Douglas Hedley and Christian Hengstermann, *An Anthology of the Cambridge Platonists: Sources and Commentary*. New York and London: Routledge, 2024. ISBN 978-1-03-202384-7, vi-351 pp, pbk $54.99; also hbk, EPUB, Kindle.

No Cambridge Platonists, no C.S. Lewis (cf. 332). This alone should be enough to convince contemporary Anglicans to care about the Cambridge Platonists, and Douglas Hedley and Christian Hengstermann's new anthology helps us do just that. The group known as the "Cambridge Platonists" were a collection of (mostly) Anglican divines centered around the Emmanuel and Christ's colleges at Cambridge roughly spanning the reigns of Charles I to George II. Caught between what they perceived to be equally oppressive alternatives of Laudian ritualism and Calvinist voluntarism with all its social and political upheaval, these figures sought a genuinely third way out of the impasses of their day, a way that was at once ancient, philosophically sophisticated, highly mystical, and had a venerable Christian pedigree—the way of Plato. Platonism, these figures believed, could provide resources for navigating both the theological disputes of the day and also powerfully rebuff the growing specter of atheism and secularism of early modernity. As Hedley notes in his introduction to this anthology, "Theirs was a philosophy that sought variously to qualify and counter the dualism of Descartes, the materialism of Hobbes and the pantheism of Spinoza and to promote instead a metaphysics of spirit" (4).

Arranged into seven parts according to different themes, Hedley and Hengstermann's anthology helps acquaint modern readers with the powerful figures and ideas of the Cambridge Platonists. All but the first and last parts begin with an introductory essay before proceeding to various short excerpts from leading figures of this movement, particularly Anne Conway (1631-1679), Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), and Henry More (1614-1687), followed by commentary on the sources. For readers new to the Cambridge Platonists, an immensely helpful "Prosopography" (cast of characters) can be found in the back, helping to make this volume both immensely valuable for scholars and also accessible to a more generally educated readership.

Readers should be aware that no complete texts are provided in this volume. Those interested in getting the full flow of any author's argument would be advised to consider supplementing Hedley and Hengstermann's anthology with another, such as Taliaferro and Teply's edited collection of Cambridge Platonist Spirituality in the Classics of Western Spirituality series. While Hedley and Hengstermann's strategy of providing shorter excerpts certainly has its downsides, it is immensely helpful in allowing the reader to quickly refer to relevant material on different topics and themes. Theologians and most general readers, I expect, will be most interested in Part VI "Rational Theology," with chapters covering Faith and Reason, the Fall of the Soul and the Resurrection of the Body, Soul-Making Theodicy, Christ's Sacrifice, and The Conflagration and Restitution of All Things. This section, more than any other, helps to illustrate what the historian Johann Jacob Brucker called their particular "Alexandrian form of Platonism" influenced primarily by Plotinus and Origen, and to a lesser extent Philo (4). Against the temptation to view these figures as modern Oxbridge intellectuals, the Cambridge Platonists emerge as figures from another, more mysterious world than the world of contemporary twenty-first century America, a world of witches, Kabbalah, and the preexistence of the soul.

It is perhaps here, not in their rationalism but their supernaturalism, not in their philosophy but their theology, that the modern Christian rightly ought to find these figures a little disconcerting. As Hedley convincingly demonstrates, for important historical reasons the Platonism of these figures is substantially divorced from the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, whose form of diffused Platonism came to shape the main theological cultures of the Church—East and West. In losing the figure of the Areopagite, the Cambridge Platonists lose his robust ecclesiology and apophaticism (p. 9–10). It is in this sense that their contemporary High Church opponents could rightly accuse them of becoming disconnected from the central currents of the tradition. Henry More argued for the pre-existence of the soul and Lady Anne Conway for *apokatastasis*. Cudworth advocated a moderated form of subordinationism—ostensibly in keeping with Nicea and the Athanasian Creed, but nevertheless eyebrow raising (15–16). If Hedley and Hengstermann's collection has a weakness, it is failing to adequately address the relationship of the Cambridge Platonists to the wider tradition of Platonist appropriation in Christianity.

Nevertheless, contemporary readers would be mistaken in thinking of the Cambridge Platonists as somehow outside or peripheral to the story of contemporary orthodox Anglican identity. The Cambridge Platonists importantly champion the patristic doctrine of *theosis* (understood for them as for the fathers as first and foremost a *christosis*), which despite important champions seems perpetually in danger of vanishing into oblivion in our tradition. And as Hedley argues, the Cambridge Platonists' abandonment of the Areopagite's ecclesial mysticism had the perhaps unexpected consequence of recovering an emphasis on God's presence in nature. John Smith, one of the more eloquent Cambridge Platonists, writes, "God made the universe and all the creatures contained therein as so many glasses wherein He might reflect his own glory. He hath copied forth Himself in the Creation" (9). This is an emphasis completely recognizable by figures like Thomas Traherne and Julian of Norwich, and presents a view of creation which stands desperately in need of retrieval in our own context of increasing environmental degradation. Thus, while we ought not to read these figures uncritically, we would be utterly impoverished if we read them uncharitably, or if we failed to read them at all: "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." (1 Cor 12:21).

Micah Hogan
Marquette University
Milwaukee, WI
https://doi.org/10.62221/ctj.2024.208

Aaron Renn, *Life in the Negative World: Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2024. ISBN 978-0310155157, xvi+246 pp., hbk $27; also audiobook, Kindle, Nook.

As the subtitle suggests, this is the latest of recent books describing the challenges facing Christians in an America that is increasingly skeptical (if not hostile) to traditional belief. The perspective is somewhat different from the earlier books, in that the author is a former IT consulting partner—rather than theologian or political pundit—who tailors his arguments to fellow evangelicals. Early on, he cites examples of why the best known of such books—Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option*—was rejected by evangelicals, justifying the need to develop "a more evangelical-friendly version of or alternative to it." (33).

His biggest contribution builds on his taxonomy of three cultural eras of the past 60 years: when American society was positive towards Christianity, when it was neutral, and (since the 2014 *Obergefell* decision) when it has been negative. Renn first proposed this taxonomy in his February 2022 article in *First Things*.

What I found most provocative was how this explained three evangelical strategies during the first two periods. In the positive era, the "culture war" of Jerry Falwell worked when Christian morality still held sway with a large fraction of the population, while the "seeker friendly" model of Rick Warren and Bill Hybels assumed that (at some level) many unchurched were still seeking a church. Meanwhile, in the subsequent neutral era, the "cultural engagement" of Tim Keller, Andy Crouch, Hillsong, and others sought to meet educated urban residents in a way that was meaningful for them.