The Significance of Singleness: A Theological Vision for the Future of the Church. By Christina S. Hitchcock. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6029-0. vii + 146pp. £13.99.

Dr. Christina Hitchcock offers the church a book on a topic that is rarely discussed through a theological lens: *are single people significant to the Gospel story?* Hitchcock, a married professor at the University of Sioux Falls, sets forth the thesis that, 'the life of Christian singleness can serve a picture of the gospel and what that means: participating in true community, finding identity in Christ, and receiving authority to act as God's agents in the world,' (p. xxii). Hitchcock then develops her argument in three parts in order to elevate the status and significance of single people. This excellent book will be of value to anyone wanting to think through singleness from a biblical perspective, particularly to those who have spiritual responsibility to teach and encourage the church.

In part one, Hitchcock offers a compelling critique of the evangelical church as she compares our often-idolatrous emphasis on marriage to our culture's emphasis on sex. Insomuch as marriage (and therefore sex) is often a marker of adulthood, singleness (a term that Hitchcock uses interchangeably with celibacy) is often seen in a negative view, denoting immaturity, and even perhaps not having reached full personhood. Hitchcock warns her readers that 'our inability to think of singleness within the context of the entire kingdom of God has not only hurt our ability to live as single people and to live with single people; it has also damaged our ability to speak wisely, humbly and biblically on such subjects as feminism, homosexuality, extramarital sex, and even missions and evangelism' (p. xxii). Therefore, to be able to engage this topic seriously will bring the church into conversations that we have historically entered with strong biases with a new hope: that we might value each person as theologically significant.

A single person is more than someone 'with extra time and energy,' Hitchcock states (p. 26); rather, he or she is someone who serves as a reminder and picture of the Gospel. A life lived by a single Christian directs our attention to the priority of the church (p. 23) as the church is the single Christian's primary family. Christian singles also show us the reality of the resurrection and the return of Christ, as they remind us that our hope and comfort does not reside fully in this life in the here and now (p. 24). Finally, Christian singles direct our attention to the proper place for our trust (p. 25). Our trust is not in an another person but rather in Christ alone.

In part two, Hitchcock shares biographies of three historical women—4th century church leader Macrina, 3rd century martyr Perpetura, and 19th century American missionary Lottie Moon—whose singleness enabled effective ministry and clearly demonstrate the aspects of Hitchcock's thesis. While I thoroughly appreciated models of the Christian faith that are single women, Hitchcock's arguments could have been stronger if she also had given examples of single men or included single women who were not engaged in full-time vocational ministry. It is noteworthy to mention that in her introduction she addresses these concerns, with the defence that these women are extreme examples whose memorable lives demonstrate truth that should appeal to every Christian, transcending gender, age, class, race, and vocation. Yet, in a diverse society, range of examples would show that singleness is even broader in scope and therefore, has a remarkable impact in the kingdom of God.

In part three, Hitchcock discusses how singleness can shape us into better theologians, drawing on the words of Jesus and of Paul, particularly in 1 Corinthians 7, reminding us that singles point us to a new reality. Hitchcock challenges the assumption that 'the family is not only God's original community but also his eternal community and blueprint for the church,' (p. 144). Our gaze should not be set only on Genesis 1-2 but should also account for the eschaton in which we will be united to Jesus alone.

Though she writes her book to the whole church, the common audience for such a book is Christian single women (like myself). However, this would be a great loss. I would thoroughly commend this book to male and female readers who are married, not-yet-married, and single-again. After all, as Hitchcock states, 'singleness is either a present reality or future possibility for everyone' (p. xxvii). Those who are in a position of power in churches certainly should read this book in order to shape church culture in this positive direction. It is imperative for our churches to come alongside single people, as that population is only growing in our churches today, not only for the benefit of singles themselves but also for the benefit of the entire church.

Rebecca Giles, Chalmers Institute, St. Andrews

The New Elder's Handbook: A Biblical Guide to Developing Faithful Leaders. By Greg R. Scharf and Arthur Kok. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker. ISBN: 9780801076343. 192pp. £8.99.

The motivation behind the book comes from Greg Scharf's own testimony, and wrestling with the question 'how can qualified elders be raised up?' The starting point many of us adopt is to look for those already qual-

ified for eldership. Scharf takes a step back to pursuing a structure for patiently training those *willing* to serve as elders. In this book Scharf and Kok have presented a biblical and helpful way for training elders. They manage, in short compass, to provide the biblical 'why', before offering their 'how'. Typically, books on developing leaders might fall into one of these two positions, so that perhaps a unique selling point of this book is its emphasis both on principle and practical tools in training and developing new elders. This book will be of value to ministers and elders considering where the next generation of elders will come from.

In section 1 they establish a vision of Biblically qualified elders who are growing in knowledge, pursuing obedience and developing as teachers. The example of Ezra is usefully employed both as a model for eldership *and* in providing assurance that God desires godly eldership (and that his grace works in, through and for those he calls). Character formation and spiritual growth are seen to be a work of God over time in which Christian men are called to participate through pursuing spiritual disciplines. Learning in community is strongly emphasized for mutual encouragement, shared wisdom and accountability among other reasons. While in some cases this would not be practical, it is a helpful ideal to pursue.

In section 2 there is the movement towards practically resourcing pastors with a list of seventy-five questions for new or prospective elders. These questions have as their aim: the discovery of truth, the honing of spiritual disciplines and ministry practices, and growth in obedience to Christ. Each question comes with a list of biblical texts to read and reflect on, along with recommendations of supplementary reading on each topic. The list of biblical texts is very extensive and the breadth of questions covering theology, life and ministry is well thought out. Slow, careful, prayerful engagement with the texts in the form of 'homework' before regularly meeting to share and discuss provides a meaningful way to assimilate truth with the intention of passing it on to others.

I deeply appreciate the *pastoral* tone struck throughout the book. This is not a 'five steps to multiplying leadership' book! Better, it calls on pastors and potential elders to lean on God and his grace, to be prayerful and humble in pursuing the noble aspiration of eldership, and it consistently frames the discussion in a way that emphasizes eldership as service not status. Finally, if you are in the camp that says 'Yes! But how?' The *practical* resources that have been used by Scharf for decades will certainly provide a foundation and framework to follow.

If you want to be *proactive* in identifying and training those who may in time be raised up by God for serving his church then you will find much to help with this. It provides encouragement that with God's help

Christian men can grow in knowledge of the Lord, godly character, and skill in serving.

I have recently begun to meet fortnightly with a small group of potential church elders. While the 'test drive' of Scharf and Kok's book is in the early stages, I am confident that this will prove a mutually beneficial resource and guide in training and developing new or potential leaders for God's church.

God's church needs godly elders. But this doesn't happen by accident. Scharf and Kok have provided discipleship principles and practice to helpfully answer the questions 'what if there are no local elders?' or 'how do I train new elders?' I look forward to this book being of benefit in our local church in coming years, and would encourage others to use it too.

James Ross, Edinburgh

The Decalogue: Living as the People of God. By David L. Baker. London: Apollos, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-78359-550-1. xvii + 221pp. £12.99.

The heart of this book is a contemporary application of the ten commandments. Baker discusses four understandings of the purpose of the Decalogue: a Hebrew catechism; ancient Israel's criminal law; basic moral and ethical principles; and the constitution of Israel. He discerns an element of truth in all, and also recognizes the danger of anachronism, but finally adopts the fourth. The Decalogue was Israel's constitution in the sense that it 'begins by stating the basis of Israel's special relationship with God and continues by listing her primary obligations in maintaining that relationship' (p. 35). Furthermore, it has an abiding relevance: 'I am convinced these laws are still important for the people of God, as I aim to show in this book' (p. x). The resulting book is of particular value for students and pastors, but is also accessible to any interested person.

The introductory section discusses the shape, form, origin, and purpose of the Decalogue. A second section, entitled 'Loving God', follows, with chapters on the first five commandments. The third section, 'Loving Neighbor', treats the final five commandments. The brief chapter, 'Living as the People of God', concludes the work. Baker expounds each commandment within three contexts: ancient Near Eastern; canonical; and contemporary. The latter involves his discussion of how the commandments apply today.

Baker is conversant with the wide range of scholarly opinion about the Decalogue, but is clear about his own view: he endeavours to take seriously the claims of the text itself. With regard to human authorship he asserts, 'there is good reason to accept the biblical tradition that the Decalogue originated in the time of Moses and played a key part in the

formation of Israel as a nation' (p. 29). He notes, however, that the text makes claims that go beyond that. Following Clines, he notes that 'the Bible claims God spoke the words of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1; Deut. 5:22)' (p. 25). Unlike Clines, Baker's view is that there is 'no reason to rule out the possibility that the text is recording a real event' (p. 28).

Baker follows the traditional Reformed numbering of the commandments (p. 5). It should be noted that he differs from that tradition in two ways. First, he understands Exodus 20:2 as a preface particularly to the first commandment, rather than to the whole Decalogue (p. 4). Secondly, as noted above, he groups the fifth commandment with the first four, rather than with those that follow (p. 9).

The book helpfully contains author, subject, and scripture indices. The bibliography is subdivided by topic, making it a useful guide to resources on particular topics.

The book has a number of strengths. Fundamentally, the exposition of individual commandments seems to substantiate Baker's claim that 'along with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and other ethical teaching in both the Old and New Testaments, […] the Decalogue should be the starting point for Christian ethics' (p. 158). A particular strength of the book is the comparison to ANE material. First, it highlights what is important to the biblical author. Baker notes that the 'relative leniency of Old Testament law in punishing property offenses may be contrasted with its severity in dealing with homicide, ruling out compromise between the murderer and the victim's next of kin' (pp. 126-7). That is, human life is prioritized over property. This comparison also highlights the relative humanity of the biblical penalties. Baker states that 'It is significant that biblical penalties for theft are more humane than elsewhere, never involving mutilation, beating, or death' (p. 126) This is useful apologetically in a society which often misrepresents the Old Testament as barbaric.

The discussion of the canonical context is another strength. For example, the discussion of theft is helpfully placed in the larger context of the Bible's discussion of private property (p. 133). He also considers the commandments in light of the New Testament's presentation of Jesus.

Baker's discussion of the contemporary context is more mixed. Sometimes in application the commandments loose distinction. This is particularly true of the first three. For example, when he says that 'another form of blasphemy is treating god as though he does not exist' (p. 69), his application of the third commandment sounds very like the first. On other occasions, the application could be more current. His treatment of the second commandment includes discussion of 'glossy magazines' (p. 58) but not social media.

Those reservations aside, Baker has produced an easily accessible and stimulating guide to the ten commandments. It would make an excellent textbook for students, with a bibliography that opens avenues for further study. It would also be a useful resource for pastors seeking to teach and apply this portion of Scripture. Indeed, it is written in such an accessible manner that it would be suitable for interested lay people.

Daniel Sladek, Edinburgh Theological Seminary

Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition. Edited by David S. Dockery and Christopher W. Morgan. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4335-5653-1. 576pp. £40.08.

In *Christian Higher Education*, the editors seek to provide a 'multiauthored, symphonic, and theologically shaped vision' (p. 13) for specifically evangelical Christian higher education in North America. The authors are predominantly from the faculty of Trinity International University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Reformed, Baptist and broader evangelical perspectives mingle. The 27 chapters, each with discussion questions, survey the theological assumptions, curriculum emphases, and formational goals of evangelical colleges and universities. Given the goal of providing a primer (albeit a hefty one) for administrators, board members and church leaders as well as faculty, staff and students, the focus is not on cutting-edge scholarship and the language is rarely technical. Rather, the book offers examples of evangelical approaches to its various themes. Although the chapters are often more descriptive and declarative than incisive or self-critical, and of rather mixed quality, the book will be useful to those seeking a non-technical representative sample of evangelical thinking about higher education as it exists across the range of a couple of current faculties.

Part 1 of the book focuses on developing a theological framework, with focused attention to knowing and loving God, biblical authority, the image of God, and church history. These chapters frame an emphasis on discipleship and extension of the work of the church that recurs in the remainder of the book. Part 2 offers a survey of curriculum emphases, with chapters focused in turn on worldview, teaching, learning, research, the humanities, the sciences, mathematics, the social sciences, philosophy, music and the arts, education and professional programs. While the approaches vary across chapters, in each case the author develops their understanding of how evangelical faith commitments frame their approach to their area of focus. Some emphasize epistemology and the role

of worldview in scholarship, while others focus more on their approach to teaching and student formation.

Finally, Part 3 is loosely organized around the institution's role in student formation outside the classroom and its mission to and impact on the wider world. Chapters here discuss catechesis, worship and service, student behaviour, leadership, culture and the wider world, the church, international and intercultural learning and missions. While the first part of the book contains a more focused emphasis on theology, various theological summaries recur through later chapters as each author attempts to anchor their own topic in evangelical commitments. While these theological commitments are frequently pointed to as a source of unity and of definitive solutions to intellectual challenges, there is not uniformity; the image of God, for instance, is discussed by various authors, but without consensus as to how it should be interpreted.

A feature of the book that initially seems to differentiate it from other collections on Christian higher education is its apparent strong focus on teaching and learning rather than the more common focus on intellectual frameworks and disciplinary or historical issues. The words 'teaching' and 'learning' appear in many of the chapter titles, and each disciplinary chapter is titled 'Teaching and Learning in…' Addressing the actual processes of teaching and learning has not commonly been a strong point of this kind of writing, and it is good to see some chapters, such as Paul Bialek's interesting chapter on mathematics education, offering concrete proposals in this area. There is a recurring emphasis on student formation, though one that too often falls back on what 'we must' do or what we should 'tell' students in place of careful attention to how to get to the declared vision pedagogically. In the end, many of the curricular chapters lack the focus promised by their titles, with some making no mention at all of students or of concrete teaching and learning processes.

The fact that most authors are drawn from a small range of institutions brings both strengths and weaknesses. The volume is built upon shared concerns and documents a useful cross-section of how faculty at this particular kind of American evangelical institution are thinking about their faith and their work. As with many such collections the quality of the individual chapters varies quite widely in terms of both scholarship and prose. The range of preoccupations addressed may also have been constrained by the culture of the contributing institutions. Secularism, relativism, and 'sexual confusion' recur as concerns, while attention to race is largely relegated to the student life chapters, and attention to current social concerns such as climate change, nationalism, or poverty is essentially absent. Current critiques of the political and cultural role of evangelicalism within the American landscape are alluded to more

than directly engaged. Evangelicals are often rhetorically positioned as standing over against the wider culture, bringing solutions to its moral and epistemological challenges, more than as fully implicated within its struggles. This makes the book feel, at times, somewhat detached from wider issues facing universities and informing current academic as well as broader cultural conversations.

There are some excellent chapters; other readers will have their own favourites, but personally, I found those by Gundlach, Forster, and Watson among the more helpfully suggestive. Those looking for the most incisive developments in Christian thinking about higher education and the life of the mind, or for self-critical engagement with the full range of current cultural shifts, will need to reach beyond this volume. Within these limitations, the book will be useful to readers seeking a sample cross-section of evangelical thinking within and about Christian higher education.

David I. Smith, Calvin University, Michigan, USA

Divine Choreography of Redemption: Setting the Eternal Saga in Time. By William E. Jefferson. New York: Hybrid Global Publishing, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-948181-08-2. 154pp. £15.95.

In this fascinating book written in almost lyrical style, William Jefferson seeks imaginatively to penetrate the spiritual world existing within and beyond time. He does this through allegorical fiction by relating the surreal experience of a fictitious twenty-first century Catholic monk who encounters spiritual manipulation lurking behind the dehumanising trends of modern media. The monk is called Narrative. He belongs to the Order of Message Makers, founded by one Bevin Roberts in 1637 on an island called Estillyen. The Order is dedicated to communicating Scripture through drama in confronting the powers of darkness and putting them to flight. Jefferson's allegory offers a theological analysis of insights culled from media theorists like McLuhan, Postman, and Harari. This book will appeal to those seeking to communicate the Gospel to media smitten audiences.

Narrative tells us how he became aware of living in two worlds—the world of time and space and the eternal world. He both participates in his story and simultaneously observes it from the outside. He finds himself walking the local streets while concurrently looking on from the window of his third-floor monastery room. 'I'm caught up,' he says, 'in something way beyond me […] I'm coping in a world I know, but nothing fits. All the true inhabitants have become characters. I know them; they don't know me' (p. 75). For Narrative, normality is temporarily suspended. He finds himself operating in an unaccustomed mode of reality.

In this allegory the evil powers take the form of three soap box street orators who terrify Narrative. Their common mission in addressing enraptured audiences is to promote the seductive power of mediated messages 'to mold and make us, alarm and harm us' (p. 28). Their names are Platform, Discarnate, and Rejection. Platform preaches 'technopoly'—the thrill of finding fulfilment and bliss in interacting with digital media. He urges his listeners: 'Discover [in technology] the true art of building an image of yourself, which is not yourself, and needn't be' (p. 13). Discarnate presses his audience to abandon the limits of human ability and put their trust in Artificial Intelligence, allowing algorithms to discover meaning and tell them what to do. Rejection, the third speaker, presses his hearers to redeem themselves. 'Oh, the vista of liberation that awaits you. Consider it: free to think, reason, and reject anything that stands in the way of your future present' (pp. 20–21). Narrative later discovers the street orators are coached by a sinister figure called 'Bewilderment' who turns out to be Satan.

Much to Narrative's relief he discovers that the three advocates of Dataism are not the only show in town. For none other than Bevin Roberts, founder of the Order of Message Makers, comes back from the seventeenth century, accompanied by three fellow actors. In a former theatre, now church property, they perform three plays which dramatically present the biblical story, 'The Divine Choreography of Redemption'. The venue is packed by people who a few days earlier were entranced by the soapbox orators. The actors promote the art of peering through the lines of Scripture (pp. 59, 109, 143) so that the audience may discover its own part in the divine drama. The audience's enthusiasm suggests the biblical Story can counteract the seduction of digital media; in the end the three soapbox protagonists flee the town.

A key figure in the book is 'Mr Kind', an elderly gentleman who at the beginning of the tale invites Narrative to descend from his monastery window and enter the allegory. And at the end, it is Mr Kind who commissions Narrative to return to normality. There are hints that Mr Kind is none other than Jesus or, perhaps, the Holy Spirit.

While the fictional audiences of the Message Makers' three plays would have captured the big picture from Adam to Christ, they might have found the specific choreography of redemption somewhat difficult to follow. For it is conveyed thematically (in terms of dreams, angels, prophecies, miracles, etc.) rather than as a sequential narrative. The focus is more on the actors communicating Scripture than on audience engagement with it. A stronger emphasis on the audience grappling with what the text is saying prior to peering between the lines would have made the engagement more rounded. The strength of this book lies, first, in its

claim that the increasingly recognized power of technologies to manipulate and coerce is an indicator of spiritual warfare; and second, in its basic affirmation that the Sword of the Spirit can resist and overthrow this modern idolatry.

Fergus Macdonald, Edinburgh

Studying Paul's Letters with the Mind and Heart. By Gregory S MaGee. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018. ISBN 978-0-8254-4472-2. 215pp. £17.99.

This 215-page softback presents a fascinating study of Paul's letters. It succeeds in balancing a popular and an academic reading of the Pauline corpus as well as striking an equilibrium between heart and mind in engaging the biblical text. In the book's fourteen chapters the author answers a series of questions ranging from 'Why should I listen to Paul?' to 'How can I get the most out of studying Paul's letters?' and 'How can I wisely apply Paul's teachings?' Also included is a chapter on 'Were all thirteen letters really written by Paul?' and another on 'What are the experts saying about Paul these days?' Anyone wanting a readily readable introduction to Paul will benefit from this book. It will also be of value to preachers preparing to expound the key message of any of Paul's epistles.

The book offers practical advice on discerning the meaning of Paul's letters in their original setting by determining the likely circumstances being addressed in each case, as well as analysing the apostle's train of thought as revealed in repeated words, phrases and topical turning points. The method of analysis on offer recommends today's readers to divide the text of a Pauline letter into paragraphs, and then to devise strong titles for each paragraph. Next steps are to group the paragraphs into larger sections to which titles are also to be assigned. An appendix demonstrates how the author does this in the case of Ephesians.

Having offered help in discerning the *meaning*, the book also stresses the importance of discovering and appreciating the *relevance* of Paul's letters for today. Application is to follow interpretation. The key role of the Holy Spirit in implanting Paul's teachings in the soils of our lives is vital if the letters are to impact us cognitively, affectively, and volitionally; that is, how we think, what we feel, and what we do. While we need to bear in mind, that as cultural outsiders, we are required to interpret Paul's teaching within the context of his original audiences, Paul's 'original intended meaning creates ripple effects touching our significant needs, concerns, and dreams' (p. 123). In making the transition from interpretation to application we don't teleport immediately from one world (of the original readers) to another world (ours). Scripture engagement methods play an

important role in helping us to slow down in the transition, and focus on the text long enough to facilitate reading for spiritual growth.

There's a helpful chapter on 'some specific interpretive challenges' (p. 133). These challenges include: aligning Romans 2:13 with being justified by grace; recognising the 'Corinthian slogans' (like soundbites today); the change of tone in 2 Corinthians chapters 10-13; whether Paul's focus in Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians is ecclesiological or soteriological; the significance of Christ's self-emptying in Philippians 2:5-11; the apocalyptic imagery in the Thessalonian letters; whether the 'trustworthy sayings' in the Pastorals refer to what precedes or what succeeds them; and the challenge of 'mirror reading' the Letter to Philemon.

MaGee also explores Paul's interaction with the Old Testament. 'Paul's letters swim in a stream filled with Old Testament works and ideas' (p. 163). For Paul the OT is revelatory rather than regulatory. This is seen particularly through the series of covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David, pointing forward to the promise of the New Covenant, which is marked by the ministry of the Son and the gift of the Spirit. In addition to the promise and fulfilment motif, Paul draws deeply on passages about Israel's wilderness wanderings and from the Servant Songs of Isaiah.

In Chapter Thirteen, MaGee evaluates a close and thick reading of the Pauline texts while reviewing the three primary spectra in contemporary scholarship. While recognising there is much to learn from both the New Perspective and the Apocalyptic Perspective on Paul, the writer tends towards the Old Perspective mainly because, in his view, it leans less heavily on leveraging outside sources to interpret the biblical text. The final chapter answers the question in its title—'What ideas were especially important to Paul?' (p. 187)—with: union with Christ; grace, faith, and obedience; the Holy Spirit; and an eternal kingdom perspective.

In this well written book Gregory MaGee offers today's readers an excellent popular introduction to Paul containing very useful pointers to discovering the ongoing relevance of his writings for today.

Fergus Macdonald, Edinburgh

Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts. Edited by Jonathan Greer, John Hilber, and John Walton. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. ISBN 978-0-8010-9775-1. xix + 616pp. £37.89.

This interesting and attractive introduction to the ancient Near East for students of the Bible distinguishes itself both in its organization and its thoroughness. Individual essays fall into three broad categories: 'Elements of the Drama,' including essays on topics such as historical geog-

raphy, archaeology, and languages; 'Acts and Scenes in the Drama,' which moves from essays summarizing broad periods of biblical history to specific essays on focus topics (e.g., the Sea People, the battle of Qarqar); and finally 'Themes of the Drama,' which includes varieties of essays on God (monotheism, temples, prophecy, etc.), family, economics, and governance. This sketch of the organization of the book also shows the way in which it gives attention to some aspects of life in the biblical world passed over in similar volumes, such as the geography of Israel (including climate and animal and plant life), burial practices, music and dance, warfare, and so on. This is not accomplished, however, by sacrificing attention to the broad history of the ancient Near East: both beginners and those more familiar with the cultural and historical background of the OT will find much that is helpful. I was especially impressed with the discussions of the ancestral period, in which it is argued that both Middle Bronze Age archaeological and textual evidence (2200-1600 BC) show the same world depicted in Genesis 12-50 (pp. 187-93), as well as with the chapter on the Exodus (pp. 194-200), which argues the plausibility of a later date (13th century BC) for the exodus as finding a more natural home in the reign of Rameses II, without dismissing or mishandling the biblical evidence.

The book is not completely positive about the OT: Aren Maeir states that the 'conquest view' of Israelite settlement in Palestine has essentially been disproved in recent scholarship (p. 55; however, the OT shows both violent conquest in Joshua and a more gradual settlement in Judges, without any archaeological evidence contradicting this). The discussion of Sennacherib's famous 701 campaign is very good on the ideology and theology behind Assyrian and OT texts (pp. 302, 5), but less satisfactory on relating them: the supposed sources standing behind 2 Kings 18-20 are mentioned, but no solution or synthesis offered.

Despite this, a variety of interesting new facts are found throughout; for example, that the Greenland ice core shows traces of lead and silver from the Greek and Roman periods, indicating that the slight atmospheric pollution from smelting reached almost to the north pole (p. 23), or that improved horsemanship in Assyria moved chariots to mainly ceremonial roles (p. 507). There is hardly a figure, date, or theme relating to the OT which fails to receive attention. The only area of the book I found sometimes underdeveloped was the connection of the background to the OT itself. While this is not always the case (e.g., the helpful discussion of the political background of Ahab's reign in connection to the battle of Qarqar [p. 284]), more explicit discussion of how we can read the OT more intelligently in light of the background was sometimes lacking. The essay on the physical geography of Israel is meticulous, for example, but aside from the 'way of the sea' in Isaiah 9:1, does not explicitly relate its

survey to the text of the OT itself. More explicit connections of this kind might have helped readers who have not been to Israel themselves. Nevertheless, this volume is very well worth the time of readers looking to deepen their understanding of the OT.

Eric Ortlund, Oak Hill College, London

A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls. By Evan B. Howard. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018, ISBN: 978-0-8010-9780-5. 288pp. £15.99.

There are many books today on spiritual formation, but this one is a fresh, comprehensive and deeply pastoral study, and well worth attention. As its title suggests, it brings together multiple strands that God uses to shape His people in refreshingly wholistic ways.

Evan Howard is the founder and director of Spirituality Shoppe: An Evangelical Center for the Study of Christian Spirituality. He is also affiliate associate professor of Christian Spirituality at Fuller Theological Seminary. In a brief epilogue, Howard describes his own Christian history, participating in and learning from a variety of evangelical (and other) traditions, including his current charismatic liturgical church in Colorado. This makes the book attractive to a wide evangelical readership as he draws on the strengths and emphases of many sources.

The book comprises twelve chapters in four sections. Part One: The Basics, defines Christian Spiritual Formation and sets it into the whole Scripture narrative. Howard's working definition (p. 18) is this: 'I see Christian spiritual formation as *a Spirit- and human-led process by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are changed into ever-greater likeness to the life and gospel of this God.'* This definition flags up that Howard's understanding of spiritual formation is very wide, and embraces almost every possible area of Christian discipleship; but while the covering of topics is quite brief and condensed it is not in any way superficial.

Part Two: The Elements, explores the aims, contexts, agents, process and means of spiritual formation. Part Three: The Practice, surveys prayer, the communal shaping that comes through Christian community and church life, the whole person/community in every dimension of life that needs to be transformed, the outreach to the world beyond the church that is the calling of God's people, and the importance of discerning what God is doing. Part Four: The Ministry, which is by far the shortest section, looks at the particular calling of those—pastors or other leaders—especially gifted to enable the spiritual growth of others.

Each chapter has a helpful summary introduction—a form of abstract—and concludes with a number of extended questions for personal or group reflection. There are also a handful of diagrams. At the end of the book there are 18 pages of notes, including details of many books and journal articles; a Scripture Index; and a Subject Index. There are also numerous stories from real life throughout the book, illustrating in very concrete terms the outworking of the point Howard is making. These elements make it very reader/user-friendly.

For some readers, perhaps accustomed to a narrower understanding of the term 'spiritual formation', or aware of how the term may have been used in past centuries focusing on an individual's private devotion, Howard's inclusion of so much may seem too broad. This is whole-life development, discipleship in every dimension. Yet, isn't this indeed the scope of authentic transformation to which the Lord calls us?

This book is clearly the fruit of many years of pastoral experience, informed by biblical wisdom and by study across a range of disciplines, and is its own testimony to a winsome combination of academic excellence and lived-out devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. It should take its place on seminary/theological college courses, and for local church home study groups, as well as for individual reading.

Rose Dowsett, Glasgow

Gospel Witness: evangelism in word and deed. By David M. Gustafson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019, ISBN: 978-0-8028-7680-5. xii + 301pp. £24.99.

David Gustafson is chair of the mission and evangelism department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. He previously served for twenty-five years as a ministry leader with Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) and as a pastor of evangelism and discipleship. This integration of academic and pastoral experience and passion enables Gustafson to write a book that is both suitable as a seminary/college textbook, and for church leaders, and men and women on the front line of disciple-making.

Gustafson's goal is to encourage mission-oriented ecclesiology, rather than simply to provide a handbook on effective individual evangelism. The book is not about evangelism in programmes or even church-organised events, but about mobilising and equipping all church members to take their part fully in witness to the gospel, and to the Lord of the gospel, in every dimension of life. This is more than what we say as we speak the good news (as we indeed should), but also about what we do and how we

live, serving our communities, being visual aids for the integrity of lives saturated with God's truth embodied.

In his Foreword, Robert Coleman suggests (p. ix) that while the Protestant Reformation rightly recovered the important doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers', this has too often been seen in terms of the individual's direct access to God, without intermediary, and not so well understood as our shared priestly task in bringing unbelievers to God, and God to unbelievers. That is frequently assumed to be the responsibility of clergy and leaders. *Gospel Witness* unpacks what it means for the whole people of God to be both disciples and disciple-makers.

Gustafson states in his Preface (p. xi) his concern: 'How do we communicate the good news of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century in ways that are clear and compelling to others? I believe that we must engage in gospel praxis by speaking the good news in words and demonstrating it with deeds. We must engage people who are far from God with the life-changing truths of the gospel. Now more than ever we must think like missionaries as we seek to bring the good news to others. The church stands at a critical moment in history. Unless we reorient our church life toward the biblical tasks of announcing the good news and making disciples, we will miss our opportunity.'

The book's twelve chapters explore how to address this pressing situation, theologically and practically. He covers topics such as Gospel Clarity (ch. 3), Conversion to Christ-Follower (ch. 7), Gospel Praxis in a Pluralistic Society (ch. 8), Baptism and Discipleship (ch. 10), and Shaping a Gospel-Sharing Church (ch. 11). Each chapter has a short introduction, and a conclusion, each of which summarises what will be, or has been, covered; and each chapter ends with a number of discussion questions, designed to help readers think further, and to apply the material to their own contexts. These questions would be helpful also in a study group setting. There are also some charts, and boxes with quotations or questions, scattered through the text. There is an epilogue, an extensive bibliography, and 8 pages of Index.

This is a book infused with pastoral heart, rooted in the practicalities of congregational life, and full of wisdom and inspiration. It digs deeply into each chapter's themes, but is always readable, and free from technical terms. Although written in a North American context, it is universal in its content and challenge, and would be as helpful in Asia and Europe, for instance, as in the USA.

I recommend it.

Rose Dowsett, Glasgow

Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution. By Matthew C. Bingham. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780190912369. xi + 234pp. £64.

In *Orthodox Radicals*, Matthew Bingham argues that historians have been mistaken to talk of 'Baptists', or even 'Particular Baptists' and 'General Baptists', when discussing mid-seventeenth-century England. He contends that these labels give the misleading impression that there was a cohesive Baptist identity during the English revolution. Instead, Bingham suggests that we should think of seventeenth-century Particular Baptists as 'baptistic congregationalists'. This is no mere rebranding exercise: Bingham seeks to re-shape our understanding of the mid-seventeenth-century confessional boundaries by demonstrating that baptistic congregationalists' closest interpersonal and theological connections were with paedobaptistic congregationalists, including those present at the Westminster Assembly, rather than with those who shared their sacramental views. As such, *Orthodox Radicals* is not a narrative history of the Particular Baptists' origins, but a carefully argued re-interpretation of their identity.

Bingham sets out his stall in the book's opening pages, claiming that historians of the seventeenth-century have been 'unduly and unknowingly influenced' by 'denominational historians whose desire to tell their own "Baptist story"' comes 'at the expense of fidelity to the early modern record' (p. 1). These remarks establish the tone for what follows, as Bingham proceeds to dismantle and reconstruct readers' understanding of the group commonly known as the Particular Baptists.

Chapter one challenges the assumption of a pan-Baptist identity head-on, highlighting the Particular Baptists' unequivocal opposition to Arminianism and consistent prioritisation of soteriological views over baptismal ones. Bingham stresses that there was a 'complex religious landscape in which multiple doctrinal issues intersected' resulting in 'a diverse range of theological alignments' (p. 22), arguing that historians have been mistaken to assume that there was a 'coherent "baptist" communion' (p. 36).

Chapter two emphasises the unity between baptistic and paedobaptistic congregationalists in the 1640s, noting that they were 'held together by unquestioned adherence to Calvinist orthodoxy and the uncompromising logic of congregational polity' (p. 40). Bingham highlights, for example, how Henry Jacob, a leading baptistic congregationalist, received counsel from paedobaptistic congregationalists like Thomas Goodwin and Jeremiah Burroughs, who he described as 'honoured & Beloved Brethren' (p. 44). Fascinatingly, Bingham argues that the 'Dissenting Brethren' at

the Westminster Assembly may have even shared information with the baptistic congregationalists, enabling the swift publication of their own confession in October 1644.

Chapter three proceeds to show that these links were not simply interpersonal, but also theological. The baptistic congregationalists' position on baptism was, as Bingham puts it, 'sunk deep within the soil of congregational principle' (p. 63). He argues that the adoption of a baptistic position from the late 1630s onwards cannot be explained by biblicism alone, but must also be understood within the context of congregationalists' beliefs about the visible church, which they correlated with the visible saints. Bingham contends that this ecclesiological position paved the way for some congregationalists to reject paedobaptism.

The book shifts gears in chapters four and five, using the preceding reconstruction as a lens through which to examine religious identity in the 1650s. Chapter four explores why baptistic views were tolerated under Cromwell while Arminian and Socinian views remained beyond the theological pale, given that they were all perceived as erroneous in the preceding decade. Bingham argues that those with Calvinistic baptistic views enjoyed religious toleration thanks to their longstanding ties to the congregationalists, who rose to prominence under Cromwell.

Chapter five examines baptistic congregationalists' self-identity in the Interregnum, arguing that they saw themselves as continuing the Puritan, and broader Protestant, pursuit of reform, viewing 'paedobaptism as simply one more "popish" barnacle that had inappropriately attached itself to the ark of Christ's church' (p. 136). In this context, Bingham argues that divisions between ecumenically minded and sectarian baptistic congregationalists were not simply about communion (and whether it should be open or closed), but reflected their broader disposition towards those who had not yet followed them in rejecting paedobaptism.

Readers might be surprised to find almost no discussion of the 'General Baptists'. Bingham unapologetically focuses on the 'Particular Baptists' because to incorporate the General Baptists alongside them would undermine his central thesis. Given his argument that Particular Baptists are better understood as baptistic congregationalists though, readers may wonder how best to describe the so-called General Baptists. This is addressed briefly in the conclusion where Bingham suggests the label 'baptistic separatists' (p. 153), but this is not explored in any detail. He has, however, examined the identity of this group in an article in *The Seventeenth Century* – 'English radical religion and the invention of the General Baptists, 1609–1660' (2019) – which readers may find a useful complement to *Orthodox Radicals*.

While Bingham's argument may irk those invested in preserving some sense of a pan-Baptist denominational identity, *Orthodox Radicals* makes the provocative and, in this reader's view, compelling case that these labels are anachronistic and misleading when applied to mid-seventeenth-century England. *Orthodox Radicals* is an important work that deserves a wide-readership amongst all those who desire to understand better the theological landscape of the English revolution.

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Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method. By John C. Peckham. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7330-9. xiii + 295pp. £35.00.

As the sub-title suggests, this is a wide-ranging book, arguing that the 66 books of the Protestant canon of Scripture must be central to any theological enterprise. They are to be the norm that norms everything else.

Peckham begins with contemporary questions about the canon of Scripture. He distinguishes the 'intrinsic-canon' model from the 'communitarian-canon' model. With the latter it is the community that determines the canon, so that the canon is in effect an extension of community authority; whereas with the intrinsic canon it is God who determines the canon which the community merely recognizes. Peckham affirms several grounds – theological and historical – why he believes the intrinsic-cannon view to be correct. At the same time he points out that since the 66 books of the Protestant canon are accepted by virtually all professing Christians (though some may acknowledge more books), this answers the tricky question – which community has the right to endorse the Scriptures? If communitarians will accept the answer that it is those communities which hold to the 66 books of the canon, then they need feel no qualms about the starting-point for Peckham's theological method.

In the second major section of the book Peckham moves on to deal with whether sola scriptura can be at the heart of the theological enterprise. He is alert to the major objections to sola scriptura – that it is the product of circular reasoning, that it excludes all other sources of knowledge (including the testimony of past generations of believers), and that it inevitably leads to subjectivism and so to unrestrained diversity. In answering these objections, Peckham recognizes that all interpreters, both individuals and community groups, will bring to the task of interpretation of the sacred texts a degree of subjectivity and fallibility. Those who make sola scriptura the touchstone of their theology are no exception. Hence Peckham is modest about the degree of certainty and uniformity his recommended approach will produce. No contemporary theologian,

however, should avoid bringing their conclusions to the bar of the whole scriptural canon. Some areas of confusion and diversity may remain; but the effort is worthwhile because presently believers may see through a glass darkly, but the knowledge they are given by God of spiritual realities is genuine (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12).

The final sections of the book, which deal most directly with theological method, are the most complex. They involve an attempt to blend together the often distinct approaches of biblical theology and systematics. Peckham believes it is vital as a first step to ascertain the significance of the various passages of Scripture in their immediate context. But it is insufficient to determine the particulars of individual texts. Canonical theologians have also to ask what is the conceptual framework underpinning the text. Once they have fulfilled these tasks, they have to use both these perspectives to formulate their own conclusions. But these conclusions, Peckham assures us, are never to be taken as the last word. They remain open to review and possible correction from further light derived from the whole of Scripture.

Peckham does not lose sight of the importance of spiritual factors in the work of understanding and of formulating the results of detailed investigation of the texts of Scripture. He is especially vigilant about drawing excessive conclusions from what he regards as limited revelation, including the accommodative and analogical use of language in relation to God. Better modest conclusions and modest pretensions than establishing some systematic theology which itself takes precedence over Scripture.

From this brief sketch of Peckham's book, I might give the impression that it is excessively abstract and theoretical. This would be misleading, because the author regularly illustrates his theories with practical examples of the procedures he commends. Thus, readers will find interesting reflections on contemporary debates about the Trinity, the (im)passibility of God and the nature of the love of God.

As with most books about theological method, this is essentially a book for the academy. Certainly, Peckham does acknowledge, in a passing remark, that churches will want to endorse doctrinal standards for their office-bearers; but he does not go into the implications of this. I would have some concerns that in a church setting his procedure in careless hands might lead to questioning the fundamentals of the faith. Even outside of church settings I feel it is unreasonable for believing theologians to question those presuppositions they acquired when they first believed the gospel message. It would have helped if Peckham had distinguished between doctrines that are clearly affirmed and those which provoke

debate among believers. Perhaps there is room here for further work on his part.

Despite the academic thrust, pastors and the like will benefit from a careful analysis of contemporary Protestant debate about the sort of issues involved in the relation between Scripture, Tradition and the authority of the Church. Though these historically have been issues central to Protestant-Roman Catholic debate, Peckham demonstrates that many Protestant scholars have for different reasons moved on to what would once have been considered particularly Roman Catholic territory – the appeal to an extracanonical arbiter in areas of theological disagreement. By contrast, Peckham seeks to demonstrate confidently that it is still possible to affirm and practise a theology based on sola scriptura.

Graham Keith, Ayr Free Church of Scotland

Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction. By Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7265-4. xiv + 806pp. £34.99.

It is difficult to do justice to a volume of over 800 pages in a short review but what must be said is that this one-volume systematic theology provides an excellent introduction to the discipline of Christian Dogmatics and is to be highly commended.

First published in Dutch, this English language version introduces to a wider audience the work of these fine Dutch scholars. It also provides a different perspective to the currently available one-volume systematic theologies, which come mostly from North America, by opening up issues from a Dutch and a wider European perspective, often lacking in those other volumes.

The book is biblical and Reformed in its approach. The biblical basis for every doctrine is expressed clearly and confidently, recognising the important contribution of biblical studies to systematic theology. It arises out of the Reformed tradition but demonstrates the breadth of that tradition, not least by introducing us to many of the elements of Dutch neo-Calvinism. The book also has a strong Trinitarian centre and, on most matters under discussion, this Trinitarian approach helps to open up the subject in an enlightening way. The same can be said of the consistent eschatological viewpoint running through the chapters.

The book begins by laying out its aims and objectives and its definition of dogmatics as 'Disciplined Thinking about God'. It then sets this discipline in the context of the wider discipline of theology, before embarking on the question of God and his existence. This is regarded as prolegomena before embarking on theology proper by discussing the

Trinity. After dealing with the doctrine of God, the writers turn to the doctrines of creation and revelation. This is followed by several chapters encompassing anthropology, before turning to Christology and Pneumatology. The final four chapters are on Scripture, Ecclesiology, Justification and Eschatology. If you think that order of subjects is a little unusual, you have to read the book to see its internal rationale!

For those who want an overview of Christian theology, covering all the major doctrines and which is up to date with recent debates and developments, this book is to be recommended. It will be particularly helpful for the reading lists of university and seminary courses in systematic theology because, while it presents a Reformed theological perspective, it does not offer a narrow 'party line' but rather explores a range of views on the doctrines under consideration, often leaving a decision on conflicting views quite open-ended. It also tackles 'hot button' issues which are absent from many similar volumes, such as the impact on Christian theology of the possibility of extra-terrestrial life (p. 205), as well as discussions on human sexuality in the light of modern debates (p. 280ff.).

Throughout, the writers engage with the leading scholars in the field, as opposed to some recent Reformed systematic theologies, which only interact with scholars in their own tradition. Indeed, van der Kooi and Van den Brink engage with theologians from the early church right through to those of the present day in an impressive and enriching manner. Having said that, we should also say that the engagement with the theological tradition and with the writers under discussion is accessible and clear. Indeed, the book has been written in such a way that educated Christians who are not registered students of theology will benefit from its simplicity of the language, careful explanation of theological vocabulary and the translation of Greek and Latin terms. The integrated footnote system and the further reading recommended at the end of each chapter, plus the excellent bibliography and indices at the end of the book, are also most helpful in directing further thought.

It is to be hoped that many will turn to this book and benefit from it.

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God of all Comfort: A Trinitarian Response to the Horrors of This World. By Scott Harrower. (Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-68-359230-3. xiv + 255pp. £16.00.

Harrower offers a theological and pastoral response to victims of horrors and trauma, arguing that their experience of life as meaningless can be transformed by sharing in God's own redemptive perspective on hor-

rors. This work might well prove useful for pastors or educated laypersons aiming to support victims of horrors as well as for the burgeoning movement within theology interacting with horror studies (however, I do note some concerns in what follows).

Harrower begins describing an experience of peaceful, interpersonal relationship with God and others as the 'ideal' human state, and against this backdrop, defines 'horrors' as events which disintegrate some aspect of a person's existence in a manner which cannot be meaningfully integrated into their self-understanding. He proceeds to dialogue with a variety of issues arising from horrors which his account will attempt to address, of particular note are problematic interpretations of horrors which fail to allow for the possibility of a victim's transformation. Scripture is then identified as a vehicle through which a horror victim may interpersonally share in God's perspective, lending a new perspective to the victim which frees them from being confined to reading scripture solely through the lens of their suffering. To exemplify this dynamic, Harrower first offers a nihilistic, horror inspired-reading of Matthew's gospel. This sort of reading would serve only to confirm the hopelessness of a trauma-victim, but then offers a 'blessed' reading of the same gospel, contending that when the gospel is read while sharing in 'God's perspective,' horrors come to be viewed in light of Christ's redemption. The book concludes with a number of chapters outlining how sharing in the triune God's perspective on horrors offers to horror victims security in the midst of a traumatic world, an antidote to a hopeless self-perception, and a sense of meaning.

Harrower integrates voices from analytic and continental philosophy, trauma studies, biblical studies, pastoral care, psychology, and systematic theology. It's rare to encounter a single text dialoguing with Richard Fahy's philosophy of horror, Paul Griffith's eschatology, Hilary of Poitiers's exegesis, Marilyn McCord Adam's theodicy, and Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenology! While the analysis is necessarily rather general given this breadth of dialogue partners, Harrower impressively weaves these divergent threads into a single compelling argument. Particularly helpful, is Harrower's insightful contention that a theological approach resists the emphasis within trauma studies upon the intractability of horror's effects (cf. pp. 70-85). Additionally, Harrower's interdisciplinary approach shines in his use of scripture. The combination of theological, biblical, and pastoral engagement, leads him to speak (winsomely and relatively uniquely given the current norms within biblical studies) of the primary function of scripture as 'mediat[ing] a personal encounter with God and God's knowledge of himself and all things as they relate to him' (p. 64).

Yet there is a dominance of contemporary voices with no sustained dialogue with pre-modern or even early modern figures (Harrower identifies Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* as a dialogue partner (p. 22) without sustained engagement with the text). One example of a consequence of this imbalance is Harrower's treatment of the Trinity. Many have noted—Barth famously—that for pre-moderns and the creeds themselves, to refer to God as three 'persons' was not to refer to God as three conscious subjects in a modern sense. Yet when Harrower (at key points in his argument) argues that God is a 'stream of consciousness' or conscious subject in which humans can share (pp. 119, 172, 208), he straightforwardly and without qualification cites as evidence of such claims regarding divine consciousness, studies on the nature of human consciousness. Harrower's mode of argumentation implies that God's life is unqualifiedly similar to a conscious human subject, without explicit discussion of the theological novelty and possible issues arising from such an approach (e.g. Ivor Davidson and Rowan Williams argue that unqualifiedly presenting God as a conscious subject is not only novel but creates intractable problems in modern Christologies). Further, Harrower refers to God as a 'mind'—another peculiarly modern divine description—without noting the ways in which such a predicate, if used at all, might need to be qualified. Finally, in some instances Harrower refers to a 'personal mind, belonging to God the Trinity,' (p. 61), while in other contexts describing the Trinity as three distinct centres of consciousness (pp. 12-13). Is God a single mind or three distinct minds? I am unsure as to Harrower's position. He proceeds so briskly to the pastoral application of the Trinity that we struggle to discern whom the triune God offering help is.

Harrower is right to contend that sustained attention to the doctrine of the Trinity yields pastoral dividends, and I applaud both the intention and the scope of his project. My concern is not that Harrower has failed to offer the particular account of the Trinity I prefer. Rather, I worry that the breadth of contemporary voices forces Harrower's analysis of the response of the triune God to horrors into a fairly narrow frame. This may lead to failures to direct us to other possible resources which reflection upon the triune God may unexpectedly offer to horror victims. Nonetheless, the God of all comfort offers victims hope and meaning in the midst of a world of horrors, and Harrower winsomely directs our attention to this God.

Jared Michelson, St Andrews