



work' (p. 30). 'In assuming a human nature, the Word communicates divine liberty to humanity' and 'the result is a transformation of human possibilities that goes beyond judgement, and towards a positive existence of faith and action' (p. 39). What is brought into being through the resurrection is the new possibility of *theosis*, a new creation to be lived out and witnessed to by a new community, in which, as Anthony of Egypt said, 'our life and death is with our neighbour' (p. 42). Gray engages with what he calls the 'parodic Christology' exemplified for Williams by Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky, who is 'deeply flawed by lack of self-knowledge, confused desire and passivity' (p. 59).

In the eschatological 'endless end' which Christ brings about, Williams draws on both Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *epektasis* and Augustine's *imago Dei* understood as 'a God-directed intentionality' (p. 151). In Jesus' self-giving 'to the point of dereliction, [he] "renders himself absent as a simple terminus of piety". In *kenosis*, he becomes that self-effacing "absence" at the centre of devotion, but *kenosis* passes over into *epektasis*, just as death cedes to resurrection, and it is not accidental that Williams goes on to speak... of Mary in the garden, finding that the human Jesus has ceased to be a simple terminus for *her* devotion. He is no longer a "steady object" or "an historical other in the past". He is now a space to be stood in where we are "deflected towards the absence of any static divine object so that the divine life may be lived in us as subjects"' (p. 168). It is worth wrestling with this demanding, and at times astringent, analysis of Rowan Williams's Christology to be made aware of the sharp challenges to any theology that seeks to do justice to the radical nature of the incarnation, and the cost of salvation from sin and death.

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Helen Bond, ***Jesus: A Very Brief History*** (London: SPCK, 2017); 128 pp.: 9780281075997, £7.99 (pbk)

Helen Bond's new book *Jesus*, part of SPCK's 'A Very Brief History' series, provides a highly approachable introduction to the 'Historical Jesus' and the impact that Christianity has made on the world. Impressively, Bond has managed to address a myriad of thorny topics in under 80 pages, including the mythical Jesus hypothesis, whether Jesus was married, the presence of women in his entourage, who the Pharisees were and why they came into conflict with Jesus, who was responsible for his execution and why, theological conflicts in the early Church, and the development of 'Christian culture'.

However, this brevity has come at a cost: important questions are not asked, and complex topics are glossed over without the nuance that they deserve. For example, Bond skims past the 'criterion of embarrassment' method when she writes, 'The embarrassment of admitting that one of Jesus' closest friends betrayed him has convinced most scholars that this is a historically reliable detail' (p. 34). But why

does the inclusion of an ‘embarrassing detail’ make that narrative more historically reliable? Without an explanation, this may be confusing to the novice. Bond similarly introduces, but does not sufficiently explain, why the inherent bias in the New Testament texts is not overly problematic for historians, why historians do not study the miraculous (p. 45), and the presence of anti-Judaism in the New Testament (p. 73). Directly identifying and succinctly explaining these concepts would have strengthened the book overall.

With the inclusion of so much material, the reader is sure to come away with interest sparked in a new topic. But again, the swiftness and simplicity of the book does not provide tools to encourage further exploration. A few well-placed footnotes or targeted ‘further reading’ suggestions at the end of each chapter (rather than the handful provided at the end of the book) could accomplish this while maintaining the book’s easy accessibility. This is likely a flaw in the format of the series, however, and not due to the author’s choices.

Bond’s attempt to write a holistic overview in such a brief framework is indeed commendable. I particularly appreciated the decision to highlight the importance of theatrical and cinematic retellings of the New Testament narrative within the overall history of Jesus (despite the scholarship flaws in the paragraph on medieval mystery plays), thus emphasizing that he is both man and legacy. But I am left wondering: who is this book for? It is too rudimentary for introductory-level students or for Christians interested in the ‘Historical Jesus’ (it certainly does not explain what the difference is between studying Jesus, a historical figure, and Christ, the redeemer of humankind) and, interestingly, not basic enough for the total beginner. Perhaps a more focused approach – looking just at the ‘Historical Jesus’, the man, and leaving ‘the legacy’ for another book – would have better suited the series’ intended style, and given Bond the space to attend to the issues outlined.

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Benedict XVI with Peter Seewald, ***Last Testament: In His Own Words*** (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); 260 pp.: 9781472944672, £16.99/\$24.00 (hbk)

The book consists of a series of transcripts of conversations between Benedict XVI, now pope emeritus, and the German journalist Peter Seewald. They were recorded as raw material for a planned biography of the pope who surprised the church by retiring from office. A short introduction sets the scene, but there is little attempt at analysis. The book records a series of conversations during which Benedict was prompted to reminisce, recall and reflect on his life.

Seewald is a surprising choice of ‘confessor’ for a pope. He is a former Marxist student rebel who returned to the Catholicism of his roots late in adult life, but the