, linking the little that we can say on the absolute chronology of Paul with the attempt at a relative dating of the surviving Pauline letters. Schnelle is not always consistent; he is sceptical about the historical value of Acts, for example, and yet he makes confident use of the document. There is, however, an encyclopaedic quality to the author’s learning; there is practically no issue in the study of Paul on which he does not have something to say. As with all the best German scholarship, the author is at ease in the Hellenistic and Classical sources; and this gives his work a commendable air of competence, for these sources are indispensable for understanding Paul.

The shape of the book is logical enough. Part I has the attempt to establish a Pauline chronology, after which he sets the individual letters (Schnelle looks only at the seven letters that are universally agreed to have come from the Apostle’s dictation) into that context, and says something about their theology. The much briefer Part II considers particular theological issues more thematically. This leads to some repetition, but since the author’s arguments are not always pellucid, that is no bad thing. (I cannot understand, for example, this sentence, from p. 502: “Paul attempted to support his thesis [sc. on the Law’s inability to deliver the life it promises] with the argument, unacceptable for Jews (and conservative Jewish Christians), that the law/Torah was secondary to sin both chronologically and substantially.”)

Of the chapters on individual letters, that on 1 Corinthians is outstanding, and the one on Galatians is good, with a very helpful account of the background to the letter, and a decidedly useful bibliography in English and German. Interestingly, he dates this letter after 1 and 2 Corinthians, and just before Romans, about 55CE, a view to which not everyone will subscribe. On Romans,

he is measured and helpful, offering a profoundly scholarly treatment; and many will applaud his listing of the factors that shape the composition of the letter, which he regards as written into a particular situation, rather than Paul's final statement of his theological position (pp. 308-309). Schnelle will also win the gratitude of many readers, even those who do not altogether agree with him, for his careful untangling of Paul's argument in Romans.

In Part II Schnelle outlines the basic structure of Paul's thought, and offers a number of lapidary statements whose brevity makes them especially illuminating. "The eschatological presence of God's salvation in Jesus Christ is the basis and centre of Paul's thought", is one such; and he fills these statements out with some very careful examination of the difficult topics that are under consideration. He is particularly helpful on the continuities and discontinuities between Paul's thought and the Judaism in which he grew up; Paul interprets the history of Israel *from its very beginning* from the perspective of faith in Jesus Christ. For Paul, Israel finds its goal in Christ. On the other hand, he argues, the crucified God of Paul is not identical with the Old Testament God. There are some very helpful reflections on "righteousness" in Paul, in a chapter dealing with Pauline Christology: "Paul only speaks extensively of righteousness/justification when he is at the same time engaged in intensive reflection on the significance of the Law" (p. 465).

Chapter 20 is excellent on Pauline ethics, with some more lapidary statements: "[God's acceptance] is unconditional but not inconsequential" (p. 546); "the beginning point and foundation of Paul's ethic are the *unity of life and action of the new being as participation in the Christ event*" (p. 551), and chapter 21, on Pauline ecclesiology and its three "foundational metaphors", is also to be commended, as is chapter 22, an extremely thoughtful reflection on Pauline eschatology.

Those who wish to write seriously about St Paul will in future have to wrestle with this immense book. It is not easy, and not everyone will agree with its conclusions; but they cannot avoid the questions it raises.

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The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology.

Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart and Nathan MacDonald (eds.) Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009, pp. xvii + 456. Pbk.

The essays in this volume were first presented at a Conference with this title held at the University of St. Andrews in the summer of 2006. This was the

second conference (the first having focussed on John and Christian theology) which aimed to bring together biblical scholars and systematic theologians, thus bridging a perceived gap between these disciplines and encouraging greater dialogue between their practitioners. Hebrews is obviously a very good subject for such conversations, containing as it does texts dealing with such theological issues as christology, soteriology, faith, and the relationship between the followers of Jesus and Judaism, all of which are explored in this collection. Many of the contributors are leading experts in their fields, thus the papers include a discussion by John Polkinghorne of the ways in which the cosmology of Hebrews intersects with modern science, and the question of the support offered by Hebrews to Christian ‘supersessionism’ is explored by, amongst others, Richard Hays, Oskar Skarsaune and Morna Hooker. I. Howard Marshall offers a thorough overview of the soteriology of the epistle, and Richard Bauckham sets out a case for accepting that it was possible for early first century believers in Jesus’ messiahship from a monotheistic Jewish background to believe that Jesus shared the divine identity. Several papers are devoted to a consideration of what is possibly the most famous chapter in Hebrews, the review of the ‘heroes of faith’ in chapter 11. In this section, the essays focus in turn on different characters, with Walter Moberley discussing the text’s presentation of Abel; Markus Bockmuehl investigating Abraham’s faith; Nathan MacDonald considering Moses, especially the meaning of Hebrews’ claim that Moses endured the “reproach of Christ”; Carl Mosser linking the choice of Rahab as an exemplar of faith with the letter’s frequent exhortation of its audience to go “outside the camp” in search of salvation; and Loveday Alexander offering a reading of the entire chapter in the light of the contemporary situation in which the idea of religious “martyrs” has taken on new and often more sinister connotations.

This volume offers numerous interesting and well-informed insights into aspects of the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews. Although all the essays engage seriously with leading scholarship, they are clearly written and accessible to readers without much previous knowledge of the text. The work of biblical critics is perhaps more prominent here than that of systematic theologians, but the contributors certainly demonstrate how biblical scholars can both be responsibly informed by contemporary Christian theology and can themselves *do* theology in their examination of the New Testament texts.

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