

Book Reviews

Accordance 6.9. Scholars Collection CD. By Oak Tree Software, Inc. 2006. Core bundle price, \$199.00.

As a professor of Greek and a member of the first generation to grow up regularly using computers, I have long taken an interest in Bible software programs. I have led training seminars on Bible software at my seminary and have written several reviews on PC-based Bible study software. For the PC, I favor BibleWorks for original language search capabilities, intuitive utility, and speed (see www.bibleworks.com). I have, however, always heard Apple users brag about the excellent Accordance Bible software. I jumped at the recent opportunity of surveying this product. I had to run the Accordance software with a “Macintosh Emulator” program on my PC laptop, so the software ran slower than on a Mac. Also, my PC initially lacked the Apple Quicktime software necessary to run the training DVD’s. And, while I used a Macintosh in college and seminary, I found that the past ten years on a PC have caused me to forget some of the peculiarities of the Macintosh operating system. I used to find the Mac more intuitive than Microsoft Windows. I see, however, that there would be a learning curve to return to Apple. These initial hurdles give me pause in suggesting this software to any PC users. Based on what I have seen, I still recommend BibleWorks to all PC users. For Apple users, however, I think the story is

quite different.

Unquestionably, the Accordance software is well-designed with an intuitive interface that allows multiple Bible texts and translations to be compared, as well as the quick referencing of lexicons and other tools. Before watching any of the training DVD, I found myself able to access the texts and lexicons with little difficulty. After a few DVD training sessions, my ability with the program increased dramatically. This is a good reminder that no matter how intuitive a software program claims to be, there is always a period of learning. The more time initially spent in learning the peculiarities of a program, the more intuitively-accessible and useful it will be in the long-run.

Included in the program’s core bundle (\$199) are morphologically-tagged NA27 and BHS texts, Louw & Nida, Thayer, BDB, and one modern Bible translation. This core bundle costs \$199. Additional lexicons, texts, and reference works can be unlocked individually, or one can unlock the entire staggering array of Scholar’s Collection resources for \$1,799! (I am reviewing only the “Scholar’s Collection,” but Accordance also has other Bible study resources available on a multitude of additional CDs.)

I was surprised at the excellent selection of optional texts available to Accordance users. Of all the Bible study software I have seen, Accordance likely offers the most extensive collection of ancient primary docu-

ments and scholarly tools. In addition to standard critical editions of Biblical texts in Greek and Hebrew, available morphologically-tagged texts include the Apostolic Fathers, the Apocryphal Gospels, the Greek Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, Qumran Sectarian documents, the Targums, the Mishnah, and early Hebrew Inscriptions. These additions come at a price, but are no more expensive than the hard texts would be.

If I had an Apple computer, and, thus, were familiar with the Mac operating system peculiarities, I would most likely be using Accordance. I am impressed with the program—especially the excellent selection of scholarly texts and tools. For readers who have Apple computers, I add my voices to the chorus of endorsements for this fine software program.

Robert L. Plummer

Literary Lessons from The Lord of the Rings. By Amelia Harper. Nashville, NC: Homescholar Books, 2004, 622 pp., \$50.00 paper.

Many Christian pastors and educators have the desire to incorporate the classics of English Literature into their reading regimens, but they fear that they are ill equipped to understand and to think critically about those works. My first observation is that the difficulty of understanding the classics has, in my opinion, been

greatly exaggerated. But having said that, I understand that it is entirely possible to receive what will pass as a fairly decent education without having read a single literary classic, and a person who finds himself in such a condition may feel intimidated by the prospect of plunging into the great books. Perhaps their perceived incompetence could be remedied by taking an introduction to literature course at a local university, but besides being time consuming and expensive, it is possible that the professor would spend more time emphasizing his particular critical approach to literature than he would spend on the literature itself.

In *Literary Lessons from The Lord of the Rings*, Amelia Harper has written a delightful introduction to literary studies, which, as the title implies, focuses on understanding one great book, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. The same tools necessary to enjoy and critically evaluate this one classic may easily be applied to enjoying and evaluating other great books. Choosing Tolkien's work as a paradigm of great literature was a wise choice. Harper observes in the introduction, "The Lord of the Rings differs from most novels in many ways: it incorporates the use of poetry; it involves invented languages; it contains reference resources such as maps, genealogies, and chronologies; and it was written by an Oxford English professor who used his knowledge of ancient literature to create his own novel" (9).

Harper's method of instruction starts with assuming the reader has

just finished reading a particular chapter from *Lord of the Rings*. She then leads the student through a brief review of the chapter, and then, in a vocabulary section, she teaches the meaning of unfamiliar words by pointing them out in their context—perhaps the most effective way of augmenting one's vocabulary. Throughout the book she introduces over 600 vocabulary words, all of which are gleaned from the pages of *The Lord of the Rings*. My favorite feature is the additional notes, in which Harper gives the reader juicy tidbits of information about Tolkien, his writing, and lots of interesting facts about Middle Earth. Perhaps more significantly, in the additional notes she introduces a wealth of literary ideas and motifs, all illustrated from the chapter under consideration. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions that require interaction with the text. There are also thirteen unit studies scattered throughout the book and two more in the appendices. These unit studies explore a wide variety of subjects that inform and enhance the study of the great books as well as *The Lord of the Rings* itself.

Literary Lessons from the Lord of the Rings was written to serve as a secondary school textbook, but it is more than suitable for anyone who would like to brush up on his literary skills or acquire those skills for the first time.

Jim Scott Orrick

Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to

Church. By James K. A. Smith. In *The Church and Postmodern Culture Series*, ed. James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 146 pp., \$17.99 paper.

With the arrival of *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, associate professor of philosophy at Calvin College, James K. A. Smith, provides the first volume in a new series that is intended to enhance the ongoing dialogue regarding the impact of the postmodern landscape on Christian identity and church ministry. With this goal in mind, as senior editor of this series Smith desires to engage a considerably broad audience including academicians in contemporary theology and continental philosophy as well as leading thinkers involved in the current emergent movement and church laity who are concerned about the present ethos of western culture. Such a text obviously would require a writer who is conversant with the philosophical complexities of postmodernity and able to explicate them in an accessible and lucid fashion. Smith, fortunately, has proven to be such a competent source because of his present affiliation with a growing consortium in academia known as "Radical Orthodoxy."

Herein, the author has published numerous articles and books in support of a segment of thinkers who contend that though the postmodern condition is completely justified in critiquing the modernistic myth of epistemic objectivity and autonomous rationality, it ultimately falls short because it is guilty of the same crime that the Enlightenment com-

mitted, namely it places reality in the hands of the interpreter. The only difference is that while modernity said humanity was god because of its discovery of the thinking subject or *Reason*, now postmodernity recognizes that humanity is actually a cluster of countless deities that use different kinds of *Reason(s)*. This being said, the irony is that this very hypothesis motivates assorted “Radical Orthodoxy” advocates to see the postmodern climate as advantageous because it sets the stage for promoting a new theological approach that is both sensitive to the contextual nature of knowledge and yet still committed to the Christian faith as being true confessionally as well as ontologically. However, proponents, including Smith, want to formulate strategies that methodologically diverge from how many twentieth century conservatives previously constructed the evangelical-theological enterprise because it is argued that they had been inadvertently deceived by the metaphysical poison of modernity.

In light of this project, Smith attempts to bring his thought to mainline readership by critically interacting with what are in his mind some of the more insightful observations of postmodern thought. Not only that, he makes his case by discussing arguably the three most influential French thinkers who helped mold postmodern incredulity, namely, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault. Specifically, Smith explicates some of the more well-known ideas that put each of these figures on the

philosophical map in hopes that the reader can get beyond reductionistic perceptions of these thinkers or what Smith calls bumper-sticker conceptions of postmodernity.

Following his introduction, Smith first deals with Derrida’s concept of “nothing being outside the text.” He argues that the point of this Derridian proverb is not to deny that the sum total of reality does not exist *per se*, but rather that all things only exist as they are connected and defined in an unending matrix of interpretive traditions. Smith then concludes that this point is exactly how Christians should understand the role of the gospel in the church, namely, that it provides the linguistic grid for defining and understanding the world in which it lives. Next, Smith then transitions to a treatment of Lyotard’s infamous definition of postmodernity as “incredulity toward meta-narratives.” Smith claims that this well-known dictum is valid in the sense that there is no one single story or worldview that stands out as an ideology which is true because it is based on a universal, objective, transcultural rationality. So then the age-old question arises as to how do we claim that the Christian narrative is “true?” Smith apparently thinks, in accordance with his interpretation of Lyotard’s point, that the “veracity” of the Christian faith is displayed in how the church becomes a kind of paradigmatic event wherein the corporate community visibly relives the redemptive acts of the biblical narrative for the world to see and encounter. Finally, Smith completes his triad of examinees by wrestling

with Foucault’s claim that “power is knowledge.” Smith contends that Foucault is especially helpful here because he reveals the covert influence that cultures and language have in molding our worldviews at both the corporate and individual levels. Consequently, Smith asserts that with regard to proper application, it is the church’s responsibility to form an environment wherein believers can be trained not just to affirm certain axioms but also to be a definitive people who think and live certain ways.

All in all, the book flows with a winsome charm as Smith keeps technical jargon to a minimum and cleverly opens each chapter with brief sketches of popular movies (such as *The Matrix*, *O Brother Where Art Thou*, and even *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*) in order to illustrate the overall points that he believes Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault were trying to assert. This strategy is so well done that most readers will be captivated by Smith’s analysis and judicious flare even if they disagree with his conclusions. Also, this work is helpful because it contains a concise annotated bibliography of sources for further reading and even a short list of online resources to consult if one is interested in some of topics Smith discusses.

These contributions notwithstanding though, some concerns do stand out in this work. One relates to Smith’s apparent assumption, which continues to grow among postconservative thinkers, regarding the notion that much of early twentieth-century evangelical theology imbibed from

modernistic paradigms. This mindset has been articulated in all sorts of forms in current literature but Smith's analysis and examples are sometimes tripe and even bizarre. For instance, he claims that certain denominations, which support the idea of autonomy in church polity, are actually revealing a commitment to a modified form of Cartesian individualism. After reading cursory statements like this, one is left wondering if Smith is simply misunderstanding the historical and theological background behind such ideas. Likewise, another ambiguity comes with Smith's discussion at the end of the book regarding a more aggressive consciousness of the physicality of worship. Here, Smith is picking up on the current emergent motif of having more of an emphasis on visual elements in the life and worship of the church, which fits very well within his Reformed commitments to the sacraments. However, several of his suggestions for improvement are somewhat vague and confusing at points. Finally, the most urgent concern that this work triggers is that though Smith may be on to something with regard to the criticisms of these French philosophers, the fact remains that the fundamental commitments that drove each of the thinkers were anything but Christian. This does not mean that one cannot learn from Derrida or Foucault. Yet for Smith to come across as arguing that their "fundamental" concepts, which are blatantly antithetical to Christian theism, are intrinsic or even necessary to a healthy Christian theological method and worldview is severely

problematic to say the least.

So in the end, this book is an engaging read for scholars, pastors, students, and laity alike. But still, it leaves so much unsaid that one is left wondering if Smith actually thinks that Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault are helpful for evangelical Christianity because they are actually methodologically linked to Augustine, Francis Schaeffer, and Cornelius Van Til.

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The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649. By Stephen Wright. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006, x+278 pp., \$85.00.

The emergence of the English Baptists in the seventeenth century is a subject that has attracted much attention in the past century and a half, and in the literature that has grown up around it, certain fixities have been established. Among these is the conviction that the early history of the General Baptists and that of the Particular Baptists are somewhat distinct. In this recent volume, however, Stephen Wright (Ph.D., the University of London) disputes this view and convincingly argues that the case is far more complex.

Wright begins with the General Baptists and maintains that the roots of this movement clearly lay within the matrix of Puritanism and Separatism (6-11, 13), though this Baptist grouping eventually became deeply antagonistic to both the Puritans and Separatists with whom they parted

company. The General Baptist leader Thomas Helwys, for instance, was not slow to talk of both Puritanism's and Separatism's "false prophets" while his fellow General Baptist John Murton criticized the Puritans for their belief in predestination and perseverance (52-53). Yet, as Wright ably shows, continental Anabaptism did have an influence over the development of some of these General Baptists, especially with regard to the subjects of Christology and church-state relations (58-64). Moreover, Wright argues that there were some Calvinists who were a part of these congregations into the early 1640s (see 95-110). Thus, the General Baptists were not as unified as some have believed. Extremely helpful in Wright's discussion of these Baptist congregations is his setting of their local histories within the larger framework of the Jacobean Church of England and especially William Laud's attempt to right matters within a Church that he felt had become far too preoccupied with preaching.

The Particular Baptists also had Puritan-Separatist roots, but did not toss away the Calvinist soil from which they emerged in the 1630s. Yet, Wright avers, contrary to what has been commonly thought, Calvinist soteriology was initially not the organizing principle of their churches. Rather, it was the restoration of baptism that was central. Now, it has been generally held that immersion became a part of Particular Baptist life in January 1642 when, according to what is sometimes known as the "Kiffin Manuscript"—called

“Benjamin Stinton’s transcript no. 2” by Wright—Richard Blunt returned from a special trip made to the Collegiants, a variety of Dutch Menonites, in Holland to find out how to immerse believers. According to this manuscript, Blunt received advice from a certain “Jo Batte,” who has long been thought to be the same as the Collegiant leader Jan Batten. Wright disputes this and argues that “Jo Batte” is more likely to have been Timothy Batte, a physician and lay preacher, who was associated with the General Baptist Thomas Lambe. Wright arrives at this somewhat startling conclusion by raising serious questions about Benjamin Stinton’s abilities as a transcriber—it was he who copied the key manuscript that we possess with regard to the introduction of immersion into Particular Baptist circles—and emphasizing that both Timothy Batte and Lambe were moderate Calvinists at the time (75-89). He also points out significant links between Lambe and the first Particular Baptist pastor John Spilsbury that lend support to his argument (89-95).

Wright further maintains that the immersion of believers was taking place before the famous account involving Richard Blunt. According to Wright’s investigation, Edward Barber, who later became a General Baptist, and Lambe were convinced of, and in Lambe’s case practicing, baptism by immersion before the close of 1641 (97-98). Wright thus concludes that prior to the issuing of *The First London Confession* in 1644, the lines between those who would later identify themselves as Particu-

lar Baptists and some of those who would be involved with the General Baptists are far “more fluid” than has hitherto been thought. And this was due to the fact that ecclesial alignments were being made not along theological lines but “over the proper means of church formation” (110).

When, however, Lambe’s congregation became increasingly open to theological novelties in the tumultuous early 1640s—in time it became typified as a source of “exotic heresies” (153)—Kiffin and Spilsbury, along with other leaders from seven Calvinistic Baptist churches in London, issued *The First London Confession* (1644) and, thus, there emerged “a self-conscious Particular Baptist denomination” that was quite distinct from the General Baptists (114-138).

The final third of the book focuses on Baptists and the political realm in the 1640s with Wright demonstrating that not all of the Particular Baptists were as politically conservative as William Kiffin (170). Some of them were definitely involved with such radical elements as the Levellers (200-210). Here Wright does some fabulous detective work to identify Baptists who held key positions within the Parliamentary Army (186-194). The tendency of the General Baptists—Wright details this from Lambe’s congregation—was also to political radicalism (176-185).

Wright’s central thesis concerning the relationship between the two types of English Baptists is a bold one, but he defends it with ample detail that is convincing. While I am not fully convinced of his analysis of the so-called “Kiffin Manuscript”

regarding the identity of “Jo Batte,” I do think that he capably shows that the situation prior to 1644 was a far more complex one with regard to Baptist identity than we have believed.

Two minor disagreements that need to be noted: the use of the term TULIP as a moniker for the theology of the Synod of Dort is anachronistic (50)—the term seems to have originated in nineteenth and twentieth-century defenses of Calvinism; and R. T. Kendall’s thesis regarding the supposed gulf between the Calvinism of Calvin and that of his successor of Beza is not a reliable one (115).

Michael A. G. Haykin

The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park. Edited by Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 320 pp., \$29.99 paper.

For far too long too little has been available on the men who saw themselves as the distinct heirs of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), namely those theologians who articulated what is often referred to as the New Divinity. With the renaissance of Edwards studies, though, has come a fresh interest in the thinking of that remarkable man’s disciples. This is evident in relatively recent monographs on Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), and Jonathan Edwards, Jr. (1745-1801). But even with this renewed interest in the theology of these authors, much remains to be done. The theological

perspectives of some of the central figures in this movement—men like the influential Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840) and Stephen West (1735-1819)—are still all but neglected.

Not surprisingly, little has been readily available of the primary sources of this theological movement. Limited reprints of nineteenth-century editions of the works of Hopkins, Bellamy, Emmons, and the younger Edwards had been done by Garland Publishing in the 1980s, but what has been sorely needed is a reader of the kind that Sweeney and Guelzo, both long-time students of Edwards and the New Divinity, have now put together. Ranging from selections from the “Wellspring of New England Theology”—Edwards himself—to some of those whom he personally mentored, namely, Bellamy and Hopkins, and on into the nineteenth century to the works of more distant—and some might reckon somewhat more questionable—disciples of Edwards, men such as Nathanael W. Taylor (1786-1858) and Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), this collection is indeed welcome. All of the key issues that the New Divinity dealt with are touched upon, including piety (69-132, *passim*), the New Divinity’s predilection for a governmental theology of the atonement (133-48), the key role that New Divinity men played in the abolitionist movement (149-64), and a passion for missions (165-70).

Sweeney and Guelzo provide a judicious introduction to the entire collection, as well as individual introductions to each of the thirty-two pieces included. In the general

introduction to the book they give a number of reasons why the New Divinity movement is important. Noteworthy among these reasons is the fact that study of this movement inevitably deepens one’s understanding of the course of intellectual and theological movements in the antebellum United States.

While I would have liked to have seen something included by the evangelist Asahel Nettleton (d. 1844), a New Divinity heir of Edwards and Charles Finney’s great opponent, I am thrilled with this volume and its potential for helping students of this era in American theological history appreciate the impact of the New Divinity men and their thought.

Michael A. G. Haykin

Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership. By Phil A. Newton. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005, 176 pp., \$13.99 paper.

There has been a recent proliferation of books on various aspects of polity by Baptist authors. This book, written by the pastor of South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, defends the thesis that a plurality of elders is the primary model in the NT, and that it ought to be the goal for every Baptist church today. Newton argues his thesis primarily from the NT, but also contends that plural eldership has been the primary model of leadership in both American and British Baptist life through the centuries. He pursues the historical argument in an attempt to fend

off the common argument that plural elder governance is a contradiction to the Baptist conviction that the model of polity for Baptists is congregationalism.

One of the key issues in discussions over plural elders has to do with whether there is a distinction between “ruling elders” and “teaching elders.” This was a distinction made by Calvin in his interpretation of 1 Tim 5:17, but many interpreters believe this is a false distinction, especially in light of the fact that 1 Tim 3:2 indicates that all elders need to be “able to teach.” Newton deals with this issue by making a distinction between teaching and preaching (42). He argues that the “call to preach or ability to fill the pulpit is not required of elders” (145). What Newton fails to do is to show how “teaching” and “preaching” stand in such stark contrast to one another, especially in light of the fact that the Pastoral Epistles make it clear that teaching is the primary task of the “overseer.”

There is good advice in this volume about how to help a church make the transition from being single-pastor-led to being plural-elder-led. What is not clear in this book is an answer to the question, biblically, of whether every church ought to make such a transition to a plural-elder ministry. Anyone curious about dealing with this issue ought to read this book; such a person ought also to be encouraged to read more than simply this book.

Chad Owen Brand

The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture. By Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, xx + 213 pp., \$20.00.

Hays is one of the important North American scholars investigating Paul's relationship to the Scriptures of Israel. Hays was one of the first researchers not only to study Paul's many direct quotations of the Old Testament but also to consider the manifold allusions to Scripture. The methodology and potential of this approach was set forth in Hays' study *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. Other scholars have built on Hays' methods and insights. In the present volume Hays gathers ten essays from 1980-1999 on Paul as interpreter of Israel's Scripture (all previously published, some of them revised and expanded for inclusion in the present volume). The collection intends to advance three theses (viii): "(1) the interpretation of Israel's Scripture was central to the apostle Paul's thought, (2) we can learn from Paul's example how to read Scripture faithfully; (3) if we do follow his example, the church's imagination will be converted to see both Scripture and the world in a radically new way." While the first thesis reflects the current consensus in most quarters of Pauline scholarship, the other two are controversial and likely will continue to be. Evangelicals will appreciate the desire to learn from Paul "how to read Scripture faithfully," though their conclusions of what this entails may differ from Hays.

In the Introduction (viii-xvii) Hays outlines why Paul's biblical interpre-

tation (and also the use of the OT in other sections of the New Testament) has received so much attention in recent scholarship, namely,

the post-Holocaust reassessment of Judaism and the Jewish roots of Christianity, renewed dialogue between Jewish and Christian interpreters; the demise of modernist historicism as a dominant hermeneutical paradigm; the emergence of 'intertextuality' as a vital perspective in literary-critical studies; growing interest in the biblical canon as a significant context for theological hermeneutics; and the concern within 'postliberal' theology to reconnect with the particular ways of reasoning that are integral to the classic Christian confessional tradition (ix).

Hays then shares his own journey and development with Paul as biblical interpreter. Early on Hays had a persistent sense that the church was in great need of a better way of approaching the Bible. The usual options on offer were some version of liberal demythologizing on the one hand and conservative literalism on the other. Each option was, in its own way, rigid and unimaginative, and neither was life-giving for the community of faith. Most tellingly, neither approach seemed able to account adequately for the ways in which Paul actually read biblical texts. In contrast to the demythologizing hermeneutic, Paul celebrated Scripture's witness to the real and radical apocalyptic action of God in the world; in contrast to the literalist hermeneutic, Paul engaged Scripture with great imaginative freedom, without the characteristic modernist anxiety about factuality and autho-

rial intention (ix).

While this is not the place for a detailed defence of what Hays describes as "conservative literalism," one should note that with his use of Scripture Paul was *within* the boundaries of Early Jewish exegesis of Scripture that limited his "great imaginative freedom." This was shown by several studies of Paul's quotations from the OT. In addition, when Paul refers to events of OT history, does he not presuppose their factuality? Compare, for example, Paul's reference to the election of Abraham and his descendants in Rom 9:7-12 or to Elijah's plea with God against Israel in Rom 11:2-5. Also Paul seems to understand "the things written for our instruction" in 1 Cor 10:1-11 as historical events. Because Paul regards these biblical events *as having actually taken place, they can be monitory and instructive for his churches*. Paul's understanding of Scripture as divinely inspired (1 Tim 3:16f) would likely have had an impact on his relationship to "authorial intent."

There is also a question to be raised about Paul's alleged "great imaginative freedom." Paul, the slave of Christ, hardly would have characterized his letters this way: his message is under the constraint of Christ. One may gladly admit that this is freedom, but this is not freedom of the imagination in the usual sense.

Hays describes the purpose of his quest as follows:

to explore what Scripture looks like from within Paul's imaginative narrative world. The

result of the exploration . . . is to discover a way of reading that summons the reader to an epistemological transformation, a conversion of the imagination. The fruit of such a conversion is described in this book's culmination essay, 'A Hermeneutic of Trust'" (x).

Hays then provides a brief introduction to each of the following essays (x-xv).

The introduction closes with a fine summary of Paul's interpretation of Scripture in five points (xvf):

(1) Paul's interpretation of Scripture is always a pastoral community-forming activity. His readings are not merely flights of imaginative virtuosity; rather, they seek to shape the identity and actions of a community called by God to be bearers of grace. (2) Paul's readings of Scripture are *poetic* in character. He finds in Scripture a rich source of image and metaphor that enables him to declare with power what God is doing on the world in his own time. (3) Paul reads Scripture *narratively*. It is not for him merely a repository of isolated proof texts; rather, it is the saga of God's election, judgement, and redemption of a people through time. Paul sees the church that has come into being in his own day as the heir of that vast ancient story and as the remarkable fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. (4) The fulfilment of those promises has taken an entirely unexpected turn because of the world-shattering apocalyptic event of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus. When he rereads Israel's Scripture retrospectively, Paul finds numerous prefigurations of this revelatory event—which nevertheless came as a total surprise to Israel and continues to function as a stumbling block for those who do not believe.

Paul seeks to teach his readers to read Scripture *eschatologically*. (5) Finally, Paul reads Scripture *trustingly*.

The following essays are included: "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians" (1-24); "Who Has Believed Our Message? Paul's Reading of Isaiah" (25-49); "Psalm 143 as Testimony to the Righteousness of God" (50-60); "Abraham as Father of Jews and Gentiles" (61-84); "Three Dramatic Roles: The Law in Romans 3-4" (85-100); "Christ Prays the Psalms: Israel's Psalter as Matrix of Early Christology" (101-18); "Apocalyptic Hermeneutics: Habakkuk Proclaims 'The Righteous One'" (119-42); "The Role of Scripture in Paul's Ethics" (143-62). "On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*" (163-89).

In "A Hermeneutic of Trust" (190-201) Hays starts with a critique of the often practised hermeneutic of suspicion. Its practitioners "endlessly critique the biblical texts but rarely get around to hearing Scripture's critique of us, or hearing its message of grace" (191). He then reflects on Paul's references to faith and unbelief in Romans, the relationship between trust and atonement and of Paul's own interpretative practice (also based on Romans). After his encounter with the risen Christ, Paul applied a new hermeneutic to the Scriptures:

In Paul's fresh reading of Scripture the whole mysterious drama of God's election of Israel, Israel's hardening, the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God, and Israel's ultimate restoration is displayed as foretold *in Scripture*

itself—but this foretelling can be recognized only when Scripture is read through the hermeneutic of trust. God's oracles and promises are interpreted anew, in ways no one could have foreseen, in light of the experience of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus (197).

Hays then describes the components of such a hermeneutic of trust. In order to read Scripture rightly, "we must *trust* the God who speaks through Scripture" (197). There is to be suspicion, but of a different kind: "suspicion first of all of ourselves, because our own minds have been corrupted and shaped by the present evil age (Gal 1.4). Our minds must be transformed by grace, and that happens nowhere more powerfully than through reading Scripture receptively and trustingly with the aid of the Holy Spirit" (198). Finally Hays demands that "the real work of interpretation is to *hear* the text. We must consider how to read and teach Scripture in a way that opens up its message, a way that both models and fosters trust in God." He ends with a trenchant but pertinent criticism:

So much of the ideological critique that currently dominates the academy fails to achieve these ends. Scripture is critiqued but never *interpreted*. The critic *exposes* but never *exposits*. Thus the word itself recedes into the background, and we are left talking only about the politics of interpretation, having lost the capacity to *perform* interpretations (198).

While this last essay answers fewer questions than it raises (and some of my answers would be different), it nevertheless contains many

astute observations and invites further reflection. An index of names (202-05) and of Scripture and other ancient literature (206-13) close this inspiring volume.

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Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America. By Jeffery Sheler. New York: Viking, 2006, 324 pp. \$24.95.

In recent years the national media has begun to recognize the influence of evangelicals in American life, perhaps most notably in giving voice to such scholars as Darrell Bock, Ben Witherington, and Craig Evans in network specials on Jesus, *The DaVinci Code*, and the like. In the print media a great deal of ink has been devoted to the impact of evangelicals in the election of George W. Bush. On the other hand, this newfound respectability that evangelicals seem to have obtained has yet to trickle down to the level of primetime dramas (think *Law and Order* here for example) that continue to cast evangelicals as intolerant fundamentalists.

Into this breach steps Jeffery Sheler, religion editor for *US News and World Report* and author of *Is the Bible True?* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2000). Determined to demystify the stereotype of “fundies” typically held by his colleagues and the public-at-large, and having started out fundamentalist in Grand Rapids and eventually

settling into a “conservative” Presbyterian congregation in Washington D.C., Sheler decided that it was up to an ex-believer like himself to set the record straight.

In *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America*, he visits the Focus on the Family ministry headquarters, Saddleback Church, Wheaton College, the Creation festival (an outdoor contemporary Christian rock/folk fest), political operatives in Washington, and goes on a mission trip to Guatemala with a church group.

After a few inconsequential visits elsewhere, Sheler visits the Focus on the Family ministry headquarters in Colorado Springs. He is there to interview James Dobson, who many consider to be America’s most influential evangelical. Politics “dominates” his interview with Dr. Dobson (Dobson was formerly a practicing child psychologist), though acknowledging that the focus on politics was clearly irritating Dobson. Latching onto a touring Brethren couple on his way out of Focus on the Family headquarters, he discovers that “common” people do not think Dobson should focus so much on politics; they liked him much better when he talked family.

Moving on, he next gives high marks to Rick Warren, Saddleback Church, and Wheaton College, seeming at times wistful as if recalling the better angels of his fundamentalist past. The chapter on Wheaton perhaps makes the most poignant observation in the book (at least from the viewpoint of the uninitiated). Evangelical Christianity in America is no longer characterized by the

anti-scholastic stance it adopted in the 1930s.

Oddly, in the Saddleback segment, Sheler recounts a conversation with a just-baptized couple who claimed that prior devotion to a Wiccan goddess brought them closer to Christ. After reading *Mere Christianity*, they became open to explore Saddleback where “one of the main tenets of this church is that you believe in Christ, but it’s not exclusionary to that extreme (people who are not Christians are going to hell).” Sheler points out that they probably were not ready for the “meat” (though clearly Saddleback, in spite of having a seeker-sensitive orientation, does not embrace universalism in any form).

Perhaps the highest mark Sheler gives is to a group of lay churchmen from Alabama who habitually go short-term to Guatemala to aid in construction. As if to offset their sacrifice, he mentions an agnostic woman who has given up everything to join the staff of Habitats for Humanity in Guatemala. Likewise, the chapter on the Creation festival, the largest of a dozen national outdoor jam fests (of every scope) held each year, gets good press. Sheler’s conclusion: Christian teens suffer the same conflict with their role in the world as their secular counterparts (though for different reasons). As with other recapitulations, Sheler’s reconstruction of Christian Rock history is facile and well-documented. He notes the festival’s standard of conduct in regard to the mosh pit fronting the stage area, “Just up and down ... no sideways please.”

Next, Sheler focuses on the presence of evangelical think tanks in Washington, following the trail of Richard Cizik, the National Association of Evangelicals's liaison for government affairs. On political activism in the evangelical ranks, Sheler is generally both irenic and agnostic in his analysis, suggesting that, in so many words, Christian activists have graduated from the "mosh pit" to the chessboard.

In the last chapter, he interviews two prominent evangelical scholars on the emergence of evangelicals as a political force. R. Albert Mohler Jr. of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary concedes that political involvement is no longer an option, but that we need to have limited finite goals for government.

Conversely, Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary suggests that Christians need to construct a theology of engagement as a means to advance cautiously in the public square now that we are no longer socially marginalized. It is not doctrine that presented a threat to unity, but preachers and leaders who advocate for partisan politics.

Early on (65) Sheler had erroneously painted Fuller as symbolic of evangelicalism while contrasting the SBC as representative of America's fundamentalist past. Rather, it is more accurate to say that Fuller Theological Seminary is representative of British evangelicalism (meaning that it is not-quite moderate), while the SBC seminaries are, in reality, certainly much more closely representative of American evangelicalism!

It may well be that Sheler's book

might accomplish what it sets out to do, that is, inform his media partners on some of the misconceptions concerning evangelicalism in America. For a novice having taken a crash course in American church history, theology, and missions, he is accurate for the most part and displays this information dispassionately.

The index itself pretty much reflects topics advanced by the media, with the most frequently cited topics being: the Republican Party (20); the NAE (18); the Southern Baptist Convention (18); Pat Robertson (18); liberalism (15); abortion (15); Billy Graham, James Dobson, and Jerry Falwell (14 each); gay marriage (12); elections (11); George W. Bush, Mark Noll, and Bible infallibility (10 each).

Yet, I must admit a certain disappointment with regard to the promotional literature heralding this release; particularly its thesis that posits a major disconnect between Christian leaders and moderately minded "common" folk. In this regard, *Believers* fails to deliver, which is surprising given the extensive analysis Sheler gave to the subject in his article, "Nearer My God to Thee": "Their distinctive faith aside, evangelicals are acting more and more like the rest of us" (*US News & World Report*, 3 May, 2004).

Actually, one cannot quite come away from reading his book without noticing that the "common" folk Sheler has in mind is the moderate himself; that is, speaking in terms of moderate theologically rather than moderate socially. Still, *Believers* is a book that many should read, if only

for an enlightening look inside an outsider's look inside.

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God & Country: How Evangelicals Have Become America's New Mainstream. By Monique El-Faizy. London: Bloomsbury, 2006, 288 pp. \$24.95.

The year 2006 has seen a spate of books on evangelicals. These run the gamut from those that try to correct the public perception that evangelicals are intolerant fundamentalists: *God and Country* by NY Daily News' Monique El-Faizy (Bloomsbury), *Believers* by US News & World Report's Jeffery L. Sheler (Viking), *Righteous* by Lauren Sandler (Viking), *Welcome to the Homeland* by NPR's Brian Mann (Steerforth), and *Holyland USA* by Peter Feuerherd (Crossroad); to those that try to reinforce the public perception that evangelicals are intolerant fundamentalists, principally, *Letter to a Christian Nation* by Sam Harris (Knopf) and *Thy Kingdom Come (An Evangelical's Lament): How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* by Randall Balmer (Basic).

Of these, two are written by former "fundamentalists" themselves, Jeffery Sheler and Monique El-Faizy, and the way in which they became fundamentalist often colors the tone of their perception of evangelicalism. Sheler was a lonely teenager who decided for himself to attend a fundamentalist church in Michigan. El-Faizy, however, was brought into a fundamentalist church in Califor-

nia as an eight-year-old when her parents joined the church. For ten years she claims to have embraced these beliefs. For Sheler it was much shorter, though eventually he found his way to a decidedly less-conservative Presbyterian church in Washington D.C.

Along the way, the paths of Sheler and El-Faizy likewise intersect (though not at the same time), visiting Colorado Springs though different people, Rick Warren's Saddleback Church (CA), Wheaton College (IL), and the Creation (Christian Rock) Festival in south-central Pennsylvania. Similarly, they both deliver mostly accurate chapters dedicated to the history of evangelicalism in America, thanks in no small part to church historian Mark Noll of Notre Dame. Their paths also diverge, Sheler spending more time addressing the influence of evangelicals in politics while El-Faizy delivers a stunning and sobering assessment of the Christian media (publishing, music, and Hollywood).

Earlier in her book when El-Faizy, like Sheler, visits her original home church, then visits a section of other congregations, a repetitive theme seems to develop around the conscious attempts of Christians to sell Jesus. At first I wondered what the source of her perception was. When I finally reached chapter five, "Spreading the Word," it became clear. El-Faizy believes evangelicals are selling out in order to become kosher to the mainstream, employing the same marketing techniques as their secular counterparts to sell a softer, friendlier Jesus who, as a

matter of fact, might not even get mentioned!

Thus, the problem is not that the public sees Christians as morphs of Falwell, Dobson, and Robertson, or that they once saw Christians as hapless hypocrites after the fashion of Bakker and Swaggart. The problem is that neither are true, but what is true is a problem.

Of course, from El-Faizy's perspective, it is up to the discerning reader to recognize this, as she is prone to giving mixed messages. In her chapters on Christian publishing and music, she faults evangelicals for adopting secular tactics in marketing their products. But in the chapter on Hollywood and Christian colleges, she faults evangelicals for failing to be broad enough in their perspectives. So, the moral of the story would be that evangelicals need to engage the world with caution but faithfully, recognizing that many will always criticize (Luke 7:31-35).

One poignant remark that particularly resonated with me was the observation that attending Wheaton College was a rather traumatic hurdle for many who had come with a simplistic knowledge of Scripture. I myself had undergone a similar crisis of faith when I first attended seminary, discovering that critical issues related to biblical study were much more complex than I had thought. For me, accepting the unmitigated veracity of gospel truth was indeed a crucible of trust that ultimately strengthened my personal faith. For yet others, such crises of certitude will perhaps lead to an irretrievable "falling off the wagon," an experience

the author claims for herself (though in different words, of course).

Further, El-Faizy, to her credit, gives props where props are deserved. She rightly identifies Robert Schuller as the forefather of the seeker-sensitive church movement and Chuck Smith's Maranatha Music as responsible for the sea-change in American worship style and the emergence of Christian contemporary music as a force.

Like Sheler also, she occasionally stumbles in her characterizations, labeling James Dobson as a fundamentalist (rather than evangelical). She also compares the theology behind the Left Behind series as a nineteenth-century phenomena equivalent to the emergence of the horror novel (*Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, etc.). Perhaps the greatest divergence from Sheler is that she does not look wistfully back upon her own experience with Christianity.

For this reason, she is to be especially commended for trying to remain the objective reporter she is, and in the process, giving Christians something to chew on. This is a book to be reckoned with, and not so much for the benefit of the secularists who need to discover that Christians are really not all that different from themselves. No, this a must-read for Christians, a shot across the bow if you will.

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