

vide a series of assessments of the ways in which the various 'practices' of cultures – aesthetic, political, religious – inform and are informed by scripture (2).” The thirty essays, mainly by British authors, seek to explore the impact of the Bible or particular biblical texts on various periods of history (e.g. the Reformation), politics in general, ecology and other topics or on specific communities in different parts of the world. The articles close with bibliographies.

Part one is concerned with ‘Revealing the past’, considering the Bible’s journey through time from the Ancient World to the modern world. P.R. Davies surveys ‘The Ancient World’, K. Cooper ‘The Patristic Period’, M. Dove ‘The Middle Ages’ (emphasis on Wycliffe and the translation of the Bible into English); I.N. Rashkow ‘The Renaissance’ (translation into the vernacular), P. Matheson ‘The Reformation’, E. Cameron ‘The Counter-Reformation’ and J.W. Rogerson ‘The Modern World’ (post-enlightenment history of biblical scholarship).

Part two describes how Bible and culture relate to each other in different religions and parts of the world (Christianity and Europe are sufficiently covered in part one, so they do not need entries of their own): E. Kessler, ‘Judaism’ (including the Bible in Jewish art); S.N. Lambden, ‘Islam’ (including the resemblances between Bible and the Quran, accusations of scriptural falsification); C.-S. Song, Asian forms of Christianity; J.A. Draper, ‘Africa’; S.M. Langston, ‘North America’; E.S. Gerstenberger, ‘Latin America’ and R. Boer and I. Abraham, ‘Australasia’.

Part three, ‘the Bible and the senses’, focuses on aesthetic and performative renderings of the Bible: J. Carruthers, ‘Literature’ (sketching a history of re-writing, supplementation and defamiliarization); A. Bach, ‘Film’; J.W. Rogerson, ‘Music’; H.J. Hornik and M.C. Parsons, ‘Art’; A. Ballantyne, ‘Architecture’; M. Twycross, ‘The Theatre’ (medieval dramatizations, liturgical drama); B.O. Long, ‘The Circus’ (a dramatization of *The Fall of Nineveh* performed in Philadelphia in 1892) and G. Loughlin, ‘The Body’.

Part four describes ‘Reading in practice’. There is G. West on ‘Contextuality’; T. Gorringer on ‘Politics’; A. Primavesi on ‘Ecology’; I.N. Rashkow on psycho-analytical approaches; D.F. Sawyer on ‘Gender’ (addressing feminist hermeneutics); J. Carruthers on ‘Nationalism’; S.A. Bong on ‘Post-colonialism’ (Asia is used as example); and A. Tate on ‘Postmodernism’. The volume closes with indexes.

This volume provides a refreshing survey of the complex relationship between Bible and culture(s). It raises several hermeneutical issues which are aptly summarised by Sawyer’s introduction and to which scholars from different backgrounds and other readers of the Bible need to find appropriate responses. In many ways the book is post-modern and also politically correct in its approach. Diversity is appreciated and celebrated. Though the question of validity in interpretation is not its focus

(and rightly so!), the volume draws attention to this neglected question as the interaction between Bible and culture has not always been a happy one. Far too many (thoughts and) acts have been justified and called for by deliberate or ignorant false readings of biblical texts. What are the instruments to deal with them? It would be worthwhile to also describe how the Bible itself, responsibly interpreted, has in many cases provided the necessary correctives – though it at times took far too long to bring about change. In addition to considering the consequences of false readings, one also needs to respect the integrity of the biblical authors who first and foremost deserve to be understood on their own terms.

Christoph Stenschke
Pretoria, South Africa

The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology

John Webster, Kathryn Tanner,
Iain Torrance (eds.)

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, xii + 708pp,
£ 80.75, cloth; ISBN 978-0-19-924576-5

SUMMARY

This book aims to provide an overall account of the field of systematic theology as it is understood by contemporary practitioners, to ‘take stock of where the discipline lies’. The book unfolds in four parts encompassing a total of thirty-seven entries. Part I considers doctrinal *loci*; Part II explores the ‘Sources’ of theology; Part III focuses on a selection of interactions that systematic theology takes up in giving a conceptual reconstruction of Christian teaching; and in Part IV, entries examine the ‘Prospects’ of systematic theology. It is difficult to imagine another volume that rivals the quality, scope and diversity of the contributions found here. University professors will find the essays here useful as brief introductions to the doctrinal *loci* of Christian theology, the settings in which it is conducted and sources from which it has traditionally made use.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Herausgeber des *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* beschreiben seinen beabsichtigten Zweck damit, dass es eine übergreifende Darstellung des Gebietes der systematischen Theologie bietet, wie diese von ihren gegenwärtigen Fachleuten verstanden wird, mit ihren Worten: „eine Bestandsaufnahme zu bieten, wo die Disziplin steht“. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, entfaltet sich das Buch nach einem einleitenden Artikel von John Webster in vier Teile, die insgesamt 37 Einträge umfassen. Teil I betrachtet lehrmäßige *loci*; im zweiten Teil untersuchen die Artikel die „Quellen“ der Theologie; der dritte Teil, „Gespräche“, konzentriert sich auf eine Auswahl von Interaktionen, die die systematische Theologie aufgreift, um eine konzeptionelle Rekonstruktion der christlichen Lehre zu bieten; und im vierten Teil untersuchen die Einträge die „Aussichten“ der systematischen Theologie. Man kann sich schwer-

lich einen anderen Band vorstellen, der der Qualität, der Bandbreite und der Vielfalt der hier gesammelten Beiträge gleich kommt. Professoren werden diese Artikel als kurze Einführungen in die lehrmäßigen loci der christlichen Theologie, in die Situationen, in der diese Theologie betrieben wird und in die Quellen, die sie traditionell benutzt hat, hilfreich finden.

RÉSUMÉ

Les éditeurs de ce manuel de théologie systématique indiquent qu'il veut apporter une présentation générale du champ de la théologie systématique telle qu'elle se pratique de nos jours et dresser un état des lieux de la discipline. Après un article d'introduction par John Webster, trente sept articles se répartissent en quatre parties. La première aborde des thèmes doctrinaux, la deuxième traite des sources de la théologie, la troisième présente une sélection de débats auxquels la théologie systématique donne lieu dans son entreprise de reconstruction conceptuelle de l'enseignement chrétien et la quatrième offre des éléments de prospective pour la discipline. Il est difficile d'imaginer un autre ouvrage qui égalerait la qualité de celui-ci, l'étendue du champ couvert et la diversité des contributions. Il offre des introductions brèves mais utiles aux différents sujets de la théologie chrétienne, les milieux dans lesquels elle s'élabore et les sources auxquelles elle a traditionnellement puisé.

* * * *

The editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* describe its purpose as providing an overall account of the field of systematic theology as it is understood by contemporary practitioners, in their words to 'take stock of where the discipline lies'. Toward this end, following an introductory essay by John Webster the book unfolds in four parts encompassing a total of thirty seven entries.

Part I considers doctrinal *loci* and is populated by pieces on the Trinity, creation, the human creature, election, salvation, church and eschatology, to name a few. In Part II, essays by contributors such as A.N. Williams, Stephen Fowl and Ellen Charry explore what are considered the 'Sources' of theology (including revelation, tradition, worship, reason, and experience). The third part of the volume, 'Conversations', focuses on a selection of interactions that systematic theology takes up in giving a conceptual reconstruction of Christian teaching. There, for example, Duane Stephen Long, Oliver Davies and Kathryn Tanner give their attention to moral theology, hermeneutics and cultural theory respectively; other chapters cover biblical studies, history, philosophy, natural science and the arts. Part IV examines the 'Prospects' of systematic theology. Welcome additions include John Webster's piece, 'Theologies of Retrieval', Christopher Rowland's on liberation theology and Joy Ann McDougall's on feminist theology.

It is difficult to imagine another volume that rivals

the quality, scope and diversity of the contributions found here. While the steep price makes it hardly reasonable for someone to purchase for their personal library, this *Oxford Handbook* will be a welcome addition to any university or seminary library. For researchers and interested readers, the footnotes, bibliographies and suggested reading lists provide useful launching points for continued study. Professors in upper level university courses and graduate classrooms would find these essays useful as brief introductions to the doctrinal loci of Christian theology, the settings in which it is conducted and sources from which it has traditionally made use. (I know of at least one prominent Scottish University who uses this text for that purpose.)

From the standpoint of its pedagogical usefulness, there is a further angle for evaluating a text like this: The way in which material is presented and what that offers instructors by way of exposing students to various theological methodologies. Authors were asked to (1) offer an analysis of the state of the question in their assigned topic; (2) indicate important issues of contention, whether formal or material, and how they are variously resolved; (3) to make judgments about the ways in which constructive developments into a particular issue might be pursued. However, decidedly few contributions successfully fulfil each aim in equal measure and this provides the reader with an instructive window through which to view various 'modes' in which the craft of systematic theology is practiced. The essays most often fall into one of three modes: (1) surfacing and then addressing a particular *problem* in the theological tradition; (2) surveying the tradition and putting forth the various options for contemporary theology; (3) developing a constructive proposal that far outweighs any analysis of the state of the question. For example, David Kelsey's essay on the human creature operates primarily in the first mode: he brings out what appears to be 'problems' for theology by surveying the state of the question in Christian theological anthropology (and more specifically in modern theology), but never shifts gears into the constructive mode. In not doing so, one finds Kelsey interacting very little with the sources and norms of Christian theology, particularly scripture, and what options theology might find in the tradition. Kelsey's essay provides a useful window onto the operation of a particular mode of theology and would, therefore, offer an instructor easy access to discussing its gains and losses.

Several essays do in fact fulfil the editorial team's intended aims and stand out in their balanced treatment of each. Ben Quash's essay on revelation efficiently gets to the heart of the matter and provides the reader a purview of major interpretive options before elegantly offering its own proposal. The same could be said for the contributions by Fred Sanders (the Trinity), Reinhard Hüter (the Christian Life) and John Webster (Theologies of Retrieval).

Kent Eilers, Muskegon, Michigan