(1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4). These, it is argued, constitute ample precedent for the activity of Jesus. It is notable, though, that raising the dead is emphatically what is not done by Elijah and Elisha: in 1 Kings 17, Elijah prays and 'the Lord heard Elijah's cry'; in the latter passage, Elisha also 'prayed to the Lord'. Neither says simply, as Jesus says to Jairus' daughter and to the son of the Nain widow, 'get up' (Mark 5:41; Luke 7:14). There seems a difference in the self-perceptions of the OT prophets and Jesus in these actions which makes them hard to bundle together as a group.

Or to take another dramatic episode, the ministry of John the Baptist is offered as a parallel to Jesus' forgiveness of sins in Mark 2:1–12 and parallels. Kirk comments that 'Jesus is not the only human in Mark who removes sins', referring to John as well. Giving the Baptist the role of 'removing sins' because he preaches a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is clearly a stretch, however. This is a case where a point becomes highly generalised in order to create a parallel, as is also seen in the comparison of Jesus' walking on the water with Xerxes' construction of a bridge of boats and Caligula's pontoon.

Overall, despite being one of the targets in this book (so the reader of this review should beware!), I enjoyed it more than I expected, because it affirms much that is essential both to the exegesis of the Synoptics and to Christian theology. It would be impossible to read Kirk's monograph without learning a great deal, even if the book is rather one-sided in depicting Jesus as 'man attested by God', to the detriment, as the following chapter of Acts puts it, of Jesus as 'author of life'.

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Bruce Gordon, *John Calvin's* Institutes of the Christian Religion: *A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. xix + 277. $19.95.

As part of Princeton University Press's series 'Lives of the Great Religious Books', Bruce Gordon has offered an attractive portrait of the composition and reception of Calvin's religious classic. Despite possible scepticism toward the oxymoronic biography of a 'book', in the hands of a scholar of Gordon's calibre, the reader is soon convinced of the value of this bookish perspective. Gordon ponders early on, for example, why there were so few constructive best-sellers during the Reformation, proposing that 'the poisonous polemic of the age demanded cut and thrust rather than contemplative classics'.

And in this atmosphere Calvin's *Institutes* stands out: 'As a literary voice on doctrine, Calvin was alone.' Gordon does much to undo the modern prejudice against Calvin and Calvinism, first by highlighting Calvin's revolutionary purpose. What Calvin set out to accomplish in his book was to present the whole of life and creation as subject to the life-changing authority of God. For twenty years he labored, through eight editions from 1536 to 1560, to craft an 'order' that not only instructed minds, but moved the hearts and emotions of readers. Displaying the rhetorical skills of the humanist tradition in which he was trained, Calvin sought to expose the order of scripture both through argument and literary beauty – in the elegant forms of Holbein, Gordon says, rather than the glorious chaos of Bruegel. Interestingly this elegance continued to move readers, from John Cotton who read the *Institutes* to 'sweeten' his mouth before sleeping, to women in early modern England who learned from the *Institutes* that 'faith is inseparable from devout affection', to Gordon's own students who found Calvin 'orderly and playful' in this book.

The knowledge Calvin sought to impart in the *Institutes*, Gordon argues, differs markedly from modern notions of abstract information; it was rather 'a continuous state of awakening from our dullness and becoming aware of who we are and who God is' – what Calvin called *pietas*. Though the double predestination so troubling to modern readers was central to Calvin's argument, Gordon avers it was not its 'cornerstone'.

Gordon acknowledges the challenges of rescuing Calvin's tarnished reputation. Part of the problem, he suggests, lies in the tendency to conflate Calvin and Calvinism, and, worse, to reduce Calvin to the murderer of Servetus. The difficulties gathered like storm clouds early in the book's history. Soon after Calvin's death in 1564, Calvin's followers abandoned the humanist style of writing and adopted a scholastic form of logical rigour aimed at academic debate. In adapting Calvin to those changing times, 'precision of argumentation, replaced the more discursive elegance of Calvin's humanist prose'.

It is a particular strength of Gordon's treatment that he develops in some detail the various settings in which the *Institutes* (and Calvin) found their way. Among the Calvinists in England, in Holland and Germany, the *Institutes* sparked debates over predestination and free will, but its authority was neither singular nor always elevated. With the Enlightenment the authority of both Calvin and his book was dislodged, both in churches and salons, in favour of 'reasonable religion'. Here the conflation of Calvin and his book became entrenched as snippets of the *Institutes* were quoted to buttress competing arguments of praise and blame. In the nineteenth century, while Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* (1536) helped recover Calvin and his book

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in Germany, France remained ambivalent until the seven-volume biography by Emile Doumergue (1899–1927). In Holland and America, Benjamin Warfield, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck founded their neo-calvinism on the *Institutes*, and the Barth–Brunner debate put 'Calvin and the *Institutes* at the heart of the most significant debate within Reformed theology during the 20th century'.

Despite the renewal of this tradition in Barth, though without its double predestination, Gordon observes the acids of the Enlightenment could not easily be undone. Calvin's book has continued to spark debate, not only in Europe and North America, but also in South Africa where it was claimed by both supporters and opponents of Apartheid. In Asia Calvin has played a role in the growth of Asian Christianity, and especially in China where Calvin is studied to discover the Reformation (and Christian) core of Western Culture.

The last chapter brings the influence of Calvin and his book up to the present, where popular culture and the media have portrayed a dour Calvin as the poster child for austerity and humourless religion. Understandably in all this the distinction between Calvin and his book is often blurred; the story, as Gordon admits, is often the continuing influence of that Reformer rather than strictly of his book.

As a church historian, Gordon is stronger in describing the influences and surprising appearances of Calvin and his book, than in treating the theological conversations it elicited. The influence of Calvin on Jonathan Edwards, for example, is noted, but the differences between them are not assessed; in the twentieth century the surprising ecumenical appropriation of Calvin is unaddressed. But these are minor quibbles with a book that brings the *Institutes* to life in colourful ways against a broad canvas.

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Beverley Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel According to Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), pp. xix + 140, $22.99

Gaventa describes her work as a book for people who wouldn't normally read a book on Romans; this is a work aimed at the gap between popular Christian literature and academic theology, a discussion for the Christian of the aspects of Romans Gaventa considers crucial both for its own time and ours.