



# Presbyterian History

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The two articles that open this issue, help us mark the 100th Anniversary of the ending of the "Great War" (aka "World War I" or "Europe's Civil War"). The two authors, young historians who have grown up in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, present us with stories about us that we have largely forgotten.

## *For All the Saints:* *Remembering Katherine Eva McKinnon (1886-1977)*

By Ian McKechnie (Lindsay, Ontario)

On Monday September 19th 1977, residents perusing the obituaries in the Lindsay *Daily Post* would have come across one announcing the passing, in her ninety-second year, of Katherine Eva Allen, née McKinnon, who had died in the Ross Memorial Hospital the previous Friday.

A long-time parishioner at St. Andrew's, Lindsay, the late Mrs. Allen is listed – though not pictured – in the 1970 church directory as living at 8 Henry Street. Her husband, George Allen, who served as superintendent of the Lindsay Fairgrounds between 1927 and 1956, had died ten years prior. (Located just behind the Ross Memorial Hospital and across from Lindsay's old water tower, the Allen house was demolished in more recent years to make way for an expanded hospital parking lot.)

Those who were regular churchgoers over four decades ago are likely to have seen Mrs. Allen out on Sunday morning from time to time. But there is more to this extraordinary woman's story than what her fellow parishioners might have realized when greeting her at the door after worship. Behind this elderly women's rimless glasses were eyes that, sixty years earlier, had witnessed firsthand the death and destruction effected by the

First World War, in which she served as a nursing sister with the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC).

Born on March 8th 1886 in Sonya, Ontario, southwest of Little Britain, to Mr. and Mrs. John McKinnon, Katherine McKinnon grew up in a tight-knit community with the Presbyterian Church at its centre. Reaching adolescence at the turn of the twentieth century when the social gospel movement was at its peak, young Katherine would have been taught the importance of doing her part in seeing that her Father's will was done on earth as it is in heaven.

In due course, Katherine made her way from Sonya to Lindsay, where she undertook training at Ross Memorial Hospital and graduated on June 9th 1916 as a professional nurse, the ceremony taking place at the Academy Theatre. Five months later, on November 16th 1916, Katherine enlisted with the CAMC in Kingston, Ontario, and was soon on her way to England aboard the steamship *Missanbie*, and to her first posting at the Moore Barracks Hospital in Shorncliffe.

It was from here that Katherine wrote a prolific series of letters about her experiences; two of these detailed epistles were printed in the Lindsay

*Post.* One of Katherine's letters, composed on the 12th of May 1917, reveals her keen sense of awareness at the poverty and social injustices wrought by war:

*Well Florence, I could not begin to describe to you the poverty of parts of London. I asked my sister to take me to some of the poorer parts, just so I could see some of the conditions, and I just felt no wonder we are having war, and how thankful we should be we have our good Canadian homes. It will be a happy band of boys and girls who are spared to return to our homes, and I do not think many of us will grumble at what is set before us. As I saw those poor, wee dirty kiddies of London streets, my mind went back to my childhood days, when I used to hide my crusts at the side of my plate so my mother would not see them and daddy would come to my rescue and eat them for me, and mother would say, "some poor little kiddies were hungry while I was wasting."*

Another letter, dated December 30th 1916, reveals how Katherine looked upon the patients in her care with kindly compassion, giving hope to those who needed it most:

*The tales of the trenches are terrible to relate. Sometime I will tell you more of what the boys have told me. One poor lad told me that he prayed for death in the trenches. He said to me, "Sister, why did you ever leave your happy home in Canada to come to this awful place." I told him it was to try and cheer a poor lonely heart like his.*

Unlike some nursing sisters, who fell victim to disease and illness while on active service in Europe, Katherine apparently enjoyed robust physical health over the course of the war. Two and a half years later, in 1919, the cessation of hostilities saw Katherine being struck off strength and return to Bonnie Brae, her family's homestead in

Sonya. Katherine married George Allen in 1922, and in due course the couple was blessed with one son, Reid. With her husband overseeing the fairgrounds for nearly twenty years, it is likely that Katherine remained in Lindsay for the duration of her career. Here, she enjoyed the company of a large and extended family that included two granddaughters, three great-grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews.

In the fall of 1968, Katherine joined former Ontario premier, Leslie Frost, and over eighty

other Lindsay-area veterans of the First World War at a dinner reception commemorating the 50th anniversary of the war's end. She was among the last of Victoria County's nursing sisters who answered the call to service half a century before, and her presence did not go unnoticed. Nine years later, she was dead; her memorial service taking place at the Mackey Funeral Home before burial at Riverside Cemetery. Katherine's blue nursing cape, issued as part of her CAMC uniform when she



went overseas, is now in the collection of the Victoria County Historical Society.

Katherine's name can be found on the Honour Roll of St. Andrew's Church, Lindsay, just outside the sanctuary. She was not a mover and shaker in the church, but during her service in the war she was – in the words of Oswald Chambers – “broken bread and poured-out wine” through which Christ blessed those who were ill in mind, body, and spirit. And so we pray:

Almighty God, We thank you for raising up your servant Katherine to shine as a light in the darkness. Inspired by her example, may we also leave behind what is comfortable and familiar, to earnestly “cheer poor lonely hearts” in our community. This we ask in the name of the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

# *For All the Saints: Remembering Rev. George Alexander Edmison*

By John Ball (Brandon, Manitoba)

This short biography of the Reverend George Alexander Edmison seeks to give space for a chaplain of the Great War's voice to be heard, so those reading this article have a greater understanding of the service provided by the Chaplains in the Great War. A brief background introduction to Reverend Edmison will be followed by material either written by him or published about him.

Reverend George Alexander Edmison was born in 1874 at Melbourne, Quebec to Henry and Mary Edmison. He graduated from Queen's University.<sup>1</sup> He was minister in Russell, Manitoba where he married Elizabeth Bain (Fraser) (Born 1883) on 18 June 1906 in the RM of Russell, MB.<sup>2</sup> The Edmisons were called to Knox Presbyterian Church Brandon on 1 November 1909, and according to the Brandon Sun George Edmison ministered there for seven years.

According to the Brandon Daily Sun, in February 1915 each of the "Men of the First Canadian Mounted Rifles were presented with a copy of the New Testament"<sup>3</sup> by the congregation of Knox Presbyterian Church, Brandon. Within a year of the outbreak of the First World War Rev. Edmison was commissioned as a Chaplain with the rank of Honorary Captain in the 99<sup>th</sup> Manitoba Rangers on the 2 April 1915.<sup>4</sup> Following that Rev. Edmison was appointed to the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 18 November 1915, and signed his attestation papers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) with

the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion CEF as chaplain on the 10 February 1916.<sup>5</sup>

The 28 December 1915 edition of the Brandon Daily Sun contains two articles on the departure of Reverend Edmison and Mrs. Elizabeth Edmison. The first article encompasses a send-off from Knox Presbyterian Church to the Edmisons and the presentation of gifts. Edmison is quoted as saying "there was greater work for him among those who were offering their lives for their king and country; as long as he had the strength to do so he would share in the work."<sup>6</sup> The second article is a parting message to Reverend Edmison "as a religious leader and man Captain Edmison will be greatly missed. Throughout the City G A Edmison was very active and a leader in many activities for the betterment of Brandon."

From the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rev. Edmison was taken on Strength with No. 7 Canadian Stationary hospital on the 11 December 1916. While with the Canadian Stationary hospital he wrote a Letter to the Irving family dated 12 March 1917:

*Dear Mr. & Mrs. Irving,  
today as I was going through one of the hospital wards a soldier by the name of Corporal Melling handed me the testament that must have belonged to your son Andrew. He knew I was from Brandon and I opened the [New] testament and also saw Kates [Mrs. Irving] name on it I am sending it to you by urgent mail. I hope you will get it safely. Corporal Melling told me he picked it up in the trenches. If you want to write corporal Melling his ad-*

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<sup>1</sup> Brandon daily sun 23 October 1909, page 1

<sup>2</sup> Manitoba Vital Statistics Marriage REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1906-001104

<sup>3</sup> Brandon Daily Sun 22 Feb 1915, p.8

<sup>4</sup> Canada, Militia and Defence List October 1915, p. 325

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<sup>5</sup> George Alexander Edmison Service File Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2830 - 30

<sup>6</sup> Brandon Daily Sun 28 December 1915 p.1

*dress is No.503244 corporal Melling 2nd Tunneling Co. BEF I hope you are all well. Give my best wishes to all your family Mrs. Alexander and family and any others I may know around your home.*

*Yours sincerely G A Edmison No. 7 Canadian Stationary Hospital BEF France.”<sup>7</sup>*

The Irvings son, Andrew Graham Irving, was killed at the age of twenty on the 2 June 1916 while serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles. The New Testament was mailed back to the Irving family, a last tangible grasp as their son is commemorated on the Menin Gate, as Private Andrew Graham Irving having no known grave.

Not only was the Rev. Edmison a minister to soldiers but also to civilians as an article via the Warwick Road Presbyterian Church in Coventry, England was published in the Brandon Daily Sun on the 20 October 1917. The article detailed the pulpit supply that Rev. Edmison did at Warwick Road Presbyterian Church stating; “on each Sabbath the congregation were good, and it was impressive to see the crowded pews on the last Sunday evening. The Captain’s breezy presence and eloquent addresses have assured him a warm welcome whenever he comes amongst us.”<sup>8</sup>

A letter to the Brandon Daily Sun Newspaper published on 1 Nov 1917 written by Rev. Edmison reads:

<sup>7</sup> RCL Branch No.3

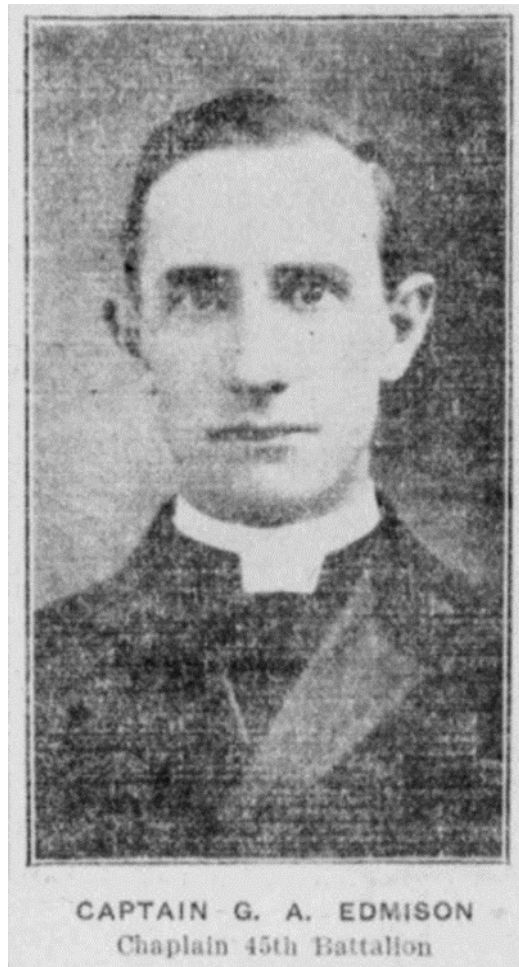
<sup>8</sup> Brandon Daily Sun 20 October 1917, p. 1

*Editor Brandon Sun;*

*Sir. As I have received so many parcels and so much money from friends and organizations in Brandon and vicinity for our soldiers, I thought it might be interesting to give to them through your paper a brief account of how some of it is expended. A great many pairs of socks I have received, and every pair was doubly used. An amusing case of how one chap valued his socks; don’t however take this as an everyday occurrence. I acknowledge it to be wonderfully unusual. Soldiers for example don’t care to darn their socks. They prefer to darn other things or people. We just wear out*

*our socks until the holes in the heels and toes are so big that you don’t know which end is the right end. We then throw them away. To return to the incident of the socks. I asked this boy how he was enjoying socks. It was summer time. “Oh he said I don’t wear socks in the summer I am keeping mine for the winter. Especially were the socks useful in the mud of France around Vimy. I could have used in my area thousands more and all with the greatest benefit. My experience and advice is that no gift is more acceptable in France next to eats than socks. To enumerate all the ways I have expended money would take all your space. My plan has*

*been to use it whenever or in whatever manner I thought wise. In some of the isolated camps boys were without money and had no smokes what could I do but make them happy? Sometimes I found them in need of reading material.*



*A few shillings purchased quite a number of the cheaper yet real interesting magazines. Some money given to me for a direct purpose viz. To be distributed to 1st CMR, 45th and 79th Battalion boys was expended as far as possible in this way in hospital work in France I came across a sergeant of one of our Brandon battalions one by the way who had received a military decoration a few weeks before. He had lost his pay book. Ten francs was a perfect godsend to him. In hospital there are dozens of ways of helping. Most boys are hard up in hospital. Fifty cents here and fifty cents there is greatly appreciated. Fruit is very welcome. In the hospital area where I am now stationed two cases I might mention. One is of a wounded soldier whose sight is at present gone, although the doctors hope to save one eye. I asked him if he needed money "not much" he replied "occasionally some of the boys take me out but I hate sponging on them." imagine the good heart of a boy mighty near strapped himself, yet remembering his unfortunate pal. But this is one of the finest things of the war the unselfishness of our soldiers. I gave my blind comrade five shillings to buy fruit. In thanking me he said "I do enjoy fruit for a change" the other case was one of a sergeant. He has had three operations and improves very slowly. Don't think it is because he is Presbyterian. He happens to be Roman Catholic. The other day he said to me "I don't know Captain why I don't receive my pay." I smiled here are a few shillings until yours arrives. He generally is out of bed, walks to the door with me. But I do not want to take up too much space. I have spent money entertaining*

*boys to treats. On one occasion – one only- I lent ten shillings to a hard up married French-Canadian, and one of the most delightful cases was when I took a Brandon convalescent boy to a restaurant and had the pleasure of filling him up- with food of course. One thing I would like to add. I have never really been asked by a boy for help and in most cases I know the little offered would be refused. It is only received because I state it is a gift from Canadian women who wish this little extra to be expended for their pleasure and comfort. With best wishes Geo. A Edmison.<sup>9</sup>*

The letter to the editor of the *Brandon Daily Sun* Newspaper illustrates the many roles in ministry the Chaplains of the Great War undertook. During the war he served with 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, No. 7 Canadian Stationary hospital, 5th Canadian infantry brigade, 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Artillery Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> District Canadian Forestry Corps, and 52<sup>nd</sup> district Canadian Forestry Corps. Rev. Edmison was struck off CEF Strength on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 1918.<sup>10</sup>

After the war in 1920 Rev. Edmison and family resided at 116 Irvington South Orange New Jersey, USA<sup>11</sup> As the pastor of First Presbyterian Church South Orange. Edmison's death was reported by the *Ottawa Journal* on 20 Jan 1961: "Rev. George A. Edmison, age 86 native of Melbourne, Que retired in 1946 after 27 years as pastor of the South Orange Presbyterian Church."<sup>12</sup> Whether a ministry to one or a thousand, Rev. George Edmison was called to serve his God, his King, and his Country.

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<sup>9</sup> Brandon Daily Sun 1 November 1917 p.4

<sup>10</sup> George Alexander Edmison Service File Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2830 - 30

<sup>11</sup> Orange, New Jersey, City Directory, 1920 page 236.

<sup>12</sup> Ottawa Journal 20 January 1968 p.9

## Reviews of 2017 History Award Winners

Donna J. Speers, *Time Line of the United Presbyterian Church*, Guelph, Ontario, (2016)

Speers' book, winner of the 2017 Congregational History Award, is an annotated publication of the Minute Book of the Board of Managers of the United Presbyterian Church, Guelph, Ontario. The story behind the Minute Book is quite unexpected. A long-time resident of Guelph had picked up the Minute Book at a book sale. Upon moving from Guelph and downsizing her library she gave the Minute Book to the Guelph Archives. (A cautionary tale is embedded here, when congregations close it is important to ensure that church records are deposited in an appropriate archives, not in private hands.)

United Presbyterian Church existed from 1846 until 1883 and was served by one pastor during its entire history, the Rev. Robert Torrance. The relationship between Torrance and the Board of Managers was at times strained. The Board, especially at the end of his tenure, was critical of his ministry, and the Board was frequently unable or unwilling to provide the agreed upon stipend in a timely fashion. The minutes themselves provide an insight into the relationship between a minister and the financial leadership of the congregation over a 36-year period.

Speers has annotated the minutes with two helpful tools. First, the book is richly illustrated, and even though the church building no longer stands, it is easy from the pictures to stand where the building used to be and imagine it. Second, and social historians will thank Speers for this work, she has provided a vignette of each person mentioned in the minutes – church members who attended the annual meetings whose minutes are in the book, members of the Board of Managers, people referenced in the minutes. From this a socio-demographic account of this one congregation could be developed, enriching our understanding of the make-up of 19th century Presbyterianism.

Joseph Cumming McLelland, *Aiming for Light: Memoirs* (Ste Anne de Bellevue, QC, broken rules, 2014)

*Aiming for Light* won the History Prize in the memoir category. McLelland wrote these memoirs for family and close friends, only 40 copies were printed and attention is paid to the relationship Joe and Audrey shared. The epigram at the start of the book is a line from John Updike rewritten by McLelland to read, "I remember love-making as the exploration of a joy so deep people must go in pairs, one cannot go alone." (The original was "a sadness so deep.") McLelland writes with insight about the ways Audrey was impacted by the various congregations he served and how his move to academia forced her to find a new relationship within the church.

McLelland reveals on the one hand a self-awareness that he was best fitted for a teaching academic role in the church, but on the other quite clearly lays out the series of surprising circumstances that led to his choice of a field of research. The reader is left with the feeling that McLelland would have been an academic regardless of the field of study he undertook, it was a happy turn for the church that he ended up in theology.

The multiple connections between the Alan Farris family and the McLelland family remind the reader that the PCC is really a very small pond and the inter-connections are part of the ethos of the denomination.

While I enjoyed reading the book, I wished there had been deeper reflection on what it meant for McLelland to serve a predominantly English-speaking church while living in a post-1976 Quebec. I liked the appendix in which he described his year as Moderator of the General Assembly, revealing the joy McLelland got out of meeting people and interacting with them.

Those who knew McLelland personally will enjoy these memoirs.

Ben Volman, *More than Miracles: Elaine Zeidman Markovic and the Story of the Scott Mission*, (Toronto, Castle Quay Books (Scott Mission), 2015)

*More than Miracles*, the winner of the 2017 Academic History Award, tells the story of the Scott Mission through the eyes of the eyes of Elaine Zeidman, daughter of Morris and Annie Zeidman and the sister of Alex Zeidman. The choice gives the book an interesting angle, of someone who while intimately connected to the day to day operation of the Mission, was never the director. This choice means the story is not an administrative history, rather it is a narrative driven by the immediacy of the call to serve people in need. Lines like the following remind the reader of the never-ending challenge of caring for the homeless of Toronto which has become the mandate of the Scott Mission: referring to the early 1950s: “at one point the Yugoslavian water polo team defected, and they came to the Mission to eat. I don’t know how they heard about us.” (p. 116)

The Scott Mission has roots in the Presbyterian Church, it was opened as the Christian Synagogue and mission to the Jewish community in Toronto. Morris Zeidman an immigrant from Poland had arrived in Toronto in 1912, and was impacted by the ministry of S.H. Rohold, and became a Christian and succeeded Rohold as the director of the Scott Mission. *More than Miracles* walks readers through the evolution of the Scott Mission from a mission to the Jews into an iconic mission to the homeless.

To read *More than Miracles* is to catch a glimpse of what it means to be a faith mission, to be so committed to the call of God that one is prepared to trust God to provide what is needed not only for the mission to continue but also for the family to keep body and soul together. Second, to read *More than Miracles* is to learn some of what it means to hold evangelistic passion and social justice action in balance.

## HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

A large number of Presbyterian Clergy served as chaplains during World War I. At the 1919 General Assembly, the General Assembly closest to the end of World War I on Nov. 11, 1918, an entire evening was given over to listening to chaplains speak of their experiences and their reflections on returning home. The Assembly was held Hamilton, Ontario at the same time as the General Strike, which was driven in part by the disenchantment of returning soldiers, was taking place in Winnipeg, Manitoba. An excerpt from Acts and Proceedings of the 1919 General Assembly Minutes – p. 45:

*As arranged by the Business Committee, the entire eleventh sederunt was given up to hearing from returned Chaplains....*

*Major Reverend George G. D. Kilpatrick...his theme being the work of the Churches in the war zone. He held that the Gospel alone can save people, and it will save them if they will let Him have His way with them. A fine spirit of toleration had grown up among the troops, opposition to a common foe and exposure to common danger had caused differences of race and creed to sink out of sight; and what the future demanded, he said, was an open communion and a free pulpit.*

*Captain Reverend J. E. Mothersill voiced the religious views and sentiments of the men [all the soldiers at the front in World War I were men] with whom he had served at the front. On the whole, they were a decent lot. Although the majority of them were not in communion with the Church, they had high respect for a genuine God-fearing person, wherever they found them....*

*Captain Rev. W.W. McNairn closed with an appeal to the Church to welcome the soldier’s return and manifest sympathy with them, and extend to them a helping hand.*

## List of Book Titles

We are embarrassingly behind in our book reviews. We will never catch up. Here is a list of books on our shelf for which we will not be writing reviews.

Wallace M Alston Jr and Michael Welker, eds., *Reformed Theology, Identity and Ecumenicity II: Biblical Interpretation in The Reformed Tradition*, (Eerdmans, 2007), 457 pgs.

Margaret Bendroth, *The Spiritual Practice of Remembering*, (Eerdmans, 2013), 132 pgs.

James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, (Eerdmans, 2013), 455 pgs.

Mark G. Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World*, (Eerdmans, 2016), 248 pgs.

Kathleen A. Calahan, *The Stories We Live: Finding God's Calling All around Us*, (Eerdmans, 2017), 136 pgs.

D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, (Eerdmans, 2016), 1240 pgs.

Heath W. Carter and Laura Rominger Porter, eds., *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, (Eerdmans, 2017), 297 pgs.

Andrew Chandler, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester: Church, State, and Resistance in the Age of Dictatorship*, (Eerdmans, 2016), 212 pgs.

Sung Wook Chung, ed., *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology: Legacy and Prospect*, (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009), 283 pgs.

Pablo A. Deiros, *Kemp: The Story of John R. and Mabel Kempers, Founders of the Reformed Church in American Mission in Chiapas, Mexico*, (Eerdmans, 2016), 522 pgs.

Michael Jenkins, *Called to Be Human: Letters to my Children on Living a Christian Life*, (Eerdmans, 2009), 150 pgs.

Rick Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather*, (Eerdmans, 2015), 162 pgs.

Jonathan Master, *A Question of Consensus: The Doctrine of Assurance after the Westminster Confession*, (Fortress Press, 2015), 223 pgs.

Christopher H. Meehan, *Growing Pains: How Racial Struggles Changed a Church and School*, (Reformed Ch. Press (Eerdmans), 2017), 206 pgs.

Richard J. Mouw, *Called to the Life of the Mind: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars*, (Eerdmans, 2014), 74 pgs.

Andy Park, Lester Ruth, and Cindy Rethmeier, *Worshiping with the Anaheim Vineyard: The Emergence of Contemporary Worship*, (Eerdmans, 2017), 148 pgs.

V. George Shillington, *James and Paul: The Politics of Identity at the Turn of the Ages*, (Fortress Press, 2015), 345 pgs.

Marvin R. Wilson, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal*, (Eerdmans, 2014), 304 pgs.

Gregg A. Ten Elshof, *Confucius for Christians: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ*, (Eerdmans, 2015), 102 pgs.

John R. Tyson, *The Way of the Wesleys: A Short Introduction*, (Eerdmans, 2014), 202 pgs.