

This year's selection highlights the growing divergence within evangelicalism. I suppose, in saying this, I betray a theological perspective of my own. While some may view the recent history of evangelicalism with a sense of comfort that we now have, in part, embraced 'a generous orthodoxy', I tend to see evangelicalism moving further away from its 'Reformational' roots. These widening differences in theology and perspective within the evangelical community can readily be seen in the collection of works and especially within edited works.

David C. Clark's *To Know and Love God* is a major new work addressing theological method;¹ latest in the Crossway series, Foundations of Evangelical Theology. His approach appears to reflect a mainstream intellectual's engagement of postmodern and global Christianity. While I did not find myself agreeing with everything he said, particularly concerning foundationalism and contextualization, I did in the main. More importantly, he expanded my own horizons and succeeded in engaging new ideas with a careful eye to biblical fidelity. His treatment, for example of contextualization, brilliantly simplified a tangled mass of theological and anthropological presuppositions, distilling everything down to two major choices. He then introduced biblical and theological data that helped us decide. Given the mountain of confusing and contrary writing in this field, his treatment was most welcome. The same can be said for his critique of John Hick, pluralism and world religions. The book is characterized by sanity, humour, and an elegant simplicity (given the complexity of its contents). Buy it now.

Ecclesiology has been a seriously neglected field. Several new works attempt to redress the shortfall. A work edited by John G. Stackhouse, *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion*,² attempts to tackle the subject straight on. Contributors represent different poles within evangelicalism and each espouses significantly different perspectives that showcase the disparity within the evangelical camp. Edith Humphrey, Kerry Dearborn, Roger Olson, and Paul Zahl seem to run the gamut of American ecclesiology. The first two adopt a kind of 'high church' sensibility, though Humphrey's approach is more satisfactory in grounding her opinion in solid theology and history. She basically argues for the primacy and exclusivity of church over and against a consumerist age that generates parachurch organizations, but seems impotent to stand against the forces of the age. Zahl, a self-confessed low church Episcopalian, fairly ridicules Dearborn and her 'smells and bells' It is not so much that she has a liturgical orientation. Rather, it is that her support for 'Celtic' spirituality is completely divorced from any concrete historical reality. Zahl contends that what she describes never, in fact, ever existed. Olson, takes up the free church, Anabaptist position. His own work is oriented in two directions. First, he ably, I think, articulates the free church ethos, that focuses on voluntarism and the individual believing community. Second, and more disturbing, he articulates where he think that independent, individual orientation leads, a 'generous orthodoxy,' typified by centred identity based on shared experience of new birth rather than a bounded identity, shaped by adherence to doctrinal standards such as creeds or confessions. Perhaps most telling is

his response to questions about whether an idea is heretical. He thinks the question now sounds 'quaint'. Perhaps less clear in the work is the answer to the question, 'Reality or Illusion?' One confronts something of the tension between trans-denominational, often anti-ecclesial evangelicalism and the idea of 'church', but the book yields few satisfactory answers. Skip it.

The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology, similarly looks at differing traditions and differing ecclesiologies as well.³ This book addresses the issues with more detail and success. Each of the offerings was worth reading, but a few stand out. **D.G. Hart** does what he seems to do best, serve as the agent provocateur of evangelicalism. He carefully demonstrates how evangelicals have, over time, succeeded in moving the focus of believers from the centrality of church and doctrine to one balanced in favour of its subjective, pietist, rather than its reformational roots. Two 'meaty' offerings by **John Webster**, professor of systematic theology at Aberdeen are particularly noteworthy. His first, 'The Church and the perfection of God' explores the relationship between gospel and church. He underscores the importance of having an adequate biblical foundation for church that, in turn, depends on a secure doctrinal base. How refreshing! What a thought! In an age of theological indifference, doctrine matters. He also performs a real service in sketching for us, 'communion theology', largely behind modern initiatives for the recovery of liturgy. This and his second article, 'The visible attests the invisible', rewards careful study. Neither is easy to plough through, but both are worth the effort.

The second explores the 'spiritual visibility' of the church, the way in which the visible church attests to God and his truth. The church is characterized by real, spiritually-based holiness. He throws the gauntlet down, challenging those who seem to see the church almost exclusively in terms of social theory. Webster, thankfully, will have none of it. He also brings the focus of church back to the basics, the preaching of the Word and the right administration of sacraments. The point he makes through this is not the support of traditional forms. Rather, it is the belief that the foundation for the church is God speaking and doing. It is about his initiative, not ours. Perhaps, his most significant contribution is his explanation of the clarity of scripture and the importance of the church as a 'hearing' community to listen to what it says and communicate it faithfully. It does not decide anything. Rather, it hears and obeys. If you are up for a challenge, buy it.

Robert Letham has produced a major work, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*.⁴ The book, to be clear, is more characterized by thoroughness, balance, and biblical soundness, rather than innovation or creativity. The author writes from a conservative, Reformed position. Excluding appendices, the work is divided into four parts. These cover biblical foundations, historical development (the largest section), modern developments (ranges from Barth to Torrance and includes Roman Catholics), and a topical discussion of four 'critical issues'. The biblical section contains a very satisfying exploration of the cumulative testimony of scripture attesting to the deity of Christ. Given the recent initiatives of scholars to

atomize the text and subsequently reduce the recognition of God the Son, Letham's observations are most welcome. His balanced evangelical discussion, concerning explicit 'Binitarian' and 'Trinitarian' texts is welcome and timely. The author's foray into the complexities of Trinitarian formulaic development is likewise careful. Letham, like Torrance and Bray, works back and forth between Eastern and Western theologians, often showing how they interrelate. He is also not intimidated by great churchmen such as Augustine and usefully explores weaknesses in his methodology. All-in-all, the book should serve as an excellent resource for pastors, educators, and students alike. Save it for Boxing Day.

Soteriology is the subject of several new works. Intervarsity/Apollos have two edited offerings, one addressing justification and the other the atonement. Both subjects have been the focus of recent heated controversy, largely involving the 'new perspective' concerning Paul. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates* is the smaller and more coherent of the two.⁵ Imputation and non-imputation are clearly debated, on biblical grounds, in detail by Robert Gundry and D.A. Carson. The value of their articles lies less, however, in the quality of their arguments than it does in considering the nature of the gulf in methodology between them. In other words, it is well worth reading the book just to see how differently the two use scripture to justify their respective positions. My money is on Carson, but Gundry ably, if unsuccessfully, argues for his position. Other interesting articles are provided by Tony Lane and Bruce McCormick, each of which addresses

Justification from a historical and theological perspective. McCormick also adds the interesting but depressing concern that the debate may signal the beginning of the end of the Reformation itself and of its central tenets. *The Glory of the Atonement* is, by far, a much larger work.⁶ Similar in structure to the work on justification, it is divided into sections concerned with biblical, historical and practical orientations. The last section concerned with the practical implications of the atonement is the shortest and, to my mind, the least practical. The offerings by Packer, Ferguson, and Nicole (normally three of my favorites) I found to add little value. It is not that they said anything wrong, it is that I heard nothing new from them. The first two sections, by contrast, are excellent and recommended. Standouts in the biblical section include the articles on the Pentateuch by Emile Nicole, Carson on Romans 3:21-26, Michaels on John, and Groves on Isaiah 53. Historical treatments were generally workmanlike, but two stood out. They include an entertainingly speculative article concerning Augustine by Stanley Rosenberg that explores Augustine's engagement of ideas, more reminiscent, however, of Eastern Orthodoxy's recovery of the divine image than Latin Christianity's forensic ideas. Perhaps the most stimulating offering was by Timothy George in an examination of Luther's views concerning the atonement. Most interesting was his appraisal of Luther's balancing of ideas related to Aulen's *Christus Victor* and penal substitution. Recent work tends to champion one over the other. George gives us a picture of different possibilities. Luther still continues to surprise.

Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross, by Hans Boersma, could not approach the same topic, the atonement, more differently.⁷ The author, sports a reformed background, complete with Dutch surname, but that is where his reformed thinking ends. Though paying some 'lip service' to reformed sensibilities, to include a tepid endorsement of some idea of penal substitution, the work seems to embody every sort of anti-reformed thinking. Just look and you will find it: praise for Catholic ecumenicalism, the New Perspective, Eastern Orthodox deification, preference for Irenaeus over Augustine, and dismay over the Constantinian settlement. While espousing support for all three of the major views concerning the atonement, Boersma's real agenda is acceptance by people with a reformed background of Eastern Orthodox-style theosis. Unfortunately for the author and all those like him, his methodology founders on one simple biblical reality. Each of the positions he espouses requires a discounted understanding of the impact of the Fall on individuals. In other words, the fact of total depravity renders most of these ideas ultimately impotent. If you wish to know what hurdles reformed theology has to surmount, read it. Otherwise, give yourself a break. In any case, stick to the library for this one. Similar, but even less Reformed is Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker's *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, a spirited, badly flawed refutation of penal substitution.⁸ Despite my objections, this is a major critique of traditional Anselmian atonement. Like Boersma's offering, Anselm and Abelard are contrasted. Ultimately it seems as though *Christus Victor* faces off against Charles Hodge and Hodge

loses. Why is it that whenever someone wants to refute a Reformed position, Charles Hodge is in variably the whipping boy? I think the answer of course is that Hodge seems to sum up Calvinism in all of its archaism and obscurantism. Better and more honest is an examination of the shame motif later in the book. Good for Green and Baker. Too much work supporting penal substitution ignores the shame dimension to the biblical text. I must say, however, that the treatment founders on the same rock as Boersma, namely total depravity. Buy it, take two aspirin, and call me in the morning.

Several works represent traditional expressions of Reformed theology. One, Peter Golding's *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* is a modern restatement of traditional covenantal theology.⁹ The other is a reprint of an earlier work, Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*.¹⁰ The two represent a sort of role reversal, however. Golding's work, though it is barely a year old, feels much older. Little of the work engages recent works or challenges. The explanations contained are sound, but one wishes for a bit more help with postmodernism. Bavinck's writing, by contrast, is astonishing in the freshness and vitality of the approach. Though Bavinck was a contemporary of the great Abraham Kuyper, his treatment of subjects, such as Trinitarian relations, still has much to teach us. The structure of the work shows its age (e.g. evolution versus creation, debates with modernism etc.) but it, nevertheless, retains its power and a bit of elegance. Take out a loan and get it. Robert L. Reymond's *Contending for the Faith* is a collection of occasional writings, classroom

lectures posed from an apologetic point of view, not my cuppa really.¹¹ While some of the short pieces such as those discussing Trinitarianism have drawn significant criticism, most lack the gravitas that would make the purchase satisfying. It is a very uneven work. The article, for example, concerning Islam, only impresses as being pedestrian. On the other hand, the article concerning Sanders/Dunn and the 'fork in the road' is penetrating and useful. The same could be said of his critique of Gerstner's affection for Aquinas. Unfortunately, the unevenness creates a 'Cut and Paste' feel that is, more than anything else, annoying. Skip it.

The growing interest in global Christianity, sparked in the West by Phillip Jenkins' *The Next Christendom* has generated several new theologically-oriented works exploring the issue. Amos Yong has produced a fascinating and important work, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh*, connecting Pentecostalism with global theology.¹² I have to note that I am not persuaded by Pentecostal argumentation. Nevertheless, this book is to be commended for its successful articulation of Pentecostal theology, no mean feat, given the preponderance of affective, emotional works that give us little to think about. Yong, like Gordon Fee, is a serious, competent theologian who rewards careful reading and deserves serious answers. Given the current propensity for shapeless, colourless evangelicalism, this work offers much more. It has become my standard work on Pentecostal theology. Bravo. A second work, *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God*, edited by Aida Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer, takes a completely different approach.¹³ Its

concern is to present evangelicalism as expressions of different global cultures. What difference does cultural perspective make in our understanding of our faith? The answers provided are worth considering and reflect the beliefs of the contributors, all of whom seem to reflect conventional evangelicalism. These voices are not those threatening to engulf the West with some sort of syncretism, a growing concern among western believers, but rather express faith we can both recognize and learn from. Find it, second-hand.

Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day, by John G. Stackhouse is a prickly critique of American evangelicalism.¹⁴ A host of worries has Stackhouse exercised: the corrupting influence of money, evangelical division showcased by a burgeoning parachurch presence, a shallow interaction with sub-Christian American culture, and obstructionist conservatism that represents the inability of conservative evangelicals to engage new things. His viewpoint is that of one who is attempting to engage, rather than reject the implications of postmodernism. His comments are reminiscent of the *missio dei* thinking popularized by Newbigin. In general, it appeared to do well in pricking consciences in a few cases, provoking thinking in a few more, and offering few clear solutions to problems. As this did not appear to be the aim of the book, it should not be viewed as a criticism. Perhaps the greatest detractor is the fact that it does reflect rather strongly an American milieu. Extrapolation can be made, but the process might be a bit annoying. Accept it as a gift. *Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail*, edited by Timothy George is a kinder, optimistic treatment of evangelicalism's

many faces.¹⁵ I am not sure I like it any better. To be honest, I often find 'broad' evangelicalism annoying. I find 'generous orthodoxy' revolting. This fits closer to the first category, but it does annoy. George, a daring and brilliant evangelical seems to find 'trueness' in civility and catholicity. This is reflected in the large section dealing with Evangelicals and Catholics together. As George sees it, Christianity has three main voices, Roman Catholicism, evangelical Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. Eastern Orthodoxy's main influence is largely geographically confined. Therefore, George concludes that it is in the world's best interest for Catholics and Protestants to talk, since the faith essentially comes down to them and the way they get along. I confess that I am not so sure. George reflects at one point on why it is difficult for Protestants to engage with Roman Catholics. He contrasts the forthright commitment to truth by *Ut Unam Sint* with the wishy-washiness of mainstream Protestantism. I agree, but I see in the contrast the seed of a different problem. If evangelicalism is a 'renewal movement' as George contends and Roman Catholicism continues to develop as the voice of the Christian West, what is there that necessitates seeing Protestantism as anything other than a critique of the true church? Why won't Catholicism, given the time, swallow up all but the rigorously Reformed? All in all, the extreme broadness, with the exception of an excellent dissenting article by Kevin Bauder, was not encouraging. Let someone talk you into accepting a complimentary copy.

Our last offering is an enormously evocative festschrift in honour of Alister McGrath. *Alister E. McGrath & Evangelical Theology: A Dynamic*

Engagement, edited by Sung Wook Chung is evocative because McGrath seems to embody all of the promise and pathos of evangelicalism in his remarkable career.¹⁶ The transatlantic selection of contributors is superb, encompassing a wide range of evangelical perspectives and denominational traditions. Bray's critique of McGrath's writings on justification seems to sum up everything positive about McGrath. Bray characterizes it as the work of a young man who has not only more to produce, but more growing to do. Given the enormous volume of writing McGrath has contributed, we forget that the book only celebrated his 50th birthday. Implicit in Bray's comments is the recognition that McGrath's work did not reflect a fully mature thinking. Roche, on McGrath's foray into scientific theology notes his wide-ranging, synthetic thinking, and a courageous willingness to engage intellectually with science. It was a good reminder of the difference between evangelicalism and fundamentalism, albeit not always a happy one. 'Machen's Warrior Children', by John Frame moves from a tribute to McGrath to an examination of Reformed American evangelicalism. It serves as a very satisfying, compact analysis of Reformed controversy in the 20th century, culminating with his wish list for a Reformed Theological ethos. Bravo for Frame. Chung made an outstanding editorial choice in placing a relatively conciliatory article by Clark Pinnock immediately following Frame; or was it just humour? As to Pinnock, I found the tone of his offering 'whining', complaining that traditional Calvinists were not being fair to him. More to the point, they would not accept his views as representing mainstream evangelicalism. Good for them. Buy it anyway.