

The Michael Ramsey Prize  
for theological writing



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2009

PRESS PACK

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## The Prize

The author of the winning book will receive £15,000. This is a substantial award, particularly for a specialist competition.

## The shortlist

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Eerdmans)

David Brown, *God & Grace of Body* (OUP)

Richard Burridge, *Imitating Jesus* (Eerdmans)

Sebastian Moore, *The Contagion of Jesus* (DLT)

Anthony Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Eerdmans)

## Prize-giving

The winner will be announced at the end of The Michael Ramsey Prize Lunch at the Guardian Hay Festival on 28 May 2009 by Archbishop Rowan Williams in the presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

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[www.michaelramseyprize.org.uk](http://www.michaelramseyprize.org.uk)

## About the Michael Ramsey Prize

The Prize, which is sponsored by the Lambeth Fund and administered by SPCK, was inaugurated by Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams to encourage the most promising contemporary theological writing and to identify it for a wider Christian readership.

The biennial prize commemorates Dr Ramsey, who was Archbishop of Canterbury 1961-1974, and his commitment to increasing the breadth of theological understanding of people in general.

The Prize was inaugurated in 2003, and the first award was made in 2005. In 2007 the Prize was awarded to Fr Timothy Radcliffe for *What is the Point of Being a Christian?*

Nominations are made by invited Anglican Primates worldwide, by leaders of Christian church bodies in the UK, Anglican Diocesan Bishops and by principals of theological colleges. Books may not be nominated by publishers or members of the public.

## Regulations

1. The Michael Ramsey Prize for 2009 will be awarded to the author of a theological work that is judged to contribute most towards advancing theology and making a serious contribution to the faith and life of the Church.
2. The book must be by a living author, and must have been first published between March 2006 and December 2007.
3. The book must be written in or translated into English, and available in the UK.
4. The Prize is £15,000, and is awarded to the author(s) of the winning work.
5. The judging panel is appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The judges' decision is final.
6. Books must be nominated by a member of the nominating body.
7. Each publisher of a shortlisted title must agree to:
  - Supply 8 copies of the book, to be used for judging and for promoting the book and the Prize;
  - Secure the attendance of the author at the prize-giving ceremony at the Hay Festival at the end of May 2009. This is especially important for overseas authors;
  - Make shortlisted/winning authors available wherever possible for other public appearances and events to promote the book and the Michael Ramsey Prize e.g. literary festivals, signings, online discussions and academic/educational events;
  - Acknowledge the Michael Ramsey Prize in subsequent reprints, paperback editions and any point-of-sale material for the winning book. SPCK will provide stickers and flyers for winning books.

## Archbishop Rowan Williams on the Michael Ramsey Prize

Archbishop Rowan Williams spoke about the purpose and nature of the Michael Ramsey Prize at the prizegiving ceremony at the Christian Resources Exhibition at Sandown Park in May 2007.

An edited version of his speech appears below.

When I was first nominated as Archbishop of Canterbury I was, of course, asked what my priorities were. The two that I named were doing something about the mission of the Church generally in terms of church planting and new kinds of congregation, and that bore fruit eventually in the Fresh Expressions initiative which was launched a couple of years ago, but also something about theological education. As you've gathered it's something that quite a bit of my own life has been devoted to and I've got a very strong conviction that a healthy church is a Church where people know their way around their Tradition; know where to look for resource, challenge, growth etc.; where people aren't afraid to think and aren't afraid to argue.

I spoke in another context of how we needed a more argumentative democracy than we've got at the moment: people who are more open in the public sphere about fundamental questions of meaning and direction and where people were able to have informed dialogue that didn't issue in stand-offs, violence or rejection. So what we're talking about is a theologically educated Church and that's not about everybody being able to get down volumes of the great classics and being able to read them straight off: it's something to do with the biblical phrase about being able *to give a reason for the faith that is in you* and something to do with an assumption that the Church is a community where people grow; grow not only in a depth of feeling, or a depth of commitment, but grow in integration with all that is to do with the work of the mind.

And so one idea that formulated itself, with the help of friends, was that we ought to have a theological book prize. There have been such in the past. The Collins Religious Book award in years gone by was a very significant presence on the scene but there didn't seem to be anything quite like that now and I thought perhaps there ought to be. Enough other people thought there ought to be to make it very worthwhile and the Lambeth partners who are generously supportive of the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury by their voluntary giving agreed promptly and enthusiastically to fund this award.

The criteria that we've applied have been twofold. We're looking for a work that does in some sense advance theology. It's the kind of phrase you get in research submissions and in universities and it's pretty vague, but I take it that what it means is that we're looking for something which is more than a text book, not necessarily something that argues some great devastating new thesis – though that is welcome – but something that extends the range of people's understanding, casting fresh perspectives on familiar territory and perhaps even giving us a bit more territory to explore. So, something that advances theology but also that advances it for the sake of the Church, in other words not *primarily* an academic monograph – though again, we're looking for rigour and intellectual quality – but something that will, directly or indirectly, nourish the Church, make people in the Church feel it's worth belonging, it's worth exploring, it's worth communicating.

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So that's what we're after and, as you'll hear in a moment, we've been extraordinarily well served this year. This second round has convinced us judges that it's a good idea. There are books out there that are worthy of consideration and that this is something which can be and will be an appropriate encouragement to people.

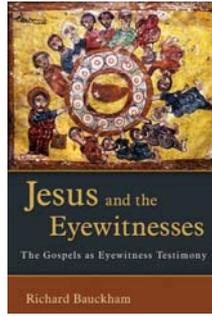
And finally, why Michael Ramsey? Well, I couldn't resist it really! He's my favourite among the Archbishops of Canterbury of the last 1000 years or so and somebody who certainly did manage to advance theology and advanced it very much by producing things that continue to nourish people in the most surprising ways and places.

I had a letter from a literary friend just before Easter who rather surprisingly confided that he was reading Michael Ramsey's *Be Still and Know* as his Lenten reading and I suspect those who are familiar with his published work would be rather surprised to find him reading that. But it's an index of just how profound an impact he had and how he exemplifies what this award is all about: a thinking church, a growing church in the spiritual and intellectual sense, a praying church, an adventurous church, a rooted church, all those things that the Church tries with extremely variable levels of success to be. I think he's the perfect patron for this award and I hope that in addition to all the other things this award will do it will keep alive a very precious and a very important memory.

# The shortlist

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## **Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, Richard Bauckham**

Paperback, £17.99, ISBN:978-0-8028-6390-4, Eerdmans

This momentous book argues that the four Gospels are closely based on the eyewitness testimony of those who knew Jesus personally. Noted New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham challenges the prevailing assumption that the accounts of Jesus circulated as "anonymous community traditions," asserting instead that they were transmitted in the names of the original eyewitnesses.

To drive home this controversial point, Bauckham draws on internal literary evidence, the use of personal names in first-century Jewish Palestine, and recent developments in the understanding of oral tradition. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* also taps into the rich resources of modern study of memory, especially in cognitive psychology, refuting the conclusions of the form critics and calling New Testament scholarship to make a clean break with this long-dominant tradition. Finally, Bauckham challenges readers to end the classic division between the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith', proposing instead the 'Jesus of testimony' as presented by the Gospels.

Sure to ignite heated debate on the precise character of the testimony about Jesus, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* is a groundbreaking work that will be valued by scholars, students, and all who seek to understand the origins of the Gospels.

Richard Bauckham is Emeritus Professor of New Testament studies at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. A fellow of both the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, he has also written *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*.

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**Richard Bauckham**

**1. Why did you write this book?**

This is a book I could not have written at an earlier point in my career, because the overall argument draws on many areas of study and expertise that I was able to bring together as I developed it. I never actually set out to write a major book arguing for a new paradigm in Gospels study, but began from a few ideas that had come to me about the significance of names in the Gospels, about what Papias meant when he wrote about eyewitness testimony, and about the origins of the Gospel of John. I thought it would be a short but suggestive book, but the argument developed, so it seemed, of its own accord and I just followed where it led, drawing in other areas of study as they seemed required by the way the argument developed. I think I was personally most pleased with the book because of the way the argument developed organically. Fortunately, I had a year's sabbatical leave in which to let it do so. Of course, I was aware all along that this was an area of truly central importance both for New Testament studies and for Christian faith, but did not really expect to have such a comprehensive new paradigm to propose until it emerged. Nor did I start with a traditional ('pre-critical') view of the Gospels that I wanted to prove. A lot of my own ideas changed in the course of writing the book and discovering where the arguments led.

**2. What is the central idea of your book?**

The book has both a historical argument and a theological argument, both centred on the notion of eyewitness testimony. The historical argument (most of the book) is that the eyewitnesses of the events of the Gospel history remained, throughout their lives, the authoritative sources and guarantors of the traditions about Jesus, and that the texts of our Gospels are much closer to the way the eyewitnesses told their stories than has been generally thought in mainstream New Testament scholarship in the twentieth century. Since the rise of the approach to the study of the Gospels known as 'form criticism,' early in the last century, most scholars have supposed that, while the eyewitnesses originated (at least some of) the traditions about Jesus, these were then transmitted as anonymous traditions in the early Christian communities, developing in all sorts of ways in the process, and reached the Gospel writers as the product of such community transmission and development. My book aims to put the eyewitnesses back into our understanding of how the traditions about Jesus reached the writers of the Gospels. One of the Gospels (John) I argue was written by an eyewitness, while the others are based quite closely on the testimony of the eyewitnesses.

The theological argument (in the final chapter) concerns what is usually called the distinction between the Christ of faith (Jesus as the Gospels portray him and as Christians believe in him) and the Jesus of history (Jesus as historians, digging behind the Gospels, reconstruct him). I argue that, since the Gospels embody the testimony of the eyewitnesses, the category of testimony offers us a way beyond this dichotomy. It is both the historical category appropriate to the sort of history the Gospels are and the theological category appropriate to the sort of accounts of Jesus that Christian faith requires for belief in and discipleship of Jesus. The Gospels, I suggest, give us the 'Jesus of testimony' – not, of course, an uninterpreted Jesus (all history is an inextricable blend of fact and meaning), but Jesus as the eyewitness participants in his history, the 'insiders' to the events, remembered and presented him.

**3. Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?**

I guess most Christians still take it for granted that the Gospels provide us with eyewitness testimony to Jesus. But for a long time this has not been the view of most New Testament

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scholars. The idea that the 'real Jesus' was not as the Gospels present him, but a very different figure as reconstructed by historians, often seems problematic to Christian believers who encounter it, especially since the media usually give prominence to those scholars who are the most sceptical about the historical value of the Gospels and come up with reconstructions of the historical Jesus very different from the way the Gospels portray him (and often quite bizarre). I think those Christians are right to find this problematic, and the fact that some retreat into a fundamentalist attitude to the Gospels is understandable. Christian faith has always trusted that the Jesus it finds in the Gospels is the 'real Jesus' – an interpreted Jesus, to be sure, Jesus as perceived by the first Christians, but Jesus interpreted in a way that is true to, rather than distorting, his historical reality, Jesus as he was perceived and understood by those who were closest to him. As the church moves into the twenty-first century these questions are vital for its faith. I hope my book gives Christian believers good reasons for confidence that the Jesus they find in the Gospels is the real Jesus.

At the same time, I would like to stress that my book is not merely a piece of apologetic. I think it has been becoming more and more apparent (for example, from recent study of oral tradition in many societies today) that what has been in the twentieth century the dominant scholarly approach to the Gospels has very serious flaws. It is ripe for radical reassessment. While my conclusions are relatively close to traditional views of the Gospels, I do not fall back on traditional arguments, but offer a series of novel considerations that have led even most of my most hostile reviewers to say that my arguments will need to be taken very seriously. I am suggesting a new paradigm for historical study of the Gospels that I think can be seen to be needed at the present juncture of Gospels study, and this is why it has been very widely welcomed, especially by younger scholars within the discipline. Such a development in Gospels study, one that models a comprehensive new approach, cannot but prove important for the church.

#### **4. Describe your ideal reader.**

My ideal reader would be someone with a serious interest in Jesus and the Gospels, who finds historical argument engaging, and who, whatever they already think, is open to fresh arguments.

#### **5. Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?**

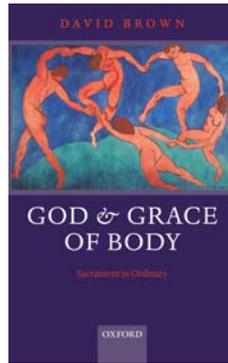
I suppose if the answer were yes, that would disqualify the book from the Michael Ramsey prize! I cannot pretend that the book is an easy read. In the nature of the case, there is a lot of quite complex argument. An innovative approach to the Gospels could not hope to convince anyone otherwise. But I had in mind throughout readers who do not have a degree in theology and tried to explain things as clearly as possible. It's a demanding read, I'm sure, but my impression is that it has been appreciated by quite a wide range of people.

#### **6. Why is theology more important than ever today?**

I think theology is certainly as important as ever. One interesting development is the amount of discussion of theological (especially biblical) matters that now goes on on the Web, which has given a lot of people the opportunity to engage for themselves in the kind of discussions that used to happen mostly only in academic contexts. People don't just receive what academics hand down via the clergy, but can think about these things themselves in dialogue with others. I think this may prove a valuable counterweight to the tendency of increasingly specialized academic work to address only a small circle of other specialists. (Of course there is wacky nonsense on the Web, but so there is also in academic publications!)

**I'm thrilled to be nominated for the MRP because....**it would be very pleasing to have my book ranked with those that won the prize in 2005 and 2007. The importance of the prize is that it identifies for the reading public some books that really deserve attention.

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## God & Grace of Body, David Brown

Hardback, £32.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-923182-9, Oxford University Press

This book explores the ways in which the symbolic associations of the body and what we do with it have helped shape religious experience and continue to do so. A Church narrowly focused on Christ's body wracked in pain needs to be reminded that the body, as beautiful and sexual, has also played a crucial role not only in other religions but also in the history of Christianity itself. Dance was one way in which the connection was expressed. The irony is not that such a connection has gone, but that it now exists almost wholly outside the Church. Much the same could be said about music more generally, and this book talks about the spiritual potential of not just classical music but also pop, jazz, musicals, and opera.

David Brown is Professor of Theology, Aesthetics and Culture and Wardlaw Professor at the University of St Andrews.

While Professor Brown's earlier career focused on the relations between theology and philosophy, in more recent years his interest has broadened to theology and culture more generally.

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**David Brown**

**1. Why did you write this book?**

*God and Grace of Body* is the second of three books concerned with religious experience beyond the more obvious contexts of worship and prayer, and as such is intended to supplement two earlier volumes on God at work through the imaginative appropriation of Scripture across the centuries (*Tradition and Imagination*, 1999; *Discipleship and Imagination*, 2000). In the three later books the imaginative theme continues, but is now addressed to where God's presence might be found in the wider culture. In contrast to our own age where religion is largely identified with worship and ethics/politics, earlier generations would have found God mediated not just in the natural world but also equally through human creativity as a reflection of divine, however partial and inadequate it might at times be. So, in this connection theologians once gave serious attention to a great variety of human activities such as architecture, landscape art, gardens and sport (*God and Enchantment of Place*, 2004), and could do so again. *God and Grace of Body* is that volume's successor, with fresh but related themes. A final volume (*God and Mystery in Words*) explores literature and drama.

**2. What is the central idea of your book?**

The central idea in *God and Grace of Body* is that, as an incarnational and sacramental religion, Christianity should take seriously the possibility of encounter with God, not just through our souls and minds but also in and through our bodies. To that end the work is divided into three parts. Part I explores the possibility of such experience through the expression of the body in movement (dance) in consumption (food and drink) and in the image it conveys (as beautiful, 'sexy' or ugly). Part II then looks at music as a physical activity in its many forms (classical through pop and heavy rock to opera). The book then ends by setting those wider reflections in the context of Christ's body present in the Eucharist. Ethical issues are avoided, not because they are unimportant but because too often in its past Christianity has jumped immediately from body to consideration of sexual practice.

**3. Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?**

Most contemporary Christian discussion, whether academic or otherwise, tends to focus in on worship and ethics/politics. The result is a compartmentalised religion where vast areas of human activity and experience are simply ignored. This is a major contrast with the past. Historically, most religions, including Christianity, have claimed to address the whole of life. I would like to ensure that such a wider discussion once again becomes the norm.

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**4. Describe your ideal reader.**

My ideal reader might fall under one of two categories, or sometimes both: (1) someone with broad interests and sympathies who is interested in the history of the arts and culture more generally, in particular how religion, and especially Christianity, has interacted with them; (2) Christians keen to dialogue with secular culture, and thus demonstrate the continuing relevance of the Christian gospel.

**5. Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?**

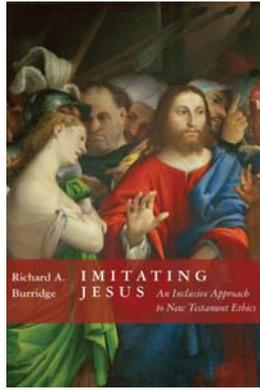
I have tried to assume as little background knowledge as possible. Inevitably, however, some chapters will be easier than others, depending on what sort of cultural background a reader has. So, for example, in the chapter on dance some readers might find the section on modern dance easier than that of ballet, or again, some will take more readily to the pop chapter (that covers everything from Bob Dylan to rap) than to the chapter on classical music (which is occasionally a little technical). On the other hand, that on food and drink has more universal themes.

**6. Why is theology more important than ever today?**

According to the 2000 census 76% of the population still believe in God but only about a tenth of that number attend church. It is my belief that theology needs to take much more seriously the other nine tenths. I think that they continue to find hints of God in the wider culture, but at present because such experience is not taken seriously by theologians or Christians more generally, for them the Church is seen as simply an irrelevance. It is important, however, that this should be a genuine listening expertise, and not just the automatic imposition of a Christian grid.

**I'm thrilled to be nominated for the Michael Ramsey Prize** because it demonstrates that there is after all some concern in the Church to address the sort of issues I have indicated above, in particular the presence of God at work in the wider culture

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## **Imitating Jesus, Richard Burridge**

Hardback, £23.99, ISBN: 978-0-8028-4458-3, Eerdmans

In contrast to many studies of New Testament ethics, which treat the New Testament in general and Paul in particular, this book focuses on the person of Jesus himself. Richard Burridge maintains that imitating Jesus means following both his words – which are very demanding ethical teachings – and his deeds and example of being inclusive and accepting of everyone.

Burridge carefully and systematically traces that combination of rigorous ethical instruction and inclusive community through the letters of Paul and the four Gospels, treating specific ethical issues pertaining to each part of Scripture. The book culminates with a chapter on apartheid as an ethical challenge to reading the New Testament; using South Africa as a contemporary case study enables Burridge to highlight and further apply his previous discussion and conclusions.

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**Richard Burridge**

**1. Why did you write this book?**

From my undergraduate studies in Classics, I have been interested in the literary theory of genres, which I also taught as a schoolmaster. My doctoral studies on the genre of the gospels (published as *What Are The Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, CUP 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn Eerdmans 2004) argued that the gospels are a form of ancient biography. My other books (e.g. *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* SPCK, 1994, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 2005) have worked out some of the implications of this for how we read the gospels today. For more than a decade now, I have been researching the implications of the biographical genre of the gospels for how the New Testament is used in ethics. In particular, I was greatly affected by a period of being asked to teach clergy schools on this material in South Africa (and going to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with Archbishop Desmond Tutu) in 1998, and researching how the Bible was used both to justify apartheid and to critique it. In South Africa, how one interpreted the Bible for ethics was, quite literally, a matter of life and death, which is why the book is dedicated 'to Archbishop Tutu and all the rainbow people of South Africa'. Subsequently I have also been trying to apply this material to the current debates in the world-wide Anglican Communion over women in leadership and about human sexuality. Therefore I wrote the book both to continue my academic interest in biblical interpretation and also in order to assist the churches, especially the Anglican Communion, in how they apply the New Testament to ethical issues today.

**2. What is the central idea of your book?**

As a form of ancient biography, the gospels provide a portrait of Jesus through his deeds and his words. Most attempts to apply the New Testament to ethics look only at his words – and miss his deeds. While Jesus' ethical teaching is extremely demanding, it is set within a biographical narrative of his ministry which shows him accepting people, including those who were having moral difficulties in precisely the ethical areas about which he taught. Therefore any application of the New Testament to our contemporary moral dilemmas must hold together both Jesus' rigorous teaching and his open and inclusive acceptance of others.

**3. Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?**

The Church is often polarised between those who stress Jesus' demanding ethic, but who therefore exclude people who struggle with it, and those who want to welcome everyone but who are accused of being morally lax and having no ethics. If the Church is truly to imitate Jesus it must proclaim his ethic and emulate his inclusive community.

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**4. Describe your ideal reader.**

While I expect those with an academic interest in biblical ethics in universities to read my book, my ideal reader would include thinking Christians who want to apply the New Testament to our life together today – which is why this book has been used in seminaries and theological colleges as well as a wide variety of contexts from the Greenbelt Christian Arts Festival to the Lambeth Conference.

**5. Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?**

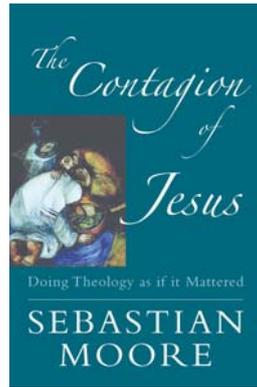
Clearly not, since the author does not have a degree in theology himself! However, the reader needs to have a lively and intelligent interest in the Bible and in what is happening in the world-wide Church, especially the Anglican Communion.

**6. Why is theology more important than ever today?**

In South Africa, how the Bible was interpreted led to the oppression of millions of people, including many deaths and much violence – and yet it also helped those seeking to bring liberation. Religious faith is more important in the world today than for many decades – and debates between ‘the People of the Book’ (Christians, Muslims and Jews) are vital for many aspects of international security. The interpretation of the Bible’s promises about the Holy Land lie at the heart of the problems of the Middle East, while both the Qu’ran and the Bible are regularly quoted in debates and discussion in our post 9/11 world. Learning to read these sacred texts together in an inclusive community (as my book argues) is vital for any hope of a peaceful future.

**I’m thrilled to be nominated for the Michael Ramsey Prize because** ever since I met Archbishop Michael Ramsey when I was a student, I have been inspired by his example of holding together spirituality and study, both academic theology and the life of the Church. This is what I have tried to do throughout my own ministry and writing – and so I offer this book to the judges in tribute to his memory.

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## **The Contagion of Jesus, Sebastian Moore**

Paperback, £14.95, ISBN:978-0-232-52717-9, Darton, Longman and Todd

A *cri de coeur* to the teaching church to 'think again' from one of the most innovative and influential theologians of the twentieth century. Sebastian Moore describes *The Contagion of Jesus* as 'passionate rather than rigorous theology', based on a loving God, a saving Christ, and a church of friendship and discipleship. Published to coincide with the author's 90th birthday, it will introduce a new generation to the work of a spiritual master.

Sebastian Moore OSB is a monk of Downside Abbey and the author of several celebrated books including *The Crucified Jesus is no Stranger* and *The Fire and the Rose are one*.

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**Sebastian Moore**

**1. Why did you write this book?**

I write because I want a church that speaks and makes sense in a desperate time. Faith keeps alive in me by creating questions that probe into my self-awareness. Out of this I have to write. Gloria Steinem said, 'For me, being in love is a state of passionate curiosity', and this tells me why I write endlessly of Jesus as the life of my soul.

I have always been intrigued by the Trinity, and as I follow this attraction in *The Contagion of Jesus* I find myself wanting to write about God from God's point of view, not from ours. If people could come to sense in themselves the passionate stillness wanting us happy in the midst of the appalling afflictions to which we are subject, they would be drawn in and changed.

The biggest event in my introspection has been the work of Eckhart Tolle. In the two pages that precede *The Power of Now*, he does something I have never seen in print before. He describes total transformation, the self unstuck from the ego in a night, after which he wakes to the world as God sees it, and he does this in non-religious language. He can fill a hall and give people a taste of our inner silence, and I can recognize in his description my own inner coming-apart, making me naked to God, so that Tolle's image of feeling the air escaping from the inflatable toy of the ego has struck me as immediately descriptive of me looking at Jesus risen and letting him/me die into deathless happiness in God. It is this process in me that I can sometimes feel alongside the 'mental noise' – Tolle's brilliant description – of ego that compels me to write.

**2. What is the central idea of your book?**

I speak for a minority that is the least-noticed casualty of the church's self-awareness, the homosexual, whose status in official church teaching today is that of virtual monk or nun. One of the things I suggest in *The Contagion of Jesus* is that this teaching is mocking and abusive, and it has been the occasion of a few suicides, as Cardinal Hume told Ratzinger when he was Prefect of the CDF.

**3. Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?**

One of my literary heroines is Mrs Moore in Forster's *A Passage to India*, who says that the worst thing in life is muddle. And how muddle reigns when the new Archbishop of Westminster, asked about homosexuality, replies that he will follow the Holy Father – this about human sexuality, the most basic thing about us, and he a bishop does not have an opinion of his own, it seems, but defers to the Holy Father, whose track-record in this matter is appalling.

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**4. Describe your ideal reader.**

My main inspiration as a writer is James Alison, the author of *Faith beyond Resentment*. Alison is the chief English representative of the revolution in anthropology started by Rene Girard. His wonderful books have opened up theology to an entirely new readership of restless, inquisitive believers from every Christian tradition, and people who had 'given up' on the church and its teachings. These are precisely the people I am writing for, too.

**5. Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?**

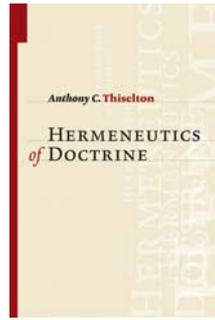
Good heavens, no.

**6. Why is theology more important than ever today?**

James Alison and other great writers about the things of God show it is possible to bring new excitement to a completely traditional reading of the Christian tradition, rooted in the scriptures and the ancient writers, but capable of enthraling readers who had come to feel that Christianity was no longer meaningful or credible. Serious, quite demanding theology can turn lives upside down. This is what theology can do. It can 'Make it new', as Pound says.

**I'm thrilled to be nominated for the MRP because** it is a recognition by the judges that theology can still bring passion and stillness and liberation and refreshment amidst the cruelty and denial and slaughter of our world.

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## The Hermeneutics of Doctrine, Anthony Thiselton

Hardback, £29.99, ISBN: 978-0-8028-2681-7, Eerdmans

Drawing on the resources of contemporary hermeneutical theory, Anthony Thiselton in this volume masterfully recovers the formative and transformative power of Christian doctrine.

The past thirty-five years have witnessed major steps forward in the use of hermeneutics in biblical studies, but never before has hermeneutics made a comparable impact on the formulation of doctrine and our engagement with it. Indeed, no other book explores the interface between hermeneutics and Christian doctrine in the same in-depth way that this one does. Throughout the book Thiselton shows how perspectives that arise from hermeneutics shed fresh light on theological method, reshape horizons of understanding, and reveal the relevance of doctrine for formation and for life.

Arguably the leading authority worldwide on biblical and philosophical hermeneutics, Thiselton has written widely acclaimed works in the areas of biblical studies and philosophical theology. His probing interaction in *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* with numerous other great thinkers — Gadamer, Ricoeur, Lindbeck, Balthasar, Vanhoozer, Pannenberg, etc. — and his original perspectives will make this volume a valuable resource for scholars and advanced students.

Anthony Thiselton is professor of Christian theology at the University of Nottingham. Among his many other books are *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, the NIGTC volume on 1 Corinthians, and *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (all Eerdmans).

The Michael Ramsey Prize  
for theological writing



## Anthony Thiselton

### 1. Why did you write this book?

It dawned on me over many years that the current generation of serious Church-goers, ordinands and younger clergy are generally (with notable exceptions) no longer interested in Christian Doctrine, certainly with as much passion and concern as my contemporaries used to be. Often this was because they seemed to misunderstand the very purpose of Doctrine.

Then I saw that it was not entirely their responsibility. For thirty-eight years I had lectured, and for thirty written on, Hermeneutics (theories of interpretation), as an inter-disciplinary subject involving philosophy (how we know or understand) and biblical studies (how we read specific texts). I had helped to reshape biblical interpretation and biblical reading. When I looked at books on Christian Doctrine, many seemed to have neglected or ignored all the steady progress which we had made in Hermeneutics.

It was therefore no surprise that so many seemed to regard Doctrine as abstract, dry, remote from life, and in no way practical or life-transforming. I therefore determined to write a book which would apply the insights of many years of hermeneutical advance to Christian Doctrine.

The book would first outline some relevant advances in biblical and philosophical hermeneutics (Part I); then consider possible objections to this method (Part II); and finally apply the results to major Christian Doctrines (Part III). Necessarily it becomes an inter-disciplinary book, combining three areas of expertise, usually found only in three separate thinkers, namely philosophy, biblical studies, and doctrine. Reviewers confirm this.

### 2. What is the central idea of your book?

The central idea is the re-instatement of Christian Doctrine. This requires explaining how to approach it in the light of biblical and philosophical hermeneutics, so that it becomes transformed into a life-changing subject. It can provide formation for people, by substituting concrete questions which arise from a given context in life, in place of abstract, timeless, 'problems'; by understanding that belief is not simply a mental state, but a practical reaction to concrete situations, by taking account of time, place and community; and by understanding the role of training and formation.

### 3. Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

It is extremely relevant because the Church as a whole has become impoverished by misunderstanding, and therefore neglecting, the place of Christian Doctrine as a practical resource for shaping its life and identity. Writers from all traditions agree.

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**4. Describe your ideal reader.**

My ideal reader is someone who is open to seeing how Christian Doctrine can transform *life* as well as thought, who will persevere with concepts in hermeneutics that may be new or complex, and who wants to see how this works out in the case of specific doctrines.

**5. Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?**

Many students have found the book readable and helpful (according to reports to me), while they are still *en route* to a theological degree. Most are second-years. However, I never intended it to be light reading, or a 'popular' book for the masses.

**6. Why is theology more important than ever today?**

Theology not only shapes life and identity in accordance with the revelation and the purposes of God, it also provides (if we may borrow the language of hermeneutics) a horizon that is broader, larger, and more comprehensive than any other discipline. It embraces the corporate memory of the Church (past history), present resources and tasks (present attention), and future expectation of Christian destiny (future hope).

**I'm thrilled to be nominated for the Michael Ramsey Prize because** it will bring to people's attention the agenda and goals set out above. Bookshops might not be otherwise enamoured with what might seem to be an obscure title: *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, but the Michael Ramsey Prize would overcome this.

The Michael Ramsey Prize  
for theological writing

## The Judges



ALISON FULFORD is a working mum who looks after her toddler as well as serving in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham as a priest. She is also taking a part-time MA in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. She studied English Literature at Cambridge University and then Theology while training for ordination at Ridley Hall. Alison was selected for the judging panel through a writing competition which was open to the general public.



PAULA GOODER is a freelance writer and lecturer in New Testament. She is Canon Theologian at Birmingham Cathedral, Visiting Lecturer at King's College London, Honorary lecturer at Birmingham University and Senior Research scholar at the Queen's foundation, Birmingham. Her research interests include mysticism in the writings of Paul the Apostle, the development of ministry in the early church and New Testament Interpretation.



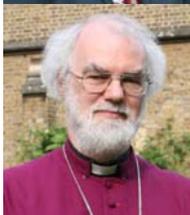
TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE is a Dominican friar. He was educated at Oxford and Paris, taught theology at Oxford, and was involved in ministry to people with AIDS. He was Provincial of the English Province of the Dominican Order, and then, as Master of the Order, he travelled widely in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He is the author of several theological works, including *What is the point of being a Christian?* for which he was awarded the Michael Ramsey Prize in 2007.



ELAINE STORKEY is trained in theology, philosophy and the social sciences and her writing has mainly been in gender studies, theology and Christian worldviews. She is President of Tearfund with world-wide links and concerns, a member of General Synod, and lectures and broadcasts widely. She has lectured in postmodern theology and secularisation theories at Oxford University and is currently Director of Education for the Church Army.



JANE WILLIAMS read Theology at Cambridge, then worked in theological publishing and education. She currently works for Redemptorist Publications and as a Visiting Lecturer at King's College, London and as a Lecturer at the St Paul's Theological Centre. Since 1981 she has been married to Archbishop Rowan Williams.



ROWAN WILLIAMS, Archbishop of Canterbury, read Theology at Christ's College, Cambridge. After research, lecturing and parochial work, Dr Williams became Professor of Theology at Oxford. He was enthroned as Bishop of Monmouth in 1992 and Archbishop of Wales in 2000. Dr Williams has written a number of books on the history of theology and spirituality and published collections of articles and sermons.



A.N. WILSON was born in 1950 and educated at Rugby and New College, Oxford. A fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, he has held a prominent position in the world of literature and journalism. An award-winning biographer, he has written lives of Sir Walter Scott (John Llewellyn Rhys Prize), Tolstoy (Whitbread Award for Biography), C.S. Lewis, Hilaire Belloc, and, most recently, Iris Murdoch. In 1992 he caused a sensation with his bestselling *Jesus* and this he followed up with his equally controversial *Paul*. He is also a celebrated novelist, winning prizes for much of his fiction.

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