

BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher R. Brewer (ed.), *Christian Theology and the Transformation of Natural Religion: From Incarnation to Sacramentality – Essays in Honour of David Brown* (Studies in Philosophical Theology; Leuven: Peeters, 2018), pp. 289. ISBN: 978-9042936393. RRP £71.08 or US\$55.15.
doi:[10.1017/S1740355320000030](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355320000030)

Christopher Brewer, whose doctorate was supervised by David Brown, is also co-editor of two recent collections of Brown's essays, *God in a Single Vision* (2016) and *Divine Generosity and Human Creativity* (2017). The latter book – as this one – is about sacramentality. This new book was also published more or less contemporaneously with another co-edited by Brewer, *The Moving Text* (2018), that one being on 'interdisciplinary perspectives on David Brown and the Bible'. This flurry of recent activity comes several years after a large collection of essays, *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture*, engaged with five of Brown's books – on tradition (*Tradition and Imagination*, 1999; *Discipleship and Imagination*, 2000) and 'reclaiming' human experience (*God and Enchantment of Place*, 2004; *God and Grace of Body*, 2007; and *God and Mystery in Words*, 2008). Brewer's book, the first Festschrift amongst all these others, is organized around 'reason, faith and tradition', 'incarnation and trinity', and 'sacramentality and the arts'. Taking in Brown's work from the whole sweep of his career – across Oxford, Durham and St Andrew's Universities – means it is wider than *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture* and *The Moving Text*.

With 8 of its 13 essays in its last part, Brewer's new book also tilts the weight of gravity to the arts among all of Brown's interests. However, the middle section is critical to fully understanding Brown's contribution, reflecting as it does the influence of both his early *The Divine Trinity* (1985) and his more recent work on *kenosis* (*Divine Humanity*, 2011) – the latter quite remarkably acclaimed (in its cover blurb by Brian Hebblethwaite) as 'Brown's return to mainstream theology and metaphysics', which albeit going on to declare *Divine Humanity* as 'fascinating' and 'fine' seems strange praise in view of Brown's decade-long and prodigious project on the arts. Here in the Festschrift, Paul Fiddes identifies a long essay of Brown's on 'the trinity in art' as a 'hinge essay' in the trajectory of Brown's work. And Brewer himself challenges too strong a distinction between an earlier and later Brown, the former engaged in philosophical theology, the latter immersed in the cosmopolitan concerns of the 'God and . . .' series.

All in all, there are 14 writers in the book, including Brown who writes a response. Of these, 13 are men (albeit one other woman, Pamela Sue Anderson, had agreed to contribute, but died), and at least 10 are linked with Scotland (as residents, former residents, or themselves Scottish, as Brown is). The book begins with a flourish as the editor's introduction expounds the idea of a *Festschrift*, 'festival writings'. Entirely appropriate to the celebratory tone of the genre, some of the essays are quite delightful – for example, David Grummett on alcoholic spirits, connecting an aside in Brown's *God and Grace of Body* to the fact that Brown grew up in a distillery town in the borders. Indeed, across the whole book there is very much to enjoy, including immersions in conceptual art (e.g. Jonathan Borofsky in Brewer's chapter) and theatre dance (e.g. Alvin Ailey in Ann Loades' chapter) as well as various excursions into the classics of Western art and literature. Many writers offer Brown respect by engaging very closely with his work: so Robert MacSwain carefully expounds Brown's place in a Butlerian tradition of thinking, and Stephen Evans explores Brown's kenoticism. Others again take ideas in Brown's work and develop them, with Brown's writing acting as a springboard as it were, a case in point being Loades' advance on Brown's chapter on the 'dancer's leap' in *God and Grace of Body*, another being Gavin Hopps' follow-up of Brown's 'illuminating comments on lightness and comedy' to juxtapose Augustine on the weight of love, Dante on the 'laughter of the universe', cathedrals as a 'gothic smile'. Yet in something of a contrast to various different ways of engaging Brown's work, Tom Wright's essay makes little connection bar a passing reference to 'my old friend David Brown'.

Respect for Brown rightly does not mute critique among those who engage him, with, for instance, Evans questioning Brown's dependence on method acting as analogue for aspects of his Christology; Fiddes noting the 'startling absence' of trinitarian theology in Brown's books on human experience; Loades amplifying Kimerer L. LaMothe's reserve (in *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture*) to suggest means of inviting more incarnational emphasis. Critique surfaces most strongly as 'sharp disagreement' between Brown and David Jasper, albeit even then with differences said to be something they 'seek to celebrate'. In his chapter on 'the eucharistic body of Christ' in literature, Jasper discusses George Herbert's well-known depiction of the table of love, giving it what Brown calls a 'sexual twist', but also more unsettling imagery (Jasper himself says 'edgier and less comfortable'), like Jori Graham's portrayal of a father's mind climbing into the dissected body of his dead son. In so doing, Jasper makes a striking argument for 'corporeal' learning, including 'reach[ing] out across the erotic spaces' of texts, in order to appeal for care about 'the variables in the term "body"'. But he is ultimately seen by Brown as 'subservient to largely secular values', at least in so far as Brown thinks he assumes that the 'deepest moments of intimacy' are sexual. The differences between the two are a key insight into Brown's work, with the *Festschrift* at large helping to bring to the surface distinctive ways Brown outlines 'a religious contribution to secular culture [that he thinks] will not come through keeping close to its current affirmations' (p. 260), but rather by attention to 'revelation working through a tradition of assumptions' (p. 240), with the tradition of assumptions held to be both 'richer' than contemporary alternatives and 'a wise way of extricating human beings from the social context in which they are set'.

A question that persists through this collection is the relation of ‘revelation’ and a more general sense of ‘religious experience’; these are categories that have shifted in Brown’s thought over time, as well as being conceived differently among his interlocutors here. A connecting strand across many of the essays is the idea of ‘divine interaction’ (highlighted by Brewer, p. 11). This category can be nuanced by tracking Brown’s own ‘still developing position’ (as he says for himself, p. 235), given he has latterly preferred ‘interaction’ to ‘intervention’ to depict God’s work in the world. And the implications of such interaction as there may be are explored in vibrant ways not only in Brown’s own work over time but among his colleagues here. This is all to say that this is a rich book, as could only be expected of engagement with Brown’s ‘open-ended way of pursuing systematic theology’ (Brewer, p. 13) and the wide-ranging dealings with Brown’s ‘avowedly unsystematic “system”’ (George Pattison, p. 162) that this book collects together in a lively celebration of Brown’s ways of thinking. Whether or not it is deemed to constitute ‘mainstream theology’, this erudite and stimulating collection deserves to be applauded for profound curiosity in Christian doctrine – a fitting tribute to perhaps Anglicanism’s most prolific contemporary theologian.

Stephen Burns
Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne,
Australia

Peter Gant, *Seeing Light: A Critical Enquiry into the Origins of Resurrection Faith* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2019), pp. vii + 302. ISBN: 978-1-78959-050-0. RRP £24.49 or US\$12.44.

doi:[10.1017/S1740355320000042](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355320000042)

This is a remarkably honest book. In fact, the author’s uncompromising commitment to articulating only what a critical reading of the actual New Testament evidence will justifiably allow, constitutes a confronting challenge, not only to the unthinking forces of contemporary fundamentalism and naive biblicism, but also to much of the Christian apologetics of mainline Christian Churches that tend to be wedded to the defence of inherited or preconceived views come what may.

This is not to say that the author is entirely without preconceptions himself. With a first degree in science, Gant candidly puts his cards on the table at the outset: He sets out to address the question of whether a ‘modern Christian’, fully committed to ‘a post-Enlightenment scientific world-view’, can ‘honestly return a clear “Yes” to the question, “Do you really believe that God raised Jesus from the dead?”’ As it transpires, Gant’s own answer to this crucial question is a very positive ‘Yes’, provided, of course, that the contention that ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’ is understood in