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Reviews

Using the Bible in Practical Theology: *Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Zoë Bennett (London: Routledge, 2014), 160 pp, £19.99 pbk

This is a book written not only for students of practical theology who need to think about how the Bible features as a source of theology in dialogue with other sources like tradition, reason and experience. It is also written for people in churches who are wrestling with how the Bible relates to their everyday lives, aware of their own changing perspectives and sometimes contradictory attitudes.

The author begins from a commitment to the Bible as a source for theology and as a place of encounter with God, but she expresses also a desire for an intellectual honesty about our own interpretive lenses, wanting to move beyond both what she calls the 'tyranny of the text' and the 'tyranny of experience'. Section 1 of the book deals with the sterile polarisations that can emerge when we assume that liberals engage only with their experience and evangelicals only with the Bible as a flat text. She illustrates, instead, the ways in which conservative thinkers, like the 1948 author of *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, B. B. Warfield, claim that only inerrancy can explain their experience, while some feminist theologians like Daphne Hampson justify their experience of the full humanity of women through the Bible.

Section 2 of the book highlights the way in which the Scriptures are held by living people in contingent and contextual ways through an extended dialogue with the work of John Ruskin.

Ruskin (1819–1901) is better known as an art critic and social critic, and for his short-lived unhappy marriage, than as a practical theologian. He was a daily

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reader of the Bible, however, and the quantity of references to the Bible in his various works reveal someone who was, at times, inspired by the Bible, and yet who was aware that his interpretation of it was shaped by his changing experiences and perspectives. As such, Bennett argues that Ruskin's relationship with the Bible is suggestive for those of us who would be personal and public theologians today.

Insisting that what matters to Ruskin (and to Christian living) is not so much a system for making connections, as the daily practice of seeing connections, in Section 3 Bennett expounds this approach in three contexts where she sees not reflection *on* action but reflection *in* action: in the Occupy movement that led to the resignation of Giles Fraser from St Paul's Cathedral in 2011; in the Kairos Palestine Document of 2009; and in her own work in leading a doctoral programme within the Cambridge Theological Federation. In each context she argues that the protagonists are seeing connections and living them in ways that are both critically self-aware and passionately engaged.

This is a book that draws on a wealth of hermeneutical sophistication but is oriented to practical ends. What Bennett invites us into is a way of thinking that is 'more fluid and mobile, a more warm and hospitable and ultimately a more fruitful and faithful way of engaging with the Bible together' (p. 51).

Jane Leach

Rethinking Biblical Literacy, ed. Katie Edwards (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 208 pp, £22.99 pbk

Rethinking Biblical Literacy sets out, as Katie Edwards says in her editorial introduction, 'to complicate and problematize the biblical literacy debate so far' (p. x). Indeed, the nine essays in the volume collectively challenge a narrow understanding of biblical literacy (which tends to focus on the decline of Bible reading and Bible knowledge in the West) and suggest many places one might go looking for it: English political discourse (James Crossley, pp. 23–46), *Lost*, the television series (Matthew Collins, pp. 71–94), street art (Amanda Dillon, pp. 95–118), Madonna's pop song, 'Girl Gone Wild' (Alan Hooker, pp. 119–142), *The Simpson*s television series (Robert Myles, pp. 143–164), the novel, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Caroline Blyth, pp. 165–186), or the comedy of Eddie Izzard (Christopher Meredith, pp. 187–212).

The only essay to focus on the more traditional concerns of biblical literacy is the first of the volume, by Máire Byrn, who focuses on biblical literacy in Ireland, raising issues about the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and religious education. Iona Hine's essay, 'The Quest for Biblical Literacy', perhaps more than any other, focuses on the issues surrounding the concept of biblical literacy itself, affirming the need to consider broader understandings of both 'biblical' and 'literacy', as these concept relate to the phrase 'biblical literacy' (pp. 43–67).

As one reads the essays, a basic thesis is implied – an argument with which most, if not all, of the essays appear to agree: the widespread (and widely reported) claim that biblical literacy is in decline is probably mistaken (or misguided) because (1) biblical literacy should account for more than rote Bible knowledge, since (2) cultural appropriations of the Bible (especially in popular media) indicate and depend upon familiarity with biblical motifs or storylines. This line of thinking is presented in the volume's opening paragraph, for example, where the claims of the decline of biblical literacy are juxtaposed with a few examples of the 'renewed attention to the Bible in the media' (p. ix), leading to the claim that 'Popular culture, then, is in a constant state of retelling, reinterpreting and re-appropriating biblical stories, characters and figures, and yet annual reports from Christian organizations repeatedly warn us of a steep

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decline in biblical literacy' (p. ix). What would strengthen the volume is an essay that argues for (or against) this in a more sustained manner, especially querying the extent to which biblical tropes in pop culture map to individual literacies.

In sum, *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* is eminently readable and informative, and will be of interest to anyone who is concerned with the cultural appropriation of the Bible. It raises many important questions, even if it provides few answers. Footnotes (not endnotes) make citations easy to navigate, and a reasonably sized subject-name index offers further accessibility.

Josh Mann

***Repentance at Qumran**: The Penitential Framework of Religious Experience in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Mark A. Jason (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 208 pp, £38.99 pbk

Mark Jason provides an illuminating study of a theological-liturgical motif integrated within an impressive array of Qumran writings: repentance. After examining the textual evidence for repentance in the scrolls, Jason further attempts to locate the ritual-liturgical act of repentance within the structures of the practical, daily life of the Qumran community. The study, thus, takes a theological-liturgical motif, somewhat peripheral to the predominant contemporary models for understanding Qumran, and prioritises it as the crucial lens for interpreting the community's self-understanding and religious experience: 'The starting point of religious experience at Qumran was a penitential experience' (p. 103).

In dealing with the complexities of the Qumran corpus, across time, as well as provenience, the study prioritises classic 'sectarian documents' believed to have been composed from within the Qumran movement (*Pesharim*, *Rule of the Community*, *Rule of the Congregation*, *Hodayot*, *Damascus Document*, *Some of the Works of the Torah*, *Temple Scroll*). Also treated are additional liturgical compositions that emphasise repentance within the context of worship and religious experience (4Q393, 4Q434–438, 4Q504–506).

A treatment of core sectarian passages of the *Rule of the Community* (8.1–14) and *Some of the Works of the Torah* (C 7–8) reveals the relationship between repentance and the community's sectarian separation from the larger Jewish community. The community's spatial locale in the wilderness literally embodied its penitential 'turning away' from sinful Israel and its corrupt legal practices. While many contemporary movements also emphasised repentance and separation within its historical environment, 'the community's identity as a separate, organized, spatial entity at Qumran … clearly rendered the Qumran community different from other "separatist groups" of that era' (p. 82).

Within the larger arena of the community's theology, penitence was also related in conceptually sophisticated ways with predeterminism, purification and eschatology. Penitence combined both personal volition and predestination by God (p. 142). The community's penitence was, thus, preordained

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and ritually embodied through exclusive water purification rituals (*Rule of the Community* 3.1–9). Through ritual, penitence became a daily way of life, a continual process that defined the community's identity. Moreover, the community envisioned its penitence within an eschatological framework in which it played a distinct role (*Some of the Works of the Torah* C 13–22): their own repentance 'inaugurated the eschatological age' (p. 228) and embodied the latter-day penitence through which God was redeeming the elect of Israel.

Jason's study provides a valuable portrait of the Qumran community as an early Jewish penitence movement. This penitence model may complement/refine more political, sociological or legal approaches to Qumran. In so doing, the study further illuminates varied conceptualities of repentance within early Judaism and the nascent church. The diversity of conceptions within the scrolls themselves will remain an unresolved problem (eg, certain tensions remain between the *Rule*, *Damascus Document* and *Hodayot*), even if Jason's contribution successfully presents a more encompassing synthesis, a holistic portrait of the community's penitential theology and self-understanding.

Casey Elledge

***Reading the Poetry of First Isaiah**: The Most Perfect Model of Biblical Poetry*, J. Blake Couey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 272 pp, £65.00 hbk

This monograph is a substantially revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation, defended at Princeton. Its title should not mislead the reader into thinking that Couey is unaware of those recent developments that have led many scholars to rediscover the value of reading Isaiah as a complex unity. Here, as always, his line is balanced, informed and judicious. He is clearly well aware of the problematic nature of Duhm's analysis of the book, but implies that, whatever the merits of that analysis, its former status as an 'assured result' has contributed to a focus on the poetic excellences of the chapters following Isaiah 40.1 to the detriment of the poetry of Isaiah1—39. Couey's aim is to redress this neglect. Acknowledging our great debt to Robert Lowth (1710–1787), the father of the academic study of Hebrew poetics, who saw in Isaiah 'the most perfect model of biblical poetry', Couey seeks to show how that judgement is as valid for many poetic sections in 1—39 as it is for the later chapters.

In a short (20 pages) Introduction Couey justifies his methodology; one that, in keeping with a certain scepticism about 'final form' analysis, treats individual poems in relative isolation 'with minimal attention to their arrangement or connections to other parts of the book' (p. 12). However, his approach is not mere formalism; he also asserts the value of allowing accounts of the historical background to inform interpretation. Admitting the subjective, provisional nature of such accounts, he nevertheless endorses the traditional understanding that Judah in the eighth century BC offers the most plausible context for much of Isaiah 1—39. Three roughly equal chapters follow, each devoted to a particular topic: *viz.* the poetic line in first Isaiah, the poetics of structure and movement in the book and, finally, imagery and metaphor. Each chapter ends with a reading of an extended passage, readings that open up the meaning of the chosen text in fruitful and illuminating ways. He concludes with a very short summary of his main themes and findings with some brief suggestions for further enquiry.

Couey's style is clear. He explains technical terms accurately and simply, drawing extensively on the text of Isaiah to illustrate the points he is making.

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His preference for the vocabulary of the literary rather than the biblical critics (eg, 'line, couplet and triplet' rather than 'colon, bicolon and tricolon') makes for clarity and accessibility. However, this is also a book of great value for specialists who will find judicious and nuanced discussions of some of the most contentious points in the field, for instance the question of synonymy and progression in biblical 'parallelism' (pp. 71–91).

Hebrew is represented throughout by transliteration; I suppose to make the book more accessible. It would have been helpful to have had the Masoretic text complete with *te'amim* ('cantillation marks') as well. This, however, is a quibble. Couey has made a splendid contribution not just to the study of Isaiah but to the discussion of Hebrew poetry in general.

Peter Hatton

Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence, Jonathan Sacks (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), 305 pp, £20.00 hbk

What if God's big project is to reconcile and bring human beings together not divide or separate them? This is the question held up by Jonathan Sacks in his timely and prophetic book on confronting religious and politicised religious violence. The book concludes with the stirring challenge,

> today God is calling us, Jew, Christian and Muslim, to let go of hate and the preaching of hate, and live at last as brothers and sisters, true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith, honouring God's name by honouring his image, humankind. (p. 267)

It would be easy to take incidents of violence like the 9/11 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, or the London (2007), Mumbai (2008), Paris (2015) or Brussels (2016) attacks, or The Troubles in Northern Ireland, or the current conflict in Syria, or the blatant violence of religious bigots of different faiths, and assert like Hitchens[1] that 'religion kills'. There is a need for serious theological examination and reflection on this charge.

Jonathan Sacks' book provides a good, sustained theological examination of the roots of religious violence. Sacks acknowledges that while religion can be hateful, much violence is political not religious. He argues that we have to re-examine the theologies that do lead to violent conflict, and is honest enough to locate 'the problem in Jewish, not just Christian and Islamic theology'.

Sacks' book is structured into three sections. The first section assesses Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the three faiths that are rooted in Abraham, and their 'fraught, often violent relationships'. Here Sacks explores the complexity of issues around identity, tribalism, and the concepts of the scapegoat, mimetic desire and sibling rivalry. He turns to biblical stories of sibling rivalry particularly in Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and Rachel and Leah, for some understanding of religiously motivated hatred and violence. Sacks admits the unexpected surprise of identifying the roots of hatred between Jews, Christians and Muslims in these stories.

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The second section is devoted to a reassessment and reinterpretation of these stories of sibling rivalry. Sacks invites another look at the subtext of the stories of sibling rivalry in Genesis and offers an interpretation which shows that God refuses to favour one side and to 'reject' the other side. For example, Ishmael is not vilified. Both Isaac and Ismael stand beside each other and are affirmed as Abraham's 'sons' (Genesis 25:9) at the time of his burial. There is a 'counter-narrative' and 'a story beneath a story' leading to a reconciliation of the brothers. The work of God is to bless people, not curse them. We can see this in the different sibling rivalry stories in Genesis. Here rivalry, anger and revenge among siblings is challenged at the very root. God blesses both 'rivals'. Sibling rivalry is rejected. This is the reply of God to those who commit violence in God's name. For Sacks this has 'astonishing interfaith implications'.

In the third section Sacks considers the universality of justice and the particularity of love in the light of the stories of the Flood, the universal Noahic Covenant, the Tower of Babel (Genesis 6—9), and the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12). These stories affirm that there is human diversity, that identity is plural, and the rejection of the imposition of a single culture on all people. What transcends difference is that all human beings bear the image of God. This unity in God challenges us all to see the image of God in each other, in those who are different from us, the stranger, the outsider. The ethnicity, identity, faith and culture of others is not the same as ours, but they are made in the image of God. He calls us to experience an event from the perspective of the victim and to discover the brother and sister in the stranger, the other. So Sacks can assert that 'those who murder God's image in God's name commit a double sacrilege'. In his view the Bible rejects literal interpretation, sibling rivalry, hatred, the alliance of religion with power, and violence in the name of God. Fundamentalism for him is text without interpretation, and this is an act of violence against tradition. Sacks challenges us to let go of hate and replace swords with words, dialogue and reasoning. Prophets use words, not weapons.

Jonathan Sacks, writing as a Jew, reflects deeply on the hatred of Jews in Hitler and the Holocaust, and in contemporary Jihadists. His book is essential reading for all religious and political leaders and preachers. It offers ample material for interfaith dialogue. His reflections point to resources that religion can offer for the complex ongoing conversations centred on national identity, young people's search for identity and their engagement with extremist political and religious organisations. Religions can indeed be very hateful. Religions also offer the ways of nonviolence and peace shown in scriptures. Religions have a role to play in providing a moral sense and ethical codes, and in seeking the

widest participation in building hospitable as opposed to hostile communities. In our internet world exclusivism is a contradiction. It is possible for everyone to be included, to engage everyone and make sure all of us are included in the discussion.

Inderjit Bhogal

Note

1. C. Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, London: Atlantic Books, 2007.