

in the name of religion – that seems to grip our world these days. The failure to highlight these new developments, which are having such an impact on shaping world Christianity, is not a shortcoming of the author (who had no way to know these developments would be emerging and so rapidly), but are rather a reminder for us that we not only need to learn from works like *The World's Christians* but also to follow its habits of always asking the questions of 'who they are, where they are, and how they got there', as we seek to understand the new developments that are happening in our world and our church today.

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Margo Todd (ed.), *The Perth Kirk Session Books, 1577–1590*, Scottish History Society (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), pp. 584. \$70.00 (hbk).

This edition of the earliest surviving kirk session books from Perth is one of the most important additions to the published sources of the Scottish Protestant Reformation to appear in recent times. Only St Andrews has a comparable run of sixteenth-century session minutes, published in the very first series of the Scottish History Society (vols 4 and 7, Edinburgh, 1889–90). Professor Todd's meticulous transcription of the original manuscripts and her fascinating and lucid introduction make available a treasure trove of primary evidence about the first generations of the parochial Reformation. As she rightly emphasises, the Reformers had the 'impossibly ambitious' agenda of completely changing hearts and minds and turning Scottish parishes into godly communities. 'The Reformation thus understood was a parochial endeavour, one whose outcome can only be understood by close examination of what went on in parish and pew' (p. 2). Thanks to the survival of other Perth records, the kirk session's business and record keeping can be placed firmly within its burgh context. The appendix identifying the elders is especially illuminating and enhances the richness of the source. These laymen were the key individuals who adopted the new religion and, by aligning the Protestant message with their own communal purposes, succeeded in changing their community. At one time or another nearly everyone in Perth would appear before the session, if only to request their marriage banns be proclaimed, and the edition furnishes a remarkable insight into the lives of the residents of this major burgh. Consequently, this volume will be of considerable significance not just within Scotland but also within British and

European Reformation studies and it will make a substantial contribution to national, social, cultural and general ecclesiastical history.

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Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 763. £95.00.

The subject of atheism has mostly been a marginal one in the theological syllabus, despite occasional references to leading sceptics, humanists and other critics of religion. This is quite surprising given the current interest amongst undergraduate students. As this excellent volume shows, atheism has significant historical and geographical reach, appearing in different manifestations and representing large numbers of people in the world today. While definitions are fuzzy and counting heads imprecise, Keyzar and Navarro-Rivera, in their demographic overview, estimate on the basis of a 2008 survey in 40 countries (which did not include the Middle East and much of Asia) that around 7 per cent of the world's population can be classified as atheist in the minimal sense of not believing in God or gods. Not surprisingly, this figure masks significant regional variations and forms of unbelief which require particular types of explanation. The largest recorded concentrations of atheists are in the Czech Republic (55%), France (41%) and Sweden (39%), while the lowest are in Venezuela (2%), Dominican Republic (3%), Philippines (3%), Chile (3%) and Turkey (3%). Elsewhere along the spectrum are the UK (30%), and the USA (8%). A disproportionate number within these groups are young, male, educated and unmarried.

A working distinction between negative and positive atheism informs most of the forty-six essays in the volume. Negative atheism is simply the absence of belief in God or the gods and so includes scepticism, agnosticism and indifferentism. Positive atheism is the belief that there is no God or gods and includes more vigorous denials of religion and positive affirmations of humanism, such as we encounter today in the new atheism. Yet the essays reveal that negative and positive atheism remain generic categories under which many types and varieties can be subsumed. Attention is given in successive essays to the history of atheism (from the pre-Socratics to the new atheism), to different intellectual traditions (e.g. analytic philosophy, Marxism and existentialism), to regional variations (including India and Japan, where atheism looks rather different from its standard