

we should not be too alarmed by Coca-Cola itself. Rather, Scholes suggests that we should treat such ‘inauthentic’ spiritualities ‘with a kind of equanimity’ (146), for our ultimate dissatisfaction with such imitation religions may still ‘carry us towards the truth’ (145).

That this volume of essays is such a mixed bag is unsurprising, given the breadth of the remit. The appeal of a particular chapter will inevitably be conditioned by the reader’s more general interests: I confess to enjoying the sections on film much more than the others. Nevertheless, as an introductory text to the comparative study of religion and popular culture, this book serves its purpose admirably, and deserves to reach a wider readership than its intended student audience. With some adaptation, there is even potential for use in a church study group. Furthermore, there is much to ponder from a missional perspective, as churches continue to make connections between faith and modern culture. And finally, it will do us Christians no harm at all to learn the tools of sociological analysis, and then to turn such analysis back upon ourselves wherever we suspect that churches have bought rather too much into popular culture.

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**J. Todd Billings, *Union With Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 442. £12.99**

J. Todd Billings’ recently published book *Union With Christ* is an excellent addition to the ever-growing field of ‘theologies of retrieval’ in general, and re-readings of the Reformer John Calvin in particular. Billings’ book is a return to and recovery of Calvin for the contemporary theological and ministerial context. Billings uses Calvin not only as a point of departure but as an informant for the current Christian climate. The main argument of the book is that central to Calvin’s theology is the notion of ‘union with Christ’. Billings returns to Calvin’s concept of union with Christ and explores

the ways in which this central Christian doctrine affects a plethora of other Christian doctrines and elements of the Christian life.

In Chapter 1, Billings addresses the *zeitgeist* of today: ‘moralistic therapeutic deism’ and its distant, theistic god. He argues that union with Christ, particularly the Christian doctrine of adoption, provides an answer to what is clearly dissatisfaction with the distant god portrayed by today’s generation. In Chapter 2, he critiques the widespread caricature of Reformed theology’s ‘total depravity’ and unpacks how union with Christ and ‘total communion’ is a rather better emphasis than ‘total depravity’. In Chapter 3, he discusses the doctrine of accommodation (that in order for humankind to know the transcendent God, God must ‘accommodate’ himself to humans and reveal himself in a human way) and argues that this patristic and Reformed doctrine is an important way to hold together the seeming paradox of God’s otherness and his condescension to humankind.

In Chapter 4, Billings discourses upon the unifying nature of the Lord’s Supper and argues that this key Reformed emphasis is the way forward for discussions of ‘social justice’. In Chapter 5, he critiques the contemporary concept of ‘incarnational ministry’ and argues that, while it is important to retain many of its elements (such as fully investing in a culture and evangelizing relationally), the doctrine of union with Christ is lost in this form. This happens when the focus of incarnational ministry, perhaps unintentionally, is placed upon the Christian (missionary, youth minister, etc.) becoming ‘incarnate’ in a certain culture, thus taking the emphasis away from the unique incarnation of the Son of God.

Billings points convincingly to a more classical lens of union with Christ, through which to view a wide array of Christian doctrines. However, his critique of incarnational ministry in Chapter 5 is perhaps somewhat overstated. While he is no doubt correct to say that the language of ‘becoming incarnate’ in a culture can detract from the one incarnation of Christ, surely it is also possible to ‘become incarnate’ in a culture in a way that actually directs people to the one incarnation of Christ. Furthermore, whilst Billings returns insightfully throughout his book to many Reformed figures, and hints at the various patristic precedents, it would have been beneficial to hear him speak more about

the many patristic figures (e.g. Athanasius of Alexandria) and themes (e.g. *theosis*) that drove – or at least further inform – the Reformed doctrine of union with Christ.

Overall, Billings’ book is an excellent text, providing a great example of how to do a ‘theology of retrieval’. His critique of many elements of popular Christianity is valid and his proposal to return to more of a classical emphasis on union with Christ is very convincing. This book will no doubt be of service to those who are interested in recovering sources from the past to inform contemporary debate.

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**Note:** Johnston McKay’s *The Kirk and the Kingdom: A Century of Tension in Scottish Social Theology, 1830–1929* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012, hardback £45), reviewed [by Douglas Galbraith] in the last issue, has now been published in a paperback edition at £19.99.