

***The Plymouth Brethren:*  
A Review Article**

**Timothy C. F. Stunt and Neil Dickson**

**The Plymouth Brethren**  
**Massimo Introvigne**  
**New York: Oxford University Press 2018**  
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*As this book is a significant publication from the press of a prestigious publisher, this review has been divided between two reviewers, with each reviewer noticing the period which is his specialty.*

**Introduction: Darby and the Origins of the Plymouth Brethren**

Massimo Introvigne is a sociologist and a lawyer who specializes in defending the rights of minority religious movements. He is the managing director of CESNUR, the Centre for Studies on New religions (*Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni*) based in Turin, an organization that has acted on behalf of such minority groups as the Black Hebrews of Dimona in Israel, Italian Pentecostals, contemporary Druidry, Baha'i, Wicca, and Aumism. One of his latest publications is *Satanism: A Social History* (2016).

Bearing in mind that in reality the Open Brethren have now become a respected part of mainstream evangelicalism, we should not be surprised that Introvigne's book on the Plymouth Brethren is principally concerned with the varieties of the Exclusive Brethren, but he is inclined to muddy the waters with examples taken from the Open Brethren. This would not be an insuperable problem if he had not at the outset made such sweeping statements as: 'Evangelicals today are normally critical of the Plymouth Brethren, as they see the latter's separatism as an obstacle to activism and missionary work' (p.11).

Introvigne does not defend the beliefs of his subject, but in his effort to give them a fair hearing he is inclined to oversimplify and minimize the importance of their beliefs and those of their critics. The reader needs to be prepared for what is effectively a sociological analysis or to put it more bluntly a presentation, which is theologically deprived. What he likes to call ‘new paradigm sociology’ is not ideally equipped to make nice distinctions between such concepts as the *condition* and the *standing* of a believer, let alone explain why such things mattered to the participants in the Reading disagreement during the 1880s—it is more interesting (and entertaining) to speculate on Clarence Esmé Stuart’s royal connections. (pp.71–2). Similarly dismissive are the (barely) three lines that Introvigne devotes to the doctrinal elements in the ‘eternal Sonship’ dispute (p.83). If a sociologist ventures to take on a subject as complex as the Reformation, it would be ridiculous for him to dispose of a key doctrinal issue like ‘Justification by faith’ in a couple of sentences.

In fact this is not the first time Introvigne has traversed this territory. Some ten years ago he joined forces with a respected Italian ecclesiastical historian with Open Brethren connections, (but later a Waldensian pastor) Domenico Maselli, to publish, for private circulation, *The Brethren: From Plymouth to the Present: A Protestant Critique of Modernity* (Turin, 2008),<sup>1</sup> substantial parts of which have been recycled in this volume together with a variety of errors to which the authors’ attention was drawn ten years ago. A few taken at random include the fact that the Haldane brothers were not ordained Anglican clergymen and must not be confused with Haldane Stewart who organized the meeting gratuitously described in the next paragraph (p.22); Cardinal Wiseman was not a *convert* to Roman Catholicism (p.23); Newton and Darby began their work in Plymouth in 1830, months *before* the Powerscourt conferences began in 1831 (p.36); George Müller’s first pastorate was in Teignmouth, (Devon), *not* Kensington, London (p.39); and the first assembly of Genevan *dissidents* was at Bourg-de-Four (p.47).

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<sup>1</sup> An Italian version appeared as *I Fratelli: una critica protestante della modernità* (Torino: Editrice Elledici, 2007).

More worrying than such factual inaccuracy is the semblance of scholarship and supporting footnotes which turns out to be largely chimerical. Introvigne makes numerous sweeping statements about the beliefs of Protestants, Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Brethren, but as often as not, the footnote cited in support of his claim is merely the title of a book with no page references. Sometimes this is because the book gives no such support: Darby's *Reflections on the Ruined condition of the Church* contains none of the ideas expounded in the previous three paragraphs for which Introvigne claims it as a source (p.44 n. 59). Emile Brocher's *Notice* was published in 1899, not 1871 (cited p.47 n.64) and is not an appropriate source for the establishment of the Bourg-de-Four assembly because the author has confused Brocher's book with Emile Guers' *Notice Historique sur l'Église Évangélique Libre de Genève* (1875). The absence of page references masks such errors. By the same token, although Tim Grass's excellent volume, *Gathering to His Name*, is mentioned in a footnote, the author has clearly made minimal use of a work that would have saved him from many errors of both fact and judgment.

My concern in this part of the review has been with the first half of the book ('Darby and the Origins of the Plymouth Brethren') because that is my specialty. My criticisms should not be taken as a total condemnation. Quite rightly, Introvigne draws attention to the somewhat haphazard circumstances that gave rise to the movement. Similarly he makes clear that Darby's thinking was far from static and that he moved away from the original vision of the earliest Plymouth Brethren—a vision that was retained by men like Groves and Müller. This of course makes the rest of the book's focus on the Exclusive wing all the more enigmatic, but on that part of his work I am not qualified to pass a judgment. I nevertheless find his approach to scholarship in this part of the book astonishingly capricious and am surprised that the Oxford University Press was prepared to publish what in my opinion is a sloppy and imprecise piece of work. Whatever happened to meaningful peer review?

Timothy Stunt

### **Later history and the PBCC**

The architectural style that is favoured by the PBCC for their meeting rooms at present is that of the ‘big-shed’ which are constructed without sanctuary windows. The dust jacket of *The Plymouth Brethren*, however, has a picture of a quaint red-brick English chapel which had been adapted in the past as an Exclusive Brethren meeting room, but has now evidently been converted into a house. I wish I could report that factual errors and misrepresentation disappeared in the discussion of later Brethren history, but Introvigne’s problems with his account of it continue, although in fairness they perhaps do become fewer.

The major difficulty with Chapter 3, entitled ‘Raven and the Time of Division’, which sets out to provide an account of later Brethren history, is methodological. Initially, Introvigne has the Brethren dividing into three streams formed by Darby, Newton, and Müller-Groves. Newton as the fountain-head of a separate stream is curious. Post-Plymouth, as Introvigne had noted earlier (p.64), he was the pastor of a succession of independent chapels which were entirely separate from the Brethren movement. Introvigne segments his definition of the other two streams (the Newton one having apparently disappeared underground) by adopting the schemata for Brethren developed initially in 1916 by the USA’s Bureau of the Census for separate censuses on religious affiliation and used until the final one in 1936 (Introvigne seems only to be aware of its use in this last year). A further four categories were added in 1970 by the American Lutheran church historian, A. C. Piepkorn.<sup>2</sup> Presumably the use of these schemata is felt to lend some sociological objectivity to the analysis rather than the contingency of historical chronology, but unfortunately the numerical system adopted is not quite as ‘arbitrary’ as its framers thought, for it is heavily skewed to the Brethren movement in North America, where the movement was not at its strongest. So we find that the Churches of God, a completely separate body who do not see themselves as being ‘Brethren’, and

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<sup>2</sup> A. C. Piepkorn, ‘Plymouth Brethren (Christian Brethren)’, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 41 (1970), 165–171. Piepkorn acknowledges the assistance of Paul F. Loizeaux and Dr Don Tinder.

with their own unique ecclesiology and theology, are included with the Open Brethren under ‘Brethren II’. Probably this is because the Churches of God are vanishingly small in the USA, with only two congregations at present in Colorado, and the Vernalites completely absent. Unlike Piepkorn’s diminutive Brethren VII and VIII (the Mory-Grant and Booth-Grant Brethren), which are found in the USA but not elsewhere, they are not assigned separate categories. The Churches of God secession, following Piepkorn, is also mis-dated to 1889 (p.69)—the most that can be said for this is that it is only a year out from the founding date of *Needed Truth*, the magazine that eventually led to the split in 1892–4. The paragraph describing what this reader can only assume to be related to the split that gave rise to the Vernalite Churches of God (p.49), is presented as being about the Open Brethren themselves, and is so confused as to be gobbledegook; nor do the sources referenced support the paragraph, something aggravated by again not citing page numbers. A lack of page numbers to the printed source for the Flemish Evangelische Christengemeenten, also hides the misrepresentation of their statistics.

In following Piepkorn, Introvigne is also quite capable of introducing his own errors. Where the former lists among the interdenominational organizations that the Open Brethren support ‘Christian Business Men’s Committees’, Introvigne amends this to the ‘Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International’ (p.71), a Pentecostal organization which to the best of my knowledge, has no Open Brethren support, not even, as Introvigne seems to imply, in the USA. The adoption of Piepkorn also means that all but one of the ten categories, the Open Brethren (including the Churches of God), are the result of Exclusive splits, which has the effect of multiplying divisions in the manner of the antiquarian Exclusive historiography of Napoleon Noel. Introvigne concludes that Brethren IV, the Exclusive Brethren group, who since 2012 have styled themselves the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC), ‘have as good grounds as anybody for claiming they are the most direct continuation of the original Darbyites’ (p.81). As he notes, however, on the next page that they have promulgated new teaching not given

by Darby, Brethren III, the Lowe/Continental connexion, seems (as he is prepared to admit) to have the better claim.

The final chapter takes us to the heart of the book and its central purpose. It is a sociological study of PBCC life and recent practice. This is the most original part of the book. It builds on the work of the late Bryan Wilson and is based on field work, some by Introvigne himself, but most of it by other sociologists. It is undoubtedly the most useful chapter. Introvigne defends the PBCC against ‘anti-cultists’, the cult being a category that he finds to be sociologically vacuous. A sober examination of the practice of separation, of PBCC schools, and their targeting by the secular media does much to put them in proper perspective. A number of ways in which the current internationally recognised leader, Bruce Hales, has sought to reduce tensions with the wider society is noted by Introvigne. There is a brief discussion of their most recent brush with the civil authorities, namely, the Charity Commission for England and Wales dispute with the Exclusive Brethren Preston Down Trust (PDT) of 2009–14. The point at issue was whether the Symington-Hales connexion provided public benefit or not, which had obvious implications for their charitable status, and the point was ultimately decided in their favour after negotiation, by which time the PBCC name was being used.<sup>3</sup> On a number of issues, Introvigne is inclined to give them benefit of the doubt. He is dismissive of ‘lurid accounts’ by ex-members (four are listed in a footnote), which uniformly testify to extreme measures of enforcing control and separation,<sup>4</sup> although he also notes as part of the PDT settlement, the PBCC accepted there had been errors in previous disciplinary cases and promised better future practice. He cites no example of public charitable works after 1876 (and that was for an Open Brethren member), but as the PBCC established

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<sup>3</sup> One potential Open Brethren witness submitted a draft statement to the Charity Commission distinguishing the Open Brethren from the PBCC, and arguing that in common with many other religious bodies, PDT was capable of advancing religion for the public benefit..

<sup>4</sup> See also Introvigne’s review of Rebecca Stott, *In the Days of Rain*, in *The Journal of CESNUR*, 1/2 (2017) 110–116. Cf. Roger Shuff’s review below, 188–92. In *Plymouth Brethren*, 100 n.23, Introvigne notes 3 other works by former members.

international Rapid Relief Teams in 2012, at the same time as the Charity Commission case, a sceptic might feel this was not entirely coincidental, especially since their creation became material to the case. It is with their work in Italy that the book begins, for these charities have done much good work since their founding. More mysterious is the statement that the PBCC is not litigious, which will come as a revelation to a number of legal defendants or those institutions and individuals threatened with legal action (some of which are personally known to the present reviewer). The idea that it is only individuals in the PBCC who contribute to political campaigns, and not the movement itself, seems to contradict the careful guard on their adherents' actions that Introvigne acknowledges.

In the final chapter, the number of references to the literature in the footnotes multiplies noticeably, and the research has obviously been in greater depth. Even here, though, the footnotes do not always support the text. For example, the novel point on separation in Roger Shuff's BD dissertation was that Darby's exclusion of other Christians from the Lord's table applied only to those Open Brethren aware of the Bethesda dispute, not to orthodox Christians from *all* other churches, and later Taylorite practice was yet another departure from Darby.<sup>5</sup> Introvigne succeeds in taking some of the heat out of the discussion of the PBCC, and makes a number of forceful points on civil liberties. This is a reminder that this sociological analysis of the PBCC occurs within the context of state, media, and anti-cult forces hostile to them. Introvigne rightly argues that there should be a place in society for traditional religion that rejects modernity. Occasionally, however, the final chapter reads more like a lawyer's case for the defence than an entirely objective sociological analysis. Unfortunately, given the prestige the publisher's name carries, and the book's handy size as an introduction, a number of errors in fact and perspective will be widely disseminated, both about the Brethren

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<sup>5</sup> See the substantial extract from the thesis published as 'Open to Closed: The Growth of Exclusivism among Brethren in Britain 1848–1953', *BAHNR* 1/1 (1997), 10–23 which is available on the BAHN website: <[www.brethrenhistory.org](http://www.brethrenhistory.org)>.

movement as a whole and the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church in particular.

Neil Dickson

## New Writing on Brethren History\*

Michael Schneider

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\* This bibliography is published jointly with *Freikirchenforschung*, 27 (2018) and 28 (2019). If anyone is aware of items that have been omitted, please contact Michael Schneider at: schneid9@web.de

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## REVIEWS

### A History of the Church in 100 Objects

Mike Aquilina and Grace Aquilina

Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press (UK distribution Alban Books), 2017

424 pp+100 colour photos ISBN 9781594717505 £20.99

What material objects would be representative of Brethren history? A baptismal tank? A woman's hat? A gospel tract? A letter of commendation? Müller's orphanages? It's an interesting thought experiment, but I feel that the reader will struggle to reach 100. As the introduction to this book reminds us, however, 'Catholicism is indeed the religion of "stuff".'

Based on the concept of the Neil McGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010), this is also an illuminating and novel way to approach all 2000 years of Church history. Here we have a catacomb painting, St Ambrose's bones, a wedding ring, Cyrillic script, the Codex Sinaiticus, a guillotine, Cardinal Newman's desk, an Armenian blunderbuss, and much else, but also the contraceptive pill and foetal models. Each item is illustrated, and there is a brief two-page essay, in clear prose explaining its relevance to the history of the Church and setting it in its historical context. The objects are evenly selected from the seven ages the authors divide Church history into, which means both the patristic and medieval periods are given equal space with the modern. Each essay concludes with a suggested couple of items of further reading. My complaint would be that the present location of the objects is not given unless it is implicit in the object itself (the rose window of Notre-Dame de Paris is an obvious example).

Just how persistent persecution has been in the history of the Church emerges, not just earlier as in the reign of Diocletian, but also in modern times in examples such as during political revolutions and the assassination of Óscar Romero. How faith sustained people throughout the centuries is evident through such examples as a roughly fashioned mortuary cross from a time of plague. But the

‘Church’ of the title is emphatically the Roman Catholic Church, as can be seen from the inclusion of its distinctive devotional practices, and the numerous examples of saints’ relics and items relating to Rome and the popes. The authors also take the continuation of the miraculous within it seriously, such as in their account of the preservation of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Torquemada is justified by being no worse for the period than Luther and Calvin, and in an essay on the doors of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg, both these Reformers are presented as lamenting the loss of order and the introduction of change.

Material matters in Christianity, argue the authors in their introduction, because the Word became flesh. This is, of course, the ancient argument against iconoclasm. Readers from the cerebral and logocentric religious culture of Reformed Protestantism will find this book as a devotional aid unappealing. But if you are looking for an introduction to Church history through the visual, and welcome at the same time an insight into aspects of Catholic devotion, then you will find this book both enjoyable and informative. It is probably best read as an item-a-day, taking the reader through some four months of the year.

Neil Dickson

**Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity**

**Andrew Walls**

**Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017**

**284 pp. ISBN-10: 1626982589 £26.99**

When Professor Andrew Walls published his first collection of essays, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, in 1996, it quickly became a ‘must read’ for history and missiology academics and mission practitioners alike. Full of wisdom and insight, it has deservedly remained a much consulted volume ever since, appreciated in the global south as well as in the north. Andrew Walls is that rare person who can speak equally to academy and pew, and whose scholarship is never divorced from the realities of living out the Christian faith in

everyday life. *Christianity Today* named the volume among the hundred most influential books of the twentieth century.

In 2002, he published a second collection: *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*. Like its predecessor, this also speedily became a highly valued resource. Could there be more to say? *Crossing Cultural Frontiers* resoundingly demonstrates that there is indeed more that Andrew Walls has to say. Sixteen essays, a short introduction, and a tantalizingly brief conclusion, all revolve around the central thesis that ‘World Christianity is normative Christianity’, and has been so ever since Pentecost. Most of the essays have originally appeared, across a span of several decades, in journals or multi-authored volumes; many began as lectures. But it is immensely valuable to have them gathered together in one place, revised and updated for this book, and for most readers available in print for the first time.

The book is arranged in three sections: *Part One: The Transmission of Christian Faith*; *Part Two: Africa in Christian Thought and History*; *Part Three: The Missionary Movement and the West*. These are broad umbrellas: for instance, Part One includes an essay on the early Church, one on Origen, one on worldviews and conversion, one on migration (historic as well as contemporary), and finally one on globalization. Wherever you live in the world, each of these speaks to issues which confront today’s church, and whether you are an academic, a church leader, or a Christian foot-soldier, there is much to feed on, much to set mental light-bulbs popping into life.

At first glance, Part Two may look less relevant to those outside the African continent. Look again, then. Andrew Walls spent some years in both Sierra Leone and Nigeria, and on his own admission found those experiences utterly life-changing as he studied Christian faith in contexts largely untouched by Christendom or the Enlightenment, both of which shaped Western Christianity more than we often realize. This post-Christendom, post-Enlightenment context is, of course, increasingly the world within which British Christians also need to live out the faith: a challenge to crossing cultural frontiers right on our doorstep, one where the need to combine

biblical faithfulness with contextual wisdom and creativity is most urgently needed. What can we learn, in theology and daily discipleship, from the global south as African, Latin American and Asian believers now re-shape many areas of world Christianity?

Part Three explores the role of Western missions in the centuries of transmission of the gospel. While fully saluting European mission, both Catholic and Protestant, over several centuries, the author shows why this is not the whole story, and why the traditional teaching of church history in the West has often been inadequate. He shows, too, some of the essential elements of moving from pioneering from outside the community to indigenous and incarnationally rooted appropriation and expressions of faith. These principles are as applicable to today's struggles facing the UK churches as we seek to make disciples among our communities as ever they were to those who first penetrated the inlands of China or Africa.

In his conclusion (p.263), Walls writes:

Our faith is incarnational: Christ is to be formed among those who receive him in faith; the Word is to take flesh again. And the Word does not take flesh in a generalized humanity, for there is no such thing. Humanity is always culture specific, reflecting the conditions of a particular time and place, and with an identity formed by a particular past. Our various segments of social reality are to be converted to Christ, turned towards him; and, when converted, all the segments are necessary to one another. They are stones to build the new temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. The representations of Christ that arise in our various segments of reality can only be partial; only together can we realize the full stature of Christ.

Buy, beg, borrow (but preferably not steal) this book. Essay by essay, ponder its message(s). It will well reward you. And so much here could help us see how to take the gospel forward once again in our beleaguered West.

Rose Dowsett

**From the Reformation to the Permissive Society: A Miscellany  
in Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Lambeth Palace  
Library**

**Melanie Barber, Stephen Taylor, Gabriel Sewell (eds.)  
Woodbridge, Suffolk: Church of England Record Society 18;  
Boydell Press, 2010**

**724pp. ISBN 9781843835585 £100**

This substantial volume of more than 700 pages celebrates the 400th anniversary of the Lambeth Palace Library and uses some of the archive's MSS to investigate a variety of subjects ranging from Archbishop Grindal's disagreements with Queen Elizabeth I to Bishop Blomfield's interest in urban church extension with particular reference to Bethnal Green, and from Archbishop Davidson's visit to the Western Front in 1916 to Archbishop Temple's correspondence with Dorothy Sayers. Of particular interest however, to readers of the *BHR*, is Dr. Richard Palmer's edition of the MS autobiography of William Dodsworth. This was part of a cache of documents, recently acquired by the Library, from Dodsworth's descendants, and usefully supplements the PhD thesis of Stephen Edward Young,<sup>1</sup> which, with his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, was previously the best account available of this interesting character.

William Dodsworth (1798–1861) was an Anglican who, like several nineteenth-century Evangelicals, eventually became a Roman Catholic.<sup>2</sup> His father was a free-thinker, who scoffed at serious religion, but in his first year at university William experienced an evangelical conversion and became a 'Simeonite' at Cambridge. Ordained as a young man, he served in several parishes but his earnest enthusiasm and his interest in unfulfilled prophecy brought him into association with radical Evangelicals like Hugh McNeile and Henry Drummond. He attended the conferences at Albury on prophetic subjects, and began to feel shunned by the Evangelical establishment. It was during this 'adventist' phase of his development

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Edward Young, 'William Dodsworth (1798–1861): The Origins of Tractarian Thought and Practice in London', PhD thesis, Open University, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Examples that spring to mind include Sir Henry Trelawney (1756–1834), Richard Waldo Sibthorp (1792–1879), John Henry Newman (1801–90), Henry Manning (1808–92), James Robert Hope-Scott (1812–73), and Caroline Douglass, Marchioness of Queensberry (1821–1904).

that he, like Drummond and McNeile, became fascinated in 1830 by the reports of healings and glossolalia on Clydeside, and among his papers there is a MS with John Nelson Darby's account of these phenomena.

Dodsworth's connection with Drummond had led in 1829 to his appointment as the minister of the Margaret Chapel (and later of Christ Church, Albany Street) in London, where gradually his earnest and conscientious attention to fasting and sacramental grace led him to adopt Tractarian attitudes and develop a ritualistic dimension in his services. He movingly describes some of the strains that these changes in his thinking imposed on his marriage—tensions which inevitably were further exacerbated when in 1851, the Erastianism of the Gorham judgment resulted in his conversion to Roman Catholicism.

It is curious that, not so many years ago, another such autobiographical MS enriched our understanding of these crucial decades of ecclesiastical change in the early nineteenth century. In 1999, Peter Galloway's life of Frank Newman's Oxford friend and Dodsworth's successor at the Margaret Chapel, Frederick Oakeley,<sup>3</sup> made effective use of his subject's MS autobiography in the Balliol College archives to bring to life Oakeley's own passage through Tractarianism to the Roman communion—a process which ought to be of some interest to those who, every year, find themselves singing his popular carol, 'O come all ye faithful!'

As a further postscript we may perhaps observe that quite a handful of converts to Roman Catholicism wrote not a few of the pieces that are regularly included in Protestant hymnody. The popularity among evangelicals of such hymns as Frederick Faber's 'My God how wonderful Thou art,' and 'There's a wideness in God's mercy,' together with Matthew Bridges's 'Crown Him with many Crowns,' is perhaps surprising in view of the authors' final Roman allegiance. They in turn bring to mind the extensive poetry produced by another Roman Catholic convert, John Henry Newman's close friend, Edward Caswall, whose recent biographer, Nancy Marie de

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Galloway, *A Passionate Humility: Frederick Oakeley and the Oxford Movement* (Leominster, 1999).

Flon, made good use of her subject's MS Journal in the archives of the Birmingham Oratory.<sup>4</sup> Evangelicals should not be in denial of the importance of the author of such familiar verses as 'See amid the winter's snow', 'When morning gilds the skies', and 'Jesus the very thought of Thee'. As far as we know, William Dodsworth was not a hymn-writer, but the fact that an original document in J. N. Darby's hand has emerged among his papers<sup>5</sup> underlines the unpredictable proximity of evangelicalism and the Roman Catholic faith.

Timothy C. F. Stunt

**The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton and Whitefield**  
**Tom Schwanda (ed.)**

**New York: The Classics of Western Spirituality; Paulist Press  
(UK distribution Alban Books), 2016**

**306pp. ISBN: 978-0-8091-0621-9 £25.98**

Building on the volume on the Wesleys in the Classics of Western Spirituality Series, Mark Noll's '100 primary sources of the era' in his *Rise of Evangelicalism* (2003), and the work of other well-known scholars of evangelicalism, this volume is well-placed to reap the harvest of that work. As well as the three major figures, Jonathan Edwards, John Newton, and George Whitefield, Tom Schwanda has widened the range of sources deliberately to include women and non-white writers as well as writers from a variety of theological standpoints. This volume contains a selection of extracts or complete texts written by evangelicals—sermons, hymns, and letters, such as Wilberforce's *Practical View*, Newton's 'Amazing Grace', and Hannah More's writings. As this is the age of the evangelical campaign against slavery, the historical nexus of African, British, and (native) American women and men, generates a set of sources tailor-

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Marie de Flon, *Edward Caswall, Newman's Brother and Friend*, (Leominster, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The full, annotated text of Darby's account of the Port Glasgow 'manifestations', written in 1830 was published as 'J. N. Darby and the Tongues at Row: A Recent Manuscript Discovery', *BHR*, 12 (2016), 1–21.

made for contemporary academic respectability. The range of sources is excellent: neither strained nor deficient but providing for the reader a thoughtful and judicious sample of works which demonstrate key themes of evangelical spirituality as adduced by the editor: new life in Christ; the Holy Spirit; Scripture; spiritual practices; love for God; love for neighbour.

The tremendous attachment expressed by people to the concepts of sin, grace, and salvation is repeatedly demonstrated in sermons, hymns, treatises and letters. The hymns of Toplady and Newton will be familiar, but the sermons of the native-American Presbyterian minister, Samson Occam, are less likely to be known, even if the substance is familiar. The external fruit in this period of the encounter with grace in terms of a life of kindness and goodness based on justice in public is well-known. It may be that the inner dynamics which produced and sustained that active Christ-centred life are less so. Drawing on practices developed, among others, by the Puritans, the continental Pietists, and High Anglicans, evangelicals set great store by ‘true religion’, or ‘heart religion’, by which they meant an authentic as opposed to an outward show of religion or a merely cerebral as opposed to an emotional response to God. There was no single form of organisation of personal prayer and so evangelicals were encouraged to seek ‘experimental knowledge’ from the Holy Spirit. The constant letter-writing about a person’s ‘walk’ (i.e. their spiritual state) is seen in private letters from one friend to another as well as the spiritual direction given by those with an acknowledged gift in that area. Anyone sinking under the weight of emails might be encouraged to know that John Newton was always behind in his correspondence by about ‘fifty to sixty letters’ (p.11). Finding himself in a similar situation, Whitefield directed his correspondents to ask Anne Dutton’s advice. She was a British Baptist who corresponded voluminously with evangelical figures on both sides of the Atlantic.

This book is an excellent volume for anyone who wishes to know not just what eighteenth-century evangelicals thought about Christianity, but how these individuals held and practised their faith.

Beth Dickson

**Aliens and Strangers? The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday Life of Evangelicals**

**Anna Strhan**

**Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015**

**232 pp. ISBN 9780198724469 £28.53**

Anna Strhan's book is based on anthropological field work she conducted at a London church, here called 'St John's'. She chose a conservative evangelical church that was a participant in the Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON). Even this reviewer, with his woefully limited knowledge of London churches, was able to readily recognise the real identity of 'St John's'. Suffice to say it is in the middle of the financial district and is inclined to Reformed, rather than Charismatic, Anglicanism.

Strhan's own spiritual pilgrimage in Anglicanism was from the conventional variety through its Charismatic manifestation to Don Cupitt's atheist participation in ritual. She is therefore familiar with evangelicalism, and an express purpose of her book is 'to move away from simplistic portraits of evangelicals that arise through sensationalizing exposé or apologetic homages that circulate in the media' (p.203). When discussing theology she is on familiar ground, although readers might be surprised to discover that Calvinism does not have a doctrine of assurance and that St John's has a dispensationalist interpretation of salvation history—though the example quoted would not be adequate for any self-respecting dispensationalist.

She clusters her research around four areas in the life of the members of St John's—speaking, listening, God's claims, and his material absence. This is an examination of urban religion and so the subjects of her research are observed in the context of their middle-class employments in the modern, multitudinous, secular city. The ways in which living out the life of a conservative evangelical in such an environment frequently leave her subjects internally fragmented and conflicted is a central concern of the fieldwork. Evangelicalism demands witness, but speaking about religion in the workplace or

neighbourhood is off-limits in the modern world, especially on areas of human sexuality that diverge from that now accepted in contemporary metropolitan London. For the Christians observed here, speaking out is a source of tension. Strhan notes how much easier it is to go to working-class neighbourhoods and be more open in witnessing about faith there. The Reformed Christian sense of selfhood is formed through listening to the Bible in the rational, cerebral culture of St John's; the transcendent God's unity of character offers a sense of coherence. But at the same time, God is materially absent, as so too Jesus has been in the history of the Church. The Christians are future-orientated to the return of Jesus and the eschatological City of God. Many of these evangelicals, then, have experienced doubt, and for some it has been a lifelong companion, in their word-based religious culture in which words can, in the lines of Eliot, 'strain, / Crack and sometimes break, slip, slide, perish'. Against the portrait of evangelicalism offering unreflective certainty, Strhan shows her subjects coping with tension, fragmentation, and uncertainty.

The book is also a fascinating portrayal of how one urban church encourages its members in Christian discipleship. It is, however, primarily an anthropological study, and the initial chapters set the research in the context of current academic literature on contemporary religious communities and the modern city. The pioneering studies of Georg Simmel on the city, and the French Jesuit, Michel de Certeau, on religion in everyday life, are central to the analysis. Perhaps mere historians might feel a dose of anthropological theory is remote from their concerns. If so, the book can still be read with profit without out delving too deeply into the theory. I found the final chapter of the book oddly moving, partly because the author is clearly involved herself in the quest of her subjects. She may not think they are right, but she certainly does not think they are stupid. The evangelicals in this study worry over what it might mean to create the good earthly city and hope for a city whose builder and maker is God. They live in the modern city with its messiness and disorder, but they also seek to relate to a transcendent Other who gives their life coherence. Their identity is

that of being ‘alien and strangers’. It is this complexity the study teases out, avoiding over-simplifications about the lived experience of conservative evangelicals.

Strhan’s study is convincing evidence of the rewards for academics in taking religion seriously in human society. After a period when it was seen as belonging to a past era, this study, as the bibliography shows, is part of an explosion of literature on the anthropology of evangelicalism. It is no longer an academic Cinderella.

Neil Dickson

### **Praying for Salvation: A Map of Relatedness**

**Joseph Webster**

***Religion, 47/1, (2016), 19–34***

Joseph Webster’s research in the fishing village of Gamrie (a.k.a. Gardenstown) in north-east Scotland was reviewed in an earlier *BHR*.<sup>1</sup> The village has four assemblies, and the other evangelical Christians ‘had strong sympathies with the religious piety and revivalist intensity of the Brethren’.

In this journal article he draws on his fieldwork to analyse the prayers of Gamrie believers. For his conceptual framework, he uses the uncompleted thesis of 1909 on prayer by the French sociologist Marcel Mauss, the nephew of Émile Durkheim. Mauss saw prayer, not reductively as an individualistic activity, but as a social institution comparable to other types of collective social realities. Webster found that this admirably fits what he found at the mid-week prayer meeting in Gamrie. It was an intensely social activity. The free, spontaneous prayers were a social activity in themselves, as the attendees prayed in concert with others using the socially approved language of the King James Version. Several prayers are quoted at length, and their embodied character in posture and emotion of the praying people is noted. The content of the prayers, too, were a map of relatedness as they were for others. They expressed gratitude to

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<sup>1</sup> *BHR*, 9 (2013), 49–56.

God for salvation, anguish over unsaved relatives (especially grandchildren), resentment at the way the traditional life of the village was disappearing, and a sense of resignation over the wave of moral degradation that was seen to be sweeping over Scotland.

Participation marked the individual out as sharing the collective identity of ‘the saved’. The prayers themselves were ‘the product of collective thoughts, feelings and actions’. Undoubtedly, collectivity is much more apparent in a close-knit fishing community such as Gamrie, but what Webster observed and recorded will be readily recognizable to anyone who has attended a prayer meeting held by evangelicals. There is a note of sadness in what he describes. The contemporary dominant pattern in church attendance is not from the Brethren to Pentecostalism (at which speaking in tongues is despised by many Gamries as ‘gibberish’) but to non-attendance. ‘Those left faithfully attending the mid-week meetings,’ he writes, ‘while locally recognised as ‘real prayer warriors’, were growing old’. He ends with suggestions for future anthropological research in religion. The future of Gamrie as a ‘Christian village’ is much more uncertain, as is demonstrated in the quotation of these prayers.

Neil Dickson

**Brethren Movement: From Itinerant Evangelicals to Introverted Sectarians**

**Bernard Doherty**

*Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion, Vol. 12: Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Movements, Institutions, and Allegiance*, (ed.) Stephen Hunt

Boston, MA: Brill, 2016

pp.357–381      ISBN 9789004265394      £141

**Restorationists and New Movements**

**Tim Grass**

*The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions. Vol. 3. The Nineteenth Century*, (eds.) Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017

pp.150–74      ISBN 978-0199683710      £95

The Brethren movement is well-served by these two articles in longer reference works on contemporary global religion and (largely) English and North American dissent. Both articles draw extensively on the flowering of historical scholarship on the Brethren movement of the early twenty-first century, as the full bibliographies appended to each article show. It is no more than the reader would expect from Tim Grass, who has been central to the process and has produced what will long remain the standard history of the Brethren in Britain and Ireland. Bernard Doherty will be familiar to Brethren historians for his writings on contemporary Exclusive Brethren, especially in Australia, but here he turns his attention primarily to Brethren origins and contemporary Open Brethren.

Doherty sets the origins of the movement firmly in the context of evangelicalism and of Ireland. He then proceeds to give an excellent summary of the development from the small Dublin groups of the 1820s to the eventual division over the Bethesda Question in 1848. Along the way he introduces the reader to the ‘chief men’ (surely he must have meant the Thirty-Nine Articles rather than the Westminster Confession that the young Darby adhered to—if so, a rare slip). He concludes the historical survey with the movement

spilling out across the globe. His section on ‘The Brethren Today’ largely concentrates on the Open Brethren. Here he departs from chronology to concentrate on ethos and beliefs (the subtitle does not relate to chronology, but to the sectarian range in the movement). After noticing the late twentieth-century ‘identity crisis’ and the consequent difficulty of defining Brethren, he takes for his structure the ten ‘cardinal principles’ of Brethrenism that Robert Baylis set out in his history of the North American movement. I would question just how unique each are to the Brethren, even if they are taken as a nexus, but it is a useful heuristic device for Doherty to tease out the ethos and beliefs of the Open Brethren particularly. He concludes on an upbeat note—that from historically specific origins, they have developed into an ‘international and strongly activist presence’, ‘whose emphasis on the local church and the working of the Spirit through non-ordained individuals has allowed them to develop along a variety of diverse trajectories.’

As might be expected from its appearance in a ‘handbook’, Doherty’s article is general and introductory, which task it performs admirably. Grass in his contribution to the multi-volume Oxford history of Protestant Dissent, also gives a basic introduction to the movement, although in doing so he puts greater emphasis on mid-nineteenth-century revivalism as a determining factor on Brethren ethos. His article, however, puts the movement in the broader context of restorationist bodies which were contemporaneous with the early movement, and as such he draws some conclusions that advance the understanding of its place in church history. He is able to show what they shared with these movements as well as what made them distinctive. He argues that the Brethren had a ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’ (p.157), as they held that the unity of the body of Christ was seen pre-eminently at the Lord’s supper to which every Christian was welcome. The need for ‘separation’ from ‘Babylon’, which they shared with a number of the other bodies Grass considers, qualified this for many, as they saw themselves representing ‘the apostolic centre ground’, on which alone true unity was possible.

I would imagine most readers will blanch at the price of these volumes for a private library (although the individual chapters can be

purchased separately from Brill as a rather expensive PDF). The publishers' target for these works is evidently public and institutional libraries. The last as a repository for these essays should be very satisfactory to BAHN members, as both place entirely reliable introductions to the movement in the public domain. Finally, readers might be curious as to which other bodies accompany the Brethren in these works. In the Brill Handbook, there are, *inter alia*, monastic communities, the prosperity gospel, Hillsong, the emergent church, and Jehovah's Witnesses; Grass includes—again *inter alia*—the Huntingtonians, the Churches of Christ, the Catholic Apostolic Church, and mission halls. Do these contents serve as an invitation to humility?

Neil Dickson

**Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism**

(eds.) Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

406 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-986309-9 £94(hb)/29.49 (pb)

Aleister Crowley may not seem a natural subject of interest to the readers of this journal, who on the face of it may have little interest or even an active distaste for Crowley's notorious neo-masonic magical, sexualised and drug-enhanced experimental spirituality. Yet his background was within a Brethren family and this factor is often highlighted by students of this notorious figure and puzzling man. Crowley was born Edward Alexander Crowley in Leamington Spa in 1875, the son of Edward Crowley and his wife, Emily Bertha Bishop.

No chapter of this book particularly highlights this aspect of Crowley's life. The details however are well known. His great grandfather, Abraham Crowley (1795–1864) was part of a Quaker brewing family in Croydon and Alton, according to Kaczynski's book, but was also an agent for the New Zealand Company. His grandfather was Edward Crowley snr (c.1788–1856), who reinvested in the railway boom, and served on the boards of several successful companies, and his Quaker outlook is evident in his address published shortly before his death, 'The Age we live in: High Art no Evidence of a High State of Civilization', addressed to members of

the Clapham Atheneum in 1854. Aleister's father, Edward jnr, (1829–1887), who was trained as an engineer, was too wealthy to need employment, and evidently financed a ministry as an itinerant evangelist. Raised a Quaker, Kaczynski has him then ordained an Anglican priest, but dates his coming among Brethren to 1861. In 1874, Edward married Emma Bertha Bishop (1848–1917), who was sister of the founder of the C.S.S.M. and Scripture Union, Tom Bond Bishop, and Aleister was born a year later when the couple had settled in Leamington Spa. He was named Edward Alexander (changing his name later by deed poll). He was educated in private schools and tutors, not all of them Brethren, despite the comments of his biographers. They included the White Rock Prep School in St Leonard's run by H. T. Habershon, who was not Brethren, and then a school in Cambridge run by H. D'Arcy Champney (1854–1922), who was. Champney had been educated at Cambridge and served initially at St Andrew's the Less, but joined the Brethren and wrote a hymn book from which several hymns were chosen for Exclusive Brethren hymn books. Edward died of cancer in 1887 and Tom Bond Bishop became more important in the upbringing of his nephew. According to Crowley, Champney's school was closed down after complaints about the mistreatment of Aleister and other boys. Aleister was then sent to a Brethren tutor named Lambert at Eastbourne, and the break with him marked Crowley's absolute breach with the Brethren. Thoroughly corrupted at school he became 'the beast' whom his mother had described. Crowley recalled his infant baptism by immersion, so it cannot have been quite at birth. He tells in his autobiography the usual Brethren childhood fear that the rapture had occurred and he had been left behind. Yet curiously Aleister retained huge affection for his father after his death and never seems to have felt he had the troubled childhood that his biographers would have liked him to have (Hutchinson quotes Edmund Gosse's experience, reasoning that Exclusive Brethren childhood must have been narrower than Gosse's, so, QED, the case of Crowley's abuse is clear!).

Edward Crowley's numerous pamphlets (twenty of which are available in the Brethren Archive) include *The Plymouth Brethren*

(*so-called*): *who they are—their creed, mode of worship etc. explained in a letter to his friends and relations* (1865, and subsequent editions); *The manifestations of Christ to his servants* (Glasgow, 1866); *Hearts and Minds* by E.C. (London: W. H. Broom, 1866); and *The story of God's grace* (Southampton, 1865); *The soldier who was bought out but was not bought in* (Walsall, 1867); *The elect, or how I may know whether I am one of them* (Southampton, 1865, repr. from the *London Messenger*). Edward evidently wrote many more works, which he gave away as he itinerated. There is an attack on C. E. Stuart published in 1885, but most of the pamphlets were published in the 1860s.

The secondary literature on Aleister Crowley is large, but perhaps inevitably few writers have much understanding, let alone sympathy, for the Brethren. Recently there has been an abundance of biographies, including Martin Booth's *A Magick Life* (2001), Richard Spence's *Secret Agent 666* (2008); Tobias Churton's *Aleister Crowley: The Biography* (2011); and *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* by Marco Pasi first published in Italian and republished in English (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2014); Roger Hutchinson's book, *Aleister Crowley: The Beast Demystified* (Random House 2011), is disappointing, and the most trustworthy account of the Brethren background is in *Perdurabo, Revised and Expanded Edition: The Life of Aleister Crowley* by Richard Kaczynski (2nd edn., North Atlantic Books, 2010). The *Confessions of Aleister Crowley* is the source of most of the information. In this work he compares himself to Edmund Gosse but notes that his background was among Exclusive Brethren at least until the dispute over F.E. Raven's teachings:

I must explain something of the horror of life in my mother's house. To begin with, I was entirely debarred from the society of boys and girls of my own age, unless they were the children of Brethren. The sect was already moribund and in addition had split over the Raven heresy. The situation is illustrated by the story which I will quote from the preface to my *The World's Tragedy*.

An irreligious man may have moral checks; a Plymouth Brother has none. He is always ready to excuse the vilest crimes by quoting

the appropriate text and invoking the name of Christ to cover every meanness which may delight his vain and vicious nature. For the Plymouth Brethren were in themselves an exceptionally detestable crew. The aristocrats who began the movement were, of course, just aristocrats, and their curious system left them so. But they ran a form of "Early Christian" spiritual socialism by having no appointed priest or minister, and they were foolish enough to favour their followers financially.

Thus Mr. Giblets—let us call him—the third-best butcher in the village found (on the one hand) that while at church he was nobody at all, and in chapel but an elder, in the little meeting in the squire's morning-room he was no less than the minister of God and the mouthpiece of the Holy Ghost; just as on the other hand it was only natural that the orders from the Hall should come his way and leave the first-best butcher lamenting and the second-best bewildered. So that in my time the sect (though it is only fair to point out that they refused to be described as a sect, since what they had done was not to form a new sect, but to "Come out of Sect"—this they maintained in spite of the fact that they were far more exclusive than any other religious body in Europe) was composed of a few of the old guard, my father the last of them all, and the meanest crew of canaille that ever wriggled.

With my father's death the small schisms which had hitherto lopped off a few members every year or two were altogether surpassed by the great Raven heresy, which split the body into two nearly equal halves and extinguished the last sparks of its importance. ....

As it happened, my mother took the minority view. This means that she cut herself off from every single intimate friend. On the strength of a text in one of the epistles, she refused to shake hands with anyone who was teaching false doctrine. The very few remaining were new friends. My associates could therefore be counted on the fingers of one hand and our only bond of sympathy was a detestation of our tyrants.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the biographies of Crowley make reference to this aspect of the Beast and see it as ironic or perhaps as an explanation of his

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<sup>1</sup> Hermetic Library, 'The Confessions of Aleister Crowley', <<http://hermetic.com/crowley/confessions/chapter7.html>>.

peculiarities. It does seem at least possible that interpretations of the book of Revelation may have begun his exotic journey into esoteric interpretations.

There are a few particular references to the Brethren in this book, notably by the editors (pp.4–5), arguing that his rebellion simply idealised the Beast of the book of Revelation, and Bogdan develops this point in his own contribution to the book (pp.99–100), and he explains his hostility to Christianity as a reaction to the version of it encountered among the Brethren.

Unfortunately, biography is not the strength of the book under review. Rather a number of specialists in occult themes explore the ways in which Crowley drew on a number of occult traditions yet diverged from them all, often falling out with their leaders personally at the same time. There are also explanations in Crowley's personal life for some of his behaviour.

The usefulness of this book lies in the way it places various of the occult traditions in relationship with each other, which shows at the same time how sectarian these traditions can be. Even some of the chapters are uncomfortable with others. The idea of a stream of occult and Gnostic hidden riches lying behind the Western rational and Christian tradition, founders on the extent of sectarianism in this tradition. As for any revelation of the Christian sectarianism in the form of Exclusive Brethren teaching lying behind Crowley's interest in these traditions, there is very little other than the study of the Beast in Revelation. It would, I think, be possible to show the kind of literature which would have filled the young Crowley's imagination from the works (not all of them by Brethren authors) which circulated at the time. But such is not the achievement of this book, and I do not think there is much point in seeing the phenomenon of Crowley as reflecting much about the deepest essence of his Brethren background, since, as the book shows, a number of other personal factors play a very significant role.

Peter Lineham

**100 Years on the Street: a Story of God's Grace through Tory Street Hall, Elizabeth Street Chapel and The Street City Church**

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**Harvey G. Rees-Thomas  
Wellington: HIS Services, 2017**

**547 pp. ISBN: 978-0-473-37936-0 NZ\$ 39.50**

This is a local church history on the grand scale. It is also an evangelistic tract, a defence of Open Brethren ecclesiology, and an intriguing analysis of contemporary trends in churches with a Brethren heritage. Lavishly illustrated, beautifully laid out it is a finely crafted volume. The scale owes something to the rich and generous vision of its author, Harvey Rees Thomas, who is a very well-known retired headmaster of the principal boys' state school of New Zealand's capital city, Wellington College, and then director of Human Resources of the Accounting Firm Ernst and Young's New Zealand operation. He was also an elder at the church he is writing about from 1968 to 2009, and was for most of those years its most influential figure, and has close family ties with the continuing leadership. So this is an insider's account.

The church which is documented here was surely the most distinctive Open Brethren assembly in New Zealand, and also for much of the time, the largest. It was renowned for being at the very open end of the Open Brethren, and this owes something to its origins as a Wesleyan city mission hall, founded in 1903 as the Open Door Mission, taken over by the main city Baptist Church in 1913, and then effectively falling into Brethren hands, and losing its Baptist links in 1919. In 1958 it replaced its Tory Street Hall with a very grand building named Elizabeth Street Chapel, and boasting a donated pipe organ (although this was later replaced with a Hammond electronic organ). In 2002 the church moved again to Hania Street and took the name 'The Street City Church', reflecting another shift of style to a large mega-church. This is an interesting and influential story in itself, and the byways of this account document details. Careful documentation from records and many personal stories enhance the volume. The thematic structure of the book—with large sections on belief and practice, music, missions, church camps, children's and youth work, and adult ministries, tend to focus the book on the current shape of this church. But it also provides a series of significant narratives on such issues as the

Charismatic movement, the employment of pastors, the role of ‘the business committee’, later renamed the elders, and the role of visiting evangelists (the church was renowned for its open platform, and many of the significant evangelical visitors to the city spoke there).

Tory Street and its successors were out on a limb compared to most assemblies, at least in Wellington, but the detail in this local history shows that on many issues including hymn books, musical accompaniment, employment of pastors, prophetic teaching, led worship, the role of women, and the decline of Brethren identity, it was not far ahead of other assemblies. The church contained some very prominent government officials and business leaders, and the church was reputed to be very affluent and contain generous donors and leaders of many Christian organisations. Rees-Thomas addresses these issues and opines on them, providing a fascinating insider’s commentary, while the biographical data is also invaluable. Thus while the book is a massive read, its strength lies in the rich assortment of details on every manner of subject related to the church. It will prove immensely helpful for anyone seeking to write a nuanced history of Brethren life and not just in New Zealand. It was my privilege to help the author discover the pre-history of Tory Street in its Methodist and Baptist days, but I feel repaid amply by the way in which the author explored and expanded every aspect I pointed him to.

Peter Lineham

**Saved for the Service of God: Biography of Allister and Jean**

**Shedden**

**Marion Cunningham**

**Kilmarnock: John Ritchie Ltd., 2014**

**108 pp.+ b&w photos      ISBN 978-1-909803-83-1      £2.99**

**India to Ethiopia: A 50 Year Journey**

**Robert Revie**

**Kilmarnock: John Ritchie Publishing, 2017**

**144 pp.+ b&w photos      ISBN 978-1-910513-95-8      £6.99**

These two books are the life stories of Echoes of Service missionaries. Both are simply told, one by a daughter and the other an autobiography. All four missionaries (Robert Revie includes his late wife, Sheena) came from Ayrshire in south-west Scotland, one of the United Kingdom regions where the Brethren have been strongest.

The Sheddens went to Honduras in 1950, having been commended by the assemblies in Ardrossan and Saltcoats; the Revies had initially intended serving in India, but a ban on missionary nurses by the Indian government led to a change of plan and instead they went to Ethiopia in 1969, commended by three small Scottish assemblies and one English one. These commendations are not an incidental detail, for none of the missionaries undertook any prior training for life in a different culture—though Robert Revie did learn vehicle maintenance. If Echoes (or the Scottish Home & Foreign Missions Fund) had any input into their intended service, it was evidently so minimal as to be forgettable. The narratives take the missionaries straight from service in their home assemblies to a foreign field. Even language study began once there. It is easy to think that ‘living by faith’ is an economic matter, but for these missionaries, it was clearly extended to matters of daily living and to cultural adaption. God would take care of every need.

Their stories are ones of miraculous preservations amid landslips, hurricanes, bandits, and political revolutions, while coping with the difficulties of travel in harsh terrain. Family life as children come along is complicated by educational needs and separation. But in both countries there was a remarkable growth in evangelical Christianity. Brethren mission in Honduras began in 1911 with the Englishman Alfred Hockings who worked with the American Bible Society, and the Sheddens arrived as part of an influx of Western missionaries in the post-war years. By the time they left, Honduras had become a sending country to other Central American states, and in Honduras itself in 2006, shortly after the Sheddens had retired, there were 267 assemblies, a number which has continued to rise, until at the time of writing there are some 1,000 assemblies.

In Ethiopia, Brethren missionaries began work in 1952, and when the Revies had to leave the country in 1978 after the Communist