

Reviews

WILLIAM B. WHITNEY, *PROBLEM AND PROMISE IN COLIN E. GUNTON'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION*. LEIDEN AND BOSTON: BRILL, 2013. VIII + 213 PP. [ISBN 978-900425-03-14].

Andrew Picard

Carey Baptist College, Auckland.

Colin Gunton was a very significant theologian in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Secondary literature on Gunton is still in its infancy, and William Whitney's book, adapted from his PhD, is a welcome contribution to the developing conversation on Gunton's work. Whitney engages with one of Gunton's major contributions to systematic theology, the doctrine of creation, and fills a genuine gap to this point. As the author rightly suggests, Gunton's trinitarian theology of creation is a central aspect of his constructive theology, around which many other important Guntonian themes cohere.

Whitney's book is divided into five chapters, beginning with Gunton's critical analysis of the influence of Western Hellenistic dualisms and the culture of modernity upon the development of the doctrine of creation. These gnostic cosmologies undermine material being for the sake of immateriality with the result that we seek salvation from the creation rather than the salvation of creation. Whitney acknowledges Gunton's propensity to employ sweeping historiographical tropes in his analysis of variegated history, especially his polemical work on Augustine, whilst helpfully suggesting that Gunton's perceived criticisms of Augustine are better understood as representative errors in the tradition from which his constructive work commences. Irenaeus serves as one of Gunton's major positive foils, who upholds the aseity of God and the freedom and integrity of creation by his emphasis upon *creatio ex nihilo*. This establishes the contingency and goodness of creation as created reality which God interacts with personally through his Son and in the Spirit to bring it towards an end which is greater than its beginning. Whitney captures the importance of Irenaeus' influence upon Gunton's view of the eschatological structuring of creation towards perfection through time.

In chapter two, Whitney outlines Gunton's major analysis of modernity in *The One, the Three and the Many* and notes Gunton's extensive account of modernity's deleterious effects upon human being in the world. Gunton's criticisms of modernity extend to the historical-critical method and its quest for direct language in christology. Whitney helpfully shows that it is against this critique that Gunton develops his theory of metaphor as indirect, yet truthful, speech about God. Such a theory of metaphor and language's polyvalent meaning opens possibilities of indwelling the world. It is the need for indwelling the world which Whitney notes as central to Gunton's project because modernity's rugged individualism is a threat to personal and relational being. The displacement of the God by divinized human reason robs divine and human relationality of the necessary space for otherness-in-relation. Freedom, in Gunton's theology, is defined as being set free through the Son for relationship with God, others and the creation by the Spirit's personalizing, particularising and perfecting action.

Chapter three examines Gunton's constructive contributions to a trinitarian theology of creation and his stress upon the contingent nature of creation and its non-necessity for God's being. In freedom, God creates the world as other than himself and relates to it in its createdness by loving and personal relationship through the Son and in the Spirit—Irenaeus' 'two hands'. God relates personally to the creation, within its temporal structures, through the incarnate Son by whom, through whom, and to whom all things are created, upheld, and directed. The Spirit, Whitney points out, is crucial in Gunton's thought as God's eschatological perfecting cause who enables created beings to realise their particularity by drawing them into relationship with God (and all else) through the Son who is the mediator of creation. It is in relationship with the creator that created being is freed from the constraints of sin to have its being perfected in relationship. In its perfectability, the creation is directed towards an end which is greater than its beginning, and this gives rise to the possibilities of human action participating in God's perfecting of creation, through the Son and in the Spirit. As Whitney stresses, trinitarian mediation and creation's directedness to perfection are at the heart of Gunton's trinitarian doctrine of creation.

Chapter four shifts the focus from the God-world relation to Gunton's theological anthropology. Whitney correctly identifies that it is the triune God who is the basis of true human personhood in Gunton's work. This has a strong christological focus as it is Jesus Christ who truly bears the image of God by his faithful human response to the Spirit's empowerment to obey the Father's will. Thus, human personhood is found in the personalizing and particularizing action of the Spirit who draws us into relation with the Father, through the Son, to be who we are in mutually constitutive relationship with God, one another and the created order. Whitney notes Gunton's indebtedness to John Zizioulas for his relational trinitarian ontology in which persons have their being constituted in relationship to God, one another and all else. This stresses a relational understanding of personhood, rather than the Enlightenment's rationalistic understanding, and the unity of the human creature—soul and body, spiritual and material. Whitney engages Green's critique of an underdeveloped harmartiology in Gunton and helpfully maintains that Gunton's analysis of modernity is part of his harmartiology and a structural analysis of sin. However, his agreement that harmartiology is underdeveloped in Gunton's wider work does not take full account of its significance in Gunton's wider corpus.

Chapter five examines Gunton's constructive trinitarian account of culture in the context of creation by contrasting it with Barth's. Whitney contends that Gunton enlarges the significance of Barth's theological account of culture which upholds the goodness of creation but holds a strong distinction between God and creation. Gunton also upholds this distinction, but, through his theology of mediation, seeks a role for genuine human contributions to the perfecting of creation in not only science but also art, politics and ethics. Such culture making, under God's good hand, will result in the flourishing of many forms of truth, goodness, and beauty (Gunton's definition of culture) in which human action participates as sub-creators in God's perfection of the creation. These finite perfections bring praise to the Father for his wise purposes in creation whilst also raising ethical questions regarding which forms of various human action bring praise to God. This leads Whitney to offer some critical comments about American Christianity's engagement in culture and the anemic influence of fundamentalism which drives thought and vision away from culture and created realities.

Whitney's work is to be congratulated for orientating readers to understanding Gunton's theology of culture within the context of his doctrine of creation. Whitney also shows the theological integration of Gunton's work by examining his theology of creation in relation to other doctrinal foci such as christology, pneumatology, anthropology, trinitarian ontology, mediation and culture. As such, this book gives a good overview of the vast scope of Gunton's theological project which leads to some of its problems and much of its promise. At the same time, Whitney's work could have been further strengthened by a deeper engagement with the criticisms which have grown in regards to Gunton's account of relational trinitarian ontology and personhood. This is an important flashpoint in contemporary trinitarian theology in which many of the settled notions of trinitarian theology, from which Gunton operated, have been critiqued. The fifth chapter, which compared Barth's work on creation and culture with Gunton's work, would have benefitted from engagement with Gunton's transcribed lectures on Barth, *The Barth Lectures*. Nonetheless, this is an important contribution to Gunton studies that examines a central aspect of Gunton's theology and highlights the ongoing significance and fruitfulness of his work.

JONATHAN LAMB, *PREACHING MATTERS: ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING GOD*. NOTTINGHAM: INTER-VARSITY PRESS, 2014. 187 PP. [ISBN: 978-1-78359-149-7].

John Tucker

Carey Baptist College, Auckland.

Jonathan Lamb is CEO and minister-at-large for Keswick Ministries in the United Kingdom. He was the founding Director of Langham Preaching, a global partnership with a vision to establish indigenous preaching movements throughout the majority world. This book is dedicated to the thousands of preachers who have participated in Langham Preaching seminars. It is clearly intended to be a resource for people without much formal preaching training. As the preface says, it "is not intended to be a detailed homiletics book", but a "simple introduction to the dynamics of preaching" for anyone who is involved in teaching the Scriptures, whether that be in a pulpit, a home group, a youth event, or a one-to-one Bible study (p. 16). But do not be deceived by the author's claims. He has distilled a considerable amount of reading and experience into this brief and very simple little book. This combination of accessibility and profundity makes it an excellent introduction to the theology and practice of preaching.

Lamb structures the book around several themes that emerge from Nehemiah 8:1-12, where Ezra the preacher leads God's people into a transforming encounter with the living God through his word. For a book on preaching, it is refreshing to see each section start with a short exposition of this important biblical text. The first section focuses on Scripture and the heart of preaching. With John Stott, Langham's founder, Lamb argues that "the secret of preaching is not so much mastering certain techniques, as being mastered by certain convictions" (p. 36). For Lamb, the central conviction is that the Scriptures constitute God's inspired revelation to all people, cultures and generations. They must therefore set the agenda for each