



themelios

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Theological and Religious Studies*

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DESCRIPTION

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EDITORS

General Editor: D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
2065 Half Day Road
Deerfield, IL 60015, USA
themelios@thegospelcoalition.org

Managing Editor: Brian Tabb
Bethlehem College & Seminary
720 13th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55415, USA
brian.tabb@thegospelcoalition.org

Contributing Editor: Michael J. Ovey
Oak Hill Theological College
Chase Side, Southgate
London, N14 4PS, UK
mikeo@oakhill.ac.uk

Administrator: Andy Naselli
Bethlehem College & Seminary
720 13th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55415, USA
themelios@thegospelcoalition.org

BOOK REVIEW EDITORS

Old Testament
Jerry Hwang
Singapore Bible College
9–15 Adam Road
Singapore 289886
jerry.hwang@thegospelcoalition.org

New Testament
David Starling
Morling College
120 Herring Road
Macquarie Park, NSW 2113, Australia
david.starling@thegospelcoalition.org

History and Historical Theology
Stephen Eccher
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
P. O. Box 1889
Wake Forest, NC 27588, USA
stephen.eccher@thegospelcoalition.org

Systematic Theology and Bioethics
Hans Madueme
Covenant College
14049 Scenic Highway
Lookout Mountain, GA 30750, USA
hans.madueme@thegospelcoalition.org

Ethics and Pastoralia
Jeremy Kimble
Cedarville University
251 N. Main St.
Cedarville, OH 45314, USA
jkimble@cedarville.edu

Mission and Culture
Jackson Wu
International Chinese Theological Seminary
East Asia
jackson.wu@thegospelcoalition.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

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REVIEWS

The book review editors generally select individuals for book reviews, but potential reviewers may contact them about reviewing specific books. As part of arranging book reviews, the book review editors will supply book review guidelines to reviewers.

EDITORIAL

The Woman from Kentucky

— D. A. Carson —

D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and general editor of Themelios.

American readers of this column will know to whom the title refers, but because this column is read in many countries I must begin by recounting a little history that identifies the woman to whom the title makes reference.

1. The Narrative and the Challenge

On June 26, 2015, SCOTUS (=Supreme Court of the United States) issued its decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. SCOTUS determined that the right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. Kim Davis, serving as County Clerk of Rowan County, Kentucky, refused to issue marriage licenses. The ACLU (= American Civil Liberties Union), representing four same-sex couples, sued Davis in the United States District Court of the Eastern District of Kentucky, which ordered her to issue the licenses. She refused, stating in front of cameras that she was “under God’s authority.” Initially she declared that even if one of her deputies issued the licenses, the demands of her conscience would not be met, since her name was on the document. In due course she was jailed for contempt of court. Her release came five days later, when her deputies started issuing the needed licenses, and Kim Davis affirmed that she would not interfere with them when they did so. In due course her name was removed from the form.

These are the bare bones of the story. I’ve ignored many layers of complexity in the narrative—layers of complexity that ensure that ongoing debates demand the continued attention of lawyers and legislators. Certainly there was a lot of political fallout. Mike Huckabee, then a presidential candidate, devoted a lot of press time to using Kim Davis as the premier example of the loss of freedom of religion in the United States. Ted Cruz was not far behind. But for our purposes, we shall use this Kim Davis saga as a kind of “test case” as we think through the rising number of situations in many Western countries where the direction of our countries and their laws is away from the Judeo-Christian heritage with which we have traditionally comforted ourselves. These trajectories place Christians in a position where they must decide between going along with what they are convinced defies God and will bring judgment on the nation, and standing against these developments and paying the consequences.

People appeal to biblical texts to support both positions. On the one hand, Paul instructs us to be subject to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1–7), and Peter writes, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (1 Pet 2:13–14). On the other hand, what are we to do if the governing authorities command us to do what is wrong? Surely

we must then adhere to another of Peter's utterances: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29). Don't the examples of Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, count for anything (Dan 3, esp. vv. 16–18)—as also the example of Daniel himself (Dan 6)?

If Kim Davis had been trying to argue theologically, she might have aligned her stance with that of Calvin's "lesser magistrate" (*Institutes*, Bk IV): a magistrate may disobey the commands of a superior in order to keep others from sinning. By refusing to issue marriage licenses to those who, according to God's revelation, cannot legitimately be "married," she is ensuring that they do not sin in this regard.

2. *The Narrative and the Options*

Granted Kim Davis's moral commitments, what options does she have?

(1) She could resign. The advantage is that she would then face no further crisis of conscience. Some think of this as the easy way out, the soft option—but is that quite fair? By resigning she would lose her income, and granted the headlines she might find it difficult to find another job with similar remuneration. Her conservative friends might treat her as a quitter. Recall, too, that this is an elected office: if her constituents don't want her in the job, all they have to do is vote her out at the next election. Worse: resigning may signify to many that a Christian who has no opportunity to provide salt and light chooses instead to hide the light under a bushel basket and spread the salt on the ground. And there are further entailments, even dangerous entailments. In California, some voices in the medical community argue that if certain people are unwilling to perform abortions, they should not become medical doctors. In one or two states, a Christian adoption agency has in effect been shut down because it refuses to place kids with same-sex couples. If Kim Davis resigns, is she not lending support to people across the country who want to exclude those who cannot with a clear conscience participate in certain actions that the government rules not only admissible but good? Doesn't the "resign" option solve a personal problem at the expense of weakening the hands of those who insist that better options must be found to accommodate the religious convictions of those who cannot buy into the latest social-cultural trends? Might not resignation therefore serve to weaken, however unwittingly, the First Amendment?

(2) She could resign and withdraw—that is, withdraw, so far as it is possible, from the political and cultural life of the nation. In short, she could pursue the Amish option. On this reading, Christians must turn the other cheek, so they cannot become police officers or join the military. They would never want to invest in companies with questionable activities, so they cannot establish portfolios with banks and investment firms that are invariably compromised. Sleaze is endemic to the entertainment and advertising worlds, so it is much better to avoid those worlds. Some minimal involvement is doubtless unavoidable (e.g., paying taxes), but the default stance must be to withdraw. Yes, of course, God has given the sword to the state, but since Christians must eschew the sword, they cannot participate in the state, beyond the bare minimum necessary to survive. This second stance, then, is a more systematic form of the first stance, and usually presupposes some sort of supporting community. Form a commune, join a monastery, live in a hut in the wilderness. Once again, the same objections surface: exactly how does this option discharge one's obligation to be salt and light? Yes, Christians are to be counter-cultural, but which apostle decided the way forward was to establish a series of monasteries?

(3) She could stay on the job, and bear the consequences. Initially, at least, that's what Kim Davis decided to do. But one might argue that she did not stay the course. Both the federal Civil Rights Act and the Kentucky Religious Freedom Restoration Act have legal provisions for re-structuring a person's

job if religious conscience issues come into play. It would have been useful to see how appeal to those pieces of legislation might have worked out in relief—but almost certainly Kim Davis would have spent more time in jail before matters were resolved. Instead, what started off as principle (whether you agree with it or not) quickly degenerated to political grandstanding.

Moreover, the price Ms. Davis was paying was not simply jail time. The hatred and vituperation poured out on her around the country demonstrated once again (if such demonstration were necessary) that many outlets simply cannot discuss these matters rationally, but fly immediately to slurs and name-calling. One article by *The Seattle Times* was titled, “Religious Liberty Looks a Lot Like Intolerance from Here.”¹ *The Huffington Post* declared, “In a homophobic political stunt poorly veiled in ‘religious beliefs’ . . . Davis denied marriage licenses to LGBT couples”—thus refusing to consider that Kim Davis might have been motivated by moral principle rather than fear and hatred.² Several voices rejoiced when Ms. Davis went to jail, and suggested that this was the time to re-think the Hobby Lobby decision.

But this third option is not as clean as some might think. A handful of questions need to be raised.

(a) Why, in this matter of marriage licenses, should we focus on the particular sin of homosexual union? After all, when it comes to divorce and re-marriage, although scholars may disagree as to which re-marriages are permitted in Scripture, virtually all Christian interpreters who want to shape their views by Scripture insist that some re-marriages are forbidden. So should not a country clerk refuse to issue marriage licenses in such cases as well? Why fasten on the issue of gay marriage—apart from the fact that this is the current hot topic in cultural debates? Otherwise put, if Kim Davis wants to argue that she is under God’s authority when she refuses to issue a marriage license in the case of a homosexual pair, shouldn’t she see herself under God’s authority when it comes to prospective marriages that the Bible condemns on other grounds?

(b) In September 2015, when the Kim Davis matter was capturing a lot of attention in the press, another religious freedom lawsuit captured little attention, but was no less interesting. Charee Stanley, a flight attendant with ExpressJet, a regional airline, converted to Islam two years earlier. Only recently, however, did she come to realize that as a Muslim she should not serve alcohol. She explained the problem to ExpressJet, and accommodations were made—at least initially: the other flight attendant served all the alcohol. Inevitably, one flight attendant objected to the extra work she was required to do because Ms. Stanley was not pulling her weight. ExpressJet suspended her from her job. Ms. Stanley therefore sued ExpressJet for religious discrimination. As far as I know, the issue has not yet been resolved. When the matter is discussed in the press, some try to isolate the differences between the Charee Stanley case and the Kim Davis case, others associate them, and still others huff and ask why Mike Huckabee defends Kim Davis but not Charee Stanley. What is very clear is that the mainstream media have not subjected Charee Stanley to the same volume and heat of condescending vituperation they have poured out on Kim Davis. Nevertheless, the question must be asked: If we think that Kim Davis should be allowed some kind of accommodation on the grounds of her religious convictions, on what conceivable ground could we deny some kind of accommodation to Charee Stanley?

(c) More broadly: If in the light of our answers to these questions, we decide that Kim Davis’s initial stance was godly and right, and that it was the right hill to die on, shouldn’t the case have been

¹ Leonard Pitts Jr., *The Seattle Times*, 6 September 2015, http://old.seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2027043487_leonardpittscolumn07.xml.html?prmid=4748.

² Sanjeev K. Sriram, “Now that Kim Davis is in Jail, Let’s Re-Think Hobby Lobby,” *The Huffington Post*, 5 September 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sanjeev-k-sriram/now-that-kim-davis-is-in-_b_8091434.html.

allowed to work its way through the courts, with a willingness to face whatever sanction the court might impose, even with a certain joy that stems from being willing to suffer for Jesus (Acts 5:41; Heb 10:34)—rather than squandering the initial courage in a strange mix of pragmatic compromises? Or do the compromises indicate that this third option is not one that we seriously want to consider?

3. The Narrative and the Complications

Before we let this go, we should reflect on some of the biblical, theological, and historical realities that disclose just how complicated these issues are.

(1) The imperial government under which Paul operated was not a democracy. He spent the most fruitful part of his apostolic ministry under the cruel tyranny of Nero. That was the government which, he declared, was ordained by God. Certainly he saw that the alternative to governmental order is the chaos of anarchy. In any case, he entertained no expectation of changing the imperial order at a future election that was never going to happen. Protests and street marches were not on any Christian's agenda. (See my *Christ and Culture Revisited*.³)

(2) By contrast, most who read these words live under one form of democracy or another. That means several things. First, there is opportunity, or at least the possibility, of voting out of office those whose leadership is, in our view, leading the country astray. Second, living in a democracy demands that we get involved with the political process (unless we adopt the stance of the Amish) in a manner that would have made no sense to Paul. That is part of our responsibility as citizens. Yet we must do this without ever forgetting that we owe primary allegiance to the kingdom of God, to our citizenship in the new heaven and the new earth. And third (and perhaps most importantly), we must recognize that democracy is not an absolute good. One recalls the quip of Winston Churchill: democracy is the worst form of government except for all the other forms. Democracy is a great system for getting rid of leaders we don't like without bloodshed, but it is no guarantee that we'll elect the best people in the first place. Moreover, the majority of the populace may opt for a worldview or a moral stance that is far from anything Christians will approve. Just because the majority wants something does not guarantee that what they want is a good thing. The three hundred million American citizens are three hundred million sinners. Why should we imagine that three hundred million sinners will always vote for righteousness? And because Western cultures generally are moving farther and farther away from the Judeo-Christian heritage that once nourished them, Christians can expect to suffer a measure of cultural and political isolation. The years ahead may witness the rise of many Kim Davises.

(3) Owing to three things—first, the tendency to empower victims, ensuring that victims are multiplying; second, the growing sense of entitlement among millennials; and third, the rise of the new tolerance that teaches us that this tolerance is the supreme good—owing to these three things, I say, it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold rational conversations about the most important things. In debate, thesis is followed by antithesis, which is followed by personal abuse. The entitled do not feel they owe a hearing to those who question their entitlements. In the name of tolerance, they shut down those who disagree with them by affixing to them the label “intolerant.” The culture breaks up into factional groups that hurl venomous epithets at other factional groups, with very few people trying to listen well and reason their way forward. Christians must not stoop to this level. We must continually commend the truth to the consciences of all men and women.

³D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

(4) Because of these cultural developments, and because we live in the tension between this life and the life to come, between serving as salt and light on the one hand, and laying up treasures in heaven on the other, we should never be surprised by opposition. We should expect opprobrium, and worse, for this is the way the Master went (Matt 5:10–12; John 15:18–25; Acts 5:41; Phil 1:29; 1 Pet 2:21–22; Rev 13). So we must try to speak the truth in love, to influence the culture in which God has placed us, and yet avoid the whining entitlement that surrounds us, while being entirely willing to suffer of Jesus’s sake—indeed, committed to rejoicing for the privilege of suffering for his sake (Acts 5:41).

In God’s wise providence, the narrative of the woman from Kentucky has many things to teach us.

Jason Sexton has faithfully served as the Mission and Culture Book Review Editor for *Themelios* since 2011. This will be Jason’s last issue as a review editor, as he has recently been named editor of *Boom: A Journal of California*. We thank God for Jason’s outstanding contribution to the journal and wish him well in his transition.

Jackson Wu succeeds Jason as Mission and Culture Book Review Editor. Jackson completed his PhD in Applied Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and teaches theology and missiology in a seminary in East Asia. He is the author of *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013) and *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013) and has contributed several reviews to *Themelios*. Jackson can be contacted at jackson.wu@thegospelcoalition.org.

OFF THE RECORD

The Echo Chamber of Idolatry

— Michael J. Ovey —

Mike Ovey is principal of Oak Hill College in London and consulting editor of Themelios.

One of the most helpful books I have read over recent years is Greg Beale's *We Become What We Worship*.¹ Beale takes up the biblical themes of idolatry (notably passages such as Ps 135:15–18) and notes that idolatry changes us – ‘we resemble what we revere.’² This is a kind of satanic parody of real sanctification in which we become more like Christ.

One of the reasons this is so pastorally helpful is that it has a certain predictive power. As someone who from time to time does Christian apologetics, I want to know what makes my interlocutor tick and also what trajectory he or she is on. I want to see the way my culture (or some of the sub-cultures comprising my ‘culture’) is going and Beale's identification that we are like, and become increasingly like, our idols is really helpful for getting a glimpse of what may be coming. It also reminds me that when I encounter an idolater (as humans naturally are after the Fall), I am not just encountering what someone thinks, but at one level, who someone is and who they are becoming.

You can see some of this line of analysis about a resemblance dynamic in Vinoth Ramachandra as he works through some particular examples:

[I]t is not surprising that those who worship technology eventually develop machine-like personalities: emotionally under-developed, shallow in their relationships, driven by a desire to control and quantify every human situation, unable to appreciate beauty and value in anything outside the artificial. Those who worship sex, on the other hand, are incapable of trust and commitment in their human relationships and hide a lonely existence behind a mask of superficial ‘adulthood’.³

This catches some modern personality types painfully accurately. Of course, it also builds on a strong line of Reformed thought which, following Calvin, sees the human heart as an idol-making factory, in which in particular we want to make a god according to our own personal specifications.⁴ All this makes the question to the effect ‘what do you worship?’ extraordinarily important in evangelism

¹ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

² *Ibid.*, 22, where he notes this is the ‘primary theme’ of his book. See also on this theme Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart: A Study in Biblical Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

³ Vinoth Ramachandra, *Gods that Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 112.

⁴ *Institutes* I.5.

and apologetics. After all, until we know what the idols are that we worship it is difficult to see how or why we should repent, as Acts 17:30 tells us God commands, notably a call to repentance given in the context of the Athenians' idolatry.

However, I want to blend this theme of the resemblance dynamic from the idol-making human heart with another ingredient from Calvin, along with a soupçon of Albert Schweitzer and indeed some duly crumbled Ludwig Feuerbach for extra flavour. (My culinary metaphor may be getting out of hand here.) As well as drawing out the compulsive designer-deity making nature of our hearts, Calvin emphasises right at the start of the *Institutes* that our doctrine of humanity and our doctrine of God inter-relate.⁵ Changing one will in all likelihood change the other. Indeed, coming to resemble what we worship is one outworking of this.

One implication of Calvin's suggestion is that the reciprocal relationship between the doctrines of God and humanity means that a change in how we view ourselves readily engenders a change in how we view God. Schweitzer's rightly famous comments on scholars searching for the historical Jesus are very much to the point here.⁶ Scholars look into the well of history and see their own reflections. In a sense Schweitzer was observing how close to the mark Ludwig Feuerbach was with his projection theory of religion, that humans absolutise their own ideals and virtues into a deity. On this view, no wonder an aristocratic Bronze Age warrior culture comes up with a set of deities such as you find in Homer's *Iliad* who would in a more bourgeois society be by rights in and out of jail like yo-yos.

This has several consequences for evangelism and apologetics. First, alongside the predictive power of an idol → human resemblance dynamic, there is also a human → idol resemblance dynamic. We make (whether consciously or not) gods in our image, even as idols make us in theirs. This helps with the key question 'Who do you worship?' because I can start to analyse what God will look like for someone when I understand who and what they think they are. There is a predictive power in looking at what someone thinks of him or herself for envisaging what his or her god will look like. The two questions 'Who do you worship?' and 'Who/what do you think you are?' are related.

Secondly, precisely because the resemblance dynamic is two way – idol ↔ human – the resemblance dynamic will tend to be self-reinforcing. Here I want to modify Schweitzer's image of seeing one's own reflection to that of an echo chamber. In an echo chamber I hear my own voice back. I speak and the echo appears to be someone else saying the same things I do. Except in this case the echo is clothed with a higher authority than I think I might possess. I mistake the echo of my own voice for the voice of God/god and am therefore encouraged to make my own voice louder because the echo has agreed with me and reinforced me. My own louder voice produces a louder echo still, which encourages me to be still louder in my own assertions and so the process goes on.

Thirdly, the echoes will not always tell the same story. We should remember that modern western culture offers different and sometimes inconsistent pictures of who the human self is: for example, is one a sovereign autonomous individual inventing oneself or a self that is shaped and moulded by the sovereign voice of the majority consensus? Both versions are vigorously sold. But if I do not have a coherent account of myself, then my echo will not simply return one voice to me, but many voices. Of

⁵ *Institutes* I.1.1ff.

⁶ 'But it was not only each epoch that found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus.' Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910), 4.

course the modern cultural west looks polytheistic: it is not just that people from London have different values from people in Ohio. It is that the person in London and the person in Ohio do not have an internally consistent view of themselves to project outwards as God. Feuerbach does have something to teach in his account of projection, but we have to modify what we learn from him by bearing in mind that the self who projects is both inclined to be individualistic and has an unstable, non-coherent individuality. This complicates the 'Who are you?' question. Frequently it may become 'Who are you in which setting?'

Fourthly, let me mix a little Luther into the pot (to return to the culinary metaphor). Luther's view of our claims to righteousness is that our good deeds are even more dangerous than our obviously bad ones. Our 'good deeds' delude us: while they may be relatively good or count as 'civic righteousness', they mislead us into thinking we can do absolute good. I wonder if when we Christians think of the idols of our culture we think of the deities of sensuality and pleasure and power. I think there is much truth in saying these are contemporary idols and they are awful ones. But Luther would also have me look at what look very much like civic virtues – democracy, toleration, the rule of law and duly enforced individual rights. These tend to be our culture's 'good deeds' in Luther's terms and when I hear spokespeople for this culture, these seem to me be the things that are to the front of what they absolutise and project. Of course, sensuality, power and pleasure may be there, but I suspect these idols are 'backgrounded' rather foregrounded.

This suggests that as I look at the idol ↔ human resemblance dynamic and ask 'Who do you worship?' and 'Who are you just now?', I remember that one of the effects of the echo chamber is not just to give me something to worship, but also to guarantee my own self-righteousness. And unless we tackle our culture's sense of self-righteousness and the dynamics that sustain it, how can we bring it to hear the call to repent?

Toward Theological Theology: Tracing the Methodological Principles of John Webster

— Michael Allen —

Michael Allen is associate professor of systematic and historical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

Abstract: This essay introduces John Webster’s approach to the work of theology by considering its formal principles and their relation to the material claims of the Christian faith. We pay particular attention to his inaugural lectures given at Wycliffe College in 1995, at Oxford University in 1997, and the University of St. Andrews in 2014, filling out the picture by considering a few other significant essays. In so doing we will sketch three phases of his methodological development, which are meant heuristically to note ways in which his principled approach has been further extended and elaborated over the last twenty years and to note ways in which there have been shifts or developments within his prolegomena (e.g., regarding the nature of Scripture and its properties). Hopefully such a critical introduction then makes possible thoughtful, contextual engagement with and conversation about various elements of his work.

1. Introduction

For thirty years, John Webster established himself as a leading theologian and shaped a variety of conversations regarding topics as diverse as the doctrine of God, Holy Scripture, ecclesiology, and creation.¹ Having previously held significant positions at Wycliffe College in Toronto, the University of Oxford, and the University of Aberdeen, he held a chair at the University of St. Andrews until his death in May 2016. He supervised dozens of doctoral students, many of whom now play key roles in a variety of theological faculties around the globe. With Colin Gunton, he founded the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* and remained at the helm as editor nearly twenty years later, even as that publication has established itself at the front rank of its kind. With Kathryn Tanner and Iain Tor-

¹My thanks to Scott Swain and Kevin Vanhoozer for comments upon this essay and to Tony Wang for help with formatting. Prior to his death, John Webster kindly read through and commented upon the essay.

rance, he edited *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*.² He served in a variety of other capacities in major book series and journals of repute: as series editor for Studies in Systematic Theology (T&T Clark) and for Great Theologians and Barth Studies (Ashgate), and as a member of the editorial board for *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *Current Issues in Theology* (Cambridge), *Journal of Reformed Theology*, *Studies in Theological Interpretation* (Baker Academic) and *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Zondervan Academic). His influence has been recently noted by his peers with the publication of a festschrift upon his 60th birthday.³

Professor Webster's work began with reception of modern Protestant theology. He introduced the English-speaking world to the Lutheran systematic theologian and philosopher of religion, Eberhard Jüngel. This first phase of his published work took the form of a published doctoral dissertation that remains the standard account of Jüngel's work as well as two volumes of edited essays by Jüngel and another edited collection of essays responding to his theology.⁴ Years later, he also put together a new translation of Jüngel's work on Karl Barth's doctrine of the theology, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, and introduced his polemical treatise on justification for its release in English.⁵

His second sustained work of reception focused on the theologian whom Jüngel drew upon most, the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth. Webster offered the first significant analysis of the final fragments of the *Church Dogmatics* and their ethical bearing on the Christian life in his *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*.⁶ He then followed this work a few years later with a collection of essays surveying more widely on *Barth's Moral Theology*.⁷ Whereas the first book focused tightly upon one relatively small section of Barth's voluminous text, the latter volume showed a sense of the whole and an ability to appreciate its dogmatic and moral architecture. Webster also offered two volumes that have proven significant in drawing new readers to Barth, releasing an introduction to his theology entitled *Barth* and editing the *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*.⁸ A few years later, he continued his own work in offering close readings of particular texts by Barth as he examined some of his earliest lecture cycles in Göttingen and explored their formative role for his own theology as an exegetical and Reformed theologian; these essays were published as *Barth's Earlier Theology*.⁹

² John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance, eds., *The Oxford Handbook to Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis, eds., *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster* (London: T&T Clark, 2015).

⁴ John Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to His Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays I*, ed. and trans. John Webster, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); John Webster, ed., *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in his 60th Year* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); and Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays II*, ed. and trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. and trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001); John Webster, "Introduction," in Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith*, trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer (London: T&T Clark, 2001), vii–xvii.

⁶ John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷ John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

⁸ John Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000); John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹ John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

The last twenty years have seen Webster establish himself as a dogmatic theologian, however, supplementing that prior reputation as a leading analyst of historical texts. A number of essay collections have been produced over the last 15 years, gathering journal articles and essay contributions to various volumes for interested readers. First, *Word and Church* offered essays focused upon Holy Scripture, Christ, and ecclesiology in 2001.¹⁰ Second, his small book *Holiness* offered four lectures in 2003, previously delivered as the Day Higginbotham lectures at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, regarding the holiness of theology, God, the church, and the Christian.¹¹ Third, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* offered his *Scottish Journal of Theology* lectures at the University of Aberdeen to a wider audience in 2003 and provided what has been one of the most significant doctrinal elaborations of a Protestant theology of Scripture's nature and interpretation in the last generation.¹² Fourth, another collection of essays, *Confessing God*, appeared in 2005 and addressed theology, God, ecclesiology, and ethics.¹³ Fifth, *The Domain of the Word* appeared in 2012 and gathered together ten essays on scripture and theological reason.¹⁴ Sixth, two volumes appeared in 2015 under the title *God without Measure*, with the first addressing "God and the works of God" and the second "virtue and intellect."¹⁵

In many ways much of Webster's work remained ongoing at the time of his death. He continued to supervise numerous doctoral students at St. Andrews. He was completing work on a volume of essays regarding creation and providence, and he was finalizing a volume entitled *Perfection and Presence: God with Us according to the Christian Confession*, previously delivered as the first Kantzer Lectures in Revealed Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 2007. He intended to write a theological commentary on Ephesians for the well-known Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. And his *magnum opus* would surely have been his projected five volume systematic theology, which he had begun in earnest.

The time is ripe for an assessment of Webster's theology (and its development). Admittedly, his lengthier and more detailed work in presenting an entire dogmatics was expected only to come—in future years and would surely have allowed for more pointed assessment in various ways. Yet his output touched on virtually every topic (with but a few major exceptions, as atonement, the *ordo salutis*, and the sacraments are the areas least touched by his writings thus far) to some degree and upon major tent-posts of a theological system at particularly great length. We can then observe something of the structures, principles, and main emphases of his thought..

This essay will seek to unfold and introduce his approach to the work of theology by considering its formal principles and their relation to the various material claims of the Christian faith. To do so, we will pay particular attention to his inaugural lectures given at Wycliffe College in 1995, at Oxford University in 1997, and the University of St. Andrews in 2014. Given the significance of such lectures for laying out one's intellectual project, they serve as helpful touchpoints for assessing continuities and developments within Webster's theology. We will fill out the picture by considering a few significant essays that further

¹⁰ John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

¹¹ John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹² John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹³ John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

¹⁴ John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

¹⁵ John Webster, *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*. Volume 1: *God and the Works of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2015); *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*. Volume 2: *Virtue and Intellect* (London: T&T Clark, 2016).

the picture. In so doing we will sketch three phases of his methodological development, which are meant heuristically to note ways in which his principled approach has been further extended and elaborated over the last twenty years and to note areas of genuine development (e.g., regarding the nature of Scripture and its properties). Hopefully such a critical introduction then makes possible thoughtful, contextual engagement with various elements of his work.

2. *Reading Theological Theology*

In 1995 Webster delivered a lecture entitled “Reading Theology” upon his installation as Ramsay Armitage Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College in Toronto. Several of his abiding concerns are evident already in this lecture.¹⁶ The lecture begins by noting the significance of the “textual deposit” which Christian theologians read, as well as the modern biases against such a notion and practice (in particular, looking at excerpts from Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* and Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*).¹⁷ Webster notes that Hegel’s concern for traditioned inquiry runs against the grain of Cartesian intellectual pursuit, which tends toward the ahistorical. “It is not simply that when they browse in the library Descartes is skeptical and Hegel is fascinated, but rather that texts and the conventions of schooling with which they are associated are for Hegel a shape for the mind, whereas for Descartes they are an obstacle.”¹⁸ Webster argues that modern theology has struggled with competing visions for the reflective self’s nature, then, and he suggests that Hegel offers a better way forward. Over against Descartes, Hegel might help us realize we never begin, much less beginning anew, for we always receive a gift prior to any action or work, intellectual or otherwise.

Yet Webster suggests a need not simply to find the right philosophical approach and apply its parameters to the pursuit of divinity, but to offer what he calls here “a theological account of theology” which necessarily “describes its nature and functions by invoking language about God, describing the human actions of creating and reading theology in relation to divine agency.”¹⁹ Webster’s first proposal addresses theology, church, gospel, Scripture, and their relations: “Theology serves the Word of God by assisting the Church to remain faithful to the gospel as it is manifest in Holy Scripture.”²⁰ Here the issue of faithfulness is highlighted, and he notes the primacy of “hearing the gospel and the Bible” over any intellectual act of construction or response. The most apt term, then, for theological work is exegesis, in as much as it honors our receptive posture and the specifically textual character of that reception. In so doing he commends the reformational concern for catechetical practices in theological training, highlighting not only Calvin’s famous purposes for preparing his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* but the lesser known program of Zwingli laid out in his *On the Education of the Youth*.

He extends his argument, however, with a second proposal that follows with many parallels and one distinctive difference from the first proposal. “Theology serves the Word of God by assisting the Church to remain alert to the challenge of the gospel as it is manifest in Holy Scripture.”²¹ Webster points to the

¹⁶ John Webster, “Reading Theology,” *TJT* 13 (1997): 53–63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

role of theology here as challenge, the single word that differs from the preceding point. He elaborates: “Theology is the tradition discriminating between itself and the Word of God, acknowledging the contingency and, therefore, openness to revision of the ways in which it has sought to represent the gospel.”²² Because the Word always comes before and remains distinct from even our most honored affirmations, it always challenges any sense of finality shy of glory. Webster grounds this discriminating or challenging role of God’s Word not in human sin, finitude, linguistic indeterminacy, or any other common argument, but ultimately in the reality that “it is the living voice of God, who, as it were, stands on the far side of all our attempts to convert God’s Word into a mere intensification of our natural existence.”²³

These two ways of theology’s operation are summed up by Webster as encompassing “a descriptive or ‘locative’ mode, in which theology serves the Church’s need to state its identity, and a critical or ‘utopian’ mode, in which theology serves the Church’s need to resist cultural sclerosis.” Further, he immediately argues that “reading will be near the centre of the theological school’s mission,” specifically, reading “Scripture and the classics of Christian response to Scripture.”²⁴ While he notes that some would see such an educational program as restrictively and impracticably intellectualist, he argues that just the opposite is true, for engagement of texts enables cultures to “articulate, reflect on, and criticize themselves” and to enable them to thoughtfully inhabit ministerial functions.²⁵

Webster draws significant implications for theological schools and their relation to the broader university culture, though he returns to this theme at greater length in Oxford inaugural lecture upon assumption to the Lady Margaret Professorship in Divinity in 1997. That lecture was entitled “Theological Theology” and offered a much more direct comparative assessment of his earlier proposals with the reigning intellectual culture of university theology and religious studies programs.²⁶

Beginning broadly, Webster there noted that “Christian theology is not a serious factor to contend with in thinking about the university’s intellectual agenda and its modes of enquiry.”²⁷ Why? First, the modern university has marginalized moral and religious concerns. Second, religious and theological work has taken upon itself the normative models and practices of university life. In other words, the discipline has been threatened from the outside and, in so doing, has assumed the form of that which is outside. The result? “[T]he more theology invokes theological doctrine to articulate its nature and procedures, the more precarious has been its tenure in the dominant institutions of intellectual enquiry.”²⁸

“Theological Theology” then presented that “anthropology of enquiry” operative in the modern university culture, one where “learning is a generic human enterprise” and that the “most basic act as

²² Ibid., 60.

²³ Ibid., 59.

²⁴ Ibid., 61.

²⁵ Ibid. Interestingly Webster commends a sense of irony and curiosity here as significant intellectual habits, which are meant to help foreclose arrogance, hubris, or a self-identification of reading with the Word of God itself. He will later offer a much more nuanced and somewhat negative rendering of curiosity as vice in “Curiosity,” in *Domain of the Word*, 193–202.

²⁶ Published as *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 28 October, 1997* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); repr. in *Confessing God*, 11–31.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ Ibid., 13.

a reflective self is that act in which I summon the world into my presence, as it were commanding it to appear before me by making a representation of it.”²⁹ This anthropology has encouraged the decline of *Bildung* (formation) and the rise of *Wissenschaft* (science), a turn from the pursuit of the good viewed in a particular shape and toward good intellectual practice according to universal protocols. The newly minted Lady Margaret chair of divinity suggested that this retrogression was not owing solely to forces external to the discipline of divinity but also largely (chiefly?) to the internal development of the discipline itself which he depicts as “its steady alienation from its own subject matter and procedures.”³⁰ He sketched the genealogies of Michael Buckley and Eberhard Jüngel to give some shape to this broad judgment of disciplinary decline, what can only be depicted as an analysis that the salt of theological inquiry had lost its saltiness (see Matt 5:13).³¹

Not content simply to gesture toward other genealogies, the lecture then offered two case studies wherein particular doctrines had become sites of “disorder within Christian dogmatics” and instances for observing the “hesitancy of theology to field theological claims.”³² First, the migration and expansion of the doctrine of revelation was highlighted. He argued that “the shift . . . in post-Reformation dogmatics—a shift described by Ronald Thiemann as one ‘from assumption to argument’—is not simply a matter of making explicit basic principles of Reformation thought. Quite the opposite: it often takes the form of the replacement of a doctrine of God by epistemology.”³³ Second, he describes how “the resurrection shifts from being an object of belief to being a ground of belief.”³⁴ In both instances, apologetic concerns based on the wider anthropological assumptions that knowledge can be discerned by any objective observer has led to re-situating and re-scaling these doctrines for new purposes.

The earlier focus upon texts and “reading theology” are not lost, for Webster then turned to contrasting two modes of theological inquiry. He speaks of a turn from what he here calls “citation” to scientific, universal enquiry as the “dominant mode” of argument.³⁵ Citation worked by way of constant reference to fundamental texts. Indeed, “theology’s literary forms and intellectual architecture, its

²⁹ Ibid., 14–15. For expansion of his contrarian anthropology, see also Webster, “The Human Person,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 219–34.

³⁰ Webster, “Theological Theology,” 17.

³¹ See Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell J. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). Similar arguments have been offered by John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), which had appeared only a few years prior to this inaugural lecture and does appear late in the footnotes of “Theological Theology” (27n25), and much more recently by Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Webster addresses such matters also in “Theology after Liberalism?” in *Theology After Liberalism*, ed. John Webster and George Schner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 52–64.

³² Webster, “Theological Theology,” 18, 19.

³³ Ibid., 19. Webster’s judgments about the principles, motivation, emphases, and structures of post-Reformation methodology will grow much more favorable in later years, such that he would no longer paint this portrait with as wide a brush (see, e.g., “ὕπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι: On the Inspiration of Holy Scripture,” in *Conception, Reception, and the Spirit: Essays in Honor of Andrew T. Lincoln*, ed. J. G. McConville and L. K. Pieteresen (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 244 n2.

³⁴ Webster, “Theological Theology,” 19.

³⁵ Ibid., 20–21.

rhetoric and its modes of argument, are controlled by proximity to these sources.”³⁶ A shift to universal enquiry, however, “involves retiring the rhetoric of commentary, paraphrase and reiteration, for those ways of doing theological work cannot serve the goal of enquiry, which is proof underived from the terms of the tradition itself.”³⁷

A complex decline narrative is presented: “It is not simply that theology has failed to keep pace with modernity (in one sense, it has kept pace all too well); nor simply that theology was turfed out by rationalism (for theology itself contributed a great deal to its own decline.” Such external threats are matched by internal malformations as well, for “internal disarray incapacitated theology all the more because it left theologians with such a reduced intellectual capital to draw upon as they sought to make judgments about the ideals, academic and spiritual, which presented themselves for their attention with such institutional force.”³⁸

And a broad future is envisioned or called for, not simply one in which theology is allowed or tolerated within the panoply of intellectual disciplines. Such would be to abandon the notion of the university as indeed unified in any sense, if one discipline were tolerated in spite of its supposed failure to meet intellectual standards. Rather, Webster argues that theology, by being more theological, might actually provoke challenge to the regnant understanding of human inquiry. Here Webster speaks of the “distinctiveness” of theology and locates it “not simply in its persistence in raising questions of ultimacy, but rather in its invocation of God as agent in the intellectual practice of theology.”³⁹ Theology not only keeps values on the table, as it were, but it reminds us that God serves the whole meal.

The lecture concludes with brief attention to the project of Johannes Wollebius. Webster noted that Wollebius identified God himself as the “principle of the being of theology,” that is, its material principle, and the Word of God as the “principle by which it is known,” that is, its formal principle.⁴⁰ A realist theological approach must be upheld, but this commitment must be matched by a rigor to focus as a discipline upon identity description of God himself, not growing bored with such concern and seeking solace elsewhere. And God’s agency must be acknowledged through the auxiliary of his Word, wherein theological inquiry is given fresh legs as its object is also shown to be its subject.

This first phase of principled exposition regarding the nature and practice of theology, then, has identified major concerns: God, Scripture, church, culture, and reading. Webster engaged with classic texts marking the modern tradition of rational inquiry as well as sought to identify ways in which such intellectual habits had infiltrated and permeated much modern divinity. By way of response, he pointed first to a need to fix upon divine agency not only as the object of our inquiry but as the context for

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁷ Ibid., 21.

³⁸ Ibid., 23. This sense that theology had internalized the principles and protocols of non-theological disciplines has shaped his criticism here and elsewhere of supposedly “conversational” approaches to theology (in a previous generation, they would have been termed “correlationist” approaches). See, for example, his “David Ford: Self and Salvation,” *SJT* 54 (2001): 548–59; *contra* the argument for needfulness of a conversational approach to theology, as in David Ford, “Theological Wisdom, British Style,” *ChrCent* 117 (2000): 388–91. The very scope and seriousness of “Part III: Conversations” in the *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (co-edited by John Webster!) speaks to the influence of the model proposed by Ford.

³⁹ Webster “Theological Theology,” 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., citing Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, Prolegomena 1.III, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. J. W. Beardslee (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 30.

such intellectual pursuit and second upon the need to challenge the supposedly universal and objective truths sought by science and to pursue distinctive and competing truths and visions by fixing upon the particular texts of the Christian theological tradition.

3. *Principled, Biblical Reasoning*

We can observe a second phase in Webster's methodological development, as we consider two texts published during his tenure at the University of Aberdeen. We will first look at his presentation of "Biblical Reasoning" wherein he returns to concerns about the anthropology underneath any theological method but also presses on to speak more fully of the economy of God's grace as well as the specific modes of reason undertaken in dogmatics and exegesis. We will then consider his essay on the "Principles of Systematic Theology," wherein he returned to those basic points drawn from Wollebius in "Theological Theology" regarding the material and noetic principles of theology. We will see that his basic concerns are sustained here, though new resources are brought to bear upon his argument and new wrinkles or details are added to the picture.

First, Webster published an essay entitled "Biblical Reasoning" in 2008. Here he expanded his methodological program by defining the nature of the discipline:

Christian theology is biblical reasoning. It is an activity of the created intellect, judged, reconciled, redeemed and sanctified through the works of the Son and the Spirit. More closely, Christian theology is part of reason's answer to the divine Word which addresses creatures through the intelligible service of the prophets and apostles. It has its origin in the Spirit-sustained hearing of the divine Word; it is rational contemplation and articulation of God's communicative presence.⁴¹

He quickly observes that this approach demands reflection upon the nature and end of Scripture and of reason and, furthermore, that the nature and teleology of Scripture and of reason, that is, the "ontology and teleology should derive from the material content of the Christian confession and, accordingly, should demonstrate a free relation to other considerations of the nature of texts and rationality."⁴² Here he further develops his program of "Theological Theology," whereby theology derives its own rules from its particular object and, further, where theology looks askance at the centripetal force of scientific inquiry (*Wissenschaft*), to which Webster counters by characterizing theology's relation to any such extra-theological values, principles, or protocols as "free" and thus *ad hoc*.⁴³

"Theological Theology" finds material expansion here, however, as Webster supplements his cultural provocation with a new focus upon the shape of the divine economy, in which he argues we must locate the theological task. He is no longer satisfied only to state formally that theology begins with a different anthropology than the intellectual programs of the modern university; no, he tells the story of Christian anthropology by speaking of the divine economy. He addresses the shape of the economy in four movements: (1) its ground in the internal perfection of the triune Godhead; (2) its unfolding "as the

⁴¹ Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," in *Domain of the Word*, 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴³ He had previously cautioned the need for a similarly "free" relation to both debates about canon as well as discussions of the nature of Holy Scripture with regard to wider philosophical conversations about textuality: see Webster, "The Dogmatic Location of the Canon," in *Word and Church*, 9–46 (esp. 9–11); *Holy Scripture*, 1.

history of fellowship in which creatures are summoned to know and love God”; (3) its inclusion, more specifically, of “the history of redemption” following the inbreaking of sin and the disruption it brings to that knowing, loving fellowship between God and his creatures; and (4) its revelatory character, such that these works of the triune God do manifest his own character.⁴⁴

Then Scripture and reason are, each in their own way, located within that divine economy.⁴⁵ For “God’s work in the economy is eloquent, speaking out of itself. Its relation to creatures is not only causal

⁴⁴ Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 117–18.

⁴⁵ While this essay does not sketch the doctrine of the nature of Scripture in Webster’s corpus as such, it does touch upon such matters. It is worth noting two major phases of reflection here: the cluster of writings that led to and were marked by the publication of his *Holy Scripture* (2003), including essays in part 1 of *Word and Church*, and then the essays that make up part 1 of *Domain of the Word* (2012) as well as the more recent essay on the doctrine of inspiration. His book, *Holy Scripture*, merited serious attention and criticism from D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, compiled by Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 238–55. Carson argued that the definition of Holy Scripture offered therein was ambiguous and seemed to include the use made of it by its human readers (zeroing in on the phrase “and its function” within this definition): “‘Holy Scripture’ is a shorthand term for the nature and function of the biblical writings in a set of communicative acts which stretch from God’s merciful self-manifestation to the obedient hearing of the community of faith” (Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 5). It is worth noting, however, that Carson has likely misread the word “function” here, for Webster is not identifying Scripture with its human use. He is resolutely relating it to its divine use (noting that it is “living and active,” not for our doing but by God’s doing and, only thus, unto our doing), evident not only in his preface (1) and the immediate context (8–9, where the divine economy is the setting) but also especially through his repeated reference to the “intrusive” character of the Word over against the church (see the entirety of ch. 2 in this regard, on which Carson only offers a brief sketch in his review). This misreading seems to stand underneath the most substantive concerns about Carson’s reading, namely, that he thinks Webster makes too small a claim of the Bible by denying that it is God’s Word only when received fruitfully by human recipients. It is God’s Word as used by God, not by humans. Webster’s focus on the divine economy, rooted in Hebrews 4:12–13, must govern our reading of this language. This misreading is understandable, however, in that Webster does not tease out the full range of “ends” which Holy Scripture accomplishes, only touching on its ideal result (reconciliation) and never addressing its role regarding judgment. In a sketch, however, an omission cannot be taken as a commission, at least not when the immediate and wider contexts suggest otherwise. Carson probably also lingers too long on the place of sanctification in chapter 1, for Webster moves on to discuss inspiration as a functional subset of sanctification (applied to the texts as such). Hence Carson’s later concerns about the ambiguity of sanctification language ought to be redirected further to the language of inspiration; sanctification is, by Webster’s own admission, pliable and, hence, is filled out by inspiration language which is more pointed (*Holy Scripture*, 30–39).

That being said, some of Carson’s concerns still rightly stand as Webster did not there offer a full dress depiction of Scripture’s nature and properties (e.g., while he speaks of its clarity at some length, its truthfulness is not teased out in any detail). But it is worth noting that Webster does not denigrate all five other concepts mentioned by Carson; while he has worries about divine accommodation and incarnational analogies (*Ibid.*, 22–23), he proposes that prophetic and apostolic testimony, means of grace, and the servant-form of the Word all commend themselves (albeit with limits; see *Ibid.*, 23–26). He is emphatically not rejecting them, merely locating them in a wider dogmatic matrix. Here, however, I must admit my own agreement with Carson over against Webster, that the incarnational analogy (rightly chastened) has much to commend it. While others have shared Webster’s allergy (see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009], 38–41), the analogy—so long as it is noted to be an analogy—seems to have much to commend it (see Warfield and Bavinck, though surely not the form advanced by Peter Enns in *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015]). I would go a step further than Carson here and also seek to argue for the viability of a form of divine accommodation as well, admitting that Webster has raised crucial concerns regarding a neat form/content distinction that

but self-expressive, producing a cognitive relation. The possibility of this cognitive relation resides with God alone.”⁴⁶ Scripture receives discussion first. God not only makes possible, but renders actual cognitive fellowship by providing an external Word (*verbum externum*) as well as an internal word (*verbum internum*) by the indwelling of the illumining Holy Spirit. God makes use of instruments in this self-revelatory eloquence for the Word “is mediated through creaturely auxiliaries.”⁴⁷ The economy shapes our understanding of Scripture’s nature, then, which in turn directs our calling to its proper use or reception. We must consider Holy Scripture under the signs of “prophetic” and “apostolic” speech, which serve an “ambassadorial” role “as an embassy of God’s eloquence.”⁴⁸ In so doing their particularity,

must be addressed. While I do not fault Webster for not addressing topics that were not within his very limited purview, I do find this allergy to the incarnational analogy and divine accommodation as useful notions in any form, as well as his stark statement that the text bears no divine characteristics (even in a participated, creaturely way), to be a false and unnecessary end.

Carson did rightly point out that Webster’s earlier book (*Holy Scripture*) was wholly negative regarding the post-Reformation orthodox divines, over against a strong reliance on Calvin (suggesting a reliance on mid-twentieth-century historiography of the “Calvin versus the Calvinists” ilk). In years since, in what I’ve called his second set of writings on Holy Scripture, he has clearly engaged historiographic work (e.g. R. D. Preus and R. A. Muller) showing that the post-Reformation divines did not treat inspiration as the leading edge of bibliology (apart from a wider account of divine action rooted in a doctrine of the divine missions), much less suggest that it was an isolated foundation for Scripture’s authority; thus, *Domain of the Word* engages those divines in an almost wholly positive light. They rooted their bibliology in the doctrine of God and the divine economy, just as Webster attempts to do. Webster explicitly notes this awareness of recent historiography in his recent essay on inspiration (“ὕπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι,” 244 n 2) and explicitly corrects his earlier assessment (*Holy Scripture*, 31). He also notes why Barth was wrongly suspicious of spiritualization of the Scriptures in the Reformed orthodox divines through his reliance on the flawed account of Heinrich Heppé (“ὕπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι,” 244–45 n 3–5), again correcting an earlier reliance of his own upon Heppé (*Holy Scripture*, 31–32n34). And his earlier distinction between the text and divine properties has been refuted in his more recent works (see “*Verbum Mirificum*: T. F. Torrance on Scripture and Hermeneutics,” in *Domain of the Word*, secs. 3–5 [where he critiques this concern in Torrance and, by extension, Barth]; and (“ὕπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι,” 247–50). Further, Webster has written at some length now about the significance of inspiration as being both verbal and plenary, drawing again on the post-Reformation Reformed orthodox tradition (see “Holy Scripture” in *Between the Lectern and the Pulpit: Essays in Honor of Victor A. Shepherd*, ed. Dennis Ngien and Rob Clements [Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2014], 173–81, esp. 177).

Webster clearly has reoriented his historical assessment and now identifies the post-Reformation Reformed (and to some extent Lutheran) divines as peers sharing his trajectory. We might note that Webster could have—and should have—expanded his own identification of post-Reformation doctrines of Scripture as not only tying bibliology in to theology proper but also to the doctrine of the covenant, as Scott R. Swain has shown in *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), ch. 2. While these are helpful advances, no doubt, in his relationship to post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy, he also increasingly made use of sacramental language to describe the nature of Holy Scripture, and I have lingering questions related to this set of tools being applied here (e.g. the dominance of the language of sign/*signum* in bibliology). Without an anatomy of the terminology of *signum* (especially as employed by Peter Lombard and his commentators), it is hard to know just what to make of its traversal into the realm of bibliology, though there will assuredly be gains and losses (perhaps accounted for with other terminology).

⁴⁶ Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 119.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

historicity, and tangible character are affirmed, even as their metaphysical roots in not only contingent human circumstance but in an eternally-rooted divine economy are acknowledged.

Without leaving the structure of the divine economy behind, Webster then turns to locate reason within that framework as well. Here the counter-cultural nature of Christian accounts of reason is brought out explicitly, wherein the notions of human nature (of a non-plastic sort), human teleology (as received from God), and divine law are shown to fly in the face of either critical or post-critical philosophy in the (late) modern era.⁴⁹ The Christian account distinctively defines reason as (1) contingent and, further, given by God; (2) defined by a metaphysical nature given by God rather than sheer human will (as in voluntarism); and (3) darkened by sin and reinvigorated by the reconciling work of the Son.⁵⁰ A small print excursus then distinguishes Webster's dogmatic account of reason from other recent iterations, namely, the semiotic approach of Oliver Davies, which is impressive for its constant reference to divine presence but too restrictively invested in the doctrine of creation apart from needful attention to divine transcendence, on the one hand, and the economy of sin and redemption, on the other hand, and the incarnational or advent-oriented approach of Paul Janz, which fails to affirm the freedom and aseity of God in its attempt to honor the immanence of the divine.⁵¹

Finally, then, the essay returns to its beginning: "Christian theology is biblical reasoning. It is the redeemed intellect's reflective apprehension of God's gospel address through the embassy of Scripture, enabled and corrected by God's presence, and having fellowship with him as its end."⁵² Reflecting on the same statement about ontological and noetic principles drawn from Wollebius in "Theological Theology," three statements are offered by way of analysis here: (1) "Scripture is the cognitive principle of theology in the sense that Scripture is the place to which theology is directed to find its subject matter and the norm by which its representations are evaluated"; (2) "the ontological principle of theology is God himself—not some proposed entity but the Lord who out of the unfathomable plenitude of his triune being lovingly extends towards creatures in Word and Spirit"; and (3) "the cognitive principle is grounded in the ontological principle," namely, the "cognitive and revelatory force [of Holy Scripture] is not that of a textual deposit but of a loving voice and act of rule."⁵³ Thus, theology has to be characterized as a determinate sort of inquiry, what he will elsewhere call a positive science that is governed by its specific object.

The determinacy of theology's inquiry shapes its exercise in two ways. "Exegetical reasoning is, most simply, reading the Bible, the intelligent (and therefore spiritual) act of following the words of the text." Following here takes the form of "intellectual repetition" and paraphrase, honoring that positive

⁴⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 124–25. This third facet finds greater expansion in Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 68–106.

⁵¹ Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," 126–28, with reference to Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Paul Janz, *God, the Mind's Desire: Reference, Reason, and Christian Thinking*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵² Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," 128.

⁵³ Ibid., 128–29. One might wish, of course, that the word "mere" were inserted here prior to the phrase "textual deposit." Later Webster offered more specific discussion of the textual product of God's economic action in his "ὕπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι," 236–50. He has also addressed the verbal and plenary nature of this inspiration in "Holy Scripture," in *Between the Lectern and the Pulpit: Essays in Honor of Victor A. Shepherd*, ed. Dennis Ngien and Rob Clements (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2014), 173–81, (see esp. 177).

character of this science, for theology is not exercised *a priori* (“from the earlier”) but *a posteriori* (“from the latter”).⁵⁴ As in both “Reading Theology and “Theological Theology,” so here the primary mode of theology in this vein is arguably commentary, that exercise of carefully tracing and teasing out the significance of determinate texts which predate the intelligent agent. “Dogmatic reasoning produces a conceptual representation of what reason has learned from its exegetical following of the scriptural text.”⁵⁵ Dogmatics does not do away with scripture but offers a new idiom for mapping it: “seeing Scripture in its full scope as an unfolding of the one divine economy; seeing its interrelations and canonical unity; seeing its proportions.”⁵⁶ The essay concludes by speaking to a commonality between exegetical and dogmatic reasoning, namely, that they are both “indirectly ascetical disciplines” such that in their exercise, “the intellect is drawn away from idols.”⁵⁷

“Biblical Reasoning” brings to bear two complements to Webster’s earlier focus on a counter-cultural approach to a distinctively Christian understanding of the nature, ends, and practices of theology. First, it focuses upon the divine economy and specifically locates Holy Scripture within that orbit; this bespeaks a move made at length in his earlier Scottish Journal of Theology lectures that were then published as *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*. Secondly, it also locates the work of reason—more specifically, the very practice of theology itself—within the realm of sanctification, such that theology is not merely about sanctification but is itself a part of God’s sanctifying work. Grace, then, is not only the content of theology but also the context for its actual exercise. Webster had unfolded these ideas earlier in “The Holiness of Theology.”⁵⁸ Without shirking the earlier confrontational approach *vis à vis* modern intellectual culture, then, “Biblical Reasoning” has focused even more specifically upon Scripture and reason as historical, human, creaturely realities and simultaneously noted the need to locate them ontologically and teleologically within a deeper divine economy.

Second, the following year saw the publication of “Principles of Systematic Theology” in an issue of the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* that included a number of programmatic essays.⁵⁹ Webster’s essay traces theology back from human thought of God to human teleology and eventually to the very nature of God.⁶⁰

Webster expands on earlier comments to note here that

the Holy Trinity is the ontological principle (*principium essendi*) of Christian theology; its external or objective cognitive principle (*principium cognoscendi externum*) is the Word of God presented through the embassy of the prophets and apostles; its internal

⁵⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131. In note 34 Webster affirms T. F. Torrance’s insistence that dogmatics “derives from the Word and refers back to it” (see Torrance, “The Logic and Analogic of Biblical and Theological Statements in the Greek Fathers,” in *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995], 381).

⁵⁷ Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 131, 132.

⁵⁸ Webster, *Holiness*, 8–30.

⁵⁹ John Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” *IJST* 11 (2009): 56–71; repr. in *Domain of the Word*, 133–49.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 133. Note that his use of the term “reduction” in this regard is medieval, scholastic language for a tracing back of an element to its principial font; it is not a pejorative term, as the term tends to evoke in modern discussions (e.g. of reductionisms). For expansion of the anthropological claims, see esp. Webster, “Eschatology and Anthropology,” in *Word and Church*, 262–86.

or subjective cognitive principle (*principium cognoscendi internum*) is the redeemed intelligence of the saints.⁶¹

He observes that speech about principles depends on the notion that being precedes knowing; further, the order and relation of being(s) shapes the order and sequence of knowing. We do not make knowledge, but knowledge is given unto us. Thus,

the idiom of the principles of theology simply schematizes the history of God with creatures in its communicative aspects. Far from lifting theological work out of temporal processes of knowledge, it aims to identify the agents and acts (infinite and finite) which together constitute those processes as they are suspended from God's self-knowledge and shaped by his self-manifestation.⁶²

First, we must attend to divine knowledge of the divine, that is, to the wisdom and knowledge possessed by the triune Godhead. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son" (Matt 11:27); "The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10). As Webster summarizes, "God's knowledge is an aspect of the perfect fellowship of his triune life, in which each knows and is wholly known by each."⁶³ But God's knowledge is not solely God's knowledge, even if it is only God's own, for this unique God is communicative (a term which most plainly can be rendered as "making common certain goods with others"). "The possibility of Christian theology thus lies in what God alone knows about himself and yet communicates by disclosure—in God and the Word of God."⁶⁴

While human capacity must be denied, divine communication is the glorious affirmation of the gospel. "God so tempers his knowledge that it assumes fitting created form. This accommodated form is Holy Scripture, and, by derivation, its reception and contemplation by the saints."⁶⁵ Decrying modern naturalistic accounts of the Bible, Webster insists that we return these texts to their place in the divine economy.⁶⁶ Here Webster brings in the classic distinction made between archetypal and ectypal theology in the Protestant scholastics, wherein God's theology and human theology are related as a source and its stream.⁶⁷ He then depicts three sorts of ectypal theology: before the fall (*ante lapsum*), after the fall (*viatorum*), and in paradise to come (*beatorum*).⁶⁸ As in "Biblical Reasoning," he offers a sketch of spiritual history to trace these distinctions across the terrain of the ages as depicted through the lens of the canonical scriptures.

What of systematic theology, in particular, if it is located amidst that broader account of theology in the economy of sin and grace? Webster addresses its object, arrangement, and relation to Holy Scripture in turn. First, "the matter of systematic theology is primarily God and secondarily all things in God, the

⁶¹ Webster, "Principles of Systematic Theology," 135.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 138, 140–41.

⁶⁶ See especially his work in this regard found most recently in *Domain of the Word*, 3–19, 32–49.

⁶⁷ Webster, "Principles of Systematic Theology," 139–40.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

latter being a derivative though no less necessary object of systematic reflection.”⁶⁹ Admittedly, in this phase of the economy, the primary object of theology (God) is “only indirectly accessible” and, thus, consideration of other things in relation to God is not mere addition but needful contemplation for the sake of actually learning of God himself.⁷⁰ Second, “because the matter of systematic theology is the ineffable God and the movement of goodness in which he extends towards creatures, an account of Christian doctrine can be only provisionally systematic.”⁷¹ The order ought to merge the “dramatic and the synthetic, in order to present to best effect the acts which make up the outer movement of that history, the agents by whom they are enacted, and the origin and telos of the whole.”⁷²

Third, “the divine Word—that is, the ascended Son of God speaking to creatures in the Spirit’s power through the biblical testimonies—is the external cognitive principle of systematic theology. Systematic theology must at every point return to this principle as a commentary returns to its text.”⁷³ Webster responds to Geerhardus Vos’s essay, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” pointing out that Vos severed systematic theology from the historical shape and sweep of the canon (assigning such texts only to biblical theology, a newly distinguished discipline in its own right).⁷⁴ Webster finds such errors to flow from treating scriptural writings as “raw material” rather than an interim step in human illumination (in the long journey unto beatitude), from treating theological concepts as “improvements upon Scripture,” and, ultimately, from neglecting the ineffability of theology’s object.⁷⁵ By way of repair, Webster calls for “immersion in the texts and thought patterns of the Christian tradition” which are “best expressed by the substantial presence of exegesis.” Indeed, he presses further to say that “Scripture must be the *terminus ad quem* of systematic theological analysis, not merely its *terminus a quo*.”⁷⁶ In other words, theology does not merely go from Bible to concepts, but those concepts—themselves biblically derived in judgment, if not in specific terminology—are meant to return us to the Bible anew.

This middle phase of Webster’s methodological expression continues to share the abiding concerns of his earlier work: the distinctiveness of theology amongst the other academic disciplines, the awareness of divergent anthropologies and their effects for self-understanding in intellectual projects of one sort or another, and the need to think of theology in light of God and God’s works. To those earlier commitments, however, new concerns have been added. The most apparent shift relates to the principles of theology. Whereas the lectures from the 1990s highlight an ontological and an epistemological or cognitive principle, Webster has now extended his analysis of the epistemological or

⁶⁹ Ibid., 142.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 143.

⁷¹ Ibid., 144.

⁷² Ibid., 146. For more on the order of systematic theology, see Webster’s “Introduction: Systematic Theology,” in *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 1–18 (esp. 9–14).

⁷³ Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” 146.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 148. Vos’s essay, his inaugural lecture as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1894, is republished in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 3–24.

⁷⁵ Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” 148.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 148.

cognitive principle in two directions: the external and the internal.⁷⁷ It is safe to say that this expansion betokens a wider appreciation for matters not only Christological and bibliological but also for similar concerns regarding pneumatology and regenerative. Webster has always insisted that we speak of divine action, and he has majored on the force of divine communication through the scriptural embassies of prophets and apostles (now beginning to make use of post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy as a resource for describing its nature and properties, diverging from some of the criticisms of those divines by Barth and Torrance). He has now also emphasized the need to locate our reception—rational and spiritual—within an economy not only of speech but of regenerated intelligence. Both “Biblical Reasoning” and “Principles of Systematic Theology,” then, develop an anthropology of created, fallen, and regenerated reason to match their schematic description of divine speech.⁷⁸ Before seeking to draw synthetic conclusions regarding his methodological development thus far, we ought to attend to a third phase in his writing.

4. *Theological Theology Again*

In his last phase, Webster both returned to earlier concerns—theological theology again—as well as further developed areas of inquiry that were relatively underdeveloped in his methodological oeuvre, specifically, the virtues and vices of human theological inquiry. We can observe both continuity and discontinuity, then, by attending to two recent lectures. First, we will consider his inaugural lecture upon assumption of a Chair of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews in May 2014, at which time he spoke on “Intellectual Patience.” Second, we will attend to his recent lecture on “What Makes Theology Theological?” which expands upon his “Theological Theology” lecture almost twenty years prior. We can see that the emphasis upon the material order and, thus, divine provenience remains unabated; we can also see a continued concern to think about cognitive order in both its external and internal registers and, thus, to attend to the economy as the field of both Word and Spirit’s work. But we see more attention given to the resultant work of those divine persons by greater focus upon the persons, natures, ends, and virtues/vices of the humans in this economy of grace.

First, “Intellectual Patience” offers “an anatomy and commendation of an intellectual virtue” precisely because “one of the chief parts of divinity’s apostolic office in the university is the articulation of a metaphysics and morals of intellectual inquiry, presenting and enacting a version of the good intellectual life.”⁷⁹ Webster observes that the faculty of divinity, alone among the four medieval faculties, has struggled for legitimacy in the modern university, and it has oftentimes found acceptance only by absorbing a “naturalist metaphysics of inquiry” or by “reinventing itself as the historical and literary science of religious phenomena,” which has brought a remarkable “scholarly harvest” and yet has also brought a “heavy cost.”⁸⁰ Such themes are familiar to anyone who has read “Reading Theology” and “Theological Theology” from his first phase. Here Webster proposes another posture toward the

⁷⁷Note that in “Theological Theology” he quotes Wollebius to speak of two principles (ontological and noetic, on which see 25–26), whereas in “Principles of Systematic Theology” he refers to Bavinck and Aquinas, speaking now of three principles (ontological, external cognitive, and internal cognitive).

⁷⁸This pneumatological and regenerative focus has been given careful exposition especially in Webster, “Illumination,” in *Domain of the Word*, 50–64.

⁷⁹Webster, “Intellectual Patience,” in *God without Measure*, 2:173.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 173–74.

modern university: “Precisely in its unconventionality, a theological metaphysics and morals of inquiry will try to illuminate the life of the mind and provide intelligibility to natural experience and action . . . by tracing intellectual life to its source in divine benevolence, by which alone its nature and duties are disclosed.”⁸¹

As in his prior phases, Webster notes the anthropology underlying different approaches to intellectual inquiry. Here he insists that “the life of the mind is natural, that is, inherent in our nature and faculties as the kind of beings that we are.” Mental activity accords with our make-up and experience, precisely because we are made to be thinking creatures. Yet he notes that inquiry’s natural-ness cannot be equated to it being an “instinctive” posture; rather, it must be intentionally cultivated so as to activate the “potentiality of our nature.”⁸² To address such intentional cultivation he draws on the language of virtue, that is, of a “stable property of character which disposes its possessor to operate well in some realm of human activity.”⁸³ While he notes the existence of moral virtues, he focuses specifically upon intellectual virtues in this essay. Those “intellectual virtues underlie intellectual faculties, powers, skills and practices, and animate excellent intellectual performance,” that is, “intellectual performance which moves in estimable ways to worthy intellectual ends.”⁸⁴ He offers a schematic description of four types of intellectual virtues: (1) those “which dispose us to labour to acquire intellectual goods,” such as studiousness; (2) those “which dispose us to receive the intellectual goods,” for example, humility; (3) those “which fit us to contribute to and profit from common intellectual life,” like impartiality; and (4) those “which ready us to deal with difficulty in the pursuit of intellectual goods.”⁸⁵ Intellectual patience fits into this final category of virtues.

Webster begins with a consideration of patience more broadly and a definition generally: “Patience is that excellence of character by which, for the sake of some good end, we tolerate difficulties, and encounter obstacles to present happiness with equanimity, collectedness and steadiness of purpose.”⁸⁶ He notes the regular appearance of patience in biblical paraenesis (citing Jas 5:7; Col 1:11; 1 Thess 5:14) and in the literature of early Christian moral teaching (noting discussions in the works of Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Thomas, John Owen, and Thomas Goodwin). He finds a focus upon the distinctiveness of patience in the Christian matrix (what Revelation will refer to as the “patience of the saints,” in Rev 13:10; 14:12), over against its pagan iterations in late antiquity, in such texts.

Why is patience distinctive amongst Christians? Webster notes that it is “an excellence of reconciled creatures.”⁸⁷ First, it is an excellence for creatures, those of us who receive life and blessing from another at his behest. Second, it is an excellence of those who have been lost to sin and found by the righteous and holy God who has intervened by Word and Spirit to reconcile us unto himself. As with the essays in his second phase, so here he locates a reality as requiring consideration within the full history of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

creation, fall, and redemption. Such consideration reminds us that “human patience is an effect of a divine cause.”⁸⁸ That broad statement merits at least a brief unpacking, which Webster offers:

Patience Christianly understood has distinct causes and acting subjects. It is not a straightforward effect of human nature. This is because, on the one hand we are creatures and so only live and move through another’s love, and, on the other hand our created nature has suffered such depredation that, though some aptitude for patience remains as a residue of our integral state, its completion is out of our reach.⁸⁹

Again, notice that it is a creaturely excellence and natural: we are patient, and such patience accords with our nature. But it is “not a straightforward effect” of our nature; it is not “instinctual” or obvious, but it must be elicited by God. Why? Both our given nature and, more so, our “depredation” through sin leave its reality to the action of God.

Patience, a human virtue, must be traced back or reduced to divine action. Webster here is highlighting its gracious character. And it is not merely an impersonal gift, for he specifically comments upon its Christological and pneumatological derivation. It is the cultivation of human habits and character traits, of a very manner of being morally speaking, which flows from triune engagement of the human self. Webster’s Augustinian and Reformed heritage finds expression here in the way in which he insists upon reducing even a human excellency and moral quality ultimately to divine enactment.

And yet, “in patience, as in all things, God so moves us so that we live and move.”⁹⁰ He refines the language of causality here to speak of God’s enactment being an internal work rather than merely an extrinsic imposition. He does admit, of course, that God works extrinsically; for example, he speaks of the “exemplary” work of God in calling us toward patience through the example of God, of Christ, and of the saints.⁹¹ But God’s gracious work toward our being made patient does not find its completion in such didactic or even exemplary work. God works within us as well, and he does so in such a way that we are not stifled but elicited to genuine human action befitting our given nature. This dynamic has marked any number of essays by Webster in recent years; he draws here upon patristic teaching (notably Augustine), its medieval development (especially in Thomas and Bonaventure), and its Reformed elaboration (especially as found in Calvin, Owen, Bavinck, and Barth). Elsewhere he has made much of the language found in Ephesians 1 to this point, highlighting the appearance of the phrase “in him you also” (Eph 1:13; Col 1:21) as well as its elaboration throughout the first chapter.⁹²

The lecture proceeds to address the objects, ends, operations, opposed vices of patience, and injunctions to its exercise. Noting that his focus upon distinguishing features of specifically Christian patience may seem “isolationist,” he nonetheless observes that this is both unavoidable but also not simply

⁸⁸ Ibid., 179.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 178–79.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 179.

⁹¹ Ibid., 179.

⁹² On Ephesians 1, see his Reformation Day Lectures given at Covenant College in October 2008, especially lecture 2 (available online: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-fathers-purpose/id426496810?i=1000092158988&mt=2>); as well as “Perfection and Participation,” in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed. Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 390–94; on Colossians 1, see especially “Where Christ Is: Christology and Ethics,” in *God without Measure*, 2:8. The matter is summarized in schematic fashion in the conclusion to lecture 5 of his 2007 Kantzer Lectures, entitled “The Presence of Christ Exalted” (as yet unpublished).

to divide Christian and pagan patience. It is unavoidable, because one must “indicate a whole anterior realm of moral nature and culture, of goods and intentions, to which the moral act gives practical assent and expression.”⁹³ But it is not the whole story, for “the moral worlds of believer and unbeliever . . . exist at different stages in the history of human renovation.”⁹⁴ The lecture concludes by reflecting upon the “temporal character of our created intellect,” which requires the exercise of patience over the journey; upon our “insufficiency” and “dependence” as creatures, requiring our “acknowledgement and embrace of this condition” in patience; and, finally, upon the social character of our intellectual action which demands certain postures in our exercise of intellectual agency. Notably, “patience involves deference to traditions of inquiry, the remains and echoes of companions long gone.”⁹⁵

Second, Webster spoke at a day conference in St. Andrews on the question “What Makes Theology Theological?”⁹⁶ In providing his answer, he both elaborated upon and furthered his earlier advocacy of purportedly “Theological Theology.” In this brief essay, Webster only adduces cultural observations regarding modernity in his concluding remarks. The bulk of the argument focuses instead on identifying the nature of Christian theology by tending to its object, principles, ends, and requisite virtues.

As to the object of theology, Webster returns to his earlier emphasis upon “God the Holy Trinity and all other things relative to God.” First, he addresses God in and of himself and then God in his works as the primary object of theological study. This twofold identification had occurred earlier in the second phase of Webster’s work, where he emphasized the need to say rather more than is commonplace about the inner life of God. He has argued that such is needful lest we wind up talking of divine works (particularly external works of the Godhead) without any depth, that is, eternally speaking. So he argues for the need to do some speculative theology in this regard, directed at knowing God in himself, though he never suggests that we reach that speculative end by idolatrous means, that is, from any conduit other than God’s own self-revelation through the works of his gospel economy. While he affirms a speculative task in terms of content, then, we might say that he agrees with Calvin and the Reformed emphasis on opposing a speculative method. Yet the knowledge of God also includes God’s works, which he has performed in our midst and through which he, in and of himself, is only ever known. Again, though, “the nature of God’s works *ad extra* cannot be grasped without immediate reference to God’s intrinsic self-satisfaction which is their principle or ground; put differently, the temporal divine missions are intelligible only as derivative from the eternal divine processions.”⁹⁷

Because the knowledge of God himself includes his external works, and, furthermore, because “all things are from him, through him, and unto him” (Rom 11:33–36), theology also includes knowledge of everything else. “Theology treats things other than God, not because there is a world, but because there is God and there is a creation.”⁹⁸ Thus, things are spoken of theologically only in as much as they relate to

⁹³ Webster, “Intellectual Patience,” 182.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁹⁶ Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” in *God without Measure*, 1:213.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 214. Webster began employing the language of divine processions and divine missions (drawn from Thomas’s *Summa theologiae*, 1a.27 [on divine processions] and 1a.43 [on divine missions]) in his essay “‘It Was the Will of the Lord to Bruise Him’: Soteriology and the Doctrine of God,” in *God without Measure*, 1:152–55; and in lecture 2 of his 2007 Kantzer Lectures, entitled “God’s Perfect Life” (as yet unpublished). In the latter portion of his second phase and throughout his third phase, the language became not only frequent but formative.

⁹⁸ Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” 214.

God; “theology is a comprehensive science, a science of everything. But it is not a science of everything about everything, but rather a science of God and all other things under the aspect of createdness.”⁹⁹ Matters of sequence and proportion are shaped by understanding this double aspect of the object of theology, as well as the way in which “All things” are included in theology’s study only as part of the gaze we give unto God himself. Webster notes that we oftentimes find this firm focus upon God and on other things only in him to be difficult, and he does note cultural challenges in that regard (naturalism and the like). But he also raises spiritual maladies to the fore in giving a “spiritual history of this neglect: complacent satisfaction with consideration of creatures and creaturely histories apart from their cause; preference for surfaces rather than origins; reluctance to allow the intellect to follow divine instruction and be conducted to God. Such defects impede theological inquiry; sometimes they defeat it.”¹⁰⁰

Webster then turns again to the principles of theology. First, he addresses the reality that God is a “God of knowledge” (1 Sam 2:3) and that theology is foremost a reality within the Godhead: Father, Son, and Spirit know one another fully. Second, the triune knowledge, while singular and unique, is not incommunicable, for God is a self-revealing God who makes common (that is, who communicates) his own wisdom to his creatures. Here Webster discusses the divine missions of the Son and the Spirit, noting that their internal processions extend outward into expressions of divine love and beneficence whereby God’s own wisdom comes to the possession of human creatures in the Son and by the Spirit. Such divine instruction is “not immediate, but mediate, served by creaturely assistants and accommodating itself to the forms of creaturely intelligence.”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, he subsumes the objective cognitive principle of theology under his first point here, namely, within the doctrine of God, rather than treating the doctrine of revelation or of the Word of God as a discrete category, and follows the doctrine of God only with a second major heading, regarding the subjective cognitive principle of theology in “regenerate human intelligence.”¹⁰² Here he addresses our knowledge as created, fallen, regenerated beings in a similar way as in his second phase of writings.

Turning from principles to ends, then, Webster begins by differentiating ends and purposes; while oftentimes related, they are not the same, for ends relate to one’s given nature and may or may not a matter of self-willed or individually-owned intentions (whereas purposes do relate to individual intentionality as such). Because of our instinctual sinfulness, “in all domains of human existence and activity, therefore, we are required to exercise vigilance and conform purposes to ends.”¹⁰³ Having observed that spiritual need to have our desires and purposes reoriented by grace to our true creaturely ends, he then identifies scientific and contemplative ends of theology. The scientific idiom parallels earlier addresses where in all three phases of his work, he has commended theology’s place in the university and its contribution

⁹⁹ Ibid., 214–15.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 215.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 217.

¹⁰² Notice, then, that his presentation differs from both that found in “Theological Theology” as well as that later found in “Principles of Systematic Theology.” Like the first and against the second, Webster here speaks explicitly only of two principles of theology. Unlike the first and like the second, however, he addresses regenerate human intelligence explicitly (alongside God as the objective principle of theology). Admittedly, such comments should not be taken to be of too great significance, given that the external cognitive principle (the Word of God) does arise within his discussion of the doctrine of God, primarily under the category of external works of the Godhead (see Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” 217).

¹⁰³ Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” 219.

to wider intellectual life.¹⁰⁴ The contemplative focus as a distinct end, however, has been a more recent concern, no doubt drawn from medieval and Puritan literature which he has more recently engaged at greater length.¹⁰⁵ The language of contemplation appears elsewhere in the essays of *God without Measure*, so that this reference is not an idiosyncrasy but a truly new focal point.¹⁰⁶

Finally, virtues requisite to the theological task are discussed. Such cannot assume pride of place. “Yet in its proper place a modest sketch of the personal graces which the theologian is to exhibit is a necessary extension of an account of the theological intellect in the realm of regeneration.”¹⁰⁷ Following his emphasis from the second phase onward regarding the integrity of human nature and action in the realm of God, Webster continues to devote specific attention to the results of grace which are found in sanctified human life and virtue. He also attends to the death-dealing pathologies that continue to mar those sons of Adam and daughters of Eve all the way unto their entrance into glory.

This finale to his latest attempt to identify “theological theology,” then, serves as a useful reminder that his project thus far has offered methodological continuity, but each phase does build upon the preceding ones. This third phase intensifies the discussion of the aseity of God by unpacking the triune processions and missions, not only in the doctrine of God but at every point in talking about the economy as flowing from and expressive of those intra-divine relations. The third phase also furthers the specific attention given to the creaturely fruits of God’s gracious labors, wherein creatures are fit for virtue and called to contemplation of the Godhead. In each of these elaborations, Webster’s engagement with the patristic, medieval, and post-Reformation traditions shows itself to be significant, as his conversation partners have extended catholically and, even within his own Reformed tradition, taken in the early Reformed resources (not shirking Barth, to be sure, but situating or relativizing him, to some extent, amongst earlier figures and texts) from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

5. Principles toward a Theological Theology

Webster had not announced publicly the scope and sequence of his forthcoming multi-volume systematic theology, much less published that material, at the time of his death. Other works of

¹⁰⁴ Such work has been present since Webster’s “Reading Theology” and “Theological Theology” in the 1990s and has continued to be highlighted and analyzed in more recent essays, such as Webster “On the Theology of the Intellectual Life,” in *God without Measure*, 2:141–56; “God, Theology, Universities,” in *God without Measure*, 2:157–72; and “*Regina artium*: Theology and the humanities,” in *Domain of the Word*, 171–92.

¹⁰⁵ In “What Makes Theology Theological?” Webster refers not only to Augustine and Gregory the Great but also to Thomas and John Owen with regard to contemplative material. Contemplation arises not only in this discrete section but repeatedly throughout the essay (*Ibid.*, 214, 216, 220, 221, and 223).

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., Webster, *God without Measure*, 1:5, 24, 44, 46, 83–84, 101, 118–19, 125, and 136; *God without Measure*, 2:29, 82–83, 89, 105, 115, 121, 123, 155, 163–164, and 172. It began appearing in essays from late in his second phase which have been gathered in *Domain of the Word* (see, e.g., 17, 27, 50, 115, 123, 138, 145, 149, 168, 171, 191, 196, 200, and 202). By contrast Webster rarely used language of contemplation in earlier works, appearing only in *Confessing God*, 29, and never in *Holiness, Holy Scripture, and Word and Church*. It would seem that he began considering contemplation in the later portion of his second phase and found a way to express it overtly within his outline of theology itself only in the third phase. Here is an instance where sources seem to show a genuine shift, as his increasing citation of patristic ascetical texts, medieval texts (not only Thomas, but also Bernard and Bonaventure), and Puritan resources (especially John Owen), in his description of the theological task.

¹⁰⁷ Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” 222.

significance were, as noted earlier, forthcoming as well. Any assessment is, therefore, duty-bound to note that he considered his published work as provisional to those intended works. Further, some have suggested that Webster had undergone a shift, having previously endorsed a more consistently Barthian theology and recently turned to divergent sources, principles, and architectonic schema. It has even been suggested that he has begun leading a “New Reformed Scholasticism” in recent years.¹⁰⁸

We have observed developments as his methodological principles have been enunciated in these three phases. Specific concern to tease out the schematic shape of the economy for thinking about God’s Word and about human reason came to mark his approach in the second phase and has been sustained to this point. For instance recent work has been willing to pair his earlier emphasis upon Holy Scripture as the sanctified word employed by the divine voice with a more recent return to teaching on inspiration of texts drawn primarily from post-Reformation Reformed Orthodoxy (with affirmation of its verbal, plenary character and with correction offered to the criticisms of that tradition by Barth and Torrance).¹⁰⁹ Similarly, this has put flesh on his earlier calls to offer an anthropology of inquiry that attends to the Christian difference, as noted in the very first phase of his work but not elaborated therein in any way. Similarly, the need to attend to the perfection of God in and of himself has marked his work in the second and third phases, extending his comments on how God is the ontological principle of theology. In the second phase, this primarily took the form of considering God’s aseity. In the third phase, this has also taken specifically Trinitarian form by elaborating the doctrines of divine processions and divine missions, drawing primarily from the Thomist tradition. Finally, his anthropology of inquiry has been extended in the most recent phase to include extended reflection upon virtues and vices which attend the intellectual calling of the theologian. Whereas practices and cultural values were noted early and often in the first phase, specific concern to extend reflection upon moral characteristics has developed over years and has drawn on patristic ascetical and medieval and Puritan spiritual writings in recent years.

Yet such additions and extensions do not negate the underlying continuity of Webster’s methodology through its various phases and multiple iterations. Indeed, it is that abiding continuity of approach that renders an interim report such as this one viable, with his *magnum opus* and several other major books still forthcoming. Each of these adjustments truly is an extension to and elaboration of his concern to pursue a theological theology whereby the object determines the shape of inquiry, precisely because the object is active and communicative. Theologians doing work in these and other areas of inquiry will need to attend to Webster’s thought; awareness of the underlying continuities as well as developing layers of concern, which have been sketched in this introductory essay, will enable more fruitful engagement and critical reflection.

¹⁰⁸ See David Congdon, “Review: Michael Allen, *Justification and the Gospel*,” *Int.* 69 (2015): 368–69.

¹⁰⁹ Compare the earlier Webster, *Holy Scripture*, chs. 1–2, with the recent “ὕπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.” The more recent work shows a more consistent exposition of a non-contrastive view of a divine and human agency and, hence, less reticence in speaking of Scripture as inspired human text as well as divine speech. It is not that he did not speak of inspiration before, but that he said rather little about the human speech and its properties (as did the Protestant scholastics). In his last phase he showed none of this reticence and took their language to be his own.

The Impassible God Who “Cried”

— Amos Winarto Oei —

Amos Winarto Oei is dean of students and a lecturer in ethics and theology at Aletheia Theological Seminary, Lawang, East-Java, Indonesia.

Abstract: Modern scholars charge that the traditional view of divine impassibility had been corrupted with Greek philosophy and thus strayed away from Scripture’s testimony of the true God. The attempt to construct a new theology of God has brought many scholars to embrace a vulnerable God. A God who is worth enough is a God who can suffer with human beings. Contrary to the opinion, an overview at the patristic theology of God and at the mediaeval theologian, including the Reformed ones, provides us with a proof that their understanding was not influenced by Greek philosophy *per se* but mainly based on the doctrine of creation: *God is impassible but not unemotional.*

In Jeremiah 14:17 Yahweh speaks of shedding “tears night and day.” We can argue that it is Jeremiah, and not God, who is crying. However, it was God who told Jeremiah to tell Judah that he, Yahweh, was crying for their plight. McConville writes that verses 17–18 “represent again the pain of the Lord through the mouth, and the experience, of Jeremiah. The Lord is not indifferent to the grief of the people, even though he himself brings it upon them as judgment. His mourning corresponds to Judah’s.”¹ Isaiah 63:9 also states, “In all their afflictions, he [God] was afflicted.” These two passages are only two examples of the emotion of God that is depicted in the Bible. These are also some of the reasons over the controversy of the doctrine of divine impassibility which holds that God is not subject to emotion. It has been argued, on the one hand, that a God who does not weep or rejoice with his creature is too distant, that an impassible God is inferior. On the other hand, a God who feels emotions will be in some sense dependent upon his creation. If things go badly with his creation, then he will feel sorrow. If he is to feel joy, then that joy will result from contingencies in the world. This idea of a God who is dependent upon creation for his well-being has been thought to diminish God, to make him vulnerable.

1. Addressing the Problem

Perhaps no traditional Christian doctrine has been subject to greater contempt from modern theologians than the assertion that God is “impassible” by nature. Such a doctrine sounds to many people today as if God does not care about human life. And in the wake of terrible sufferings of our time, the impassibility of God is under fire. Jürgen Moltmann has said:

¹ Gordon McConville, “Jeremiah,” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson, 4th ed. (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 684.

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being. Aristotle’s God cannot love; he can only be loved by all non-divine beings by virtue of his perfection and beauty, and in this way draw them to him. The “unmoved Mover” is a “loveless Beloved.”²

Taking their cue from men like Jürgen Moltmann, who lived through the destruction of European Jewry and who had some personal experience of that catastrophe, many theologians have looked for a God “after Auschwitz.” This movement has been affirmed by Moltmann himself, when he said: “My book *The Crucified God* was said to be a Christian theology ‘after Auschwitz.’ This is true. It was for me an attempt to speak to God, to trust in God and speak about God in the shadows of Auschwitz and in view of the victims of my people.”³ There is a desire, then, to have a God who is near to us, who understands our suffering, and who participates in it with us. Only by such participation, it is argued, can redemption occur, because only then has God truly committed himself to the reality which he himself created. No wonder Ronald Goetz can even speak with some accuracy of the emergence of a “new orthodoxy” of a suffering God.⁴

In such a context, it is commonly claimed that patristic theology fell prey to the assumption of Hellenistic philosophy about the impassibility of God and departed from the allegedly biblical view. Francis House explained:

The patristic writers may have been mistaken in taking the notion of the impassibility of God as a self evident truth. If this philosophical axiom is rejected as incompatible with the fundamental New Testament doctrine that God is above all to be thought of as a loving Father, then many false dilemmas are cleared away.⁵

House and many others charge that for centuries the Christian church has been in thrall to an alien philosophy, from which it must now liberate itself.

In this article I will limit myself to the discussion of divine impassibility in general. More specifically, I will not undertake the task of explaining the relation between divine impassibility and Christology, though it is indeed very interesting.⁶ I am interested mainly in the question of whether or not the divine nature is capable of emotion.

²Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 222.

³Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wende, “*The Crucified God Yesterday and Today: 1972–2002*,” in *Passion for God: Theology in Two Voices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 71.

⁴Ronald Goetz, “The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” in *ChrCent* 103 (1986), 385–89.

⁵Francis House, “The Barrier of Impassibility” in *Theology* 83 (1980), 413.

⁶Recent books that incorporate Christology within theology proper of divine impassibility include Rob Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012) and Ronald S. Baines, et. al., eds., *Confessing the Impassible God: The Biblical Classical and Confessional Doctrine of Divine Impassibility* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2015).

2. Patristic Understanding of Divine Impassibility

According to the doctrine of divine impassibility, God is invulnerable to suffering. Nothing can act upon him, but he is in no way passive. However, the suffering of the impassible God provides a major reconsideration of the notion of divine impassibility in patristic thought.

In this section I will not present extensively every thought of divine impassibility in the church fathers. I will only deal with the charge that early fathers had a corrupted understanding of divine impassibility. A helpful summary of their doctrine is found in Kelly's *Early Christian Doctrines*. He helps us understand the unity of patristic understanding with respect to divine impassibility. He confirms that all the fathers, including even most heretics, strongly believed that God is impassible.⁷ Nobody orthodox denied impassibility and even the heterodox acknowledged it. They did not cite Aristotle's unmoved mover, Plato's eternal forms, or anything of the sort. Rather, their arguments were based mainly on the usual biblical texts that theologians today still cite to teach God's immutability (Ps 102:27; Isa 43:10; Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17). Early fathers understood that divine impassibility is closely related to divine immutability. The reason is, as Paul Helm has explained, that "God cannot change or be changed, and *a fortiori* God cannot be changed by being affected. So that impassibility is a kind of immutability."⁸

What actually is the reason behind modern theologians' charge? Weinandy believes that the reason is a corrupted presupposition:

Contemporary theologians have not come to the Bible and the Fathers philosophically neutral, but rather already convinced that an impassible and immutable God will not do. Thus, their interpretation of the Old Testament and the Fathers is driven, at least in part, by an already preconceived understanding of the philosophical issues involved and the philosophical answers that must be given.⁹

For example, Francis House believed the charge can be established because not every father held the doctrine of divine impassibility. He quoted Tertullian who seemed to contradict other church fathers: "If the Father is impassible he cannot suffer with another; if he can suffer with another, then he is passible, should we not prefer the second alternative?"¹⁰

However, House has misunderstood Tertullian's understanding of divine impassibility. While the Bible attributes to God hands, eyes, and feet, what they depict about God is far different from what they refer to human beings. Similarly, while we can speak of God's sensations and emotion, they too designate something radically different of God from what they designate of humankind. Elsewhere Tertullian explained,

These sensations in the human being are rendered just as corrupt by the corruptibility of man's substance, as in God they are rendered incorruptible by the incorruption of the divine essence. . . . [I]t is palpably absurd of you to be placing human characteristics in

⁷J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 84, 120, 122, 142–43, 169, 291, 299, 314, 317, 322, 325, 372, 476, 488.

⁸Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford, 1989), 120.

⁹Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 84.

¹⁰Tertullian, *Prax.*, ch. 29 (ANF 3), as quoted by House, "The Barrier of Impassibility," 412.

God rather than divine ones in man, and clothing God in the likeness of man, instead of man in the image of God.¹¹

In other words, for Tertullian divine impassibility does not mean that God is without emotion, rather it means that God possesses emotions in a divine manner.

This modern corrupted interpretation of the relationship between Christian theology and Greek philosophy is deeply rooted in Adolf von Harnack’s theory of the development of dogma in terms of Hellenization.¹² Harnack saw the development of Christian theology as the Hellenization of the gospel. The process of Hellenization for Harnack had a negative meaning: it implied a deterioration of the originally unadulterated gospel into a rigid doctrinal system. The interesting thing is that this theory was not unknown to the early fathers. It had been around since Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–235), who argued that the heretics did not derive their doctrines from the scriptures and apostolic tradition but rather from Greek philosophers.¹³

The early church fathers actually had anticipated the charge that they corrupted a pure biblical doctrine of a loving, personal God through introduction of Greek speculative philosophy. For example, when Clement of Alexandria had to face opposition from those who oppose any employment of philosophical learning, he said that they “prefer to block their ears in order not to hear the sirens” and that Christians as a whole “fear Greek philosophy as children fear ogres—they are frightened of being carried off by them. If our faith (I will not say our gnosis) is such that it is destroyed by force of argument, then let it be destroyed; for it will have been proved that we do not possess the truth.”¹⁴

We must understand that the early Fathers lived and worked within the environment of the Jewish and Hellenistic culture. Therefore, they did not think it inappropriate to use language and concepts that were prevalent among their contemporary philosophical proponents. Following the apostles—especially Paul, who engaged with the philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16–34)—the apostolic fathers saw themselves as apologetic and evangelistic “bridges” to the pagan and philosophical world in which they lived. Do we today dare to ask: did they do so without any, or little, gospel and theological discernment?

Thus, what the fathers did was not “as Harnack tried to maintain, the product of encounter between Gospel and Hellenism. It is not the Hellenisation of Christianity. It was not the fruit of speculation but *sincere effort to use the techniques* of the learning of the day to elaborate Christian truth.”¹⁵ Even someone as critical as J. K. Mozley could write: “To suppose that Christian thinkers carelessly passed over all that seems to us involved in our belief in God’s loving care, his fatherly providence, and his moral purposefulness, would be the greatest injustice both to their words and their thought.”¹⁶ Paul Helm has further written:

¹¹ Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.16 (ANF 3); cf. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 102.

¹² Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (New York: Harper, 1957), 207, 211–12.

¹³ Hippolytus, *Haer.* Proem. 3; cf. Paul L. Gaurilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

¹⁴ Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. and ed. John Austin Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 304–5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 303, emphasis added.

¹⁶ J. K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 46.

While the categories of Greek philosophy, or for that matter Cartesian or Kantian philosophy, might be the occasion for maintaining some metaphysical view from Scripture, they are not (or ought not to be) the *grounds* or *reason* for maintaining, say, divine impassibility or immutability. Greek or some other philosophy might provide the conceptual tool for developing the doctrine of divine impassibility, but it does not follow that what doctrine results is derived not from Scripture but from philosophy.¹⁷

Patrick Lee explained that the doctrine of divine impassibility was actually derived from the doctrine of creation. It is because God is the source of the total being or existence of the things in this world that early fathers began to seek an adequate explanation of the existence of things.¹⁸ He concluded that “the truth at stake does not originate in ancient Greek metaphysics; rather, it is a fundamental truth of Scripture and the creeds that God is the creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.”¹⁹

In summary, let me quote two theologians in this modern era on the doctrine of divine impassibility as understood by the early church fathers. First, Weinandy wrote: “For the Fathers, to deny that God is passible is to deny of him all human passions and the effects of such passions which would in any way debilitate or cripple him as God. Thus, to say that God is impassible is again to ensure and to accentuate his perfect goodness and unalterable love.”²⁰ Similarly, Prestige has said:

It is clear that impassibility means not that God is inactive or uninterested, not that he surveys existence with Epicurean impassibility from the shelter of a metaphysical isolation, but that his will is determined from within instead of being swayed from without. It safeguards the truth that the impulse alike in providential order and in redemption and sanctification come from the will of God.²¹

Thus, the misreading of the early fathers by some modern theologians is founded upon the false premise that to be impassible is to be devoid of emotion.

3. The Impassible God Who “Cried”

Impassibility continued to be an uncontested assumption of orthodox theology beyond the church fathers. The scholastic work of Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* (Why the God-man), affirmed divine impassibility in his dialogue with Boso: “Therefore when we state that God undergoes some lowliness or weakness, we understand this to be in accordance with the weakness of the human substance which he assumed [in incarnation], not in accordance with the sublimity of his impassible [divine] nature.”²²

Aquinas himself does not object to some of what are affections in human beings being a part of God’s character. He only objects to those affections that, if, they are possessed by anything, require

¹⁷ Paul Helm, “The Impossibility of Divine Passibility,” 135.

¹⁸ Patrick Lee, “Does God Have Emotions?” in *God under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, eds. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 229.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁰ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 111.

²¹ G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1969), 7.

²² Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, 4 vols. (Toronto & New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976), 3:58–59.

God to be passive and to be in time.²³ These attributes, which God has, cannot carry such implications as they in fact carry when possessed by human beings. Aquinas recognized that clearly there are such emotions—joy, delight, care, love and grace, for example—in God and he has each of these with the greatest possible power and intensity.

Similarly, Calvin urged submission to God as he has revealed himself to us. He said, “Let us then leave to God the knowledge of himself . . . but we shall be ‘leaving it to him’ if we conceive him to be as he reveals himself to us, without inquiring about him elsewhere than from his Word.”²⁴ In his writings Calvin often reluctantly speculated about God’s essence. He preferred that we should contemplate God in his works as guided by the Bible.²⁵ However, Calvin did not reject the patristic consensus on divine impassibility. Once in commenting upon God’s “repentance” he explained that the depiction of the divine Being is

accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it. Now the mode of accommodation is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us. Although he is beyond all disturbance of mind . . . whenever we hear that God is angered, we ought not to imagine any emotion [i.e., passion] in him, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience.²⁶

At this point, I will try to explain the doctrine of divine impassibility, seeking to be faithful to the scriptures and to the inherited theological tradition of the early fathers, mediaeval and reformed theologians. My aim is not to solve all theological problems but to allow the glory of the mystery of the divine impassibility to shine forth ever more radiantly, and then within it the pure radiance of God’s love for all who suffer.

If one says that God is not affected by people’s sufferings and stops with this negation, one strongly suggests that God is aloof, cold, and unconcerned about our sufferings. However, in talking about God, one must not restrain a certain set of descriptive attributes and then think that God is like contingent entities in a few respects, which can be included in a minimum description of God. Any such minimum description is not only inadequate to God but is altogether false representation of God.²⁷ What we should say is that while God is not affected by people’s sufferings, it does not mean that he has no emotion at all.

Calvin explained biblical descriptions of God having emotions as examples of divine accommodation to our human limitations like “nurses are wont to do with little children.”²⁸ He condescends to human incapacity and weakness in permitting such terms to be employed to portray him. Clement of Alexandria had already made this point: “deity cannot be described as it really is, but only as human beings,

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis, 4 vols. (Garden City, NY: Image, 1955), 1:90.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 1.13.21.

²⁵ *Institutes* 1.5; 1.6.1.

²⁶ *Institutes* 1.17.13.

²⁷ Germain Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 246.

²⁸ *Institutes* 1.13.1.

themselves fettered to the flesh, are capable of hearing; the prophets therefore adopted the language of anthropomorphism as saving concession to the weakness of human understanding.”²⁹

The language of accommodation is not the result of human thought to make something about God. Rather, it is an expression of the act of divine condescension. The direction is from God to mankind, and not *vice-versa*. More importantly, God’s act of accommodation is also an act of grace. God reveals himself by speaking to us in a human-like way, so that we may know and understand him. Paul Helm asserted:

[T]he centrality of God’s grace in the activistic language of Scripture needs to be given emphasis. It is because God wishes people to respond to him that he *must* represent himself to them as one to whom response is possible, as one who acts in time. Only on such an understanding is that divine-human interaction which is at the heart of biblical religion is possible.³⁰

The doctrine of divine accommodation relies on the logically necessary condition of conversation or dialogue. If such dialogue is to be real, then God cannot represent himself as wholly impassible. Another conclusion that we can derive logically is that the disclosure of God in the Bible is primarily toward shaping our covenantal relationship to God. Thus, one must read Scripture as a whole and, in the context of the tradition and life of the church, understand this covenantal relationship. It is upon this ground that we can build our understanding about God much more than by natural reasoning unaided by revelation. Even though we still do not understand God’s intrinsic essence, we may understand that God has in himself what is necessary for this relationship to him to be possible and appropriate.³¹

For instance, the assertion “God is love” means that God presents himself as a true and faithful lover and offers in himself what is necessary for a loving relationship with his people. To say that “God cries” is to say that God treats his people as someone responds to his precious one being lost. Again, God is in himself what is necessary for this relationship to be real. This is the reason Grisez insisted that “in reality, an existential description of a necessary entity is informative only if it is either negative or relational—that is, if it indicates how other things are related to *D* [God].”³² God accommodates himself in this kind of relationship so that human beings can understand what it means for God to love and feel sorrow for them. This does not necessarily mean that God in himself has emotion. It only demonstrates God’s care for humans.

Thus, if we are presented by the question: “Does God have emotion?” then we should probe the question deeper. If it means that the concept of our various emotions is also of what God is, then the answer is no. We should remember that this is equally true of other concepts, such as our concepts of knowledge and willing. The answer is yes if we understand it in the relational sense explained above. The way we understand God’s relational wrath towards us is informed by our own capacity to be angry as human beings. This divine wrath is not just an imagination or false depiction, even though we understand it in a human way since God has what is necessary to be related in this way. Calvin says that though “this is said in accommodation to the weakness of our capacity, it is not said falsely.”³³ This predication (“the

²⁹ Cited in Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 8.

³⁰ Paul Helm, “The Impossibility of Divine Passibility,” 133–34.

³¹ Lee, “Does God Have Emotions?,” 225.

³² Germain Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism*, 246.

³³ *Institutes* 2.16.3

wrath of God”) and all of the others which the Scriptures portray indeed tells us indirectly something about God in accommodation to the limitation of human capacity

We can better understand this when we enter the realm of human beings. We all know that we have a distinction in human emotions between a disposition and the exercise of it. We may be disposed to be angry, or fearful or joyful, but we may also under certain circumstances express one of these emotions. Then consider this. God accommodates himself to this kind of distinction. For example, God has the disposition to love. When the creatures need and he becomes aware of it, his disposition to love comes into exercise. As the need vanishes, the disposition is no longer exercised.³⁴

Therefore, while it may be helpful to think of God’s emotions as dispositions, unlike human beings, we should always keep in mind that God’s moral traits are both essential to him and never having division between the disposition and the exercise of it. These dispositions are maximally active and exercised without any limitation or conditionality.³⁵ The love of God, for example, is *never* not exercised where it is appropriate for it to be exercised. This is part of what the scholastics and others meant when they referred to God as “pure act.”³⁶ There is no unfulfilled potential in God.

From what we have discussed above, there are three things that we should understand in regard to the doctrine of divine impassibility. First, the doctrine does not mean God has no emotions at all. The term “emotion” here, however, should be more qualified. Divine impassibility does not merely mean “God does in fact has emotions but they are a lot different than human emotions.” This qualification is important since God’s emotions are revealed *relationally* to humans. Human emotional relationships are conditioned by our human senses. Since God is incorporeal and has no sensitive appetite, one may correctly argue in this sense that God has no emotions. Aquinas, for example, gives us a sophisticated account of how it is that God has love, joy, and delight without having emotions.³⁷ Calvin also argues that “whenever we hear that God is angered, *we ought not to imagine any emotion [i.e., passion] in him*, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience.”³⁸ So when we talk about God’s emotions or “dispositions,” they are far beyond and not the same as human emotions.

Second, biblical portraits of divine emotion should be understood in how God relates to us in a human sense. For instance, when Scripture speaks of God “repenting” (Gen 6:6; Judg 2:18; 10:16; etc.), the passages are a means whereby God relates to human beings in human way. Or when the Scripture says God has eyes, or a mighty right arm, or that he comes down to dwell on Mount Sinai (2 Chron 16:9; Is 62:8; Exod 19:20), such descriptions are accommodations to humans that are designed to communicate certain truths humanly. They reveal the infinite God in language that humans limited by their finite capacities can comprehend.

Third, human sufferings and catastrophes cannot be denied as tragic events. However, our suffering in this fallen world, even that of mass genocide, should not shape our understanding of God. Rather, the understanding of God that all believers hold to be faithful to the Scripture should shape our

³⁴ Helm, “The Impossibility of Divine Passibility,” 124.

³⁵ Paul Helm has offered the following philosophical definition of divine impassibility: “God is impassibly X (where X is any [appropriate] disposition of God [for example, joy]) only if: (i) God has X essentially; (ii) X is necessarily maximally exercised. . . . A is impassible if and only if it is logically impossible for any of A’s belief or intentions to be changed by emotional factors” (Ibid, 126–27).

³⁶ Ibid., 125–26.

³⁷ See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.90–91.

³⁸ *Institutes* 1.17.13. Emphasis added.

understanding of our own suffering. Rather than having a finite god who can be a fellow-sufferer with us, we should rather have the God who, in his eternal bliss, understands our suffering and overcomes them.

This is evidenced by the incarnation of the Son of God. The sufferings that Jesus Christ went through were real. He was despised and rejected by people. He was crucified but then resurrected victoriously. As the one glorious Person with two natures, human and divine, Christ as God did not suffer and die, but Christ as human. There are not two Christs, but one Christ who has two natures. Ignatius writes about this to Polycarp as such:

Look for Christ, the Son of God; who was before time, yet appeared in time; who was invisible by nature, yet visible in the flesh; who was impalpable, and could not be touched, as being without a body, but for our sakes became such, might be touched and handled in the body; who was impassible as God, but became passible for our sakes as man; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes.³⁹

Or, as Tertullian puts it succinctly: “As for Soter (Jesus), he remained in Christ to the last, impassible, incapable of injury, incapable of apprehension.”⁴⁰ To keep the suffering and death of Christ within the bounds of his humanity assures divine impassibility. Conversely, divine impassibility puts away the notion of a God who suffers and dies. And this Christ, who once crucified and resurrected, keeps calling us: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28 NIV).

4. Conclusion

Theologians today want to affirm that God can suffer in his divine nature, and to claim that the whole concept of “suffering” needs to be rethought. If it is true that human beings can have a relationship with God which is both just and caring, then God must be capable of entering into our pain. In other words, it is all about compassion and “empathy.” However, it is not merely the understanding of pain *per se*, but the overcoming of it is what all sufferers really want. The analogy of a doctor and a patient capture this well. We indeed do not want a doctor who is only capable of sleeping in the bed next to his patients, and then mourns and groans with them. Rather, we need a doctor who understands our pain and then is able to take action in curing it. The incarnation and the resurrection of Christ reveal God’s compassion and solution for human sufferings and pains.

The modern reaction to impassibility may be understandable in its context, but it is essentially misguided. Accusations that the fathers of the church were influenced by their pagan philosophical background do not stand up to serious examination. More importantly, the doctrine is not a barrier to understanding God’s compassion, but is in fact the assertion that his compassion is always fully available and functioning. Impassibility may not be something that we need to think about very often (when things are going well, we usually take them for granted), but it is vitally important. As Christians we need to appreciate where divine impassibility fits into the overall picture of God’s saving work.

Furthermore, the argument that if God is personal love then he must be open to suffering reveals the basis of our understanding of personal love. Do we begin from the human perspective and then try to stretch our concept by applying it to the divine? Or, are we humble enough to take our starting point

³⁹ Ignatius, *Pol.*, ch. 3 (ANF 1).

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *Val.*, ch. 27 (ANF 3).

from his unique personhood, by which love is only understood as it is revealed to us according to his eternal nature? Dawn DeVries critiqued the argument very well: “Intensified personal language for God may encourage us to imagine that God is at our disposal or to project onto God our own favorite wishes and highest value; in other words, it may lure us into a form of *idolatry*.”⁴¹

I believe that those who question or disagree with the doctrine of divine impassibility do not necessarily reject the authority of Scripture. If this belief is not mistaken, then those who still uphold the authority of Scripture should not easily fall into a trap of too quickly jettisoning impassibility. We should realize that the doctrine should not be set aside merely by the consensus of a single generation, despite the aftermath of this exceptionally brutal time. Such attitude presupposes that our reading today of the Bible is better than the way that church has viewed God’s impassibility.

We should understand that God’s impassibility also meant that he does not have the same emotions as the gods of the heathen. His care for human beings is free from self-interest and any association with evil. Prestige said, “There is no sign that divine impassibility was taught with any view of minimizing the interest of God in his creation or his care and concern for the world that he had made.”⁴² Furthermore, Jonathan Edwards rejected every notion of an indigent, insufficient or mutable God “or any dependence of the Creator on the creature for any part of His perfections or happiness.”⁴³

This is also the reason why we must understand that the biblical accommodations or anthropopathisms are based on analogy. Analogy means similarity, but not equivalence; otherwise it is not an analogy but a definition. God’s repentance is not an emotion of his Being but a change of treatment towards mankind from a human point of view. Thus, as to God’s love and all other emotions—jealously, hate, etc., we then must say that they are an analogy of our emotion. Something about men is analogous to something in God because we are his image-bearers. God indeed has emotion, but his emotion is far beyond and even not the same as our emotion. Divine impassibility presents, first of all, the transcendence of God’s emotion, or, borrowing Paul Helm’s term, *themotion*: “A themotion X is as close as possible to the corresponding human emotion X except that it cannot be an affect.”⁴⁴ And then, it also encounters us with the sovereign God who is not subject to human suffering but rather understands it (even better than our attempt to understand our suffering itself) and overcomes it. We should remember what Paul taught almost two thousand years ago, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28 NIV).

⁴¹ Dawn DeVries, “The Living God: The Problem of Divine Personality in Reformed Theology” in *Reformed Theology for the Third Christian Millennium: The Sprunt Lectures 2001*, ed. B. A. Gerrish (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 81, emphasis added.

⁴² Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 11.

⁴³ Jonathan Edwards, “Dissertation concerning the End for which God Made the World,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, reprint ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:97.

⁴⁴ Helm, “The Impossibility of Divine Passibility,” 140.

The Problem of Repentance and Relapse as a Unifying Theme in the Book of the Twelve

— Gary E. Yates —

*Gary Yates is professor of Old Testament at Liberty University School of
Divinity in Lynchburg, Virginia.*

Abstract: This article builds on earlier studies highlighting repentance and return as unifying themes in the Book of the Twelve by developing a pattern of repentance and relapse that emerges from a reading of the Twelve. The recurring pattern of failed repentance explains why exile was necessary and why even the postexilic return to the land did not bring about Israel’s restoration. The hope that emerges in the Twelve is that Yahweh would act at a more distant time in the future to produce the repentance and spiritual transformation in his people that would bring about the blessings of repentance and full restoration.

1. Introduction

For more than two decades, studies have devoted significant attention to the Book of the Twelve as an edited literary unity.¹ James D. Nogalski writes, “Long-standing traditions in ancient Jewish and Christian sources provide incontrovertible evidence that the twelve Minor Prophets were

¹ Representative studies include: Jason T. LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*, HBM 41 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012); Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, Jakob Wöhrle, eds., *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 433 (New York: de Gruyter, 2012); Aaron Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölf–propetenbuchs: Neubearbeitungen von Amos im Rahmen schriftenübergreifender Redaktionsprozesse*, BZAW 260 (New York: de Gruyter, 1998); B. A. Jones, *The Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Study in Text and Canon*, SBLDS 149 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995); Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, eds., *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 325 (New York: de Gruyter, 2003); James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, SBL Symposium Series 15 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 217 (New York: de Gruyter, 1993); Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 218 (New York: de Gruyter, 1993); Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, JSOTSup 97 (Sheffield: Almond, 1990); and D. A. Schneider, “The Unity of the Book of the Twelve” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University Press, 1979).

transmitted on a single scroll and considered as a single book.”² In a 2013 monograph, Jason T. LeCureux argued that the themes of repentance and return were central to the thematic unity of the Twelve as a corpus.³ The Hebrew word שׁוּב (“repent/return”) appears 83 (or 84) times in the Book of the Twelve, and LeCureux suggests the central message of the Twelve to be: “As the people struggle to turn [*shuv*] from covenant failure toward YHWH in repentance and receive his blessing, YHWH struggles to turn [*shuv*] from judgment toward his people in grace.”⁴ Craig Bowman also observes that the motif of the reciprocal return of Yahweh and Israel to each other appears throughout the collection of the Twelve from the repeated calls for the people to “return” to Yahweh in Hosea at the beginning to Yahweh’s promise, “Return to me, and I will return to you” in Zechariah (1:3) and Malachi (3:7).⁵

The purpose of this study is to further explore repentance and return in the Book of the Twelve and to develop a pattern of repentance and relapse that emerges from reading the Twelve as a literary unity. After the book of Hosea introduces the theme of failed repentance with a series of calls to return to Yahweh that the people of Israel refuse to heed, this cycle of repentance and relapse repeats itself three times in the Book of the Twelve: 1) repentance (Joel) and relapse (Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah); 2) repentance (Jonah) and relapse (Nahum); and 3) repentance (Haggai, Zechariah) and relapse (Malachi).⁶ The Book of the Twelve attests to more than three centuries of prophetic activity in ancient Israel and Judah, and the recurring pattern of failed repentance helps to explain why the judgment of exile was necessary and why even the postexilic return to the land did not bring about the restoration of Israel envisioned by the earlier prophets. The hope that emerges in the Twelve is that Yahweh would act at a more distant time in the future to produce the repentance and spiritual transformation in his people that would bring about the blessings of repentance and full restoration.

2. Israel’s Refusal and Inability to “Return” to the Lord in Hosea

The problem of Israel’s failure to repent in response to the prophetic word surfaces as a prominent motif in the opening Book of the Twelve, Hosea, which employs some form of the Hebrew שׁוּב 24 times. Bowman argues that chapters 1–3 provide not only an introduction to Hosea but also “a guide for

²Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, 2. It should be noted that the overarching literary unity of the Twelve does not remove the particularity of each book’s author, historical setting, and message, and these individual features remain primary for the interpretation of this material. This study does not attempt, like Nogalski and others, to use literary connections in the Twelve as a means of reconstructing the redactional history of these books but merely to develop major theological themes and motifs that link these books together.

³LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*. For a brief overview of the theme of repentance in the Twelve, see also Mark J. Boda, *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 35 (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2015), 95–107.

⁴LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*, 39.

⁵Craig Bowman, “Reading the Twelve as One: Hosea 1–3 as an Introduction to Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets),” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 9 (2006): 41–59.

⁶The formative work of House in 1990 (*The Unity of the Twelve*) argued that the Twelve as a whole reflected a pattern of sin (Hosea-Micah), punishment (Nahum-Zephaniah), and restoration (Haggai-Malachi). The movement from judgment to salvation is a common pattern in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible in general. Recognizing a complementary pattern highlighting the inadequacy of Israel’s repentance helps to explain why Israel’s restoration remains incomplete.

reading all twelve books of the Minor Prophets together.”⁷ In the first section of the book where Hosea’s marriage to Gomer serves as an allegory for the marriage of Yahweh and unfaithful Israel, Yahweh pleads with Israel to repent (2:2–4), but Israel instead expresses its love and devotion for idols (2:5). Their refusal to repent would bring judgment from Yahweh, but this divine discipline and punishment is also what would cause Israel to “return” (2:9) [2:7, EV] and to repudiate her loyalty to Baal so that her relationship to Yahweh as her husband might be restored (2:14–23).⁸ The ultimate outcome of the judgment was that Israel would “return” (שוב) and “seek” (בקש) the Lord (3:5).

In the oracles of Hosea 4–14, calls to repentance appear in 6:1–3; 12:6; 14:1–3, and each of them specifically implores Israel to “return” (שוב) to Yahweh (6:1; 12:6; 14:1), but the reality is that Israel’s sinfulness makes it impossible for them to “return” (5:4) (שוב). The call to repent in 6:1–3 is followed by an indictment of Israel’s lack of covenant fidelity toward Yahweh and the people’s violence and injustice toward each other (6:3–11). The people’s arrogance prevents them from “returning to” (שוב) or “seeking” (בקש) Yahweh (7:10). The time has come for the people to practice righteousness and “seek” (דרש) the Lord (10:12), but the people instead cling to “turning away” (משובה) because of their devotion to Baal (11:7). In spite of their sinfulness, Yahweh loves his people and cannot give them up (11:8–9). He will ultimately cause the people to “return” (Hiphil of שוב) to him so that they might obey him (11:10–12).

Response to the call to repent in 12:6 is not forthcoming, but instead only the charge that the people’s idolatry causes them to sin “more and more” (13:2). Because there is once again no change of heart, Yahweh repeats his threat to tear his people like a lion, a leopard, and a bear (13:7–8). With one final call for his people to “return” (שוב), Yahweh stipulates that this return would involve confession of their sin and repudiation of their trust in Assyria and their idols (14:1–3). The hope of restoration is again put on Yahweh as he will be the one who would heal Israel’s “turning away” (14:4) (משובה). Yahweh would enable Israel to “return” (שוב) to him and to the land where they would enjoy blessing and abundance (14:7).

3. The Pattern of Repentance and Relapse in the Book of the Twelve

The theme of Israel’s refusal to repent carries over into Joel–Malachi. Beginning with the book of Joel, a pattern emerges that is repeated three times in the Book of the Twelve. An episode of repentance is followed by a relapse into sin. In the first instance, Israel’s repentance in Joel 2:12–27 is followed by a relapse into sin that leads to the judgment of exile for Israel (Amos) and for Judah (Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah). The book of Jonah tells the story of Nineveh’s repentance, but the announcement in Nahum is that Yahweh is prepared to destroy Nineveh for its violence and bloodshed. In the postexilic period, the books of Haggai and Zechariah document the repentance of the people in response to the prophets’ calls to rebuild the temple and return to the Lord, but the message of Malachi indicates another relapse into disobedience and rebellion. This pattern that emerges in the Twelve reflects Israel’s persistent disobedience and refusal to return to Yahweh. The postexilic community is as guilty of unfaithfulness toward Yahweh as Israel and Judah before the exile. The inclusion of the Nineveh narrative in this

⁷ Bowman, “Reading the Twelve as One,” 44.

⁸ Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 296.

pattern reflects that the story of the nations is essentially the same as that of Israel in terms of their persistent rebellion against Yahweh as the one true God.

The Pattern of Repentance and Relapse		
Narrative of Repentance: Joel 2:12–27—Israel repents and God spares from judgment	Narrative of Repentance: Jonah 3—the people and king of Nineveh repent and God spares from judgment	Narrative of Repentance: Postexilic Israel “obeys” calls to rebuild temple and “returns to the Lord (Hagg 1; Zech 1)
Relapse and warning of judgment of exile for Israel (Amos) and Judah (Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah)	Relapse and warning of judgment and destruction for Nineveh (Nahum)	Relapse and warning of further judgment for post-exilic community (Malachi)
		Narrative of partial repentance in Mal 3:16–18 with a warning of final judgment for the wicked

3.1. First Example of Repentance and Relapse: Israel and Judah Leading to Exile

The six books in the Twelve with historical superscriptions provide an overall chronological sequence that begins with the Assyrian period, moves to the Babylonian crisis, and concludes with the postexilic era.⁹ The other six books are given their location by the chronological period in which the prophet ministered and/or by catchword and thematic connections to the books they precede and/or follow.¹⁰ The books of Hosea-Micah generally cover the Assyrian period, Nahum-Zephaniah the Babylonian, and Haggai-Zechariah the postexilic.

Scholarship generally recognizes the book of Joel as a postexilic prophecy,¹¹ and thus the literary location of the book within the Twelve removes Joel from its chronological setting so that it might introduce themes and motifs that run throughout the Book of the Twelve. Nogalski argues that Joel provides a “literary anchor” for the Twelve and introduces a “transcendent historical paradigm” of God’s

⁹Rolf Rendtorff states that “the superscriptions give the Book of the Twelve an explicit chronological framework” (“How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SBL Symposium Series 15 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 76). The order of the six books with superscriptions (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah) is the same in both the MT and LXX relative to each other. The last six books in the Twelve are also in the same order in the MT and LXX, and Nahum-Malachi reflect a chronological arrangement. The differences between the MT and LXX order have to do with how the books of Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah are interspersed among the eighth-century prophets in the first half. The MT reflects an order of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah. The LXX order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. For further discussion of these two different arrangements of the book of the Twelve, see note 17 below.

¹⁰For specific examples of catchwords and how they are used to link together the individual books in the Twelve, see Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, 20–57.

¹¹See Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 2 vols., Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 1:149–50 for a brief discussion of the basic arguments for this dating of the book.

work of judgment and salvation that unfolds in the books that follow.¹² Joel provides the first explicit references to the “day of Yahweh” (1:5; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14), and this concept becomes a dominant theme in the Twelve.¹³ The prophets portray various events throughout the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian periods as “days” of the Lord as Yahweh intervenes to bring both judgment and salvation. The book of Joel also influences the overall direction of the Twelve in the specific way that it connects warnings of the coming day of Yahweh with calls for repentance, expressing the hope that confession of sin and a genuine turning from evil may result in divine relenting from judgment.¹⁴ Jeremias notes that the book of Joel is “the only book in the Old Testament daring to speak of the survival of a whole generation in Israel in the context of the Day of the Lord.”¹⁵ Thus, Joel tempers passages on the day of the Lord that follow in subsequent books in the Twelve that seem to present death and destruction as the only possible outcome of the coming “day” (cf. Amos 5:18–20; Zeph 1:14–16).¹⁶

In its present literary position, Joel 2:12–27 recounts an episode of repentance that literarily (though not chronologically) precedes the warnings of the judgment of exile for Israel in Amos and for Judah in the books of Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.¹⁷ Thus, the first example of repentance followed by relapse in the Twelve relates to Israel and Judah before the judgment of exile. In Joel 2:12–17, the prophet calls for repentance in the context of a locust plague that has brought devastation and destruction on the land. The prophet calls for an internal change that goes beyond the external signs of contrition, and

¹²James D. Nogalski, “Joel as ‘Literary Anchor’ for the Book of the Twelve,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SBL Symposium Series 15 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 91–109. For a similar perspective on Joel’s key role in the Twelve, see also Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve,” *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, BZAW 325 (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 133–54. Nogalski (p. 106) and Sweeney (pp. 143–49) note an extensive number of intertextual parallels between Joel and other books in the Twelve that reflect Joel’s overall literary significance to the whole of this composition.

¹³Nogalski, “Joel as ‘Literary Anchor,’” 104–5. For further discussion of the theological significance of the day of Yahweh as a theological theme in the Book of the Twelve, see also Paul R. House, “Endings as New Beginnings: Returning to the Lord, the Day of the Lord, and Renewal in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, BZAW 325 (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 312–38; Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, 192–213; Jörg Jeremias, “The Function of the Book of Joel for Reading the Twelve,” in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, BZAW 433 (New York: de Gruyter, 2012), 78–81; and Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve,” 78–87.

¹⁴Nogalski, “Joel as ‘Literary Anchor,’” 107–8.

¹⁵Jeremias, “The Function of the Book of Joel for Reading the Twelve,” 78.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Nogalski, (“Joel as ‘Literary Anchor,’” 107) explains that the placement of Joel in its present location in the MT version of the Twelve “does not ignore the chronological context,” but rather “transcends it.” In reading the Twelve sequentially, it is significant that this episode of repentance occurs near the beginning of the story, even if chronologically this event did not actually occur until the post-exilic period. The chronological fluidity of Joel is reflected by its different locations in the MT and LXX versions of the Twelve. The scholarly consensus is that the Masoretic order is most likely the original and that the LXX simply placed Amos and Micah after Hosea because their superscriptions placed them in the same basic time period and then retained the order found in the MT for the other books. Of the eight partial manuscripts from Qumran all but one has confirmed the order of the MT for the Twelve, though none contain the entire corpus. For the one exception, the most plausible reconstruction of 4Q12³ is that Jonah follows Malachi at the end of the Twelve. See Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, 2.

he exhorts the people and leaders of Israel to pray that Yahweh spare them from judgment. The need for repentance is so urgent that it must include all segments of the population, from the eldest down to nursing infants. The national emergency was so severe so that even the newly married, who were exempt from military duty (cf. Deut 20:7) needed to present themselves before Yahweh.¹⁸

This passage is important for what follows in the Twelve in that it becomes the first of four passages that reference the confession concerning Yahweh's character in Exodus 34:6–7 (cf. Jonah 4:2; Mic 7:16–18; Nah 1:3).¹⁹ Joel quotes Exodus 34:6 in noting that Yahweh is “gracious, and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” as the motivation for the people to repent. Likely through the influence of Exodus 32:12–14, the prophet also proclaims that Yahweh is a God who “relents” (נחם) from sending calamity when people repent.²⁰ The prophet Joel anticipates that Yahweh would show mercy to the people of his generation in the same way that he had in the early days of Israel's history at Mount Sinai when the people had worshipped the golden calf. Another detail reflecting the influence of Exodus 32–34 is that the reason for the plea for divine mercy in Joel 2:17 is God's reputation among the nations, whose people would say, “Where is God?” if he allowed Israel to be destroyed (cf. Exod 32:12–14). The priests who pray this prayer in Joel have taken over the role of Moses as intercessors for the people.²¹

As the question, “Who knows?” (מִי יוֹדֵעַ) in 2:14 reflects, repentance does not guarantee divine favor and blessing, but there is always the possibility that God would “relent” and send blessing in the place of judgment. As Chisholm notes, Joel 2, Exodus 32–34, and a number of other texts in the Hebrew Bible relate this inclination of God to relent from sending judgment “as one of his foundational attributes.”²² This specific attribute of Yahweh clearly influences the way in which he works out his decrees of judgment and salvation in the Book of the Twelve.

The text does not explicitly state how the people responded to Joel's call for repentance, but what follows in 2:18–20 indicates that they followed through on what the prophet had commanded. Allen comments, “We are intended to assume that Joel's appeals . . . were successful. Evidently the people did gather to a national service of fasting and lamentation, and the priests duly offered prayers on behalf of a genuinely repentant community.”²³ Yahweh's response to the people's repentance in verses 18–19 is expressed by the use of a series of four *wayyiqtol* verbs (וַיֹּאמֶר, וַיַּעַן, וַיַּחְמַל, וַיִּקְנֵא). Yahweh showed

¹⁸ Ronald L. Troxel, “The Problem of Time in Joel,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 94.

¹⁹ For the use and importance of Exodus 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve, see Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 307; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John C. Gammie*, ed. L. G. Perdue, B. B. Scott, and W. J. Wiseman (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 31–49; and Richard L. Schultz, “The Ties that Bind: Intertextuality, the Identification of Verbal Parallels, and Reading Strategies in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, BZAW 325 (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 37–40. Outside of the Twelve, the confessional statement of Exod 34:6–7 is also found in Num 14:18; 2 Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8.

²⁰ Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 307.

²¹ Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy,” 40.

²² Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 372. Cf. Num 14; Jer 18:7–10; Mic 3:9–12 with Jer 26:17–19; Amos 7:1–3; Jer 26:3–7; 36:3–7. On the conditionality of prophetic warnings and promises that are not based on sworn oaths or that do not express the ultimate fulfillment of outcomes guaranteed by Yahweh's covenant promises, see also Richard L. Pratt “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” in *Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 180–203.

²³ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 86.

compassion to the people and began to reverse the effects of the locust plague that had afflicted the nation. As a result, Joel 2:18 serves as “the pivot point of a story that offers a model for later generations seeking to escape the Day of the Lord.”²⁴ While the prevailing view is that these verbs should be read like prophetic perfects, stressing the certainty of the promises that Yahweh is making (cf. KJV, NIV, NASB), the *wayyiqtol* is primarily used as a preterite to indicate past time events in narratives (cf. ESV, NET).²⁵ The narrative use seems more likely here, and the verbs relate how Yahweh responded to the people’s repentance. Troxel explains that the preterite verbs in 2:18–19 resume the narrative storyline from 1:1–3 that presents the ministry of Joel and the deliverance of the people as a story to be told to successive generations.²⁶ Troxel comments, “Just as 1:2–3 viewed these events as past, so 2:28 presupposes that the promises of salvation announced for the future in vv. 19–20 and 25–27 have already been fulfilled.”²⁷

In light of the paradigmatic example of repentance and divine favor in the book of Joel, it is both ironic and tragic that repentance is not forthcoming for Israel (Amos) or Judah (Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) in these books that warn of the coming exile.²⁸ Intertextual links particularly highlight how the response to prophetic appeals in these books is the exact opposite of what is portrayed in Joel 2. The locust plague in Joel leads to the people’s repentance, but in Amos, Yahweh has sent a locust plague (and other covenant curses), but the people “have not returned (שוב) to him” (Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11).²⁹ Jeremias states that the reference to the locust plague in Amos 4:9 “sounds nearly like a citation of Joel, but this time with a negative result.”³⁰ Because of their failure to repent, the prophet warns them to prepare to “meet” their God in judgment (4:12). Nevertheless, before sending judgment, Yahweh still provides an opportunity for the people to return to him. The prophet calls on the people to “seek” (דרש) Yahweh (5:4–6, 14) so that they might live and so that Yahweh not break out like a fire against them. The possibility (אולי) of the Lord showing grace in response to repentance recalls the מי יודע

²⁴ Troxel, “The Problem of Time in Joel,” 81.

²⁵ For the view that the *wayyiqtol* verbs here should be viewed as prophetic perfects, see, for example James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, SHBC (Macon: Smith & Helwys, 2011), 234–37; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 257–59; and Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 1:69. For the view that the *wayyiqtol* verbs should be taken as preterites, see Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 86–88; Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 308n42; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 373; Troxel, “The Problem of Time in Joel,” 78–83; and Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 57–60.

²⁶ Troxel, “The Problem of Time in Joel,” 81.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The recurring calls to “hear” the word of Yahweh in Amos (3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 8:4) and Micah (3:1, 9; 6:2) emphasize the necessity of proper response to the prophetic word.

²⁹ Roman Vielhauer notes that outside of Joel 2:12 and these five uses in Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, the exact collocation of שוב + ועד appears only one other time in the Book of the Twelve—in Hos 14:2, a passage that seems to connect the books of Hosea and Joel (“Hosea and the Book of the Twelve,” in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Rainer Albertz, James Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, BZAW 433 [New York: de Gruyter, 2012], 65).

³⁰ Jeremias, “The Function of the Book of Joel for the Reading of the Twelve,” 84. Two key intertextual links to Amos at the end of Joel signal that the books are to be read in light of each other: (1) Yahweh roars from Zion (Joel 4:16 [3:16 EV]; Amos 1:2; (2) the mountains shall drip sweet wine (Joel 4:18 [3:18 EV]; Amos 9:13).

doing the same in Joel 2:14.³¹ Like Joel, the call to repentance in Amos is linked to a warning of the impending day of Yahweh that would be a day of disaster for Israel in contrast to Israel's expectations of blessing and deliverance (5:18–20).

A further parallel to Joel is that the book of Amos also includes a documented response to the prophet's teaching, but the parallel is again one of contrast. The context of Amos 7 focuses on Yahweh's willingness to show compassion and spare his people from judgment (7:1–6). As in Joel, this judgment involves both locust plague and "fire" (cf. Joel 1:19, 20; 2:3, 5). In spite of the people's sin, Yahweh still deals with Israel as he did when Moses prayed for the people after their worship of the golden calf (Exod 32:11–14). The Lord responds to Amos's intercession for Israel and "relents" (נחם) from sending the judgment he had threatened to bring (Amos 7:3, 6). Yahweh's mercy, however, is met with Israel's resistance to the prophetic word preached by Amos, and the priest Amaziah orders him to stop preaching and to return to Judah (7:10–17). Because of this rejection of Amos and Yahweh's spokesman and the refusal to repent, the judgment that Yahweh had relented from because of the prophet's intercession would now come in full force (8:1–9:10). There would be no "turning" on the part of the people or Yahweh until the eschatological future when Yahweh would "restore the fortunes" (שוב שבות) of Israel (9:11–15).

As in the ministry of Amos to Israel, there is no positive response to the preaching of Micah in Judah like that recorded in the book of Joel. In the place of repentance, there is direct resistance to the prophetic word in Micah 2:6–11.³² The leaders that Micah indicts for their injustices in the preceding verses command Micah to "not preach" (אל + נטף) and argue that one should not "preach" (נטף) harsh words of judgment like those proclaimed by Micah (2:6). The verb נטף means "to drip," and may suggest the idea that the prophet is speaking "drivel" or "foaming at the mouth."³³ Micah turns the insult back on his opponents, characterizing their speech by the same verb in verse 6. Micah further labels the speaking of the false prophets who utter lies as נטף in 2:11. This rare term for prophetic proclamation also appears in Amos 7:16 when the priest Amaziah orders Amos "not to preach," thus reflecting that the response to the preaching of Micah in Judah is exactly the same as that to the preaching of Amos in Israel.³⁴

Micah's opponents have a defective view of the covenant that instills the presumptuous confidence that "no disaster will overtake" Judah (2:6). The people's question, "Has the patience of the Lord run short?" in 2:7 reflects that they likely view Micah's message as suspect because he inverts the attribute of Yahweh as "slow to anger" that is celebrated in Exodus 34:6.³⁵ The people have taken the assurance

³¹ Rendtorff, "How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity," 81.

³² Ironically, Jer 26:17–19 preserves the memory of Micah's preaching led Hezekiah to repent and then Yahweh relented from destroying Jerusalem; however, the book of Micah itself includes no indication of a positive response.

³³ See HALOT 1:694–95, s. v. "נטף." The verb refers to the seductive speech of the adulteress in Proverbs 5:3, and the NET Bible offers an idiomatic translation for נטף here in verse 6 that has Micah's prophetic opponents saying to him, "Don't preach with such impassioned rhetoric." They view Micah's message of judgment as empty ranting.

³⁴ Ezekiel 21:2, 7 is the only other passage where נטף refers to prophetic activity, and it seems to be a synonym for the standard verb "to prophesy" (נבא). The verb נטף is parallel to נבא in Amos 7:16, but the LXX translates נטף with ὀχλαγωγέω, which means "to attract or stir up a crowd." See Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 111.

³⁵ Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy," 46.

of Yahweh's compassion and mercy in the wrong way, as an absolute guarantee of divine grace rather than a motivation for repentance. The unqualified promises offered by the false prophets, rather than Micah's message reminding them of their covenant responsibilities, were precisely the words that the people wanted to hear (2:11).

The fact that Micah receives the same response to his preaching in Judah that Amos had received in the apostate Northern Kingdom explains why Yahweh is now prepared to destroy the sanctuary on Zion like he did the one in Samaria (3:9–12; cf. Amos 9:1). The diminishing calls to repentance moving from Hosea to Micah in this section on the Assyrian crisis in the Twelve seems to reflect a missed opportunity to repent and avert judgment. The only thing closely resembling a formal call to repentance in Micah is found in the covenant lawsuit/trial speech in 6:1–8, in which the prophet directs the people of Judah to the way in which they can restore their relationship with Yahweh. The solution is not cultic ritual and sacrifice, but rather the practice of justice, kindness, and walking humbly with God.

Like Joel and Jonah, Micah 7 demonstrates an intertextual connection to Exodus 34, but this passage does not record a sparing from judgment when God “relents” as in the two previous instances. The prophet himself provides the only recognition of Judah's sinfulness with his confession that the nation is thoroughly corrupt in 7:1–6. The only thing that the people “do well” is practice “evil” (7:3) (רעה). House observes, “Micah 6–7 offers a new twist on return and renewal by using first-person confession as a means of expressing change.”³⁶ The prophet's only hope in the light of such pervasive national wickedness is “to look” and “to wait” for Yahweh to hear his prayers and to bring deliverance after the judgment is complete.³⁷

The future remnant would join the prophet in confessing their sin and expressing their confidence that Yahweh would turn their darkness into light by saving them (7:8–10). In Joel 2:17, the people had prayed for God to save them from judgment so that the nations would not say, “Where is their God?” (איה אלהיהם), but the people here in Micah look forward to a time in the future when the enemy would no longer be able to say “Where is the Lord your God?” (איה יהוה אלהיך). The judgment would not be avoided in this instance, but when Israel is finally saved, the nations themselves will also turn to Yahweh in fear and in reverence (7:12–17).

In Micah 7:16–20, the remnant celebrates what the Lord would do for them by quoting from the Exodus 34 confession. The way in which Yahweh would “forgive sin” and “pardon iniquity” would demonstrate his “compassion” (רחם) and that he does not stay “angry” (אף) but delights instead to show “steadfast love” (חסד).³⁸ Because of his covenant commitments to Israel, Yahweh would wage war on Israel's sin and cast those sins into the sea. Unlike what occurred in Joel 2, there is no immediate confession of sin and repentance on the part of the people. The nation here must first experience devastating judgment until the time that a remnant enjoys pardon and forgiveness. The fact that the Assyrian section of the Book of the Twelve concludes with the use of Exodus 34:6 as a closing doxology reflects the hope that Yahweh's mercy would ultimately triumph over his judgment.³⁹

The emphasis on judgment leading to exile carries over into the Babylonian section (Nahum-Zephaniah) of the Book of the Twelve. The judgment of the nations and of Judah blends together in this

³⁶ House, “Endings as New Beginnings,” 329.

³⁷ Ibid., 330.

³⁸ Schultz, “The Tie that Binds,” 39.

³⁹ Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy,” 47.

section. The day of Yahweh against Nineveh in the book of Nahum becomes the day of Yahweh against Judah in Zephaniah. The book of Habakkuk reflects on how Yahweh will use Babylon to judge Judah and then turn that judgment on the Babylonians. In Zephaniah, the destruction of Judah is like the reversal of creation in Genesis 1, and divine judgment would extend to the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Cushites, and Assyrians. The theme of repentance is muted in this section, and the last intertextual connection to Exodus 34:6–7 in the Twelve occurs in Nahum 1:3, reflecting that Judah like Israel had forfeited its opportunity to turn from sin and experience Yahweh’s mercy instead of wrath.

In Habakkuk, the people of Judah are characterized by “violence” (חמס) and “iniquity” (עון) (1:2–3). Their practice of “violence” (חמס) makes them indistinguishable from the Babylonians who would also face divine judgment (cf. 1:9; 2:8, 17). Standing between Nahum and Zephaniah, the book of Habakkuk reflects on the tumultuous time between the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586.⁴⁰ There is no offer or hope that repentance would forestall judgment, but only the confident prayer that Yahweh would ultimately act on behalf of his people after bringing them through this time of judgment (ch. 3). Like Micah, Habakkuk confidently “waits” for Yahweh to deliver his people and to bring judgment on their enemies (3:16–18; cf. Mic 7:7).⁴¹

The only call to repentance found in the three Babylonian crisis books appears in Zephaniah 2:1–3. The hope of repentance that might lead God to avert the coming judgment is minimized but still present. The prophet urges the people to repent before the decree of judgment takes effect and he calls upon them to “seek” Yahweh (בקש) by also “seeking” (בקש) righteousness and humility (2:1–3). Just as in the calls for repentance in Joel 2:12–14; Amos 5:15; and Jonah 3:9, the motivation for the appeal is the possibility (אולי) that they might be spared from judgment (3:3).⁴² House notes that there is one notable difference between the call for repentance in Zephaniah and these earlier texts. The seeking of Yahweh that Zephaniah exhorts “will not forestall the day of the Lord, as was true earlier in the Twelve. Now such seeking will merely hide the persons who seek the Lord in the midst of the inevitable day of the Lord.”⁴³ The time for a seeking and finding of the Lord by all the people “has passed.”⁴⁴ Judgment would come for the nation, but “the humble (ענובים) of the land” would become the remnant of blessing when Yahweh “restored their fortunes” (7, 2:3) (שוב שבות). This promise offered hope to the righteous who endured the calamity of the Babylonian exile.

⁴⁰ See A. Joseph Everson, “The Canonical Location of Habakkuk,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, BZAW 325 (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 165–74.

⁴¹ The two passages use synonyms for “wait”—יחל in Habakkuk 3:16 and נוח in Micah 7:7. Both Habakkuk and Micah anticipate that Yahweh will engage in war on Israel’s behalf when the judgment is over. Habakkuk focuses on how Yahweh will destroy the wicked and “trample the sea” (Hab 3:13–15); Micah stresses how Yahweh will humiliate the nations (Mic 7:10, 15–17) and then trample on Israel’s sins before casting them “into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:18–19).

⁴² Rendtorff (“How to Read the Book of the Twelve,” 84–85) notes that Joel, Amos, and Zephaniah “are very close to each other in relating the Day of the Lord to the call to repent or to ‘seek,’ and in expressing a reticent and even fearful hope that God might listen and react to a change in the behavior of the people.” He further suggests that this thread is important for the overall message of the Twelve, because these three books (with the exception of Malachi) “represent the span within which the topic of the Day of the Lord appears.”

⁴³ House, “Endings as New Beginnings,” 332.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

3.2. Second Example of Repentance and Relapse: The People of Nineveh

The second example of repentance and relapse in the Twelve comes from an unexpected source, the Ninevites of Assyria. This picture emerges from a reading of Jonah and Nahum in connection with each other. Jonah appears in the Assyrian section of the Twelve, and Nahum introduces the Babylonian section. In the books leading up to Jonah in the Twelve, the judgment of the nations is a prominent theme. There is judgment for the nations (Joel 3:1–15) and salvation for Jerusalem and the people of God (Joel 3:16–21). The Lord will “restore the fortunes” of Israel so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and the other nations (Amos 9:11–15). In Obadiah, there will be survivors of the judgment from among the people of Israel but no survivors for Edom (Obad 16–21). One could easily infer from these passages that there is a future salvation for Israel and no salvation for the nations, but the story of Jonah offers a balancing perspective.⁴⁵

The passage depicting the repentance of the Ninevites in Jonah 3:4–10 provides the closest intertext in the Book of the Twelve to the paradigmatic repentance text in Joel 2:12–14. The specific connections to the Joel text include the use of the verbs **שוב** and **נחם** in (3:8–10) with reference to human repentance and divine relenting from judgment and the use of the question 3:9 **מִי יִדְעַ** to raise the possibility that God might show mercy in response to repentance (cf. Joel 2:14). The king of Nineveh calls for his people to “turn” (**שוב**) from their “evil” (**רעה**) way, and this repentance is motivated by the possibility that God may “turn” (**שוב**) and “relent” (**נחם**) from the “calamity” (**רעה**) he has planned against Nineveh. As in Joel 2, repentance takes the form of a fast, a time of mourning, and a turning from evil. When God sees that the Ninevites have “turned” (**שוב**) from their “evil” (**רעה**), he does “relent” (**נחם**) from sending “calamity” (**רעה**) upon them.⁴⁶ Another link to Joel 2:12–14 is the quotation of Exodus 34:6 in Jonah 4:2, regarding Yahweh’s gracious and compassionate nature that leads him to relent from sending judgment.⁴⁷ Ironically, however, Jonah had rejected his prophetic commission in a futile attempt to sabotage Yahweh showing mercy to the Ninevites. The parallels between Jonah 3–4 and Joel 2:12–14 within the Twelve demonstrate that Yahweh extends mercy to the nations in response to their repentance in the same way that he does toward Israel.⁴⁸

The repentance of Nineveh in Jonah 3 is noteworthy for several reasons. They respond to a warning of judgment from the prophet of a foreign deity with whom they have no prior experience on the first day of Jonah’s preaching mission. As Fretheim notes, the Ninevites repent in spite of the fact that “Jonah makes his message as vague and as blunt and as offensive as he possibly can” and that “would make it almost impossible for the people to respond positively.”⁴⁹ The repentance of the Ninevites extends to

⁴⁵ Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” 80–83. For development of the idea that the conversion of the sailors in Jonah 1 and the Ninevites in Jonah 3 anticipates the eschatological salvation of the nations, see Gregory Coswell, “Jonah Among the Twelve Prophets,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 283–99.

⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, one specific difference between Joel 2:12–14 and Jonah 3:9–10 is that the first text uses the name Yahweh and the second the name Elohim.

⁴⁷ Van Leeuwen (“Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy,” 44) even suggests that the genre of the book of Jonah as a whole “is perhaps best taken as an early midrashic homily on Exodus 34:6.”

⁴⁸ The hope of the Ninevites that Yahweh would “turn” (**ישוב**) and “relent” (**נחם**) from the “calamity” (**רעה**) he planned to send against them also reflects the cry of Moses in Exodus 32:12 as he intercedes for divine mercy for Israel after the people have worshipped the golden calf. See Boda, “Return to Me,” 99.

⁴⁹ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 107–8.

their king, even though the Assyrian rulers are portrayed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as arrogant and blasphemous (Isa 10:5–34; 37–37; 2 Kgs 18–19).⁵⁰ The king’s edict calling for fasting and the wearing of sackcloth extends even to the animals. In the larger context of the Twelve, this radical repentance on the part of the Ninevites serves as a rebuke to Israel’s lack of repentance. As Nogalski states, “Jonah has the people of Nineveh doing what the people of YHWH have been unable or unwilling to do: turn from evil and violence.”⁵¹

The repentance of Nineveh in Jonah unfortunately becomes a relapse into violence and wickedness in Nahum. The message of doom against Nineveh in Nahum reverses Yahweh’s gracious relenting from the destruction of the city in Jonah. Nahum also overturns the emphasis in Joel, Jonah, and Micah from Exodus 34:6 on the mercy of God and instead focuses on the negative aspect of God exacting vengeance on sinners in Exodus 34:7.⁵² Yahweh’s dealings with Nineveh have demonstrated that he is “slow to anger” (Nah 1:3), but Nineveh has exhausted Yahweh’s mercy and must now face judgment. In Jonah 3:10, God spares Nineveh because they “turned” (שוב) from “evil” (רעה), but Jonah’s initial warning that Nineveh would be overturned is reinstated when they return to their “evil” (רעה) ways (Nah 1:11; 3:19). Fire, locusts, and lions have served as previous images of judgment in the Twelve, and Nahum warns that all of these horrific judgments would now fall on Nineveh (3:15–17). There is no turning to Yahweh in Nahum, and no hope for Assyria’s restoration is offered in the book. In the larger Book of the Twelve, Assyria becomes representative of the wicked nations judged by Yahweh (Mic 5:5–6; Zeph 2:13–15; Zech 10:11).

3.3. Third Example of Repentance and Relapse: The Postexilic Community

The third example of repentance and relapse occurs in the postexilic section of the Book of the Twelve. When Haggai and Zechariah call for the people to renew their efforts to rebuild the Temple in 520 B.C., their preaching is met with immediate and enthusiastic response. Haggai is the one book in the Twelve in which the word שוב does not appear, but the book depicts a genuine repentance in which the people “obeyed” (שמע) the prophetic words, “feared” (ירא) the Lord, and began the work of rebuilding in the same month in which Haggai commenced his ministry (Hag 1:12–14). The promises announced by the prophet in the remainder of the book—the surpassing glory of the new temple (Hag 2:7–9), agricultural and economic prosperity (Hag 2:17–18), and the exalted status of Zerubbabel as the Lord’s representative (Hag 2:23)—are the blessings that Yahweh would pour out on the people in response to their obedience.

The book of Zechariah also records the positive response to the prophet’s call for action. When Yahweh says, “Return (שוב) to me and I will return (שוב) to you,” the people “return” (שוב) and acknowledge that Yahweh has dealt with them according to their sinful ways in the judgment of the exile (Zech 1:3, 6). Nevertheless, there are also indicators that this repentance and return is inadequate

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:326.

⁵¹ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, 441.

⁵² Exodus 34:6–7 also provides a direct link between Nahum and the preceding book of Micah (cf. Mic 7:18–20). Schultz (“The Ties that Bind,” 39) notes that when Nahum mentions that Yahweh is “slow to anger,” it appears that he will focus on the pardoning of sin in the same manner as Micah does, but he turns instead to how Yahweh would punish the guilty. Boda (*A Severe Mercy*, 307) notes that Nahum 1:3 is the only passage outside the Pentateuch which mentions the negative side of Yahweh disciplining sin when referencing the confession in Exodus 34:6–7.

in many ways.⁵³ The vision of the flying scroll in 5:1–4 portrays a people still characterized by covenant infidelity, and the vision of the woman in the basket that follows in 5:5–11 warns of a further exile to Babylon for those who continue in their wicked ways. In Zechariah 7:8–14, the prophet rehearses Israel’s miserable history of response to the preaching of the prophets that led to the judgment of exile in the first place. Zechariah also called for the present generation to practice justice and to cease from evil so that the blessings of restoration promised to Israel, including the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, might become a reality (8:16–23). The fact that the postexilic community never fully returned to Yahweh meant that these blessings would not occur until the eschatological era portrayed in Zechariah 9–14 when Yahweh would completely purge evil from his people.

The message of Malachi at the end of the Twelve demonstrates how the postexilic community eventually relapsed into evil. Their estrangement from Yahweh is reflected in how they question God’s love at the very beginning of the book (1:2–5). They offer polluted offerings (1:6–14), have priests that fail to honor Yahweh and lead the people astray (2:1–9), violate their marriage commitments (2:10–16), and rob God by not paying their tithes (3:6–14). Malachi’s message takes the form of a dispute, as the people not only refuse to listen to the Lord’s commands, but arrogantly dispute the charges brought against them. In 3:7, the prophet delivers the same “Return to me and I will turn to you” message found in Zechariah 1:3, but there is no community-wide response as there was to Zechariah’s preaching.⁵⁴ The people have “wearied the Lord” with their words as much as with their actions, and instead of confessing and turning from their wrongdoing, they disparage God’s justice and question whether there is even any benefit in serving him (2:17; 3:13–15).

Malachi 3:16 provides the only narrative material in the book.⁵⁵ Coming at the end of a long cycle of dispute between Yahweh and Israel and following the specific argument of the people in 3:13–15 that serving the Lord is futile, one expects an announcement of judgment. Instead, the verse recounts the final example of positive response to the prophetic word in the Twelve. Unlike the negative speech (דבר in verse 13) of the people against Yahweh in the preceding verses, a group of God-fearers “speak to each other” (Niphal of דבר). Their speech is not recorded, but their words expressed in some way their reverence and honor for Yahweh. As in previous instances of repentance in the Twelve, Yahweh takes note of this positive response. Unlike the episodes of community-wide repentance in Joel, Jonah, and Haggai, and Zechariah, the positive response here only involves a minority of the prophet’s audience. There is a division in Malachi 3:13–16 between those who speak arrogantly and those who truly fear God. There is no relenting from judgment or promised national blessings in this instance. Instead, Yahweh hears the words of those who fear him and records their names in “a book of remembrance” so that they might be spared from the coming future judgment.⁵⁶ The people would see from the distinction

⁵³ Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 337–38.

⁵⁴ Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 25D (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 407.

⁵⁵ Note the perfect verb נדברו (describing the action of the men—“they spoke to each other”) followed by a series of *wayyiqtol* verbs describing what was done as a consequence of their action (ויכתב, וישמע, ויקשב) (“Yahweh drew near . . . and heard . . . and a book of remembrance was written before him”). See Hill, *Malachi*, 337.

⁵⁶ An alternate understanding is that the latter part of verse 16 records the actual speech of the God-fearers (“Yahweh has paid attention to us and has heard us”), countering the claim that serving Yahweh is futile, but there is nothing that specifically marks this part of the verse as reported speech, and the verb sequence favors reading the verse as a narrative report. See *ibid.*

in what happened to the righteous versus the wicked that there was value in serving Yahweh. Because of this limited positive response to the prophet's preaching, there would still be a need for future judgment. As Watts notes, "The post-exilic situation is not the perfect end time. It is filled with sin and needs the continual cleansing and judgment of God."⁵⁷

4. Significance of the Repentance/Relapse Pattern

This study has suggested that recognition of the pattern of repentance and relapse provides a helpful reading strategy for understanding the Book of the Twelve as a literary entity. The significance of this literary pattern is seen in three specific ways. First, the pattern of repentance and relapse reflects the pervasiveness of Israel's unbelief and attributes the "day of the Lord" judgments associated with exile in large part to improper response to the prophetic word. In the three centuries of prophetic activity reflected in the Twelve, there are only limited examples of turning to Yahweh, and one of those examples comes from the pagan Ninevites. The Book of the Twelve offers a story of Israel's engagement with Yahweh's prophets that confirms the assessment of Zechariah 1:4 that previous generations had not "listened or paid attention" to Yahweh's words.⁵⁸

Second, the problems of partial repentance or repentance and then relapse also explain why the conditions of exile and alienation from Yahweh persist for Israel even after the return from exile.⁵⁹ The people would only fully enjoy the blessings of return when they had truly turned back to Yahweh. Geographical return to the land without a spiritual turning back to Yahweh was inadequate. Thus, the calls for repentance in the Book of the Twelve and especially in the postexilic prophets serve as a call for successive generations reading these books to always be returning to the Lord. LeCureux comments that "the Twelve raise a warning that the return (שוב) relationship is one that will never cease, and in fact, requires constant vigilance. The struggle with Israel between turning toward Yahweh and turning toward rebellion must be confronted continually."⁶⁰ In this way, the Book of the Twelve helps prepare the way for the call of John and Jesus in the New Testament to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2; 4:17) or for Peter's exhortation for Israel to "repent" so that "the times of refreshing" might come (Acts 3:19–20).

Finally, in light of Israel's persistent inability to return to Yahweh, the Book of the Twelve reflects the reality that the only hope for Israel's future lies in Yahweh's work of sovereign grace that would internally transform the people so that they would be able to faithfully follow and obey him. At some unspecified time in the future, Yahweh would heal Israel's apostasy (Hos 14:2). Yahweh would "pour out" his Spirit on his people so that they would call on him and be saved (Joel 3:1–5) [2:28–32, EV]. Yahweh would provide transformative forgiveness for his people by casting their sins into the sea (Mic

⁵⁷ John D. W. Watts, "A Frame for the Book of the Twelve: Hosea 1–3 and Malachi," in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SBL Symposium Series 15 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 212.

⁵⁸ For similar statements concerning Israel's resistance to the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, cf. 2 Kings 17:13–14; Isaiah 6:9–10; Jeremiah 7:25–26; 25:3–7; 26:4–6; 35:15; 37:1–2; Ezekiel 2:3–4; 3:7–9.

⁵⁹ A canonical reading of Jeremiah and Daniel reflects that the "70 years" of exile in Babylon (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10) was just the beginning of the ultimate restoration of Israel that would require "seventy weeks of seven" (Dan 9:24–27).

⁶⁰ LeCureux, *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the Twelve*, 109.

7:18–20). He would “pour out a spirit of grace and prayer” that would finally produce the repentance and return he had desired from his people all along (Zech 12:10–14). The concluding promise in the Twelve in Malachi 3:24 (4:6, EV) is that Yahweh’s eschatological prophet “will turn” (Hiphil of שׁוּב) the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to the fathers, indicating that Israel’s spiritual transformation would also bring restoration of family relationships at the human level. These promises in the Book of the Twelve align with the promises of new covenant and new heart and the consequent spiritual transformation in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (cf. Deut 30:6; Isa 59:20–21; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:24–30). These promises of spiritual transformation for Israel in the Twelve apply to all who belong to the new covenant community, both Jew and Gentile, with Romans 9–11 (esp. 11:23–27) also indicating a future eschatological salvation of ethnic Israel (cf. Luke 22:30; Acts 3:19–20; 26:6–7). Brueggemann has noted the interplay between “Deuteronomic” and “Prophetic” models in the Hebrew Bible, the former stressing “an eschatological pardon that is conditioned on Israel’s repentance,” and the latter a “full and unilateral pardon without reference to repentance” (cf. 1 Kgs 8:46–51; 2 Chron 7:13–14).⁶¹ The Book of the Twelve certainly emphasizes divine initiative as the ultimate cause of Israel’s final salvation, but without completely removing the tensions between these two models. The timing and manner of Israel’s restoration in some sense remains contingent on human response to the divine initiatives, and this interplay between divine initiative and human response is central to the ongoing drama of salvation history.

⁶¹ Walter Brueggemann, “The Travail of Pardon: Reflections on *slh*,” in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brett Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 283–97.

The Septuagint and Biblical Theology

— W. Edward Glenny —

Ed Glenny is professor of New Testament and Greek at the University of Northwestern—St. Paul, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Abstract: This article addresses the question: *How does the LXX relate to the Christian Old Testament, and more specifically, what role does the LXX play in Christian biblical theology?* The first part of the article is a brief overview of five different approaches to the role of the LXX in a whole-Bible biblical theology. The five approaches are: (1) LXX Priority and Canon, (2) LXX Priority, Hebrew Canon, (3) Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Bridge, (4) Hebrew and Greek Are Sanctified by the Spirit, and finally (5) Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Commentary. Building on the different perspectives surveyed in this study, it is suggested that the importance and function of the LXX in Christian biblical theology is at least fourfold: (1) The LXX can function as the source of Christian biblical theology; (2) The LXX is valuable for biblical theology in its role as a commentary on the biblical text; (3) The LXX is a bridge or link between the Christian OT and NT; and (4) The LXX complements the Hebrew Scriptures.

This is a great time for the study of the Septuagint (LXX), and there is an ever-increasing number of resources available for studying it.¹ Septuagint scholars are publishing monographs and dissertations,² new lexicons,³ commentaries,⁴ a new grammar,⁵

¹I presented an earlier version of this essay in the Septuagint Studies Consultation at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, GA, November 2015. My thanks to the participants in that consultation for their feedback and especially to William A. Ross for taking time to read and comment on a later version of the essay.

²For example, see the LXX titles published in the SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies Monograph Series, the *Vetus Testamentum* series published by Brill, and the *The Hebrew Bible and Its Versions* series published by T&T Clark.

³For example, T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009); J. Lust, E. Eynikel, K. Hauspie, *A Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, compiled by G. Chamberlain, 2 vols. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1992, 1996).

⁴For example, *La Bible d'Alexandrie* Septuagint commentary series ed. by Margaret Harl; Stanley Porter, ed. *Septuagint Commentary Series* (Leiden: Brill); Robert Hiebert and Cameron Boyd-Taylor, eds., *The SBL Septuagint Commentary Series* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature); and M. Karrer and W. Kraus, eds., *Septuaginta Deutsch: Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).

⁵T. Muraoka, *A Syntax of Septuagint Greek* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016).

translations,⁶ and introductions,⁷ and work continues on a full critical edition called the Göttingen Septuagint.⁸ Also, important works have been translated into English,⁹ and, of special interest for this study, several works are being published emphasizing the role of the LXX in Christian biblical theology and the importance of the LXX for the study of the NT.¹⁰ Also, scholars are calling attention to the fact that the discipline involves more than the quest to determine the original text of the Hebrew Bible/OT and that the study of the LXX is no longer simply a subdivision of Hebrew Bible or OT studies.¹¹ Increasingly, scholars are studying the LXX as a “free-standing Greek religious document” and attributing an independent voice to it.¹² In this regard the LXX is especially important for understanding the NT and for the discipline of biblical theology.¹³

Before we can begin to discuss the Septuagint’s relationship to biblical theology we must define some terms. The term “Septuagint” (LXX) refers, strictly speaking, to the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek in the third century BCE, as allegedly described in the *Letter of Aristeas*. However, the term is often used generally to refer to the Greek Jewish Scriptures, consisting primarily of translations of the books of the Hebrew Bible,¹⁴ but also containing additions to some of the books of the Hebrew Bible and some other independent works.¹⁵ This more general use of the term “LXX” is much like we might refer to the “English Bible,” without having a particular English translation in mind.¹⁶ My use of the term “LXX” in this article, unless otherwise noted, is a general use of the term, referring to the Greek Jewish

⁶ For example, Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Karrer, *Septuaginta Deutsch* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009); the French translation in *La Bible d’Alexandrie*; and the Spanish translation, *La Biblia griega: Septuaginta*, which is nearly complete.

⁷ For example, Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015); Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); and James K. Aitken, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint* (London: T&T Clark, 2015).

⁸ *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht).

⁹ See Natalio Fernandez Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G.E. Watson (Boston: Brill, 2000).

¹⁰ R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); McLay, “Beyond Textual Criticism: The Use of the Septuagint in NT Research,” *JNSL* 28 (2002) 69–85; Karen H. Jobes, “Got Milk? Septuagint Psalm 33 and the Interpretation of 1 Peter 2:1–3,” *WTJ* 63 (2002): 1–14.

¹¹ For the importance of the Septuagint for studying the text of the OT, see Peter J. Gentry, “The Septuagint and the Text of the Old Testament,” *BBR* 16 (2006): 193–218.

¹² Stanley E. Porter, “Septuagint/Greek Old Testament,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1099–1106, esp. 1103.

¹³ With reference to issues of language, Muraoka (*Syntax*, xli) maintains, “New Testament Greek can be best analysed, interpreted, and understood when one is intimately familiar with [Septuagint Greek].”

¹⁴ McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint*, 6.

¹⁵ See *Ibid.* Some of these additions and other works that are included in the LXX were translations from Hebrew or Aramaic, while other books [independent works] were originally composed in Greek. The issue of the meaning of the term “Septuagint” is further complicated by the facts that it was translated from Hebrew over several centuries, and the translations began to be revised shortly after they were completed.

¹⁶ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 14.

Scriptures, consisting primarily of the books of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷ As a point of clarification, most specialists use the term Old Greek (OG) to designate a (critical) text that in their judgment represents the original translation of books other than the Pentateuch,¹⁸ and some use the abbreviation LXX/OG, when referring to the initial translations of the Hebrew Bible as a whole, as a reminder of the diversity that characterizes the corpus.¹⁹

By “Scripture” I mean the books that have authoritative status for a faith community, such as the Christian Church or Judaism, and a “canon” is the official list of books that have the status of inspired Scripture for a faith community.²⁰ When I refer to biblical theology, I especially have in mind a “whole-Bible biblical theology,” which pulls together and attempts to make sense of the inductive, grammatical-historical exegesis of the individual passages of the Christian Scripture found in both testaments.²¹ It is an attempt to synthesize the content of the individual passages of Christian Scripture in a theology of the whole, and in this paper I would like to consider how the LXX might factor into such a theological enterprise. In J. Ross Wagner’s words, “Any attempt to elucidate how the two Testaments of the Christian Bible, individually and together, testify to the redeeming work of the Triune God must sooner or later address the question of the authority of the Septuagint as a witness to the biblical text and thus as a resource for doing Christian theology.”²²

The Septuagint is indirectly influential in the study of biblical theology because of its contribution to the determination of the texts of the OT and the NT. More importantly, perhaps, the LXX is significant for biblical theology because of its influence on the language of the NT and the use of the LXX in the OT references in the NT. McLay notes that most who have studied the influence of the LXX on the NT have focused on determining the sources of citations from the OT in the NT. Therefore, “few have ventured to examine possible allusions in the NT to the Greek Jewish Scriptures, and even fewer have sought to

¹⁷ McLay (*The Use of the Septuagint*, 6) explains, “A terminological difficulty is encountered when nonspecialists employ a reading from printed editions of the LXX (Rahlfs or Brooke-McLean) or a manuscript and refer to it as *the reading of the Septuagint* as though it represents the oldest recoverable form of that book. In such cases the text that is being used may represent a LXX reading, that is, it is part of the scriptural tradition that originated in the Greek Jewish community, but it does not necessarily represent the original reading for that book that can be critically reconstructed using textual criticism.”

¹⁸ McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint*, 6.

¹⁹ Jobs and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 16.

²⁰ See Eugene Ulrich, “The Notion and Definition of Canon,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 21–35. We should not think of the early collections of approved books as a Bible before the fourth century CE, since this is the first that the books of the Christian canon were placed together in one volume, a codex, and the term “Bible” means all in one book or inside of the same cover. On the meaning of “Bible,” see Eugene Ulrich, “The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures of Qumran,” in *Community of the Renewed Covenant: Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Eugene Ulrich and James VanderKam (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 77–93, esp. 79.

²¹ I am translating the German, *eine gesamtbiblische Theologie*. See the helpful discussion on biblical theology in D. A. Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective,” *BBR* 5 (1995), 17–41, esp. 20–23.

²² J. Ross Wagner, “The Septuagint and the ‘Search for the Christian Bible,’” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 17–28.

illuminate how presupposing the Greek Jewish Scriptures as the Scriptures of the NT writers may have influenced their theology.”²³

Probably the main and certainly the most foundational issue concerning the role of the LXX in biblical theology is the place of the Septuagint in the development of the Christian canon. Should the LXX be recognized as the OT of the church? And if it should, then what form of the LXX is the OT of the church: the fourfold form that contains the so-called apocryphal and deuterocanonical books (sometimes called the Alexandrian canon) or the threefold form that corresponds to the Hebrew Scriptures (Law/Prophets/Writings)? And furthermore, what historical stage of that form’s development is best? Or, is the LXX a derivative and secondary form of the Christian OT that should be understood and read in relation to, but not instead of, a Hebrew original? If it is secondary and derivative, then what place does it have in relation to the Christian Scriptures?²⁴ These questions are important because they have implications not only concerning the books contained in the OT, but also concerning the text of the OT, and the order of the books of the OT. And the implications of these questions are important for biblical theology, since biblical theology works from the text of an agreed upon canon of Scripture.²⁵

The question that I will begin to address in this article is *How does the LXX relate to the Christian Old Testament, and more specifically, how does the LXX fit into Christian biblical theology?* Or to say it another way, what role should the LXX play in determining a whole-Bible biblical theology? Some of the issues related to this question are far too complex to address adequately here, and I need to warn the reader at the beginning that this essay is introductory in nature and there are many related issues that will not be addressed in it. My goal in this essay is to summarize some of the present discussion on the question of the role of the LXX in biblical theology and attempt to show how the different positions on this issue relate to one another. Then, I will present a tentative and initial conclusion.

1. Different Views of the Role of the LXX in Christian Biblical Theology

I will consider and evaluate briefly five different approaches to the role of the LXX in a Christian’s attempt to construct a whole-Bible biblical theology (*gesamtbiblische Theologie*).

1.1. LXX Priority and Canon

The first approach to the role of the Septuagint in biblical theology is that of Peter Stühlmacher, Hartmut Gese, and their colleague at Tübingen, Martin Hengel. Stühlmacher and Gese, whose writings are more oriented to biblical theology than Hengel’s historical works, adopt a tradition-history approach

²³ McLay, “Beyond Textual Criticism,” 71. McLay comments that such work is certainly not beyond the reach of LXX research, since comments and studies abound on how the theology of the LXX translator is responsible for the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew *Vorlage*. McLay is interested in pursuing the influence of the translator’s theology in the forward direction (toward the NT) rather than the backward direction (toward the Hebrew *Vorlage*). In his book, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*, McLay attempts to demonstrate the importance of possible allusions to the Greek Jewish Scriptures in the NT for giving insight into the meaning of the New Testament. Scholars may debate the degree and manner of the LXX’s influence on the NT, but there is no doubt that its influence was substantial.

²⁴ In the words of Brevard Childs (*The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 313), those who want to interpret the Christian Bible must wrestle with “the textual tension between the Hebrew and the Greek.”

²⁵ Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology,” 27–29.

to Scripture as the foundation for biblical theology and for bridging the period between the OT and the NT.

For these scholars the OT consists of a stream of diverse traditions speaking over the head of any final literary statement that, once it begins, cannot stop developing. This developing stream of traditions finds its fulfillment and completion finally in the NT. For Gese, revelation is a human-oriented disclosure of God that can only unfold in a process, as proceeding toward a goal; that goal is that God appears, in the deepest depth of the human, in the human's uttermost distance from God. "Biblical theology is the comprehending reality of this revelation history, which leads through all stages of human existence in the historical process."²⁶ The task of biblical theology is to teach us to comprehend this whole tradition or path through Israel to the inclusion of the whole world.²⁷ The task of determining the theology of the whole tradition "confronts (a) the individual text with its preliterary antecedents, (b) the development of the text as literature with its own literary classification, and (c) the growth of the text tradition into a corpus embracing the whole."²⁸

It is the fulfillment in the NT that identifies the canonical direction and course of the tradition stream from its beginning to that point and finally stops the stream. Thus the NT relates not to a closed literary canon (of the OT) with a given form but rather to traditions in motion, which develop through the continual actualizing of the text.²⁹ As a result, these scholars include the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books, which are in the Septuagint, in the OT canon that was still developing in NT times. In this regard, they give the LXX priority for what they would consider to be a genuinely Christian biblical theology. They believe that for Christians this tradition-history approach points to the LXX as the stream through which the tradition flows, since the LXX is necessary to connect the tradition from the OT to the NT and since the LXX is the tradition most often cited in the NT. Furthermore, for these scholars, in the NT period the third division of the canon was under negotiation,³⁰ and thus their

²⁶ Hartmut Gese, "Tradition and Biblical Theology," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (London: SPCK, 1977), 326.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁹ With regard to this idea of continual development of tradition, Christopher R. Seitz ("Two Testaments and the Failure of One Tradition History," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 198) comments, "It is an empirical fact that the OT is more than growing traditions and endless refabrication, or else it would forever resist literary fixation in deference to movement and change and life processes. We would have no container holding the diversity we seek to valorize, with a fixed form and a delimited scope, if diversity and growth were ends unto themselves." Seitz raises several questions about the tradition-history approach. First, if diversity and growth are an end unto themselves as tradition-history suggests, then why is there any final, stable form to the OT? Also, how can we speak of a threefold or fourfold canon of the OT literature, if it bears witness to an ongoing process of tradition extending without interruption to the NT? The answer is that for many proponent of the tradition-historical approach there is no stable form of the OT canon, and the canon is open (*ibid.*, 198–99).

³⁰ Seitz clarifies concerning Gese, that for him "the NT ushers in a critical period when the limits of the OT canon are under negotiation. As such, one could not speak about a stable Scripture speaking a word over the tradition process, not even in the case of parts one and two (Law and Prophets)" (*ibid.*, 199).

tradition-history approach is connected to their conviction that the form of the canon of the Jewish Scriptures (Christian OT) was not fixed until the Christians (or Jews) gave it a fixed form.³¹

Martin Hengel's book, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, clearly demonstrates the implications of such a tradition-history approach for the discussion of the OT canon and the place of the Septuagint in the Christian canon. Hengel amasses a vast amount of detail and historical information concerning the Septuagint and the canon in the pre-Christian and early church periods. His argument (for the priority of the LXX) is built on the fact that the important codices of the 4th and 5th centuries (Vaticanus and Alexandrinus) contained the fuller LXX or Alexandrian canon in them.³² He explains that this phenomenon is evidence that Christians held to a fuller OT canon than the traditional Hebrew canon, although it is not always clear that the evidence supports his cause.³³ He develops the thesis that for the early church the center of Scripture was the fulfillment in the gospel, i.e., the truth of the gospel, and for the early church Scripture was not limited by a defined collection. Their primary Scripture was, of course, the Greek Bible, which, judging from their use of it, must have been for them a "bipartite reality."³⁴ On the one hand, at the center of this body of literature was a "relatively tight circle of frequently cited scriptures in which 'the Scriptures' were primarily seen from the perspective of the fulfilled prophetic promise." On the other hand, other texts including individual apocrypha and pseudepigrapha could also be used as "Scripture" in a quite free inspired treatment of those texts.³⁵ The main supports for Hengel's thesis concerning a bipartite canon are (1) the use of these apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts in the NT and early writings of the Church, (2) the presence of these same works in the early codices, and (3) the fact that the LXX, the OT of the Eastern Church and the OT text primarily quoted in the NT, contains many of these works.

Hengel argues that the rabbis with their pharisaic Jewish canon broke off history and historiography with the end of prophecy in the OT at the time of Artaxerxes I.³⁶ However, Christians continue the history of the developing tradition on to Christ. This continuation of the tradition involves the so-called apocryphal and deuterocanonical books in the Septuagint, as well as a wider dimension of other writings from around the first century CE like Josephus, Philo, and the Pseudepigrapha.³⁷ Hengel argues further that for Christians, since the NT is the conclusion, goal, and fulfillment of the OT, the OT must remain open until the NT fulfillment in Christ. Hengel questions whether the NT authors would share the same preoccupation with the concept of an OT canon that is found in the later church.³⁸ He

³¹ For summaries of their views, Gese, "Tradition and Biblical Theology," 301–26, and Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Toward a Hermeneutics of Consent* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

³² Although, the extra books contained in these two codices are not the same, Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 57–60.

³³ The respected Septuagint scholar Robert Hanhart argues that there was a relatively well-defined Hebrew canon in Alexandria in the second century BCE ("Introduction: Problems in the History of the Text of the LXX Text from Its Beginning to Origen," in Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 1–23). I further discuss Hanhart's argument near the end of section 1.2 below.

³⁴ Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 108, 110.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 102–3. Artaxerxes I reigned from 465–424 BCE.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 105–8.

asks, “Does the church still need a clearly demarcated, strictly closed Old Testament canon, since the New Testament is, after all, the ‘conclusion,’ the goal and the fulfillment of the Old?”³⁹ He follows this statement with what he feels is the most important example in the NT itself for the openness of the OT for the NT, the final. That example is John the Baptist, since Jesus says, “The Law and the Prophets are until John” (Luke 16:16; cf. Matt 11:13). For Hengel this passage proves that we “cannot go any farther back” than John to find the closing of the Old Testament canon.⁴⁰ Whether these words of Jesus have anything to do with the openness of the OT canon until John is most questionable. The context is one of fulfillment that suggests instead the point is that the OT prophesies until its fulfillment begins in John, the forerunner of the one who ultimately fulfills the Law and the Prophets.⁴¹

He concludes his book with a long quotation from his colleague Gese, some of which is worth repeating here.

A Christian theologian may never approve of the masoretic canon. The continuity with the New Testament is in significant measure broken here. . . .

The New Testament brought the formation of the Old Testament tradition to an end, a final conclusion. The formation of biblical tradition is thus, for the first time, in a deeper sense, canonical.⁴²

In summary, proponents of this first view, such as Gese, Stuhlmacher, and Hengel, believe that the LXX should be the Bible of the church.⁴³ Furthermore, they believe that if the LXX is the Bible of the

³⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 126.

⁴¹ Hengel seems to confuse the openness of the OT canon with what Jesus is clearly referring to, the period of the authority of those writings, which will be followed and superseded by the reign of Christ and his Kingdom. To say that the old era lasts until John, and that Jesus is the turning point and beginning of the age of fulfillment, the new era, does not mean that the canon of the OT must still be open until the time of John; it means that the prophecies of the OT prophets were pointing ahead to their fulfillment until Christ, and in Christ their prophetic function finds its fulfillment. In fact, Matthew 11:15 (which Hengel does not quote) makes it clear that they actually begin to find their fulfillment in John, who fulfills Malachi’s prophecy of an end time Elijah who was to come before the Lord to prepare his way. As mentioned above, Hengel’s approach focuses on the historical development of tradition rather than a prophecy-fulfillment relationship between the testaments. In this regard, the focus of the John the Baptist account in Matthew 11 is the fulfillment of the OT in John and Christ (Matt 11:3–6, 10, 14). In Luke the context emphasizes the fulfillment of every detail of the OT (16:17), not the continuation of OT tradition until the NT.

⁴² This is an English translation of Gese’s words as given in Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 126. Gese’s remarks come from his article, “Erwägungen zur Einheit der biblischen Theologie,” *ZTK* 67 (1970): 417–36. Cf. Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, JSOTSS 206 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 123n64.

⁴³ Tim McLay, like Gese, Stuhlmacher, and Hengel, argues for the priority of the Septuagint and also believes the OT canon was not closed until sometime in the early centuries of the church. In his book, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*, McLay concludes “. . . the Jewish Scriptures were in a fair degree of flux during the NT period. However, the forces that would eventually lead to the standardization of the Hebrew text and the fixing of the authoritative books in the Jewish tradition must also have been in place because the canon was fixed some time during the early centuries of the church” (143; see also 172). McLay cites Müller in support of his position, but Müller believes the canon was closed by the end of the first century, as discussed below. McLay also seems to believe that the Septuagint should be understood as the Christian OT. He concludes his book with the question: “How would our understanding of the NT be enhanced if we read the Greek Jewish Scriptures as the

church, it follows that the OT canon of the church should be the fuller canon of the LXX, not the Jewish canon. I call this view “LXX Priority and Canon.”⁴⁴

1.2. LXX Priority, Hebrew Canon

Mogens Müller, Professor of NT at the University of Copenhagen, espouses a second view of the role of the LXX in biblical theology that differs slightly from the position of Hengel, Stuhlmacher, and Gese. In his book, *The First Bible of the Church*, Müller argues that for Christians “in a biblical theological context we must insist that the Septuagint is at least part of a canon.”⁴⁵ Müller, like the proponents of the previous view, suggests that the OT had a fluid tradition history, and the OT texts were rewritten and redacted to make them applicable to later times and situations. Thus, following Julius Wellhausen, he theorizes that the prophets were not calling their recipients back to Moses, but rather “founding a new religion.”⁴⁶ He posits that the “date of the origin of the Law and Prophets and the Writings in their present shape and with their present religious concepts is to be found in the post-exilic period.”⁴⁷ The OT books were created over a short period of time, and the time when the misnamed “original” came into existence approaches the time when the LXX translation was made. Therefore, “the Greek translation may reasonably be seen as *evidence of a process reflecting changing traditions*”⁴⁸ that only gradually ended after the choice of a particular Hebrew text as the normative text. The LXX is “a witness of this process of transmitting traditions”; it is not just “a source for the underlying Hebrew *Ur-text*.”⁴⁹ In this regard the LXX is more than a word-for-word translation; it is a key witness of the handing on of traditions in the Hebrew Scriptures. Following Robert Hanhart on this point, Müller suggests that “the Septuagint is in many respects a theologically outstanding version of the Old Testament, amplifying the religious traditions of Judaism” and thus defining the meaning of the Jewish Bible “in the centuries around the birth of Jesus.”⁵⁰ For Müller, decisive differences between the so-called original and the translated text are only important in contexts where the goal is to reveal the “original intention of the original authors.”⁵¹ This goal, however, does not make sense when studying texts that in their present or final shape are the result of an editing process, like the OT. For such texts the focus of attention is the final form or the end of the tradition.

primary source for the interpretive and theological reflections of the NT authors?” (ibid., 173). It is important to note that although McLay apparently agrees with the Tübingen scholars that the LXX is the Christian OT, McLay does not come to this conclusion concerning the Septuagint on the basis of a tradition-historical reading of Scripture, as they do, but instead on the basis of historical evidence from the time of the early church.

⁴⁴ T. Michael Law also seems to take this position in his book, *When God Spoke Greek* (Oxford: University Press: Oxford, 2013); see esp. his Postscript (pp. 167–171). On p. 171 he asks what modern Christian theology would look like “if its theologians returned the Septuagint to the place it occupied at the foundation of the church, or at least began to read it alongside the Hebrew Bible?”

⁴⁵ Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 122.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 102. For Müller, the “Law is not the starting-point but the result of Israel’s spiritual development” (102).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 102, italics original.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 119.

⁵¹ Ibid., 143.

Another main point in Müller's thesis is his belief that the meaning of the OT is determined by the Church's interpretation of the events of Christ's life or the NT. There are two levels of meaning in the OT text, and it is the Christ events and beliefs of the church which are read back into the church's OT that determine its distinctive meaning for the church. For Christians, Jesus had given the correct meaning to their OT, and that meaning "was not immediately apparent from the text alone."⁵² The correct understanding of the OT for the church, therefore was determined by two poles, on the one hand, God's words as handed down in those holy writings and, on the other hand, the early church's "faith in and confession to Jesus Christ who has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets."⁵³ True understanding of the meaning of the OT in the NT context only comes when these two poles are activated. And since the OT text form that predominates in the NT is the LXX, then that is the text that determines the meaning for the last step of Christian tradition and is therefore a necessary part of the Christian canon. Müller writes,

In this way the wording of the Old Testament, in the shape it has in the New Testament, gains independent significance, and the Septuagint can be viewed as a true expression of the Bible which is called to witness. Moreover, the Septuagint has largely replaced *Biblia Hebraica* in the New Testament. For the New Testament authors this translation had tremendous impact. It influenced their wording of the Bible text decisively, and, to a varying degree, left its stamp on their language.⁵⁴

For Müller, to abandon the LXX is, therefore, to abandon the harmony and continuity of the two testaments.⁵⁵ He writes, "In a biblical and theological context the Septuagint does in fact convey, more convincingly than *Biblia Hebraica*, what the New Testament authors understood as their holy writ."⁵⁶

Also, he argues that the LXX is the Bible of the church, on the basis of textual evidence. He believes that the Hebrew text was still fluid in NT times, not being stabilized until 70–135 CE, and at that time the NT authors were primarily using the LXX instead of the Hebrew text.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the LXX may reflect an early Hebrew *Ur-text* that "had not been emended in line with a gradually emerging textual 'norm,'"⁵⁸ and thus represent an earlier stage of the OT text than the MT. He maintains that the evidence from Qumran suggests it is unrealistic to think that there was one Hebrew *Ur-text*, as if one can be sorted out which is the original upon which all further text transmission was based.⁵⁹ This clearly applies to the masoretic text tradition, which he believes has no claim to superiority.⁶⁰

⁵² Ibid., 126, 135.

⁵³ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 114, 119.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁰ In response to Müller's arguments it should be noted that although perhaps the early church favored the LXX, there is also much evidence for the use of a text form similar to the MT in the NT. Furthermore, it seems that both the LXX and Hebrew text forms were developing and changing in the first centuries of this era. Emanuel Tov critiques Müller's thesis and suggests it is not without its own problems, since "the quotations from the Septuagint in the New Testament often differ from the known manuscripts of the Septuagint" ("The Status of the Masoretic

Therefore, for Müller, one cannot maintain that the LXX is merely a translation and a secondary witness as compared to the Hebrew Bible. If the Christian Bible includes both the OT and the NT, and the OT version most often referred to in the NT is the LXX, then in the “biblical theological context” of Scripture, the LXX cannot be ignored and must at least be considered part of the Christian canon. In fact, in a historical perspective, Müller argues that the LXX became the OT of the NT for the early church to an even greater extent than the *Biblia Hebraica*.⁶¹ He concludes, “For the New Testament authors, the original text, that is, the text they drew on, was primarily the Septuagint.”⁶² For these reasons Müller believes it was a fatal mistake for the Church to put aside the LXX in favor of the Hebrew-Aramaic text.⁶³

It should be noted that Müller disagrees with Gese and his colleague Peter Stühlmacher on several important points. First, Müller believes that the boundaries of the Hebrew canon were firmly established before the beginning of the Christian era.⁶⁴ Second, and related to the previous point, he affirms that “the Septuagint’s part in the Christian reception of the Old Testament did not imply the inclusion of the Old Testament Apocrypha in line with the books contained in the *Biblia Hebraica*.”⁶⁵ Third, Müller sees the OT and the NT as two poles and seems to emphasize the meaning in both contexts and the fulfillment of the OT in the NT more than Gese and Stühlmacher, who to a greater degree than Müller see Scripture as a developing tradition and emphasize the endless pressure of the tradition to change and adapt.⁶⁶

In these regards Müller’s position seems to be similar to Robert Hanhart, whom he quotes several times in his work. Hanhart disagrees with Hengel’s “open canon” view that is discussed above in this article, and he argues convincingly on the basis of the evidence from the prologue of Jesus Ben Sirach, Josephus, Qumran, and the NT that there was a relatively well-defined Hebrew canon in Alexandria in the second century BCE. He believes “*in the realm of pre-Christian Judaism* of the Hellenistic period that all the writings of the ‘Palestinian canon’ transmitted in the Masoretic tradition already possessed the canonical status of ‘Holy Scripture.’”⁶⁷

Text in Modern Text Editions of the Hebrew Bible” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 240n31). Furthermore, Müller (*The First Bible of the Church*, 40) notes that the debate in the early Church was not the issue of the limits of the canon, but rather textual issues, and in the last centuries of the previous era the LXX was being compared with and edited toward the Hebrew text by the Jews, and in the first centuries of this era both Jews and Christians seem to be involved in this discussion. In fact, he suggests that the LXX text was not stabilized until after 70 CE (p. 44). Thus, Müller’s argument that the LXX is superior, because the Hebrew was not established yet, does not prove the superiority of the LXX type text. Both text traditions were developing in the NT period.

⁶¹ Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 116.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 25–45, esp. 27, 33, 113, 102–3. Müller remarks that what occupied attention about the Hebrew Bible at the time of the NT was not the number of books in it but textual differences (p. 40). He suggests that the words of the Hebrew text were fixed in the 3rd–4th century CE (p. 32).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 130; Seitz, “Two Testaments,” 197–201.

⁶⁷ Hanhart, “Problems in the History of the Text of the LXX Text from Its Beginning to Origen,” 4, italics original. Hanhart (p. 3) suggests the few exceptions in the evidence actually prove the rule, as does Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 34.

In summary Müller proposes that the LXX should be the OT of the church, like proponents of the previous view. However, unlike proponents of the “LXX Priority and Canon” view, Müller and Hanhart do not believe that the canon of the Christian OT should be the larger LXX canon, but rather the Hebrew canon. I call this position “LXX Priority, Hebrew Canon.”

1.3. Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Bridge

A third group of scholars believes that the LXX is something like a bridge between the authoritative, original OT *Ur-text* and the NT. They believe that the LXX was the Bible of the early church, by virtue of it being in a language that they could read, but they would not agree with the proponents of the previous two views that it also should be the main form of the authoritative Bible for the contemporary church. They recognize that the early Christian communities promoted the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, and these communities give no evidence of being chained to the Hebrew Bible; for these early Christian communities the new versions of the Bible were “not merely an aid to understanding the text but they replaced the original with authority.”⁶⁸ They argue that the LXX was very influential and important in the early church’s interpretation of the OT and acknowledge that it was in a very real sense the Bible of the Early Church, but they still acknowledge that the authority of the LXX is ultimately derived from the underlying Hebrew original of which it is a translation and reflection. They would agree with James Barr’s warning that biblical theologians dare not “pass without substantial temporal interval from the main body of the Old Testament into the New. There is . . . a time of ripening, as it were, in which the Old Testament is able to develop its effects historically within the life, history and thought of a historical people.”⁶⁹ For these biblical theologians the LXX would be a part of that development and could at some points reflect the developing theology of Judaism between the OT and the NT. Furthermore, in contexts where the LXX differs from the Hebrew the LXX reading may be an interpretive or theological rendering of the original, which the NT authors could employ, believing the LXX rendering is consistent with the intent of the original context (or at least the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures) and thus approving the theological content of the translation. For these scholars the LXX was the OT of the early church, and yet at the same time it is a translation of the Hebrew original and provides a link or bridge for Christians between the NT and the Hebrew original. This seems to be the position of Jobs and Silva, in their book, *Invitation to the Septuagint*. They write

One must appreciate that the continuity and development of thought between the Old and New Testaments is of particular concern for biblical theology. The Septuagint provides essential, but often overlooked, theological links that would have been familiar to Christians of the first century, but are not so obvious in the Hebrew version. . . .

[T]he Greek versions contain textual links not found in the Hebrew text that provide historical and literary continuity for the important task of biblical theology and for accurately understanding the exegetical debates of the early church fathers [since they were based on the LXX].⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context*, 346. Marcos has an excellent discussion about the openness toward translations in the early Christian communities.

⁶⁹ James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (London: SCM, 1964), 156.

⁷⁰ Jobs and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 5–9; see also 326–50.

Indications of their differences from Hengel and the proponents of the first view discussed in this paper are found in Jobes's review of Hengel's book, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*.⁷¹ Jobes disagrees with Hengel's conclusion that the basis for the acceptance of the LXX as the OT of the early church was the legend of its miraculous translation. Instead she believes the basis for its acceptance as the OT of the early church was its use by the NT apostles. She concludes her summary of Hengel's book by questioning his proposals that there was no clearly demarcated and strictly closed OT canon for the NT writers and that the church does not need such an OT canon. She is of the opinion that neither the evidence presented by the LXX itself nor the Jewish and early Christian use of the apocryphal books demands that Hengel's proposals be adopted. However, she does recommend careful consideration of the issues that Hengel raises and their implications.⁷²

In a footnote in their book, Jobes and Silva also clearly distinguish their position on the LXX from Müller's position, the second view summarized in this essay. They write that he "goes so far as to argue that the Christian church in the West was quite wrong to follow Jerome's preference for the Hebrew text over that of the Septuagint." They note further that while the arguments of Müller "are not persuasive, they are helpful for showing the great importance of the Greek text for early Christianity."⁷³ Thus, even though they acknowledge that because it was accessible in their language the LXX became the OT of the early Christian church, they are of the opinion that it is right to prefer the Hebrew over the LXX when translating the OT. In this regard they write,

Today's English translations of the OT are rightly based, not on the Greek or Latin versions, but on the best available Hebrew text, known as the Masoretic Text (MT). While the Hebrew is the best textual base for modern translations, we cannot forget that the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament was nevertheless the Bible of the earliest Christian writers.⁷⁴

Hence, Jobes and Silva emphasize that the LXX is a translation of the Hebrew original and they speak often about its role as a *link* or *bridge* between the Testaments.⁷⁵ However, these authors do not emphasize that the LXX should be for contemporary Christians the OT of their NT, instead of the Hebrew. For them the best text to use as a basis for modern versions is the Hebrew text, known as the Masoretic Text.⁷⁶ Thus, they distance themselves from the positions of Müller and Hengel. I will call this

⁷¹ Karen H. Jobes, review of *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* by Martin Hengel, *JETS* 46 (2003): 318–19.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 9n13. They refer to Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 143. Dines (*The Septuagint*, 143) also thinks Müller has gone too far, but she believes his position "draws attention to important issues in the relationship of between the NT authors and their biblical texts."

⁷⁴ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 9.

⁷⁵ See also Karen H. Jobes, "When God Spoke Greek: The Place of the Greek Bible in Evangelical Scholarship," *BBR* 16 (2006): 219–36 (esp. 234–36) for further examples of the LXX as a bridge or link between the testaments. Marcos uses similar language in describing the role of the LXX for theology. He calls it "a link between the religion of the Old Testament in its original language on the one hand, and the witness of the New Testament on the other" (*The Septuagint in Context*, 316). In an important discussion on p. 346 he writes that "Not only did Christianity adopt a translated Bible as the official Bible, but from the beginning it was a religion that favoured translation of the Bible into vernacular languages." Also Dines (*The Septuagint*, 135, 142–143, 152) gives examples of how the LXX bridges the Hebrew Scriptures and the NT.

⁷⁶ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 9.

position “Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Bridge.” By “bridge” I mean that the LXX is an important bridge (or link) between the testaments and it is also a bridge back to the original text, the *autographa*.

1.4. Hebrew and Greek Are Sanctified as Scripture by the Spirit

This is the view of J. Ross Wagner in his article “The Septuagint and the ‘Search for the Christian Bible.’”⁷⁷ In this essay Wagner “raises the question of how the two-testament nature of the Bible exercises its influence on Christian doctrine, given that the New Testament authors, most of the church fathers, and the Eastern Orthodox churches to this day have read the Greek rather than the Hebrew as the normative Old Testament of their Christian Bible.”⁷⁸ By means of interaction with Brevard Childs, Wagner “argues that the Septuagint highlights for theology the importance of the unfinished ‘search’ for the Christian Bible, not least because it extends key canonical trajectories that arise from the final form of the canonical text.”⁷⁹ Wagner employs John Webster’s dogmatic category of the “sanctification” of Holy Scripture to specify how the LXX “may, within the church’s ongoing search for the Christian Bible, legitimately be recognized as a norm for Christian faith and practice.”⁸⁰ For Webster the Christian Scriptures are human artifacts that are sanctified by the Spirit’s “election and overseeing of the entire historical course of the creaturely reality so that it becomes a creature which may serve the purposes of God.”⁸¹ The texts, though sanctified, remain creatures, and they continue to function in the divine economy as well as in the realm of human processes. As creaturely realities, the texts serve God’s purposes of “redemptive self-communication.”⁸² God’s Holy Spirit sovereignly superintends their function from pre-textual tradition to interpretation, and “because of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the translation, canonization, and reception of the Christian Bible . . . we are able to hear in the Septuagint, too, ‘the terrifying mercy of God’s address.’”⁸³ Thus, Wagner’s understanding of the LXX is that it stands alongside the Hebrew Scriptures to serve God’s purposes to communicate his “merciful self-manifestation to the obedient hearing of the community of faith.”⁸⁴ The application of the Spirit’s sanctification to the LXX is, of course, similar to the manner in which Origen and Augustine justified its role as a “norm for Christian practice and belief.”⁸⁵ Thus, the LXX complements the Hebrew Bible and together with it extends God’s continuing self-revelation as the Spirit illuminates people through them.

1.5. Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Commentary

There is a fifth position that is worth mentioning. As we have seen in our survey of the four previous views, some scholars and surely many other Christians understand the LXX to be something

⁷⁷ Wagner, “The Septuagint and the ‘Search for the Christian Bible,’” 17–28.

⁷⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, “Introduction,” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Wagner, “The Septuagint and the ‘Search for the Christian Bible,’” 27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28, quoting John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 28, quoting Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 41.

⁸⁴ Wagner, “The Septuagint and the ‘Search for the Christian Bible,’” 27, quoting Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

like a commentary on the OT or on the NT. A modern day representative of this understanding of the relationship of the LXX to biblical theology might be J. Julius Scott Jr., who argues that the literature of Second Commonwealth Judaism must play a significant role in understanding NT biblical theology by its illumination and clarification of the socio-historical-cultural background of the NT. Interestingly, he includes the LXX in this literature along with the “apocrypha, the so-called pseudepigrapha, the Qumran literature, inscriptions, official and private documents, the writings of Philo and Josephus, and parts of the rabbinic literature as well as the NT itself.”⁸⁶ Thus, although he probably would not want to limit the importance of the LXX for biblical theology to this function, he emphasizes its role in providing background information for understanding the NT “as first given” and for doing NT biblical theology.⁸⁷ I call this position “Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Commentary.” Such a view is clearly not sufficient to explain the role of the LXX in Christian biblical theology, and Scott would very likely agree with this conclusion.

2. Summary and Implications

In this essay I have surveyed various views that scholars have suggested concerning the place of the LXX in Christian biblical theology and grouped them in five categories. The five categories I have suggested for the views I surveyed are: (1) LXX Priority and Canon, (2) LXX Priority, Hebrew Canon, (3) Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Bridge, (4) Hebrew and Greek Are Sanctified by the Spirit, and finally (5) Hebrew Priority and Canon, LXX Commentary. Several complicated and interrelated factors affect the place of the LXX in Christian biblical theology. These factors include OT textual history, historical evidence concerning the OT canon, one’s understanding of inspiration and its relationship to the autographs, OT textual updating, and revelation and history and their relationship to or compatibility with a tradition-historical understanding of OT history. Furthermore, the very nature of the LXX complicates this issue. How does this diverse translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek,⁸⁸ which we call the LXX and which was in large part the OT of the early church at the time the NT was written, relate to the Christian Bible, OT and NT, which is in itself believed to be true, cohesive, and complementary?

Building on the different perspectives surveyed in this study, I suggest that the importance and function of the LXX in Christian biblical theology is at least fourfold, and these four functions overlap.

First, the LXX can function as the source of Christian biblical theology. Textual scholars are convinced that although the LXX is primarily a translation and, in some of its forms, a revision of the original Greek text, in some of the instances where the LXX disagrees with the MT it preserves an

⁸⁶ J. Julius Scott, “On the Value of Intertestamental Literature for New Testament Theology,” *JETS* 23 (1980): 317. In the remainder of the article Scott focuses on the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and the Qumran literature. The fact that Scott lists the NT as well as the LXX with other Second Commonwealth Jewish literature that illustrates and clarifies “the society, customs, issues, and world views assumed by Biblical writers” (317) indicates that he could see the function of the LXX for biblical theology as more than a commentary on the NT.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* By “as first given” Scott means that through this literature contemporary theologians receive insight into the world of the NT writers, and “the modern world may touch the ancient.”

⁸⁸ The LXX is diverse in a number of ways, and it also contains some works that were originally written in Greek and several books that are not included in the Christian OT.

earlier form of the Hebrew than the MT.⁸⁹ This is especially the case where details reflected in the text of the LXX that differ from the MT are also attested in manuscripts from Qumran or the Samaritan Pentateuch. Having said this, it is important to emphasize that although the LXX was in many ways the Bible of the early church and does at times bear witness to the earliest form of the Hebrew text that is available to us, it was with few exceptions understood to be a translation of the Hebrew, and revisions of it were invariably made toward an authoritative Hebrew text.

Second, the LXX is valuable for biblical theology in its role as a commentary on the biblical text. Here I am referring to situations where the LXX provides socio-political-cultural-historical background that sheds light on our understanding of the biblical text.⁹⁰ It is especially valuable for its role in providing background for the NT, but it is conceivable that it could function in this manner in the interpretation of the OT. In this role it joins with other ancient literature that provides background for the understanding of the Bible. It is also important to add that as all translations are the LXX is an interpretation of its *Vorlagen*, which are for the most part the books we call the Hebrew Scriptures, and thus it provides some of the earliest evidence of how Jews in the Second Temple period understood the OT. In this regard it is a commentary on the OT.

Third, and perhaps most important, the LXX is a bridge or link between the Christian OT and NT. The LXX's role as a bridge between the testaments is not as a part of a continuing tradition but as a unique literary connection that, as a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, reflects and interprets them, thus forming a link back to them. Then as the writers of the NT refer to and quote those Hebrew Scriptures, often in their Greek translation, the LXX provides the form of the OT promise that Christ fulfills in the NT, providing a link between the Hebrew Scriptures and the NT. The influence of the LXX on the NT is not limited to the citations from it in the NT; the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, style, and even theology of the LXX has influenced the NT.⁹¹ The Septuagint and the NT are also useful for doing textual-critical work on each other.⁹² Thus, for Christians the theological connection between their OT and NT is made in great part via the LXX, but the links between the LXX and the Christian OT and NT also extend beyond theology to many other areas.

This leads to a fourth role the LXX plays in a Christian biblical theology, the role of a complement to the Hebrew Scriptures. The LXX differs from the Hebrew in many ways, including its quantity, its order of books, verses within books, and words, and its meaning. Especially important for this discussion are contexts in the NT where a LXX text is used to support the argument of the NT text, and the meaning of the LXX passage employed in the NT differs from the meaning of the corresponding passage in the

⁸⁹ Determining such things involves retroversion of the LXX to attempt to reconstruct its Hebrew *Vorlage* in order to compare it with other Hebrew texts. The process is complex, and it is often difficult to determine if differences between the MT and LXX are the result of a different *Vorlage* or result from some other factor, such as the technique of the translator.

⁹⁰ See W. Edward Glenny, *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 149–273, for examples of this.

⁹¹ One of the best resources on the influence of the LXX on the NT is McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*; he has a section that specifically addresses the influence of the LXX's vocabulary, citations, and theology on the NT (137–70). Other helpful introductions to the influence of the LXX on the NT can be found in Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context*, 320–37, and Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 200–27. The *koine* Greek of the LXX is invaluable for studying the Greek of the NT.

⁹² Of course, the LXX is also valuable for the study of the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, style, theology, and text of the Hebrew Bible.

Hebrew. One example is the use of Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:16–18. I have argued elsewhere that the LXX rendering was a “theological” rendering and that the quotation in Acts, which comes primarily from the LXX of Amos 9:11–12, is composite, also including references to other OT passages.⁹³ In this passage the LXX reflects and repackages the theology of several passages in the Hebrew Bible in a unique way, and the LXX form is fitting for the argument of James at the Jerusalem Council, as described in Acts 15. Thus, I contend that Christian biblical theologians should understand theological statements that are unique to the LXX to complement and extend the understanding of the Hebrew Bible, as far as they reflect and repackage the theology found in the Hebrew Bible or as far as that reflected and repackaged theology of the LXX is picked up and used in the NT.⁹⁴ When the NT authors employ the LXX, the OT text in its Greek translation is Spirit-breathed Scripture in the NT context where it is employed. I would not argue that it replaces the corresponding Hebrew OT text as Scripture in the OT context, but by virtue of its inclusion in NT Scripture it functions as Scripture in that context and in that regard it complements the Hebrew Scriptures.

The LXX should be considered in doing Christian biblical theology. And in that regard, it would be helpful to have some works on the biblical theology of the LXX, primarily on the individual translations, but also on the whole, as far as that is possible.⁹⁵ Septuagint scholars debate the degree of possibility of writing a biblical theology of the LXX, but it seems there could be some progress, at least to begin with on the individual translation units of the LXX. One other way that biblical theologians could profit from the LXX is by consulting the growing number of commentaries on the LXX to study LXX quotations and references in the NT in their LXX context. As mentioned above, often the meaning of OT references in the NT that are taken from the LXX differ from their counterparts in the Hebrew Bible, and often the context of the LXX references in the NT differs from the context of such passages in the Hebrew Bible. A commentary on the LXX is an efficient means of checking the OT context of LXX references in the NT, and it could provide insight into the texts of the LXX and the NT.⁹⁶

The Septuagint scholar Sidney Jellicoe wrote, “He who would *read* the New Testament must know *Koiné*; but he who would *understand* the New Testament must know the LXX.”⁹⁷ And if knowledge of the LXX is necessary for understanding the NT, it is also certainly imperative for the practice of Christian biblical theology. Therefore, all biblical theologians should take to heart the words with which the nineteenth century German biblical scholar Ferdinand Hitzig is said to have begun his class in Septuagint: “Gentlemen, have you a Septuagint? If not, sell all you have, and buy a Septuagint.”⁹⁸

⁹³ See W. Edward Glenny, “The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15,” *BBR* 22 (2012): 1–26.

⁹⁴ By “repackage” I do not mean to change the content of the theology of the Hebrew Bible, but I mean to put it together in ways that differ from the ways it is found in the Hebrew. This is evident primarily when the LXX translators give a theological rendering of a text, basing their translations on theology found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

⁹⁵ Martin Rösel is one Septuagint scholar who has cast a vision for a “Theology of the Septuagint”; see esp. his article “Towards a ‘Theology of the Septuagint,’” in *Septuagint Research*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden, SBLSCS 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 239–52.

⁹⁶ See the LXX commentary series mentioned in n3 above.

⁹⁷ Sidney Jellicoe, “Septuagint Studies in the Current Century,” *JBL* 88 (1968): 199.

⁹⁸ Ferdinand Hitzig, quoted in Frederick W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 61.

John Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* and the New Perspective on Paul

— Douglas J. Moo —

Doug Moo holds the Wessner chair of biblical studies at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, and serves as the chair of the Committee on Bible Translation.

Abstract: John Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* is one of the most important books on Paul's theology in years. By setting Paul's teaching on grace in the context of ancient conceptions of "gift," Barclay is able to highlight the distinctiveness of Paul's teaching while at the same time setting that teaching in the context of his Jewish environment. As Barclay himself claims, then, the book opens the way for a way of thinking about Paul that does not obviously fit in either the "old" or the "new" perspective.

John Barclay's book *Paul and the Gift*, published late last year, has been receiving rave reviews.¹ Paul Foster has called it an "absolutely splendid study,"² while Tom Schreiner claims it is "stimulating and ground-breaking;" "one of the most important books in recent years on Paul."³ I agree. I think it is one of the best books on Paul's theology in the last twenty years. But why all the hoopla? One reason is the sheer quality of the book. It is wide-ranging. Barclay grounds his study of Paul in insights from cultural anthropology, provides a generally competent survey of the reception of the Apostle's teaching in the history of the church, and puts Paul in conversation with selected voices from Second Temple Judaism. The research is broad, and at the same time well-focused on the key scholarly contributions. He sets forth his argument in logic easy to follow and in English that is clear and even elegant at times.

But the greater reason for the attention the book is receiving is its attempt to chart a course between the Scylla of the "old perspective" and the Charybdis of the "new." In his conclusion, Barclay claims that his work on Paul and the gift opens a path beyond the dichotomies of the "old" vs. "new" perspective debate. Barclay is himself unsure about which direction his book ultimately leans, noting that it can be seen either as "a re-contextualization of the Augustinian-Lutheran tradition" or as a reconfiguration of the new perspective. A *via media* between old and new perspectives is a welcome development to many. To be sure, many scholars and pastors are pretty well entrenched on one side or the other. For many in

¹ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). This article was first delivered as a paper at The Gospel Coalition Council Meeting in Deerfield, IL (May 17, 2016).

² Paul Foster, "The Concept of 'Gift' in Paul's Thought," *ExpTim* 127 (2016): 340.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Paul and the Gift: A Review Article," *Them* 41 (2016): 52–58.

our ultra-tolerant culture, however, the famous cry “Why can’t we all just get along” captures their basic impulse. They are tired of debates over doctrine. They are confused about the theological issues at stake. According to my wife, I myself lean too far in this direction, tending toward a Charlie Brown “wishy-washiness” that too easily sees truth on two sides of an argument. I am probably guilty as charged. So, on the matter before us, I applaud James Dunn and Tom Wright for many insights they have brought to the study of Paul. At the heart of the new perspective is a concern to make the issue of Gentile inclusion the driving force and ideological hub of Paul’s theologizing. While I think new perspective is guilty at this point of an over-correction, they are on to something. And when we put their work in the big picture of theological options for interpreting Paul these days, we should also thank them for propagating basic orthodox and even Reformation views. If we have to choose sides, I am cheerfully going to align myself with the “old perspective.” However, I am also uncomfortable with the black-and-white division of the Pauline theology game into two teams. On the one hand, the dual schema ignores some other teams in the game, some of which pose far more serious challenges to the Reformation view of Paul than does the new perspective.⁴ And, on the other hand, scholars who hold quite significantly different views on a spectrum of important issues are forced to choose sides by joining one team or the other. For myself, while I think the “old” perspective has on the whole reads Paul more faithfully than the “new,” I incorporate insights from the new perspective in my description of Paul’s theology (though it is probably fair to say that most of those insights are ones that scholars long before the new perspective had identified). Put another way, I see my own work as an attempt to re-state and mildly tweak basic Reformation theology in light of current research.

But I stray from my purpose, which is to briefly and very inadequately summarize the state of play in current interpretation of Pauline soteriology in light of Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift*. To accomplish this, I will survey the course of the new perspective, describe Barclay’s main argument, and make some guesses about its ultimate significance.

1. The Old and New Perspectives on Paul

First, then, a brief history. Committing the reductionism that I just criticized, the course of the new perspective may be plotted in three main stages.

In the first stage, the key figures in the movement, Tom Wright and James Dunn, began their invasion of the “old perspective” redoubt with seminal articles that appropriated E. P. Sanders’s “new perspective on Judaism.”⁵ Sanders’s reconfiguration of Jewish soteriology as “covenantal nomism” posed a significant problem for the interpreters of Paul: just who was it that Paul was attacking when he denied that a person could be justified by “works of the law”? Since, according to Sanders, Jews were not trying to be justified by doing the law, some other problem within Judaism had to be identified as the culprit. Building on Krister Stendahl’s stress on the importance of corporate thinking in Paul’s world, Dunn and Wright identified the Jewish tendency to confine salvation to their own nation as that culprit. I might just note here that this “new perspective” on Paul grew out of a profoundly conservative impulse. In contrast to some more radical scholars who accused Paul of arbitrarily misrepresenting Judaism in order to

⁴By “Reformation view,” I refer to the common soteriological concerns of Luther, Calvin, and their heirs.

⁵See James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *BJRL* 65 (1983) 95–122 (republished with additional notes in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990] 183–214); and N. T. Wright, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” *TynBul* 29 (1978) 61–88.

score polemical points, Dunn and Wright tried to find a way to match Paul's polemic with the Judaism that Sanders described. And here, indeed, in my view, is the driving impulse of the new perspective. In all its diversity—and it is, of course, quite diverse!—the new perspective is fundamentally about re-reading Paul as a first-century “converted” Jew engaged in dialogue and dispute with covenantal nomism. Wright's massive and impressive project establishes a certain version of the “story of Israel” as the metanarrative within which Paul did all his theologizing. Dunn is less concerned with story but also reads Paul against the structures of first-century Judaism.⁶ The result is a shift in the axis of Paul's teaching from the *vertical*—sinful human beings and a just God—to the *horizontal*—the selfish Jewish people and estranged Gentiles. Paul attacks the law and its works mainly because it creates a barrier to Gentile inclusion; justification is a doctrine Paul deploys to offer Gentiles entrance into the people of God; Jesus—at least for Wright—is more the “second Israel,” fulfilling its role as the “light the Gentiles,” than the “second Adam,” whose obedience becomes the basis of salvation for those who believe.

In the years 1978–1985, then, the new perspective established a beach-head in the battle ground of Pauline studies. The next two decades saw the new movement consolidating itself and sparking serious resistance. Sanders's view of Judaism quickly gained ascendancy in the scholarly world—albeit not without questions and caveats. The “new perspective” itself equally quickly established itself as the “new orthodoxy.” Scores of articles, dissertations, and books developed the new view and worked it out in terms of texts and issues. Wright and Dunn initially characterized their approach as a necessary corrective to “Lutheran orthodoxy,” their label for the academic establishment which for many years had read Paul as if he were a sixteenth-century Christian trying to assuage his conscience rather than a first-century Jewish-Christian apostle who was trying to incorporate Gentiles into the kingdom of God as full citizens along with Jews. No wonder, then, that the new view met strong resistance from those convinced that the reformers, indeed, had Paul right. Scholars began to look critically at both the “new perspective on Judaism” and “the new perspective on Paul.”

Sometime in the early 1980s—the exact date is lost in the fog of time—I foolishly agreed to debate E. P. Sanders on these issues. At one point in the debate, Sanders asked me, “Dr. Moo, have you read the entire Mishnah in Hebrew?” “No,” I replied—too embarrassed to admit just how much of it I had read. “I have,” he said, “and I don't really think you have much standing in this debate.” He was right: early reactions to Sanders's covenantal nomism were hindered by a lack of expertise in the Jewish literature. This was gradually corrected, as a number of scholars conversant with these Jewish works were able to confirm that “covenantal nomism” was not quite the monolithic soteriology that Sanders claimed it was. Other scholars, while often acknowledging lack of balance in some traditional approaches, argued in various formats that the “old perspective” gave, on the whole, a more faithful reading of Paul's letters than the “new perspective.”

In the last decade, the battle lines between the old perspective and the new perspective have lost some of their sharpness at the same time as other movements have become powerful threats. As I have noted, most advocates of the “old perspective” recognized from the beginning, in various degrees, that the new perspectives on both Judaism and Paul contained some measure of truth. On the other side, new perspective advocates have appeared to back off from their earlier more polemical stance. Dunn now admits that Sanders's view of Judaism errs on the side of stressing “covenant” too strongly in relation to “nomism.” Both Dunn and Wright insist that their focus on justification and Gentile

⁶N. T. Wright notes that narrative framework is what is lacking in Dunn (*Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015], 98).

inclusion is not meant to push out the truth that justification, which at least in its initial form is “by faith alone,” puts sinful humans in right relationship with God. Wright wants to dismiss the language of “new perspective” altogether, to be replaced with a “fresh perspective” that melds the best of the two.⁷ He even speculates that the new perspective movement might not have been needed if the Reformation teaching had followed Calvin exclusively.

Perhaps one of the reasons “old” and “new” perspective advocates are “kissing and making up” is because they recognize the need to present something of a united front against more radical threats to traditional Pauline doctrines. The easiest classified of these threats is the so-called “radical perspective on Paul,” or, as some of its advocates are now labelling it, “Paul within Judaism.” While some of its basic arguments are not new, this movement has gained increasing momentum over the last ten years. As the Jacobins of the French Revolution were not content with a constitutional monarchy but pushed a more radical agenda, leading to a republic, so some scholars today view the new perspective as an ultimately unsatisfactory way-station in reconfiguring relationships between Judaism and Christianity. The problem is that new perspective advocates continue to think that Paul criticizes Judaism and in that respect are no better than the “old perspective.” Judaism is still faulted, the fault simply being relocated from “works righteousness” to “ethnocentrism.” These scholars read Paul as fully affirming Judaism. Paul’s polemic is limited to attempts to force Judaism on Gentiles. For all their differences—and I don’t want to ignore or minimize them—“old” and “new” perspectives are united in insisting that, for Paul, salvation is to be found in Christ alone. Wright has been particularly eloquent on this point. And, if I might just make here an observation that is probably obvious to all of us: it is precisely because Wright is close to what we might call “evangelical orthodoxy” that his views can attract such a following from among evangelicals.

Another trend in recent Pauline scholarship is a renewal of the Augustinian/Roman Catholic view of justification as more than forensic. Scholars from a wide variety of theological postures, including evangelical, are reviving the old criticism that standard Reformation teaching has at its heart a chasm

⁷Wright: “In particular, there is no need to perpetuate the battle between things that call themselves the ‘new perspective’ or the ‘old perspective’ on Paul. Both were, in any case, misleading in their singularity: there are many ‘new perspectives’ on the loose by now, and a good many significantly different ‘old perspectives’ as well. Insofar as the ‘new perspective’ ran the risk of collapsing into ‘sociology’ or ‘comparative religion,’ it of course needed to be rethought theologically to take account of, and to give the central place to, Paul’s emphases on the divine act in the cross of the Messiah and its appropriation by faith. Insofar as the ‘old perspective’ continued to base itself on a caricature of ancient Jewish beliefs, forcing old Jewish texts as well as Paul himself to give answers to questions they were not asking while ignoring the ones they were faced with, it of course needed to be rethought theologically to take account of, and give a central place to, the Jewish and Pauline emphases on the surprising and freshly revelatory divine act in fulfilling the covenant with Abraham and completing (balancing both meanings of *telos* in Romans 10.4!) the covenant with Moses. But I hope that the discussion in this book has given a quite new set of angles of vision—perspectives, I almost said—on the false either/or of the last generation. Protests are often necessary, even if sometimes overstated. Reactions are sometimes appropriate, even if sometimes shrill or merely nostalgic. Fuller integration, fuller reconciliation, is always the Pauline aim, and I hope we have gone a good way towards achieving it.” In *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1513–14. See also Dunn: “It also follows that the ‘new perspective’ should not be defined or regarded as an alternative to the ‘old perspective.’ The ‘new perspective’ does not pretend or think or want to replace all elements of the ‘old perspective.’ It does not regard the ‘new perspective’ as hostile or antithetical to the ‘old perspective.’ It asks simply whether the ways in which the doctrine of justification have traditionally been expounded have taken full enough account of Paul’s theology at this point.” In “A New Perspective on the New Perspective on Paul,” *Early Christianity* 4 (2013): 157.

between the believer's standing with God and his or her living for God. Noting the Finnish school revision of Luther's own teaching and often appealing to the unitive eastern orthodox doctrine of *theosis*, these scholars argue that justification is transformative, not simply forensic. Here again, Dunn and Wright have made common cause with old perspective advocates. For all his differences with the usual Reformation view, Wright, for instance, has been very clear about denying any transformative element in justification.

It would be interesting, and potentially helpful, to look here at some other recent emphases in the study of Paul that have the potential to shift both his theology and our preaching of his letters—the expansive view of what “gospel” means for the apostle, the degree to which his teaching may be seen as directed against the idolatry of empire, a focus on the power of sin and rescue from it at the expense of the problem of sins and their forgiveness, a prioritizing divine agency to the point that human agency almost disappears, and the question of how the clear focus on the corporate may be brought into correct balance with the equally clear focus on the individual. But these issues, though a prominent part of the program of new perspective advocates—one thinks here again of Tom Wright—are not really part of the “new perspective” per se. So it is time—finally—to assess Barclay's contribution to this continuing discussion.

2. Barclay's Contribution to Pauline Scholarship

First, I will briefly summarize the argument of *Paul and the Gift*. As the title of the book signifies, Barclay situates his discussion of Paul's teaching on grace within the larger context of “gift.” Only by setting Paul's grace in the wider context of “gift,” particularly in his own day, will we be able rightly to appreciate its place in his theology.

Barclay sets the table by analyzing the general concept of “gift,” which, he argues, is a potentially ambiguous and multifaceted concept. With the help of seminal studies in cultural anthropology, he sets out to disambiguate the idea of “gift,” or perhaps more accurately, to display its conflicting definitions. One of his key claims is that the idea of a “pure gift”—a gift given freely and without any expectation of return—is a modern notion. In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, gift-giving took place within a nexus of reciprocal relations. Gifts cemented existing relationships and were given in expectation of some kind of return. He concludes this initial discussion by setting forth six ways that “gift” could be “perfected”—that is, six characteristics that might define the essence of “gift”:

1. *Superabundance*—gift-giving is extravagant, lavish; as when one “showers” gifts on someone.
2. *Singularity*—gift-giving is unmixed with other postures; as when one relates to another solely as gift-giver and not, e.g., as judge.
3. *Priority*—gift-giving comes before the response it might be intended to evoke; as when parents give gifts spontaneously and freely to their children.
4. *Incongruity*—gift-giving “without regard to the worth of the recipient” (p. 73); as when God causes his rain to fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous.
5. *Efficacy*—gift-giving is powerful, accomplishing its purpose; as when parents give the gift of life to their children.
6. *Non-circularity*—gift-giving is unconditional, expecting no return; as when one gives food coupons to a homeless person.

Barclay concludes this section with the observation that debates about grace often involve “perfecting” grace in one way and then criticizing those who perfect it another way as not really believing in “grace.”

With the scaffolding put in place, Barclay next turns to church history, looking at the way key theologians have analyzed grace. He treats Marcion, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, several modern theologians, and concludes with Sanders. Generally, he argues that these figures “perfect” grace in different ways. Thus, for instance, “Augustine did not believe in grace *more* than Pelagius; he simply believed in it *differently*” (p. 77, emphasis original). Particularly important for our purposes is his claim that Sanders, and most new perspective advocates who follow him, make the mistake of treating “grace” too simply. By focusing on one “perfection” of grace—its priority—Sanders irons out the wrinkles in first-century Judaism, failing to discern just where the similarities and differences among Jewish works, on the one hand, and between Jewish literature and Paul, on the other, are to be found.

Jewish literature is Barclay’s next port of call. He analyzes Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, the Qumran *Hodayot*, Pseudo-Philo, and 4 Ezra and, in a pattern we should recognize by now, concludes that these writings “perfect” grace in different ways—but they do all perfect grace. Barclay’s view that “gift” can be perfected in different ways allows him to claim that Judaism was as a whole characterized by grace—even the rabbis, who often tied God’s grace to human worth, perfect grace in a certain way. As he says, “Those who deserve gifts are still the recipients of gifts, given voluntarily and without legal requirement. They do not *cause* the gift to be given (that is always a matter of the benefactor’s will), but they prove themselves to be its suitable recipients and thus provide the *condition* for its proper distribution” (p. 316). Barclay’s general conclusion on this section is nicely put: “Sanders is right that grace is everywhere; but this does not mean that grace is everywhere the same” (p. 319).

With the framework of analysis established, some historical perspectives in place, and Paul’s Jewish environment established, Barclay can turn finally to Paul. But Paul in a limited sense. He chooses to analyze only Galatians and Romans. He carefully works through most of both of these books, naturally focusing on occurrences of “gift” language. His interpretation takes account of recent academic discussion, is informed by history and theology, and often insightful. Two brief examples. In the ongoing battle between apocalyptic and salvation history in Paul, Barclay contests, on the one hand, the continuous progression from Abraham to Israel to Christ that marks the work of Dunn and Wright while at the same time faulting J. Louis Martyn’s “apocalyptic” view as failing to do justice to the continuity at the level of God’s plan and story (pp. 411–14). On a related point, he again criticizes Wright and Dunn for insisting that Galatians be interpreted within the framework of the OT and the Abrahamic story in particular. Paul, insists Barclay, gives hermeneutical priority to the Christ event, reading the OT stories in light of this epochal event. Barclay captures his view in another nice turn of phrase: “Paul finds *echoes of the gospel in the Scriptures of Israel*” (p. 418, emphasis original).

Two general points emerging from Barclay’s exegesis are worthy of note here.

First, on the critical issue of Paul’s polemic against “works of the law,” Barclay steers clear of both the ethnocentric view of the new perspective and the human doing focus of the old perspective. Paul does not suggest that works of the law are inadequate because sinful humans can’t do them well enough; nor does he argue that they are wrong because Jews, relying on an outmoded Torah, were using them to keep Gentiles out of the kingdom. Rather, what Paul is resisting is “the ‘objective’ (socially constructed) value systems that make works, and other forms of cultural or symbolic capital, accounted worthwhile or good.” What Paul objects to is “the enclosure of the Christ-event within the value-system of the

Torah, because for those whose lives are reconstituted in Christ, the supreme definition of worth is not the Torah but the truth of the good news” (p. 444).

Second, Barclay insists that grace is central to Paul’s theology. He faults Wright and Dunn for not giving Paul’s teaching on grace the fundamental importance it deserves.⁸ But, of course, it is not just grace as a generalized idea that is important for Paul but the particular way that he “perfects” grace. Paul, Barclay claims, clearly views the Christ gift as superabundant, prior, and incongruous. Paul does not perfect the singularity of grace since he maintains that God judges as well as saves. He does not perfect its efficacy, because taking divine efficacy to its logical conclusion would undercut human agency. Nor does Paul perfect the non-circularity of grace. God gives generously, prior to human response, and without regard to the worth of its recipients. But while the gift is *unconditioned*, it is not *unconditional*. That is, God’s grace is not given after the fulfillment of prior conditions, but it is given in expectation of a response. Indeed, Paul teaches that response is absolutely necessary, since the salvific goal of God in giving the gift is not attained without appropriate human response. Barclay here reminds us that no one in the ancient world would have expected a gift to be given without thought of subsequent obligation.

Barclay lays particular stress on the significance of incongruous grace in Paul’s life and theology. Paul is not unique in seeing grace as incongruous; Barclay thinks that the Qumran *hodayot*, Pseudo-Philo, and at least the voice of Ezra in 4 Ezra, also perfect grace in this way. But Barclay appears to suggest that incongruous grace has an especially significant role in Paul. “It is the incongruous grace that Paul traces in the Christ-event and experiences in the Gentile mission that is the explosive force that demolishes old criteria of worth and clears space for innovative communities that inaugurate new patterns of social existence” (pp. 498–99). Barclay agrees with new perspective advocates in locating the context of Paul’s theology in Gentile mission. But he does not think the Gentile mission generated Paul’s distinctive theology. “Paul’s radical policy in his Gentile mission is not a protest against ‘nationalism’: it is the disruptive aftershock of the incongruous gift of Christ” (p. 361).

Since this is not a book review, I will forego the usual list of pluses and minuses. Rather, I will mention several concerns related to our topic this evening and then conclude with an attempt to estimate the significance of the book for continuing debates about Paul’s theology.

An initial question—and it is a question more than a criticism—is whether the framework Barclay uses in investigating “gift” is the right one. As a matter of fact, I find his heuristic model very helpful as a tool to analyze the similarities and differences among ancient interpreters of “gift.” But we perhaps do need to keep in mind that Barclay’s description of the contours of gift in Paul’s day has its starting point in insights from modern cultural anthropology. Moreover, while Barclay cites ancient texts to support each of his six “perfections” of gift, the scheme itself appears to be his own attempt to characterize the different ways gift was understood in Paul’s world.

I also wonder about the decision to treat Paul’s teaching on grace within the semantic concept of “gift.” Of course *χάρις* often means “gift”; it is one of the semantic categories in the lexicon of Louw-Nida used to define the word. But it might be instructive that Louw-Nida list the semantic concept “gift” second, after “kindness.” BDAG lists “gift” within the third definition they give; the first is “a winning quality or attractiveness that invites a favorable reaction”; and the second “a beneficent disposition

⁸ Although Dunn would appear, at least in his explicit claim, to escape this criticism. He argues that “*charis* joins *agape* at the very centre of Paul’s gospel. More clearly than any other, these two words, ‘grace’ and ‘love,’ together sum up and most clearly characterize his whole theology” (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 320).

toward someone.”⁹ I don’t want to make the mistake of over-analyzing the lexicons. But I do wonder if the sequence of their analyses might point to an underlying issue in Barclay’s discussion. An analysis of Paul’s teaching of “grace” within the general framework of “gift” might miss, or at least fail to do full justice to, the way Paul seems to ground the Christ gift in God’s own character and disposition. In my reading of Paul, the character of the Christ event as sheer gift is the necessary manifestation of God’s utterly unqualified posture of benevolence toward his creation, rooted in his nature as a One whose own will is the only cause of his actions. Barclay does not ignore this dimension of grace, but by making “gift” the overall semantic category of χάρις, Barclay may not fully account for this important aspect of Paul’s teaching on grace.

Another way in which Barclay may fail to describe the breadth of Paul’s teaching is noted by Tom Schreiner in his *Themelios* review article. Following the “critical orthodoxy” of the academy, Barclay dismisses Ephesians and the Pastoral epistles as “deutero-Pauline,” further arguing that their perspective on grace is somewhat differently focused than what Barclay has found in Galatians and Romans. Now, on the one hand, limitations of space and time make the decision to focus on the two Pauline letters most important for his teaching on grace hard to quarrel with. However, this limitation does mean, as Barclay acknowledges, that his conclusions about grace in Paul might have been slightly different if he had taken into account all thirteen letters ascribed to Paul.

Barclay’s robust discussion of historical theology is very welcome and, from the perspective at least of this rank amateur, generally accurate. I do fault him at one point, however. He argues that Luther and Calvin differed somewhat in their way of characterizing the problem of the law. While Luther stressed that the problem was the boastful attempt to use the law to gain status with God, Calvin focused on the sheer inability of humans to meet the demands of God’s law. I worry a bit that this distinction might fail to capture the nuances of both reformers’ views. More important, however, is Barclay’s tendency to cite the Lutheran subjective posture of seeking to secure righteousness as the Reformation perspective that he contrasts with his own view (e.g., p. 444). Focusing more on the human inability issue—which, in my view, is the more fundamental issue for Paul—might have shifted the contours of these exegetical discussions.

These questions and criticisms are not fatal to the basic argument of *Paul and the Gift*. And, on the other side, the book contributes significantly and usefully to the continuing debate over the basic thrust of Paul’s theology.

First, the analysis of gift in terms of its various perfections provides us with a tool to more accurately characterize Second Temple views on grace. In place of a definition of grace in terms of prior divine action that was so general that Paul and virtually all Second Temple Jews could be lumped together, Barclay has given us a tool which we can use to chart more accurately similarities and differences among these writers. To be sure, Barclay is not the first to point out the differences in the way Paul and his Jewish contemporaries understand grace; but his framework enables us to describe with greater precision just where these similarities and differences lie. Moreover, while Barclay is concerned to stress that it is wrong to think that Paul believed in grace more than other Jews of his day, he also suggests that there was something about Paul’s teaching on grace that made his view distinct. “The way Paul radicalizes the incongruity of grace, and the distinctive way he connects that grace to the Christ-event and practices it in his Gentile mission, relatives the authority of the Torah in a way unparalleled among his Jewish peers” (p. 566).

⁹BDAG 1079–80.

Second, Barclay's book has the very great merit of putting grace at the center of Paul's theology. This is a word Paul uses 100 times and which he uses as a distinctive characterization of what God has done in Christ. Paul nowhere defines χάρις, but he everywhere assumes it and often puts it at the center of the new realm that Christ has inaugurated. "Grace" has "appeared" and "teaches" us (Titus 2:11–12); we "stand in grace" (Rom 5:2) and live under its reign (Rom 5:21; cf. 6:14, 15). Whether Barclay's claim that Dunn and Wright underplay the role of grace in Paul is justified or not, it can be said, I think, that they tend to limit its significance by tying it so much to Paul's concern about overcoming ethnocentrism. Barclay, in contrast, gives Paul's "incongruous grace" a vital role in the apostle's self-understanding, in his analysis of the human condition, and in generating the sequence of Paul's argument in letters. For instance, commenting on the Antioch incident (Gal 2:11–14), he says "the good news is good precisely in its disregard of former criteria of worth, both Jewish and Gentile: the gospel stands or falls with the incongruity of grace" (p. 370). Similarly: "Paul's radical policy in his Gentile mission is not a protest against 'nationalism': it is the disruptive aftershock of the incongruous gift of Christ" (p. 361). To be sure, in an excess of enthusiasm for his subject, Barclay perhaps occasionally over-emphasizes the role of grace. I am not convinced, for instance, that incongruous grace is the main point Romans 9 is making or that it can in itself explain the flow of thought from chapters 9 to 11 (cf. pp. 521–26). But, while recognizing that the Gentile mission was the context in which Paul developed much of his theology, Barclay is to be applauded for locating the generation of that theology not in Jewish nationalism but in a more fundamental and broadly human factor: the incongruous grace that Paul himself experienced when God "revealed his Son" to him.

A third area in which Barclay provides a more satisfactory interpretation than the typical new perspective approach is his explanation of the "works of the law" vs. grace and faith contrast. This contrast lies at the heart of interpretations of Paul's soteriology. It occupies a central role in general reformation theology. Although the reformers recognized that Paul's "works of the law" referred to obedience to the Jewish Torah, they were convinced that the phrase ultimately should be interpreted as including any kind of human obedience. They therefore identified in this contrast a basic anthropological contrast between "doing" and "believing." Because Paul therefore excludes all human "doing," the appropriation of Christ by "faith alone" is the necessary corollary. And they also grounded this claim in grace: if God by his nature relates to humans only by grace, then justification must be by faith and not by works of any kind (see Rom 4:4–5). I think that Barclay may be closer to the reformers than to the new perspective on this point. Yes, he is very clear about distinguishing his view from the typical Reformation concern about "good works" becoming a basis for salvation. But he is equally concerned to distance himself from the usual new perspective view that Paul polemicizes against a Jewish concern to confine righteousness to the possession and performance of the Jewish Torah. For Barclay, rather, as we noted earlier, Paul resists all "objective' (socially constructed) value systems" (p. 444). The good news of God's grace in Christ, he claims, "brings into question *every* pre-existent classification of worth." I wish Barclay had spelled out more clearly just how we move from the phrase "works of the law" to "value system," but his view represents a move away from the new perspective and some distance back to the old. On Barclay's reading, one can move, it would seem, pretty directly from Paul's "works of the law" to any human value system. To be sure, it is still the system rather than human attempts to meet its standards that are the problem. In other words, a person might fully meet the demands of their own value system and fall short of God's approval because the system itself is at fault. On the one hand, then, Barclay is closer to the new perspective in insisting that it is "law" and not "works" that is the key word in Paul's debated phrase; but he is closer to the old perspective in finding in the phrase a universal condemnation of

human systems of worth. It should be acknowledged that Dunn and Wright find a broad criticism of human works in Paul's polemic against "works of the law." The problem is that I am sometimes not sure how their exegesis in terms of "covenant markers" leads to these conclusions. Barclay provides a more secure foundation for this broad application.

Barclay's *Paul and the Gift*, then, raises significant questions with both the "new perspective on Judaism" and the "new perspective on Paul." As someone who has raised similar questions over the years, I appreciate these criticisms—even if Barclay ends up somewhere between "old" and "new" perspectives on the spectrum of Pauline interpretation. His book is truly a gift to the academic study of Paul's theology—though not, in his own terms, a "singular" gift.

3. Concluding Exhortations

As something of a postscript, let me conclude with a series of exhortations to fellow teachers and preachers. The balance they embody is nothing new; the best of the old perspective has insisted on these same kinds of balanced approaches for centuries. Yet it is perhaps worth restating them in an attempt to remove caricatures of the old perspective in some quarters and at the same time to warn those of us who identify with the old perspective about an excessive zeal in defense of our view that can result in imbalances and distortions.

1. We must preach the good news that Jesus has been enthroned as Lord in all its Pauline breadth—without in any way blunting what was clearly for Paul its cutting edge, the offer of new life through Christ's death and resurrection.
2. We must preach the lordship of Christ in all its dimensions, including its implications for the totalizing claims of the state and other institutions.
3. We must proclaim that God in Christ breaks the power of sin but that he does so by providing forgiveness for our sins in the substitutionary death of Christ.
4. We must preach that God draws people to himself through his incongruous grace—without shying away from insisting that people must themselves respond in faith to God's offer.
5. We must proclaim that God in Christ justifies the ungodly individual, at the same time as we make very clear the way that God's justifying action is the spring board for the breaking down of ethnic, racial, and gender barriers.
6. We must reiterate the great Reformation truth that God's justification is an entirely forensic act at the same time as we make clear to our people that no one can receive the gift of justification without at the same time receiving the gift of sanctification.
7. We must proclaim that people are justified by faith alone with all the vigor we can at the same time as we warn people that they will not go free in God's judgment without works.

PASTORAL PENSÉES

Numbering *and* Being Glad in Our Days: A Meditation on Psalm 90

— Mike Bullmore —

Mike Bullmore is senior pastor of CrossWay Community Church in Bristol, Wisconsin, and serves on the council of The Gospel Coalition.

Abstract: Psalm 90 tells us that our lives are ever so brief and it also tells us why. It is the result of God’s just judgment on us. In light of these realities we are instructed, somewhat paradoxically, both to “number our days” and “be glad all our days.” How is this possible? Ultimately Psalm 90 points us to the God who out of his “steadfast love” has done something for his people that reverses the judgment and enables us to live with an abiding, in fact an eternal, joy.

Psalm 90 is ancient wisdom, but it is the kind of ancient wisdom that is timeless.¹ It is the only psalm written by Moses, at least as far as we know, so it predates most of the psalms by several centuries. It is, however, not one bit less relevant today than it was when Moses first wrote its words.

Moses begins his psalm talking to God about what he is like. “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations” (v. 1). As soon as we read or hear those words we are immediately drawn to that idea of God being our “dwelling place.” That speaks of security and rest and refuge and it sounds so comforting and attractive, especially if our circumstances are currently challenging. And it’s true. God is the dwelling place of his people. We live in him and the Bible is very eager for us to know that. But, for Moses speaking here, that is almost a given. What he is stressing is not the “dwelling place” part but the “in all generations” part. “Lord, you have been our dwelling place *in all generations.*”

Moses is not marveling here that God is our dwelling place. Certainly he loves that truth, as should we. Here he is marveling at God’s unchangeableness, his eternal unchangeableness. That becomes clear in verse two: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, *from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*”

It is very important that we correctly identify and not miss that emphasis. But it’s also important that we see Moses’s purpose because even though Moses is stressing the eternal unchangeableness of God his purpose is actually to contrast that with our mortality, and so to confront us with our

¹This meditation was first delivered at The Gospel Coalition Council Meeting in Deerfield, IL (May 18, 2016).

mortality. Notice the argument and emphasis of verses 1–3: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting *you* are God. You return *man* to dust and say, ‘Return, O children of man!’” It is our mortality he is stressing. Then, in verses 4–6, Moses proceeds to unpack that point, which is his main point, at least in these opening verses.

Consider verse four: “For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.” What’s the point there? Moses is saying that even if we were to live a thousand years that would be just like a day in God’s sight. In fact it would be less than that. It’s like “a watch in the night,” a brief four-hour span. Even if we lived a thousand years that would be next to nothing to God. And the fact is we don’t live anywhere near a thousand years. This very psalm reminds us that “the years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty” (v. 10).

What is the point of verses 3–4? Unlike God, we are not everlasting. We are mortal and our lives are very brief. Verses 5 and 6 drive this point home: “You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.” What is Moses saying? Life is really short.

The Bible is not sparing in its pressing of this point. “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (Jas 4:14). “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath” (Ps 39:5). “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle” (Job 7:6). “My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away” (Job 9:25). “[My days are] like an eagle swooping on the prey” (Job 9:26). “You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream” (Ps 90:5). The point is clear, and we feel it! And we feel it all the more as time passes.

I am presently fifty-seven years old. In three brief years I will be sixty. That doesn’t bother me much at all. But what can throw me a bit is the fact that in just thirteen years I’ll be seventy. That’s the age that is specifically named in verse 10! When I was twenty it was unfathomable to me that I would ever be seventy. I knew it as a fact but it really didn’t register in my psyche at all. I couldn’t imagine it. In truth, it wasn’t so much that I couldn’t imagine it. I wasn’t even trying to imagine it. I wasn’t even thinking about imagining it. Now I’m fifty-seven and I’m thinking about it.

Bring the point home to yourself. If you are in your fifties or sixties or seventies you are probably already tracking with me. But let’s say you are in your forties, or thirties, or twenties. This psalm is saying it is not too soon to come to terms with the brevity of your life.

I learned in my church history classes that certain medieval scholars would place a human skull on a shelf where it could be regularly seen as they studied, as a vivid reminder of their mortality and the brevity of their lives. It was a regular practice in our own society, until seventy or eighty years ago, for a church to have a graveyard adjacent to the church building, not just as a matter of convenience but as a statement and so that every Sunday there would be a regular reminder of this truth from God’s Word.

God’s Word is very clear. Life is short and we will die. And that raises a burning question in the human heart, present there whether fully articulated or not. Why? Why do I have to die? And why so soon? Why is life so short?

Verses 7–11 provide the uncomfortable answer to that question. “For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and

trouble; they are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?" These verses are not easy to understand and once we understand them they are not easy to accept.

When verse 7 says "we are brought to an end by your anger" it is not talking about God's occasional anger directed toward us. That is talking about a decision, a judgment God made in his righteousness, the result of which is our mortality and the brevity of our lives. There was a clue to this back in verse 3: "You return man to dust and say, 'Return O children of man.'" That should remind us of something God said back in Genesis chapter three. In Psalm 90 Moses is very clearly alluding to Genesis 3 (which he wrote by the way). When he writes these verses in Psalm 90 he has in mind the curse, that righteous judgment that God made on Adam and Eve (and their progeny) for the sin they committed in Eden. (We hear echoes of Genesis 3 in verse 10 as well.) That's why there is this reference to our sin in verse 8: "You have set our iniquities before you."

Do you see how that explains verses 7 and 9? "We are brought to an end by your anger." "All our days pass away under your wrath." Our mortality and the shortness of our lives is a direct result of God's judgment in consequence of man's sin.

And it also explains the question of verse 11: "Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?" In other words, who thinks about this? Who makes this connection? People don't typically think of the relationship between their mortality, their sin, and God's judgment. I've never had an unbeliever come up to me and say, "I'm experiencing the wrath of God on my life today as my life hastens to its end." Yet that is exactly what is happening. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). And the main way God's wrath shows up is in our mortality and the brevity of our lives. That is the main, and searing, point of the first eleven verses of this Psalm.

However, all is not lost. Moses says in verse 12: "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." The first part of that verse is simply reiterating the point Moses has already made. "Teach us to number our days." Teach us to recognize that our days are, in fact, numbered. That's the main truth Moses was teaching in verses 1-11 and here at the start of verse twelve he's simply asking God to help us get that truth.

But even in that restatement Moses is beginning to suggest what the rest of verse 12 says explicitly. "Teach us to number our days *that* we may get a heart of wisdom." Life is short and apparently everything is at stake in this short life so God's Word is calling us to be wise. And the big question is, "How?" How does that happen? How does living wisely come about? The answer is right there in verse fourteen. "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

The only true wisdom is God's wisdom and living wisely can happen by only one means and that is being "satisfied" with God's steadfast love.

But we need to back up for just a moment. Right at verse 13 something turns in this psalm. While Moses is very aware of the situation we live in under God's judgment he also knows that's not the end of the story. There is something in him, something very strong in him, that cries out in verse thirteen: "Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!" Translation? "Do something God! Don't leave us in this situation! Have mercy on us!"

And he just continues in that vein. The entire rest of the psalm is a prayer of Moses pleading with God. You could take those words "O Lord" from verse 13 and distribute them all the way down to each

verse. “O Lord, satisfy us!” (v. 14). “O Lord, make us glad!” (v. 15). “O Lord, let your work be shown to us!” (v. 16). “O Lord, let your favor be on us!” (v. 17). O Lord, do something to save us!

And this is not just some desperate prayer in the dark for Moses. He knows what he’s asking for. He knows what he both wants and needs the Lord to do. It is summarized powerfully there in verse 14. In fact, Psalm 90:14 is one of the great summarizing verses of the Bible. “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” That’s what is needed. And the key thing there is in that little two-word phrase “steadfast love.”

That phrase speaks of God’s eternal and unbreakable commitment to love his people. It speaks of his eternal and absolutely reliable love. Sometimes it is spoken of as his covenant love but the key idea is the love that flows out of his character, out of his own heart.

Despite the reality of his judgment, there is still this commitment to love and we can see how critical this is to the thought of verse fourteen: “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, *that* we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” We can feel the weight of that, especially after having heard what verses 1–11 have said about our days.

See, God’s steadfast love is not just critical to the thought of verse 14. It’s critical to our existence. It reverses everything! We’ve been wrecked, completely devastated by our sin and God’s righteous judgment on it. We live all our days under that judgment with the brevity of our lives always right there in front of our faces, whether we think about it or not. It’s dismaying. So we cry out, “O Lord, have pity! Rescue us! Bring us out of the hopelessness of all that! Show some favor to us! Instead of dismaying us, satisfy us! Bring us to a place of wholeness!” And we know what will do that. At least Moses knows.

It is the steadfast love of the Lord for his people. It is the demonstration of, the expression of God’s deep-hearted commitment to love his people. It’s his steadfast love and it’s entirely of his own initiative.

I can’t write those words without thinking of Romans 5:6–8: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

That is the only thing that will cause a people who have been so devastated by sin and God’s judgment to be rescued and, therefore, to be able to rejoice and, in fact, be glad, all our days! If God doesn’t show his steadfast love for us we’re still in verses 7 and 9—still dismayed by God’s anger, passing our days under his wrath with no hope. If God doesn’t show us his steadfast love we’re stuck in verse 10, seventy or eighty short years of life with the terrifying prospect of eternity separated from God to follow.

But now, because “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son” anyone who “believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). In this we can rejoice and be very glad all our days!

And instead of not giving any thought regarding these things, as we saw in verse 11, we, as steadfast-love-rescued and steadfast-love-satisfied people, can desire God’s saving work to be made much of before God’s people and their children (v. 16). And in the end, it is that demonstration of steadfast love that is the ground we stand on to say, with Moses, whether with reference to our lives, our ministries, or our participation in the larger work of God in the world, “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!”

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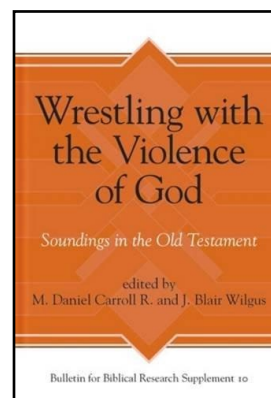
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— OLD TESTAMENT —

M. Daniel Carroll R. and J. Blair Wilgus, eds. *Wrestling with the Violence of God: Soundings in the Old Testament*. BBR Supplement 10. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015. £26.39/\$37.50.

Divine violence has become a heated discussion point in recent years, and Christians have been writing many volumes on this topic to defend against the attacks of the “new atheists” (for example, see Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan’s *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014]; Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan’s *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013]; and Joshua Butler’s *The Skeletons in God’s Closet* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014]). This particular volume is the result of a session of the Old Testament Theology study group at the 2012 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. Each author was assigned the task of looking at divine violence in a specific corpus of the Old Testament in which they are an expert, with the goal of situating divine violence within the overarching theology of the corpus.



The introductory chapter by the editors sets up the issue by describing the problem that many have with the violent deity of the Old Testament and how Christians have responded. For those unfamiliar with academic study of the topic, this chapter is a good place to start and the very full footnotes direct the reader to the essential works on the topic. In short, the problem revolves around serving a God who acts in violent ways and commands his people to act in violent ways; the preeminent example is the commanded destruction of the Canaanites, which sounds very similar to the modern definition of genocide. If we then proclaim that God loves the world and sent his Son to die for us, how can we reconcile the gospel with such harsh actions against large groups of humans in the Old Testament?

In the second chapter Paul Kissling addresses the “near-sacrifice of Isaac” in Genesis 22 (often called the *Aqedah*). He summarizes his article with the following words:

It must be granted that, removed from its textual, historical, early interpretive, and canonical contexts, the *Aqedah* can and has been used to justify all manner of evil. Nevertheless, it is only within its textual, historical, early interpretive, and canonical contexts that this text has been accepted as authoritative. Those contexts do not support understanding this text as justification for God’s people to inflict violence on the innocent. (p. 28)

The third chapter, by Daniel Block, covers Deuteronomy by looking at the forms, targets, and motivation for divine violence. Highlighting how both non-Israelites and Israelites were targets of YHWH’s violence, he shows how YHWH acts violently in response to moral offenses (usually those of the Israelites) and ungodly religious conduct (primarily referring to the Canaanites). In particular, YHWH acts violently against the Israelites for two types of behaviors: “those that challenge the integrity of human relationships, especially within the family and the clan, and those that challenge the integrity of God’s relationship with his people” (p. 37). YHWH acts “within the framework of divine perfection, justice, fidelity, integrity, righteousness, and consistency” (p. 36). Block ends the chapter with ten very

helpful observations to help us think through the commanded destruction of the Canaanites, including its basis in divine command, its background in Genesis, its focus on sin rather than ethnicity, and its paradigmatic role showing that we all deserve judgment.

Hélène Dallaire examines the book of Joshua in chapter five, briefly covering the history of interpretation, the view that the book was written during the time of Josiah, and how YHWH acts as a warrior god in the book. The second half of the chapter looks at the rhetoric of violence in the book, emphasizing that the Canaanites could have accepted the Israelites peacefully and that the Canaanites were not worse than other nations (though she grants the possibility that a small portion of the Canaanites might have been this evil). Recognition of the genre of Joshua leads us to reading the book not “as an exact description of the events but rather as historical national literature in which the accounts reflect the literary traditions of the day, the rhetoric of military records, and the theological language of Israel” (p. 72).

In chapter five David Firth studies the imprecatory psalms. After identifying the characteristics of the individual and communal imprecatory psalms, he concludes that Christians may use such prayers today because YHWH continues to care about justice, but only as an extreme ethic as they recognize their own powerlessness and examine carefully the basis of their desire for vengeance. Similarly, Heath Thomas surveys divine violence in Lamentations in chapter six by helpfully dividing the topic into divine passivity, distance, and activity. In a world where divine passivity and distance seem much more real to us than divine violence, the book of Lamentations guides us as we face these categories of divine violence because “Lamentations negotiates violence and pain primarily through prayer, especially confession and complaint” (p. 108).

In a study of divine violence in Amos, M. Daniel Carroll R. reminds us of the importance of understanding the culture of the time and the nature of judgment, as “divine violence is a response to human violence” (pp. 120–21). While this may sound like special pleading (why does God violently punish someone for using violence?), Carroll argues that it is based on *lex talionis*, in which the punishment corresponds to the transgression (pp. 122–23). However, YHWH does not delight to punish, and the final passage of the book reminds the reader that God’s goal is redemption more than judgment. Likewise, the final chapter on Jeremiah by Elmer Martens demonstrates once again that YHWH is a God of both anger (because of his justice) as well as love and mercy, but the eschatological images in Jeremiah emphasize the love of God. Martens is careful, though, to emphasize that we cannot just remove the violent texts because we may not like them: “It is more faithful to the biblical text to live with the conundrum of a God who defies neat characterization than to wiggle around some inconvenient truths” (p. 149).

Like most multi-author books, this book struggles at points with coherence and repetition (for example, the chapters on Deuteronomy and Joshua cover much of the same ground). Though it would be churlish to demand the book to be exhaustive, several important aspects of divine violence are missing (for example, why does YHWH allow Cain to live but then destroys the world in the flood?). However, overall, the chapters included in the book provide the reader with good models of how to interact with difficult cases of divine violence in the Old Testament and will be helpful to any who are concerned about serving a God who has sometimes acted in violent ways which trouble modern readers. While the problem can be partially mitigated through better exegesis of biblical texts, it cannot be removed

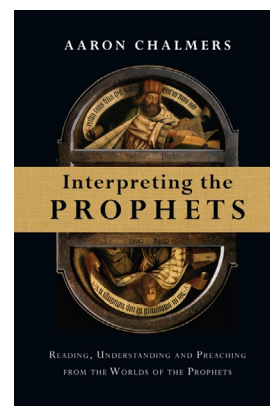
entirely through such methods. That is to say, modern interpreters of the Bible's ethical dilemmas will need to reexamine their ideas of what is morally appropriate for God.

Charlie Trimm
Biola University
La Mirada, California, USA

Aaron Chalmers. *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. xiv + 173 pp. £13.20/\$24.00.

This publication does all it says it will do in the subtitle, namely, it assists the reader of the Prophets in these three respects: reading, understanding, and preaching. And the inclusion of “understanding” between the other two is properly placed and not at all minimized, for many a sermon has been preached without the preacher’s appropriate understanding of his or her text. To this reviewer, this is the greatest strength and most important part of this fine handbook.

The book is divided into six parts: (1) a definition of the term prophet and his function; (2) the historical world of the prophet; (3) the theological world of the prophets; (4) the rhetorical world of the prophets; (5) from prophecy to apocalyptic; and (6) guidelines for preaching from the prophets. In what follows, these parts will be considered discretely as quite separate issues.



1. Though Chalmers’s treatment of the person and function of the prophet is helpful to the beginner, it breaks no new ground to what has been adequately handled by scholars such as C. Hassell Bullock (*An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 2007]), Willem VanGemeren (*Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996]), and Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. (*A Handbook on the Prophets* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002]).

2. Chalmers correctly underscores in this section the fact that to understand the works of the prophets, one must understand the environments in which they lived. His proposition is aided by juxtaposition of the prophets to specific historical events contemporary to them. These events are well illustrated by extra-biblical inscriptions containing ideas and concepts that impacted Israel and thereby called for prophets to respond.

3. The theological world of the prophets was one of pantheistic idolatry and cultic practices of the most repulsive and base kind, such as infant sacrifice and “sacred” prostitution. This milieu has been particularly well illuminated in the present day by Marti Nissinen’s study of prophecy in the world surrounding Israel (*Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, WAW 12 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003]). The prophets were, of course, aware of these things, frequently mentioned them, and assessed them to be the wicked things they were judged to be by Yahweh their God. However, their greater attention was devoted to warnings to their own people to avoid such things if they were to enjoy the covenant blessings graciously promised them by Yahweh. Here Chalmers brings the Decalogue into his purview and explains its relevance as a standard against which the idolatry of the nations must be evaluated and condemned.

4. Section 4 deals with the rather elusive theme of rhetoric. By “rhetoric” and “rhetorical world” the author means (1) “the study of the technique of using language effectively” and “the art of using speech to persuade, influence or please; oratory” (p. 93). Chalmers does not compare and contrast the Prophets with the rhetoric of other Near Eastern cultures; rather, he employs the results of modern literary criticism, form criticism, rhetorical criticism, and a touch of linguistic analysis. This is useful, to be sure, but a study of the contemporary literatures of neighboring peoples would also have been of benefit. To what extent was “borrowing” done by Israel and to what extent were their native-grown literary styles and methods unique?

However, Chalmers is most helpful in his examination and clarification of literary features characteristic of prophetic literature. Thus, he properly begins by suggesting steps in identifying literary structure and all its major units and subunits. These latter can include prophetic formulas, changes in content, changes in speaker, or a new form. The units themselves can be set off from the main clauses by conjunctions, changes in speaker/addressee, changes in content, forms, and repetition (pp. 94–98).

The author then addresses prophetic literary forms which he describes as having “specific content, a certain structure and a fixed purpose” (p. 100). The most important of these are (1) the prophecy of judgment; (2) the prophecy of salvation; (3) the prophetic disputation speech; (4) the prophetic lawsuit; (5) the prophetic vision report; and (6) the symbolic action report.

5. The chapter that deals with the differences between apocalyptic and “regular” predictive prophecy is one of the best in the book. Chalmers provides many examples of these two types, but the following summary will suffice for the whole: “It needs to be emphasized from the outset that prophecy and apocalyptic are not two completely distinct genres. Apocalyptic is essentially a subset of prophecy and grows out of prophecy. It is prophecy with a special form, and striking content, or, to put it more colloquially, it is ‘prophecy on steroids’” (p. 121).

6. The book concludes with a succinct application laying out some guidelines for preaching prophecy. They are: (1) choose your preaching texts carefully; (2) identify appropriate analogies; (3) focus on the theology of the text; (4) consider the witness of the New Testament; and (5) note potential problems to avoid, such as reading into the text and failing to consider context and other clues to meaning.

Of the numerous recent works on this subject, this is among the best. All pastors, teachers, and others who are called upon to preach the Prophets should obtain and make regular use of this superb guide book.

Eugene H. Merrill
Criswell College
Dallas, Texas, USA

David G. Firth. *The Message of Joshua: Promise and People*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. 226 pp. £10.99/\$21.00.

“We should begin by noting the elephant in the room.” Thus boldly does David Firth begin his book, under the heading “Joshua and the problem of violence” (p. 19). He then proceeds to address head-on the challenges posed by the “new atheism,” especially Richard Dawkins, who speaks of “bloodthirsty massacres” and “xenophobic relish” in the book of Joshua (p. 19).

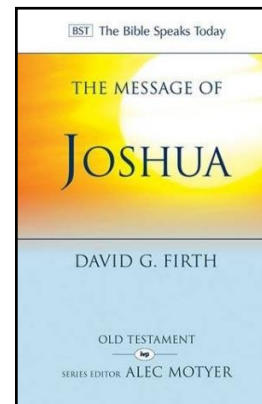
In this way, readers can immediately see what this book is and what it is not. It is not a commentary in the traditional sense. So, for example, the introduction does not discuss the normal issues in a commentary, not even covering the book’s main themes (or else simply limiting his discussion to two; see below). Rather, its two sections deal with the aforementioned problem of violence (pp. 19–25) and “Reading Joshua today” (pp. 26–30). But the Bible Speaks Today series does not claim to be a commentary; it has three goals, as indicated in the Series Preface: (1) “to expound the biblical text with accuracy”; (2) “to relate it to contemporary life”; and (3) “to be readable.” This entry in the series by Firth succeeds remarkably well in all three of these.

The book is nevertheless “commentary-like,” in that it does go through the entire book of Joshua section by section, and it does take the *message* of Joshua seriously (per the book’s title). Firth includes a three-page “Select bibliography” of respected works on Joshua, and he regularly engages selected conversation partners. (He honors my own commentary on Joshua by including it among these.)

For Firth, the message of Joshua is primarily the outworking of two main themes: (1) the land of Canaan belonged to Yahweh, not the Canaanites or the Israelites, and (2) it was Yahweh’s gift to Israel, which was a much more inclusive group than simply the blood descendants of Abraham. So, the first idea allows Firth to counter critics’ objections that Yahweh simply stole the Canaanites’ land and gave it to Israel. No, it belonged to Yahweh alone and, when the Canaanites opposed him, he would use his people Israel to punish the Canaanites. But the issue gets complicated, as Firth observes, when we realize that “Israel,” a community of faith, included a number of Canaanites, such as Rahab and her family (Josh 2) as well as the Gibeonites (Josh 9), and conversely, that the Israelite-born Achan suffered the fate of the Canaanites (Josh 7). By the end of the book, “The nation . . . clearly included native-born Israelites who had continued to worship other gods as well as Yahweh, native Canaanites who had joined Israel, and perhaps others” (p. 25). Firth thus shows that the book is much more nuanced than the popular imagination has it, where a bloodthirsty god unjustly destroyed innocent foreigners in favor of his own chosen people. Rather, the book shows a generous, welcoming God who desired that all peoples, Israelites and Canaanites alike, should embrace him.

True to the series’ goals, Firth continually engages modern culture and attempts to make relevant applications of the book’s message to contemporary life. In service of this, he mentions such things as ordering something online (p. 43), the 1915 Anzac defeat at Gallipoli (p. 53), taking his children for a walk on the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway in Sydney, Australia (p. 60), the movie *Dead Poets Society* (p. 64), Charles Colson and Richard Nixon (p. 68), a chapel service he once attended (p. 99), his work in Zimbabwe (p. 146), Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (p. 205), and more.

But, these are not simply illustrations as resources for sermons. Firth uses them in a winsome way to invite readers into the sometimes-difficult text of Joshua. Firth is a respected scholar—the author or



editor of many books and articles on Old Testament topics and lecturer in Old Testament at St. John's College, Nottingham—and each section of this book expounds the text of Joshua in helpful ways. To his credit, Firth does not give short shrift to the chapters in Joshua on the land distributions (chs. 13–21), as many commentaries do; he devotes more than 50 pages to these, unpacking their meaning in a clear manner.

Firth also regularly refers readers to New Testament points of contact, as well as modern-day applications, and he clearly has a heart for the living God revealed in Joshua. One quote will have to suffice to illustrate this; commenting on God's fulfillment of his promises in 21:43–45, he concludes, "Taking God at his word, then as now, leads to doxology, while also challenging us to ask whether the promises have indeed become reality in our own experience" (p. 193).

I was enlightened, entertained, challenged, and blessed as I read this book, and I recommend it highly.

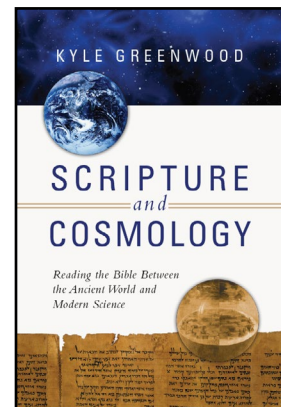
David M. Howard, Jr.
Bethel Seminary, Bethel University
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

Kyle Greenwood. *Scripture and Cosmology: Reading the Bible Between the Ancient World and Modern Science*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. 251 pp. £20.57/\$30.00.

Although the Old Testament was indeed written *for* us, as John Walton notes, it was not written *to* us originally—rather, it was written first to ancient Israel and then through Israel to us (*The Lost World of Genesis One* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009], 9). Sound historical-grammatical exegesis, then, calls for the study of the original audience's context, in this case, the ancient Near Eastern context of Israel. In *Scripture and Cosmology*, Kyle Greenwood, associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Colorado Christian University, provides a popular-level resource for better appreciating biblical cosmology within the OT's cultural context, and for grappling with the difficult questions that arise in relation to contemporary science.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first, Greenwood surveys ANE cosmologies and then rehearses the same topic in Scripture, suggesting with proper nuance that there is a generally similar portrayal of the cosmos as a three-tiered structure: heavens, earth, and sea. Part two reviews the history of the church's efforts to understand Scripture in light of ever-developing scientific knowledge about the world, relating how leading theologians—from Basil, Chrysostom, Augustine to Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, as well as touching on Jewish interpreters like Philo and Maimonides—struggled to interpret Scripture amidst the prevailing cosmologies of Aristotle and Copernicus in turn. The last part of his book is devoted to questions about the authority of Scripture, given its perceived scientific inaccuracies, and promotes the doctrine of divine accommodation; that is, God has graciously adapted revelation to his people's level of understanding in a manner similar to a father's adjustment when talking to his young children.

Inevitably, questions remain after reading a concise work on this controversial topic. Firstly, how does one discern the line between language that is deliberately analogical and phenomenological on



the one hand, and language that exemplifies a faulty science about the physical universe on the other hand? Did the ancient Israelite *really* believe there were physical latticed windows in the firmament (Gen 7:11; 8:2)? Was the “foundation” (from the verbal root **יָסַד**) of the earth (Job 38:4) understood any differently than the description of the Lord’s testimonies, which were “founded” (also from **יָסַד**) of old (Ps 119:152)? While the term “analogy” and the like are interspersed throughout the book (e.g., pp. 71, 78–79, 194) to describe the Bible’s language about the cosmos, the discussion at times appears to assume that Israelites employed such descriptions in a literal or material (rather than analogical) manner. To take a NT example, it is doubtful that the apostle Paul, though he used a three-tiered cosmos reference in Philippians 2:10, expected he could dig his way into *Sheol* in the first century AD any more than Dante thought so in the early fourteenth century. Moreover, at least with some of the Scripture passages utilized—such as Satan’s “going to and fro” on the earth (Job 1:7) said to assume “an earth that the Satan can cover completely by foot,” comports with a “small, round disk supported by pillars” (p. 74), and Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 4:10–11) said to rely on “a small, flat earth” (pp. 75–76)—one wonders if we are taking literally language that was meant to be understood figuratively. Though Greenwood’s case for a three-tiered portrayal of the cosmos in Scripture is clear, some discussion on genre, poetry, and idiomatic language would be helpful on some of these proof texts.

Secondly, to what degree is accommodation a matter of navigating the tension between an audience’s limited understanding *versus* their misunderstanding? Greenwood builds upon the work of Kenton Sparks (*God’s Words in Human Words* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008]) for his explanation of accommodation (p. 194). Sparks in turn had utilized the work of Peter Enns (*Inspiration and Incarnation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005]), whom Greenwood also references (pp. 72, 202). While these authors, including Greenwood, appeal to Calvin for his own employment of accommodation (pp. 175, 200–201), Calvin seems to use phenomenology to evade accusations of faulty science, urging rather the former’s compatibility with (and, sometimes, irrelevance to) contemporary scientific discoveries (see his discussion on firmament in *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. J. King [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 79–81). By contrast, the accommodation espoused by Sparks and Enns includes human errors and evils. Since divine accommodation encompasses a variety of views, readers would be served by greater clarity and distinction on this point.

Finally, is it possible the three-tiered cosmos is used purposefully in a theological, mythic, or cultic sense—and, if so, what then gets lost when biblical cosmology is dismissed? In this regard, one may refer to Walton’s treatment of the Bible’s cultic or temple theology in propositions 7, 8, and 9 of *The Lost World of Genesis One* (see also Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010]). While Greenwood does note sanctuary imagery in discussing some texts (pp. 78, 111–12), this point is incidental to his focus and, therefore, not noted in the actual summaries of his first section. In our estimation, however, this insight should be pressed further in relation to its theological implications, such as—to note merely one example—humanity’s priestly nature, created to worship and dwell with God. Scripture portrays the three-tiered structure of the cosmos as a particular sort of house: a temple. The theology of this cosmic temple develops from Genesis to Revelation and serves as the context for NT arguments concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ (see John 1:14; Heb 9:24). Intrinsic to this point is an important facet for understanding biblical accommodation, namely, that the Lord God did not have his hands tied (to use an anthropomorphism!) with regard to revelation, but sovereignly determined and ordained the very cultural context which he, in his infinite wisdom, deemed paramount for delivering his eternal Word. Rather than explaining it away with a blush or literalizing it into sterile science, cultic cosmology should therefore be studied and enjoyed for its theological profundity and

beauty. Happily, Greenwood's work avoids these pitfalls, but a more robust exposition of the theological upshots of understanding the cosmos as a temple would have furthered his pastoral aims in the third section.

With good success, Greenwood has pursued the difficult task of addressing a topic from a multidisciplinary approach, so that *Scripture and Cosmology* forms something of an entry-level primer on the subject, reader-friendly both in terms of style and its condensed length. Admittedly, the relationship between science and Scripture is fraught with controversy, discussions often marked by heated polemics and uninformed assertion, and entry into the fray is done typically at one's peril. While, therefore, some readers may not agree with certain arguments or conclusions set forth in this work, Greenwood is nevertheless to be thanked for engaging and contributing to the issue in an exemplary thoughtful and irenic fashion. Also laudable is that the book is written with a high view of Scripture, reverently concerned that more care be taken to discern what the Scriptures actually teach and do not teach—lest faulty science be asserted which brings Scripture into ill repute, while straining the faith of the less-seasoned among God's people. Greenwood's tone is winsome and pastoral; rather than writing to refute the Bible's gainsayers, he has endeavored to help the challenged believer. Though not referenced in *Scripture and Cosmology*, such readers will also profit from G.K. Beale's *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), which has two chapters titled "Can Old Testament Cosmology Be Reconciled with Modern Scientific Cosmology?"

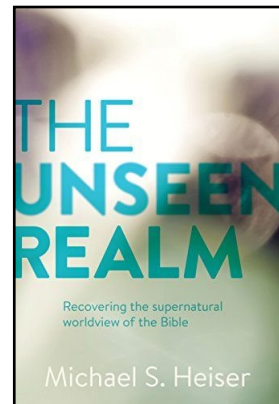
L. Michael Morales
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Taylors, South Carolina, USA

Michael S. Heiser. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015. 413 pp. £19.17/\$27.95.

A fundamental Christian belief is the existence of the supernatural. However, in *The Unseen Realm*, Michael Heiser (Scholar-in-Residence for FaithLife's Logos Bible Software) argues that Christians—primarily conservative Western Christians—have not fully appreciated the role of the supernatural for biblical theology. According to Heiser, "a theology of the unseen world that derives exclusively from the text understood through the lens of the ancient, premodern worldview of the authors informs *every* Bible doctrine in significant ways" (p. 13, italics original).

Heiser's theology of the unseen world is founded on the premise that God presides over a council of lesser divine beings (cf. Ps 82). The members of this "divine council" (pp. 25–27) accomplish God's purposes in the supernatural realm, therefore functioning as the heavenly counterpart of humanity on earth. Although he refers to these divine beings as "gods" (*elohim* in Hebrew), Heiser rejects the notion that God is subordinate or co-equal with them in the polytheistic sense and instead contends that "there is no warrant for concluding that plural *elohim* produces a pantheon of interchangeable deities" (p. 31).

Despite their noble status, some members of the divine council rebelled against God. Heiser argues that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 describe the self-exaltation of one of the divine council's members. This



lesser divine being—identified by the New Testament as Satan—corrupted Adam and Eve as the serpent. God, in turn, declared war between the offspring of the serpent and humanity (Gen 3:15). This conflict subsequently manifests itself in two key events from the Primeval History that lay the foundation for the rest of the biblical metanarrative.

The first key event is the “sons of God” episode of Genesis 6:1–4. Heiser rejects the idea that the “sons of God” are mere humans and instead argues they are members of the divine council who, like Satan, rebelled against God. Instead, the Nephilim or “giants”—analogous to the *apkallu* of Mesopotamian tradition—were their semi-divine offspring. Like the fallen divine council members that engendered them, these “giants” posed a serious threat to the reestablishment of God’s Edenic rule.

The second key event is God’s judgment at the Tower of Babel. Heiser interprets Genesis 11:1–9 in light of Deuteronomy 32:8–9 (as preserved in the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls rather than the Masoretic Text), contending that at the Tower of Babel, God chose Israel for himself but disinherited the other nations, placing them under the authority of his divine council. Many of those divine beings, however, became corrupt and led the nations they supervised astray in idolatry. Heiser refers to God’s disinheritance of the nations at the Tower of Babel as the “Deuteronomy 32 Worldview” (pp. 113–15).

God’s disinheritance of the nations and selection of Israel necessitated the call of Abraham and the establishment of the Israelites as a nation in Canaan. The fallen divine council members opposed this, however, and once again engendered semi-divine offspring known as the Anakim and Rephaim. These “giants” were therefore the targets of Israel’s conquests (cf. Josh 11:21–23) and of David’s military exploits (cf. 1 Chr 20:4–8). Their defeat paved the way for God’s future reclamation of the nations he had disinherited at Babel, his future defeat of the rebellious divine council members, and his future establishment of an everlasting kingdom (cf. Isa 66:16–19; Zech 14:1–5, 21–23; Ps 82:6–8; Dan 7).

Jesus—who, as Heiser contends, ranks unique among the divine council members and is to be identified with the Hebrew Bible’s Angel of Yahweh (pp. 36–37, 134–148)—is ultimately the one who reestablishes Edenic rule through his work on the cross. Jesus’s followers, as the offspring of Abraham in perpetual conflict with the serpent’s offspring, are to expand God’s kingdom by proclaiming the gospel in the very nations governed by fallen divine council members. According to Heiser, Pentecost “began the process by which the disinherited nations would be brought back into Yahweh’s family . . . that would culminate in a global Eden” (p. 306). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit’s commissioning at Pentecost provided believers with authority over the nations that were originally assigned to the divine council members. In this way, believers are effectively incorporated into the divine council and the latter becomes integrally connected with both the Creation Mandate (Gen 1:28–30) and Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20).

According to Heiser, the divine council will play a significant role even when Christ returns. Gog and Magog—the nations of the “north” that are none other than the territories once governed by corrupt divine council members—will be defeated at Armageddon (pp. 358–367). Furthermore, according to Heiser the Hebrew phrase underlying the Greek *harmagedōn* (Rev 16:16) is not *har megiddo* (“the mountain of Megiddo”) but *har moed* (“the mountain of assembly” (pp. 368–75). In Jerusalem, therefore, God will defeat the powers of darkness once and for all and restore his Edenic rule. In his victory God will be accompanied by both loyal members of the divine council and believers who have displaced the corrupt gods of the nations.

The above summary does not do adequate justice to this unique and fascinating book, which indeed accomplishes its purpose of recovering the supernatural world of the Bible and demonstrating how the notion of God’s divine council affects all of Scripture. On the whole Heiser cogently and effectively

demonstrates the importance of the divine council for Scripture's metanarrative. In doing so, he offers a fresh and coherent reading of Scripture that is appropriately shaped by the contextual world of the Bible.

The Unseen Realm is generally academic in tone but easy enough for non-scholars to follow. This makes it quite accessible, but I found myself occasionally wishing for more extensive discussion and substantiation of certain claims. For example, somewhat underdeveloped is Heiser's claim that acceptance of the divine council, which is composed of lesser divine beings or "gods," does not constitute polytheism (pp. 29–32). On this point Heiser offers only a brief discussion and refers the reader to the book's companion website (www.moreunseenrealm.com) as well as some of the articles he has published on this topic. Similarly, Heiser provides very little discussion of his claim that Deut 32:8 should be read in accordance with the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint rather than the Masoretic Text, once again referring to one of his own articles. I understand that Heiser is writing for a more popular audience, and I do not necessarily disagree with his conclusions. Nevertheless, it would have been better for Heiser to substantiate these potentially controversial claims in the book itself, especially given their foundational nature for his argument as a whole.

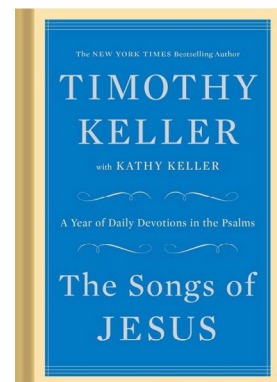
Readers of *The Unseen Realm* may not agree with each of Heiser's points, and they may not always be comfortable with Heiser's insistence that we read the Bible through ancient Near Eastern lenses, especially when the resulting interpretation clashes with traditional theological formulations and creeds. Ultimately, however, these same readers will be better off for having been challenged to read Scripture within its original context. *The Unseen Realm* offers a valuable contribution to our understanding of the unseen realm, and its biblical theology of the supernatural should receive serious consideration by Christians.

Benjamin J. Noonan
Columbia International University
Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller. *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms*. New York: Viking, 2015. xi + 372 pp. £12.99/\$19.95.

Although Timothy Keller is best known as an author of popular-level theology books, his most recognized achievement comes in the realm of apologetics. For his 2008 book, *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton), Keller entered the ranks of authors with books on *The New York Times* top-ten nonfiction bestseller list. In addition, the current devotional book was preceded by similar works such as *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014) and devotional commentaries on Judges, Romans, and Galatians in the God's Word for You series (Purcellville, VA: Good Book).

As becomes obvious from its title, the book follows the structure of devotional books that offer short daily meditations for each day of the year. Though such a work can sometimes lead to the extremes of superstition or eisegesis, Keller's approach to daily devotions is less susceptible to feed superstition than divination-like reading of Psalms, since the canonical book is analysed in a verse-by-verse order instead of at random.



By grounding the daily prayer in a concise contextual and intertextual study of the passage at hand, Keller avoids the danger of eisegesis that is so alluring to many authors of this genre through using the text as pretext and supporting their message by means of illustrations and anecdotes. Three ways of reading are recommended instead by Keller: prayerful reading of the text, studying the complementary biblical references, meditating on God, self and life (p. xi).

Each day's material is fitted to one page and includes three sections. First comes an excerpt from the Psalms, taken from the NIV, having on average six verses but no more than thirteen verses. Thus, longer Psalms are divided into two or more days of reading. Due to the one-page limit for each daily entry, psalms are unfortunately not formatted as poetry. Occasionally, the interpretation of some psalms would have benefitted from a division of the text which is more geared to its thematic shifts. Take, for example, Psalm 18. Although scholars differ somewhat when it comes to the proper division of this Davidic poem into its thematic sections, many would agree that Psalm 18 contains a theophany (vv. 7–19), a reflection on his loyalty and innocence before God (vv. 20–30), a reflection on earthly kingship (vv. 31–45), and a conclusion (vv. 46–50). Although the NIV formats Psalm 18 into paragraphs that concur with such a thematic outline, Keller does not follow his translation of choice.

Returning to the book at hand, exposition of each Psalm passage comes next and herein resides Keller's main contribution. The author offers a synopsis of the selected text in its context and a typological reading, one of the most common interpretations of the psalms in Christianity. By means of intertextuality, Keller allows relevant Old Testament and New Testament texts to inform his interpretation of various utterances in the Psalms (e.g., Pss 8; 69; 77; 95; 105), as well as in other occasional occurrences where adjacent psalms are connected by means of common themes (e.g., Pss 1–2; 20–21; 30–31; 41–42). Keller's main exegetical support comes from Derek Kidner (*Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 15 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973]; *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 16 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975]) and J. Alec Motyer ("The Psalms," in *The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, et. al. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994]). His notes are enriched by citing the work of poets like John Newton and George Herbert, as well as the theological reflections of C. S. Lewis (*Reflections on the Psalms* [San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1964]).

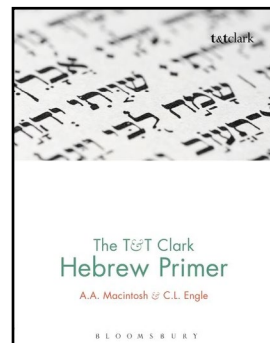
Keller concludes each daily meditation with a prayer that picks up the main theme of the biblical text and clothes it in a contemporary garment. A full array of feelings from the Psalms is given expression, a fact that enables Keller to relate to even a biblically uninitiated readership. This reflects Keller's effectiveness in communicating truth to those to whom he has wholeheartedly served during his past twenty years of urban ministry.

By its Bible version employed, doctrinal position, and type of warm faith voiced, *The Songs of Jesus* embodies well the forms and substance of contemporary evangelicalism. Here is found its highest value—presenting the gospel to this generation of people while reflecting thoughtfully on ancient Hebrew poetry. Bringing together the Semitic world that gave birth to the Psalms and contemporary society is a good and noble task to be emulated by other ministers.

Silviu Tatu
Institutul Teologic Pentecostal din București
București, Romania

A. A. Macintosh and C. L. Engle. *The T&T Clark Hebrew Primer*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. xiv + 82 pp. £12.99/\$22.95.

A. A. Macintosh and C. L. Engle are a good pairing to produce a Hebrew primer. Macintosh, dean emeritus of St. John's College, Cambridge University, brings over forty years of teaching experience, and C. L. Engle, adjunct professor of Hebrew Bible and Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, adds a fresh perspective. By its very nature, a primer is intended to be a broad overview that highlights the main points of the language, reviews language skills the individual has already learned, and is thereby not intended to replace a full Hebrew grammar (p. vii). This primer accomplishes its purpose well by containing a great deal of information in a well-organized, brief format.



After the introduction, the primer deals with nouns and adjectives, then the strong verbs and weak verbs, followed by the definite article, various types of *waw* conjunctions, and finally particles, prepositions and articles. It may have been more logical to deal with articles, particles, and prepositions before the discussion of verbs since the former are more closely connected with nouns. Still, the arrangement is clear in dealing with the major parts of the language.

The introduction provides definitions of foundational terms that serve as standard terminology for many Hebrew grammars. A significant drawback of this primer, however is the omission of several key rules that explain why certain vowels change. For example, one of the most important rules for determining vowel qualities is that there is always a short vowel in a closed, unaccented syllable. The rule that gutturals prefer *pathah* explains why some shortened vowels change to a *pathah*, whereas others change to a *hîreq*. A more salient explanation of the rules that govern vowels is that the vowel in a noun's near open syllable lengthens (or remains long) and the distant open syllable reduces, whereas in a verb these rules are reversed (see, e.g., C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989], 18; Gary D. Pratico and Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Grammar*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007], 32–35). Not only do these rules help to explain why vowels react the way they do when adding a pronoun to a verb or a noun, they also help the readers understand and remember why these changes occur. Thus by adding three or four rules (maybe only 2–3 more paragraphs) the readers would understand why these vowel changes occur and not just memorize the vowel changes which they will likely quickly forget.

By and large the book is concisely written, with highly instructive examples that illustrate key concepts (examples were oddly lacking in just a few instances, e.g., p. 6). Especially useful is the concept of “crucial signposts” for the verb forms (pp. 19, 21, 23, etc.)—remembering these few forms provides the major structures that the verbs will take.

One thing that was particularly perplexing, however, was the grouping of the verbs into “patterns” for rhythmic recitation. For example, they group the *Qal* perfect verb forms together in groups of three (3MS, 3FS, 2MS), two (2FS, 1CS), one (3CP), two (2MP, 2FP), and one (1CP). However, this arrangement is not particularly helpful in remembering the verb forms nor in understanding how the verb forms relate to each other. Perhaps this arrangement of the verbs into “patterns” just needs a clearer explanation of what they were trying to accomplish, but for most readers it would be confusing. A more transparent way of grouping *Qal* forms is to draw a line between the third-person forms (both singular and plural)

and the second-person forms, and then contrast the third-person forms above the line to the second- and first-person forms below the line.

In a few places it would also be helpful to include the accent marks so that they can be learned along with the forms (e.g., segholate ending on the participle, קוֹטְלָת, p. 18; change of accent and vowel on קָטַלְנִי, “killing me,” p. 19). Because there is some variation on the tone syllable in this last example when the 1CS suffix is added (e.g., *pathah*: הַשְׂיֵאֲנִי [Gen 3:13]; עֲצָרְנִי [Gen 16:2]; תִּדְבְּקֵנִי [Gen 19:19]; or *šērê*: יִהְרֹגֵנִי [Gen 4:14]; שְׂמַעְנִי [Gen 23:11, 13]), at least a note about variations in this vowel pointing of suffixed verbs is needed. This is important since some Hebrew grammars suggest the *šērê* is more common on the infinitives (cf. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, 188).

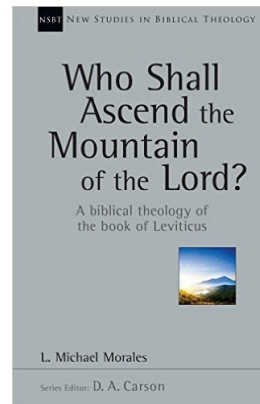
At first glance the vocabulary section may not seem particularly useful given the plethora of Hebrew vocabulary helps that are already available. But the authors' vocabulary helps are surprisingly effective in assisting the understanding and retention of the words. However, it would have been even more helpful to highlight words with the same root radicals so that the readers could easily see that by learning the three primary root radicals, they are actually learning multiple words that differ merely in their vowel pointings.

While any primer needs to be augmented by a full grammar, this primer is a very effective tool that can help students bring back their Hebrew skills—which also makes it a Hebrew teacher's good friend. If the authors were to enhance the introduction by including, for instance, the Hebrew consonants, an explanation of the *begadkepat* letters, quiescent letters and gutturals, this book could be made even more valuable as a help for those seeking to learn, and not simply review, the basics of biblical Hebrew grammar. It is becoming more and more common in seminaries to condense the Hebrew grammar into one semester or even during a summer-school class, and a brief Hebrew primer may be the best way to point out the most crucial things to learn about the Hebrew language. While it would be very difficult to learn Hebrew by using this primer alone without a teacher's help, it would be extremely useful for learning the basics with the proper instruction along the lines of other one-semester textbooks (e.g., John Dobson, *Learn Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014]; Gary A. Long, *Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013]; Jo Ann Hackett, *A Basic Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010]).

Paul D. Wegner
Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary
Mill Valley, California, USA

L. Michael Morales. *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 37. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015. 349 pp. £16.99/\$27.00.

The book of Leviticus continues to receive sustained academic attention, yet it also represents the object of many laypeople's neglect. With this latest addition to the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, L. Michael Morales attempts to bring these disparate worlds together by making cutting-edge Leviticus scholarship accessible to non-specialist readers. The result is a rare treat, for biblical theologies of Leviticus are scarce indeed. Even those works which approach Leviticus in relation to its wider Pentateuchal context (e.g., C. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT 2/25 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007]) do not explore in any substantial way its reception in the NT. Thus, by building on and extending doctoral research completed under Gordon J. Wenham (see L. M. Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, BTS 15 [Leuven: Peeters, 2012]), Morales fills a notable void in current Leviticus literature.



Who Shall Ascend is divided into eight chapters. The first three of these establish the broader literary context for a final-form reading of Leviticus. Chapter 1 surveys several approaches to the Pentateuch, with Morales concluding that the primary theme of the corpus concerns Yahweh's opening of a way for humanity to dwell in the divine presence (p. 23). Accordingly, and in line with much contemporary discussion, chapter 2 argues that creation in Genesis 1 is best envisioned as the formation of sacred space (pp. 39–49). Thus it is exile from, and potential return to, this locale and the presence of God therein which drives the central plotline of the Torah. Thus understood, the book of Genesis becomes a story of increasing separation from God which ends in the “grave of Egypt” (p. 74). Chapter 3 suggests that the book of Exodus reverses this separation: “The book of Exodus . . . narrates how Israel is reborn out of this grave and ushered into the divine Presence, reversing the movement of Genesis” (p. 74). The importance of the tabernacle for this reversal obviously looms large. Morales helpfully explores the issues here at some length, especially in relation to the tabernacle as a portable Mt. Sinai (pp. 95–100) and as a return to Eden (pp. 100–103).

Chapters 4–6 treat Leviticus in three sections—chs. 1–10, 11–16, and 17–27, respectively. Here, Morales focusses on segments and themes which elucidate the *Leitmotif* of dwelling in the divine presence, and seeks to relate these to the wider literary context examined in chapters 1–3. For instance, against the backdrop of the Pentateuch's storyline the high priest's entrance into Yahweh's presence on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) is reckoned a “liturgical drama” which portrays a re-entry of Eden (p. 173). Similarly, the cleansing of the tabernacle on this day is viewed as an eschatological hint that the cosmos will one day be cleansed—finally restoring the global-level sacred space of Genesis 1 (p. 171).

The aim of chapter 7 is to tease out how the cultic theology of Leviticus is developed in the remainder of the OT. Particular attention is given to the theological significance of Zion as the locus of divine blessing (pp. 224–237), and to the theme of exile and restoration (pp. 236–254). The pervasive idea of God's presence is once again highlighted: “To gaze upon his splendour, upon his face—this one thing is both the end and the fount of Israel's most profound longings and doctrines” (p. 254).

Finally, chapter 8 moves discussion into the NT. Here Morales notes that, while atonement cleansed the model cosmos (i.e., the tabernacle), it did not cleanse the cosmos itself. Thus a central NT

question becomes, How does the Son make possible entry to the heavenly abode of God? In light of the previous seven chapters, the ministry of Christ takes on added depth and meaning. This provides a fitting conclusion to the volume as Morales highlights how Jesus enables those united to him to “ascend the mountain of Yahweh” and to enjoy the blessing of his presence.

There is much to commend in *Who Shall Ascend*. In line with the aims of the series, the volume attempts a synchronic reading of Leviticus in its canonical setting. Source- and form-critical debates—somewhat onerous topics for students and non-specialists—are thereby placed into the background. This is apposite for a volume such as this and has the added advantage of allowing Morales to concentrate on other more recent trends in Pentateuch scholarship—for instance, the hermeneutical importance of narrative progression for reading the Torah. This is played out in an excellent discussion of the narrative setting of the Pentateuch’s legal material (pp. 111–121). Furthermore, on numerous occasions Morales helps readers navigate tricky conceptual ground—gradations of holiness, clean/unclean distinctions, and the like (e.g., pp. 153–167). Moreover, in similar manner to his 2012 monograph, *Who Shall Ascend* is filled with nuggets of exegetical gold—the fruit borne from prolonged engagement with the biblical texts. For students, pastors and specialists alike, therefore, there is much here to stimulate further thinking on this vital OT book.

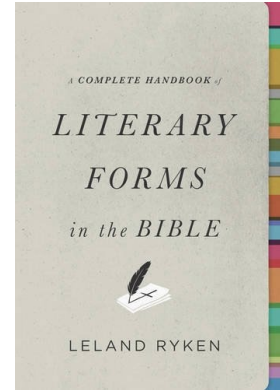
However, as with any volume, not all points are equally persuasive. For example, some readers will not be convinced of Morales’s treatment of hand-leaning, blood manipulation and sacrifice (pp. 127–37). He concludes that the cultic burning of sacrifices functioned to transfer not only the animal into the heavenly realm, but also the worshipper vicariously through it. While interesting, Morales’s argument requires more detailed analysis to support his claim than is possible here. Another area that may not convince lies in connection with the various symbolisms outlined by Morales. Symbolic readings are notoriously fraught with difficulties, especially in relation to avoiding the charge of subjectivism. While Morales’s reading of Leviticus symbolism is helpfully constrained by his focus on Pentateuchal context and the intertextual allusions he identifies, I suspect not all readers will be happy to go as far as he does at times. So although an understanding of the tabernacle as symbolic of Eden is common, less so is Morales’s conjecture that “the later high priest of Israel serving in the tabernacle must be understood fundamentally as an Adam-figure serving on the (architectural) mountain of God” (p. 53).

In the end, however, these are minor quibbles in what remains a persuasive and perceptive exploration of Leviticus in its canonical setting which, in the final analysis, has potential to propagate engagement with this oft-neglected book. While the going might be tough in places for the uninitiated, the benefits are more than worth the effort; I have already added the book to my suggested reading for graduate classes. Moreover, *Who Shall Ascend* offers preachers a broad conceptual understanding of the book that will nicely complement standard commentaries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, D. A. Carson surmises in his preface that this volume “will spawn some excellent sermon series on Leviticus” (p. 8). Regarding that outcome, this reviewer sounds a hearty “Amen.”

G. Geoffrey Harper
Sydney Missionary & Bible College
Croydon, New South Wales, Australia

Leland Ryken. *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 220 pp. £12.99/\$19.99.

Philip the Evangelist asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch did not; he needed someone to explain Isaiah 53:7–8 to him. In the same way, Leland Ryken, the literary evangelist, asks the question, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And Ryken anticipates that many readers of the Bible will answer this question like the Ethiopian eunuch: “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” Ryken’s work, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible*, provides an answer to these sorts of questions. The piece seeks to achieve two purposes. First, Ryken attempts to define and illustrate literary terms that one may hear when the Bible is taught or read in conjunction with biblical commentaries (p. 9). Second, Ryken seeks to introduce and explain the nature, characteristics, and function of literary forms in the Bible so that readers may discover the richness of the text’s content and meaning through the form in which they are conveyed (pp. 9–10). In so doing, Ryken hopes to offer “practical help to the general Bible reader as well as to scholars who teach the Bible” (p. 10).



This practical help is delivered throughout the *Handbook*, where Ryken discusses literary terms, genres, literary techniques, motifs, archetypes and types scenes, figures of speech, rhetorical devices, stylistic traits, and formulas in alphabetical order. The individual entries operate under the assumption that the content of a text is communicated through forms that are part and parcel of the text’s meaning. And the vast majority of these entries move beyond a definition of these literary forms and a description of their fundamental “ingredients” to an illustration of their use and function through specific biblical texts. In fact, many entries include illustrations from both the Old Testament and the New. The combination of definition, description, and illustration in a clear format and through accessible language is thus a hallmark of the *Handbook*.

In addition to the general nature and characteristics of the individual entries within the *Handbook*, it is important to note that many of its entries offer sound advice and open stimulating horizons. For example, on many occasions, Ryken notes that all the elements characteristic of a literary form may not be present in a text (e.g., pp. 74, 90). In certain instances, he identifies the way in which biblical texts mirror and modify elements common to literary genres elsewhere in the ancient world (e.g., p. 81). He includes entries that describe methodological approaches to certain literary forms, such as lyric, parable, personification, and proverbs. And he introduces genres that provide a useful heuristic guide for reading biblical texts. Among these genres, “docudrama” may be the best example (pp. 63–64). According to Ryken, docudrama is a genre of modern visual media which employs a set of stock techniques to convey information about a subject. These techniques include the communication of factual information, interviews with eyewitnesses, quotations from the subject of the piece, and clips of the physical landscapes in which the subject performed important actions, just to name a few (pp. 63–64). As Ryken observes, docudrama would be anomalous in the ancient world, but the techniques used in docudrama are analogous to the techniques used in biblical narrative. Accordingly, this form provides a creative and imaginative framework within which to read certain texts.

While one might question whether Ryken’s work is a *complete* handbook of literary forms in the Bible, a more important question looms throughout the volume: Are literary genres pure, fixed

ontological categories into which readers place texts? Or are literary genres fluid and flexible forms that integrate and gesture to ingredients common to other genres? How one answers these questions will shape the way in which one uses Ryken's *Handbook*. If one assumes that genres are pure, ontological categories, then Ryken's *Handbook* provides a taxonomy of literary forms into which one may place a text. If, however, one assumes that genres are fluid, then Ryken's *Handbook* defines and describes various literary forms that may be integrated and included in a single text. By a single text, I am not referring to an "encyclopedic form," like the prophetic books, wisdom literature, or the Gospels, each of which includes a host of genres. I am instead referring to a single discourse unit such as the parental discourse in Proverbs 5, which contains elements of both the genre of instruction and the genre of love poetry. In the same way, the discourse in Proverbs 7 seems to intermingle the genre of instruction with the genre of fictional or imaginative literature (see Daniel J. Estes, "Fiction and Truth in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature," *Them* 35 [2010]: 387–99). If one approaches these texts in Proverbs from an ontological perspective, they would be divided into units, and thereby slotted into categories that tend to be mutually exclusive. But if one is free from the presupposition that genres are fixed (as form critics have tended to believe), they may be read as discourses that mingle elements of different genres to produce and organize meaning, rather than fit into a specific category.

In this vein, some discussion of genre theory in the introduction to the *Handbook* would help readers use the volume more effectively. This would provide a framework within which to understand, for instance, how the narrative concerning David and Goliath can be classified as a "coming of age story" (p. 47), a "conflict story" (p. 47–48), and a "conquest story" (p. 49). In addition, a Scripture index would be invaluable for readers who are unfamiliar with many of the literary forms in the piece but are interested in using it as a reference volume for study or sermon preparation.

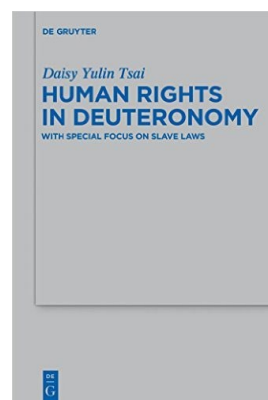
Despite these comments and questions, Ryken has produced a very helpful *Handbook*. The volume accomplishes its goal and will benefit many Bible readers and scholars.

Christopher B. Ansberry
Oak Hill College
London, UK

Daisy Yulin Tsai. *Human Rights in Deuteronomy: With Special Focus on Slave Laws*. Beihefte für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 464. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014. xiii + 244 pp. £82.99/\$154.00.

Daisy Yulin Tsai, in her revised PhD dissertation examined in 2011 at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, studies Deuteronomistic slave laws, compares them with other Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern laws, and argues for two main distinctions between OT laws and other ANE ones: (1) *all* agents (e.g., slaves, captives, and criminals) are regarded as *persons* and should be treated accordingly; and (2) *all* legal subjects are seen as free, dignified, and self-determining human beings. Unfortunately, though, the important concepts of personhood and freedom are not clearly defined.

Chapter 1 explains the importance of slave manumission laws for Israel as owing to her origins from slavery in Egypt. This accounts for the primacy of the slave law in Exodus 21:2–11 and the uniqueness of the fugitive-slave law



in Deut 23:16–17 (pp. 1–2). Here also, the author reviews the literature on slave laws, but her interests mainly lie in reading the text synchronically to examine how this legislation relates to the character of YHWH (pp. 9–10). She states that “neither dates nor historical settings of biblical laws are critical for explaining the underlying concept of human rights” (p. 15). Instead, the original function or purpose of the laws is no longer available to us, making attempts at historical reconstructions fruitless (p. 16). This stands at odds with her opening assertion that an exodus background explains the prominent place of slave laws in the Book of the Covenant.

In chapter 2, Tsai examines the Deuteronomic slave laws beginning with their arrangement. To explain why they are separated by seven chapters (15:12–18; 23:16–17), she adopts the “Chiastic Framework Approach” proposed by Frank Crüsemann and Martin Oosthuizen (pp. 25–34). For Tsai the center of the chiasm (19:1–21:9) is the preservation of human life while the corresponding parts (15:1–16:17 and 23:16–25:19) both demonstrate concern for the poor. However, it is unclear how this lengthy discussion on structure pertains to exegesis of the slave laws.

A thorough exegesis of Deut 15:12–18 and a discussion of its motive clauses follow. “Hebrew” in 15:12 is one of the terms Tsai examines and she takes this to refer to an ethnic identity, not a social one, although she does not clarify what she means (pp. 41–46). Is this blood relation? Or rather covenantal? Similarly, the lack of definition for a loaded term such as “freedom” creates confusion, as when she states but leaves unexplained that “in Deuteronomy . . . slavery is in opposition to freedom both sociologically and soteriologically” (p. 47).

Only two and a half pages are given to the exegesis of Deut 23:16–17, and Tsai moves quickly into comparing it with 15:12–18. The former appears to undermine the authority of masters over slaves, seemingly witnessing to contrary views on the justness of slavery (p. 65). Tsai disagrees by arguing that both laws require liberation and stress the dignity of the released person with extravagant honor (pp. 65–67). However, if this law does indeed speak of fugitives from outside Israel, as she accepts (pp. 62–63), then the two passages envisage different situations and for Deuteronomy 23 it would be the authority of foreign masters that is undermined, not Israelites.

Chapter 3 compares the Bible’s various slave-manumission laws. The regulations in Exod 21:2–11 are parallel to Deut 13:12–18 except for the former’s provision for releasing a female slave. Tsai interprets this regulation in Exod 21:2–11 as a separate law that deals with marital transactions. This explains why the woman is not to be released on the seventh year (pp. 79–90).

Deuteronomy 15:12–18 is then compared with the Jubilee in Lev 25:39–55, where the latter appears to regulate a service period of forty-nine years as opposed to six as in other manumission laws. Scholars have generally explained this as a reform of earlier biblical laws or as dealing with different types of slaves (e.g., Bernard M. Levinson, “The Birth of the Lemma: The Restrictive Reinterpretation of the Covenant Code’s Manumission Law by the Holiness Code (Leviticus 25:44–46),” *JBL* 124 [2005]: 617–39). Tsai, on the contrary, does not find Leviticus at odds with either Deuteronomy or Exodus. She understands the Jubilee as the final recourse in a wider system of social protection, but does not explore why this would exist alongside the seven-year release.

Chapter 4 thoroughly examines the ANE laws relating to slavery (which are neatly compiled in two appendices) with considerable discussion of different terms used, methods of slave acquisition, redemption or termination. She explains each category of slave laws, even brings to the surface more subtle forms of bondage such as the “human pledge,” and argues that these laws demonstrate little concern for the rights of slaves. Tsai concludes that the situations envisaged in each ANE law differ

from those of the biblical slavery laws. Though this is the most helpful chapter of Tsai's analysis, it is surprising that the book's title does not indicate that the treatment of ANE laws will take up almost half of the book (including the appendices). Tsai also adds a brief survey of slavery in the modern world, but this does not contribute to the dissertation.

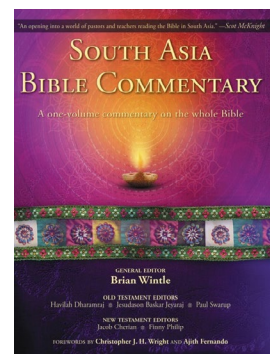
Chapter 5 discusses ancient cosmologies and worldviews. One page is then reserved for the "concept of human rights" (p. 180). But given that "human rights" is the subject of the book, one would expect at least a section dedicated to the broader discussion of human rights, its history, and basic definitions in order to avoid thinking anachronistically about it. In closing, Tsai realizes that the destruction of the Canaanites may be a challenge to her thesis, so she mentions it in passing without intending to follow up (p. 181). Chapter 6 concludes the monograph by summarizing Tsai's work.

Overall, the lack of definitions, the attempt to enter discussions of modern slavery, the failure to engage the disciplines of human rights and ethical theories, and leaving aside the issue of the Canaanites give the impression that Tsai attempts to "bite more than she can chew." Having said that, I think that Tsai has successfully shown us the various necessary parameters that one *should* consider when dealing with the complex topic of slavery.

Myrto Theocharous
Greek Bible College
Athens, Greece

Brian Wintle, ed. *South Asia Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. xvi + 1807 pp. £28.32/\$39.99.

The *South Asia Bible Commentary* (SABC), a second installment in the Zondervan series that began with the *Africa Bible Commentary* (2006), traces its origin back to a meeting of Langham Scholars in Kolkata in 2007 which was convened by Christopher Wright, International Director of the Langham Partnership. This creative, single-volume, whole-Bible commentary bears evidence that its contents are rooted in the soil of South Asia and represents the fruit of the labor of scholar-practitioners who work that soil. Special concerns addressed include: God among other Gods, Gurus and Godmen, Indigenous Music and Worship, Rituals and Festivals. The volume contains the collective insight of over 90 contributors (45 different authors providing commentary and others offering pertinent, applicational articles in the context of the commentary) who not only originate from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka but also reside and minister in that context (with only one exception known to the reviewer). This cadre is drawn from a wide range of denominational backgrounds, ensuring the book's appeal to a broader South Asian and global evangelical audience.



The vision of the editors and advisors of the SABC was to provide, in their own words:

a one-volume commentary, written and edited by biblical scholars from South Asia, on all the books of the Bible. The commentary upholds the divine inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture. Its general aim is to interpret the word of God so as to speak relevantly to South Asian realities today. It seeks to equip Christian leaders at the grassroots level—pastors, students and lay leaders—who under the guidance of the

Holy Spirit can be instrumental in the establishment and nurture of a vibrant church in this region (p. vi).

Further, the directive to the contributors was to “explain the meaning of the text, relate the meaning to the context and apply it to wider life and ministry” (p. vi).

For the reader who may be wary of any collaborative effort that appears to be ecumenical (which was the initial impression of this reviewer upon scanning the list of contributors, their respective church affiliations, and academic/theological credentials), the *SABC* begins with a clear statement of the evangelical hermeneutical approach that is employed by the contributors. The article on “Biblical Interpretation” (pp. 3–4) gives the reader confidence that what follows is written from a conservative, evangelical perspective. The author acknowledges the dynamics of divine-human authorship of the Bible as well as the difference and similarity between the “then” and the “now.” Moreover, he affirms that the goal of interpretation is application, that Scripture should interpret Scripture and that the Holy Spirit is both the divine Author and the divine Guide for interpretation of the Scriptures.

The commentary is based on the New International Version (2011) and is similar in its approach to *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2 vols. [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983, 1985]). Specifically, evidence of careful exegetical work is unfolded in an expositional, verse-by-verse commentary on each book of the Bible. And like *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the treatment for each book begins with helpful introductory information. Entries include a brief overview (often a single paragraph) and short discourse on the relevance of the book to the South Asian audience. Most introductions highlight matters of provenance, structure, and themes or theological emphases. Other components may include discussion of the purpose, context, background, or the biblical-theological connections between OT and NT. Each introduction concludes with a detailed outline of the book.

Following the outline offered in the introduction, the exposition of the text in each of the biblical books includes a summary explanation on the larger literary units (marked by the first-order outline level) before delving into the verse-by-verse commentary. The running commentary then incorporates phrases from the NIV in italicized text (with parenthetical verse references to guide the reader). This exposition also includes discussions of application relevant to the South Asian context.

However, unlike the *BKC*, this commentary is interspersed with ninety-one strategically placed articles on application. Contrary to the common practice of “discovering” applications and theological formulations that are fanciful, these applications are clearly derived from the biblical text. Some essays may be of more interest to the non-South Asian reader who is seeking biblical insight from the local perspective (e.g., Astrology, Bible and Science, Creation and the Environment, HIV and AIDS, Human Trafficking, Persecution, Prosperity Theology, Role of a Pastor, Suffering, The Bible and Gender, Witchcraft and Demons, Yoga and Meditation). Other essays may be of more interest to the South Asian reader (e.g., Avatar and Incarnation, Christian Bhakti, Dalits, Karma and Fatalism, Pilgrimages and Holy Places, South Asian Responses to Christ, The Church in South Asia). Also providing valuable insights are additional overview articles which are placed prior to the major literary divisions in the Bible (Introduction to the Old Testament, Pentateuch, Historical Books, Hebrew Poetry, Prophetic Literature, the Intertestamental Period, the New Testament, the Gospels, the Letters, and the Apocalyptic Literature).

As with any multi-authored commentary, there is some variance in the quality and expertise reflected in the individual contributions, but the overall quality of the volume is a testament to the

careful and painstaking work of a committed editorial team. The only other criticism that might be mentioned is that the font size is too small, especially with the abbreviations that are in small caps (e.g., OT, NT, NIV).

This resource will be of value to native and expatriate residents of South Asia, to members of the South Asian Diaspora, and to those seeking a South Asian perspective on biblical interpretation and matters of Christian faith and practice. This volume ought to be included in the libraries of students of the Word, pastors, and biblical/ministerial training centers in the region. Furthermore, this tool would be a fine addition to the library of anyone who desires to consult an evangelical exposition of the biblical text for assistance in faithful preaching and teaching of the Word.

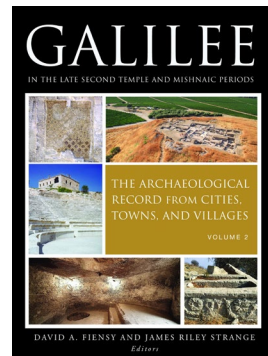
Steven W. Guest

South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies
Bangalore, India

— NEW TESTAMENT —

David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange. *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods. Vol. 2: The Archeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. xviii + 502 pp. £46.99/\$69.00.

This is the second book in a two volume project, the first of which (published in 2014) pertains to life, culture, and society. The scope of both is to “consolidate a great deal of information that has been brought to light” in various streams of research (p. 4) in order to make this information accessible to NT scholars. It contains reports on archeological excavations of Galilee at which significant remains from the Second Temple and Mishnaic period have been found (ca. 110 BCE to 220 CE). According to the editors, although there is a renewed interest in the Jewish literature from the time of Jesus, “the material culture of Jewish sites has remained largely unknown” (p. xvii). That void is capably addressed in this significant contribution.



The book begins with an outline of archeological chronology (p. ix) and a timeline of events and rulers in Galilee and Judea in the period under consideration. This is complemented by sixteen pages of excellent color maps and a color photo gallery of important features of select sites. The first essay, by Mordechai Aviam, uses archeological evidence to chronicle the transformation of Galilee as a whole from a largely gentile to a Jewish region. The remainder of the contributions focus on specific sites, or facets thereof. The first city discussed is Sepphoris, which is discussed in four distinct essays that provide an overview of the site (James F. Strange), examination of the residential area on the its western summit (Eric M. Meyers, Carol L. Meyers, and Benjamin D. Gordon), its evolution as evidenced from select archeological features (Zeev Weiss), and its aqueducts (James F. Strange).

The site of Kefar Shikhin (James Riley Strange), though not mentioned in the NT, was apparently an important center for the production and exportation of pottery and lamps in antiquity. Another town, Jotapa (Yodefata; Modechai Aviam) reveals material evidence for a vibrant center of wool and olive oil production. Skeletal remains found at Jotapa reveal the scars of Jewish revolt against Roman

rule. Khirbet Qana is one of three sites covered in this volume that could be identified as “Cana of Galilee” from the NT (C. Thomas McCollough). It is this site that bears closer correlation to the literary evidence of Josephus, and provides archeological evidence for occupation from the late Hellenistic period and material evidence (esp. coins) of Jewish inhabitants. The village of Karm er-Ras, located near Kafr Kanna, is claimed by others to be the authentic “Cana of Galilee” (Yardenna Alexandre). This site likewise contains evidence of Jewish occupation in antiquity and was a frequent destination from earliest Christian pilgrims. In the essay on Kafr Kanna itself (F. Massimo Luca), attention is given to the history of pilgrim identification of this as the site for Jesus’s famous water-to-wine miracle.

Nazareth, of course, is an important city for students of the NT (James F. Strange). The essay here surveys its location, natural resources, and references in Jewish and Christian literature and concludes with a brief summary of modern excavations. Kefer Ḥananya is explained as a town from the late Roman period known from literary and archeological attestations for its pottery production (David Adan-Bayewitz). The contribution on Tiberius (Katia Cytryn-Silverman) provides a history of the site from the Roman to Byzantine eras, with a site map and image Roman-period carved inscription of a menorah. The nearby Hamath Tiberius (Carl E. Savage) or “hot springs” of Tiberias, is not mentioned in the NT. However, its synagogue that contains a mosaic pavement featuring the zodiacal ornamentation illustrates the deepening of Hellenization in Late Roman Judaism in Galilee.

Like Nazareth, Capernaum was an important town in the life and ministry of Jesus. The extended article on Capernaum by Sharon Lea Mattila surveys its history and archeology from Hellenistic to Byzantine times. Among the detailed charts, graphs, maps, and reconstructions the authors survey important elements such as its synagogue, houses, olive press, and its development and expansion based on ceramic and numismatic (coin) finds. Bethsaida, which appears both in the NT and the writings of Josephus, is discussed in its first century context with particular attention to imported Rhodian vessels and stamped handles, as well as coins and glass (Rami Arav and Carl E. Savage).

The town of Magdala, also known as Taricheae, has been recently excavated with extensive discoveries relevant to the time of the NT (Stefano De Luca and Anna Lena). The authors survey debates about the identity of the site and detail its excavations with superb site maps. They discuss its pools—which may have been used as a fish pond for fishing industry—as well as its synagogue and the famous stone “table” found therein. Khirbet Wadi Ḥamam is a largely unknown site that was first settled early in the first century BCE (Uzi Leibner). It contains a public building that is most likely a synagogue as well as evidence of violent destruction between 125 and 135 CE, indicating the reaches of the Bar Kochba revolt into Galilee.

Ḥuqoq is a Jewish agricultural settlement northwest of the Sea of Galilee mentioned neither in the NT nor in Second Temple Jewish literature (Matthew J. Grey and Chad S. Spigel). Nevertheless, its three (or four) *mikva’ot* (ritual baths) evidence a Jewish village in which ritual purity laws were observed during the Roman period. A larger town is Meiron in Upper Galilee (Eric M. Meyers and Carol L. Meyers), which experienced a major demographic shift after the wars with Rome. Excavations of a large tomb and synagogue that could seat over 1000 people illustrate the prosperity of the town.

Gush Ḥalav, also known as Gischala, sits atop a chalk hill north of Mount Meiron (James F. Strange). It is mentioned in Josephus, as the site of a fortification against the Romans during the first revolt. Its ancient synagogue from c. 250–306 CE is discussed alongside a floor plan. The essay on Nabratein (Eric M. Meyers and Carol L. Meyers) focuses on the four synagogues, which date from 135 CE. In Khirbet Shema’ (Eric M. Meyers) archeologists found the alleged tomb of Rabbi Shammai near a synagogue and,

even more surprising, human remains beneath the synagogue. This seems to contradict purity customs. The village of Kadash in Upper Galilee (Andrea M. Berlin and Sharon C. Herbert) has a long history. Evidence both literary and material indicates it was initially Canaanite before it became an Israelite city of refuge. It featured in Hasmonean era as well as in the Jewish Wars, as a place where the Romans encamped for a time. The authors here display images of seal impressions, coins, and other artefacts from these occupation periods.

This is an excellent book, and well worth the price and effort to read through the minutiae of archeological discussions. Each essay explains something about the location of the site, its significance in history and literature, and some discussion of the history of archeology of the site. Authors ensure that key features of each site are discussed and provide innumerable images, maps, drawings and reconstructions to inform the reader. Furthermore, each essay closes with a thorough bibliography for further inquiry. The book is supplemented by complete indices and—most importantly—a glossary of terms used. For non-specialists, the value of this volume is as much in how it demonstrates archeological methodologies as it is presenting readers with material witness to ancient Galilee.

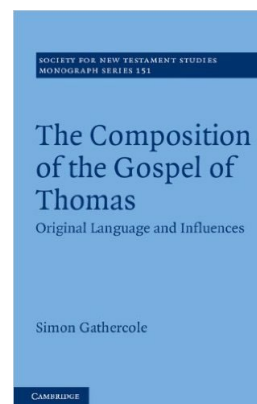
Daniel M. Gurtner
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Simon Gathercole. *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xiv + 322 pp. £25.99/\$39.99.

Contemporary interest in the *Gospel of Thomas* (hereafter, *Thomas*) is high. In the academic world, there are papers delivered on *Thomas* and its relationship with the canonical gospels or Q at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings. There are online commentaries about *Thomas* which garner scholarly interest from around the world. Recently, a textbook aimed at students of early Christianity included *Thomas* along with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in its section entitled “Biography, anecdote, and history” (Steve Mason and Tom Robinson, ed., *An Early Christian Reader*, [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013]). In the popular realm, translations of *Thomas* are sold in mainstream bookstores in books such as *The Five Gospels* (edited by Robert Funk et al., [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993]) and *The Complete Gospels* (edited by R. J. Miller [Sonoma: Polebridge, 2010]).

Thomas was discovered in 1945 at the village of Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Prior to this discovery, we had knowledge of it through a few references within the church fathers. We currently possess three fragments of *Thomas* in Greek and one full length version in Coptic. The extant Coptic version of *Thomas* dates to shortly before the year 350 AD, though components of it may date much earlier. The date of the Greek fragments is debated, but one of the fragments may date as early as shortly after AD 200.

It is the opinion of several scholars that the original *Thomas* predates the fragments substantially. A key factor in the dating of *Thomas* is its composition. That issue is the focus of this study by Simon



Gathercole. Some propose that *Thomas* was originally written in a Semitic language. Several scholars such as April DeConick, Peter Nagel, A. Guillaumont, and G. Quispel, have advocated for an Aramaic origin of *Thomas*. Nicholas Perrin has argued for a Syriac original, linking *Thomas* with Tatian's *Diatesseron*. There are others who are more convinced of a Greek origin. R. M. Grant and Helmut Koester have argued for a Greek original text. G. Garitte proposed a Coptic original for the *Gospel*. In the first half of *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, Simon Gathercole argues convincingly that *Thomas* was originally written in Greek.

Gathercole advances three main arguments for supporting a Greek original for *Thomas*. In his second chapter, Gathercole provides reasons to doubt a Semitic origin of *Thomas*. The first and most obvious argument is the need to eliminate Greek and Coptic explanations for the word before arguing for a Semitism. This makes sense since the few copies that we possess of *Thomas* are in these languages. Gathercole's other reasons for preferring a Greek original are also convincing. These include the need to establish a linguistic base for identifying Semitisms, classifying Semitisms, and then assessing these Semitisms for the significance of original language composition. It is also difficult to assess Syriac influence in the text due to the paucity of Syriac literature within the period under consideration, the rarity of the translation of Syriac works into Greek, and the unlikelihood of a bilingual translation that dates back to the time when *Thomas* was originally composed. Gathercole also claims that there is also uncertainty that there were mistranslations or wooden translations made. With all of these difficulties, it is better to assume that *Thomas* did not have a Semitic origin. The simpler hypothesis is that *Thomas* was originally written in Greek, in keeping with the language of the earliest surviving fragments.

His third chapter provides a detailed consideration of particular texts within *Thomas* in which an Aramaic or Syriac original is proposed. Gathercole examines 77 sections, comparing the copies of *Thomas* with a proposed Syriac or Aramaic equivalent. In each of these examples, Gathercole finds reconstructing another language behind the current text of *Thomas* to be unnecessary. His discussion can be detailed at times. Some who do not have understanding of these extra biblical languages will have difficulty in following the argument. Even without access to other biblical languages, readers will still understand Gathercole's point that the need to find another language underlying *Thomas* has been greatly exaggerated.

In his fourth chapter, Gathercole provides six reasons for a Greek original behind the text of *Thomas*. First, the material evidence that we possess from *Thomas* is in Greek. Second, there is a strong level of correspondence between the words in *Thomas* and the Greek language. Third, *Thomas* contains a high proportion of Greek loan words. Fourth, *Thomas* is regularly associated with other works written in Greek. Fifth, the association that *Thomas* has with other Nag Hammadi literature also further strengthens a Greek origin. Finally, *Thomas* shows a close similarity to other gospels that are written in Greek such as: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.

Gathercole concludes the first part of his book by strongly stating "that a Greek original (*Vorlage*) to the *Coptic Gospel of Thomas* is a virtual certainty with proposals for a translation into Coptic from another language being highly speculative" (p. 125). With the rationale that he has assembled, his argumentation is convincing.

From this base, Gathercole now moves into the second part of his study, which addresses whether *Thomas* is dependent upon the New Testament Gospels. Some see *Thomas* as independent of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John by following the Western Aramaic theories of *Thomas*, and others see *Thomas* as dependent on the four Gospels by following the Syriac theory of composition. Gathercole develops

a different approach, viewing *Thomas* as influenced by Matthew and incorporating some of Luke's phrases. Gathercole also sees *Thomas* as further extending some of Luke's special language.

Gathercole then responds to arguments for the independence of *Thomas*. While some would find the difference in order between the Synoptics and *Thomas*, form critical factors, lack of extensive verbatim correspondence, and the absence of *Thomas's* appropriation of the Synoptic material as reasons to support the independence of *Thomas*, Gathercole argues that these criteria are insufficient and can be countered. He concludes that "there is not really a single argument for the thoroughgoing independence of *Thomas* which has any force" (p. 143). His argument is once again convincing.

His following chapters trace the influence of the Synoptic Gospels within *Thomas*, following Gathercole's method proposed in chapter 6. This starts from *Thomas's* reception of redactions from the Gospel of Mark rather than from the standpoint of an early dating of *Thomas*. Several scholars like A. DeConick, S. Davies, and K. Johnson will not like this approach due to their conclusions of an early date for the *Gospel of Thomas*. Yet, the possibility of Gnostic influence (cf. Gos. Thom. 83–84; 114), the presence of Matthew within *Thomas*, and the Lukan redactional features within *Thomas* would make a later date of *Thomas* likely. Despite the interest in an early date of *Thomas* seen in the work of some scholars, Gathercole provides a "short and sweet" presentation for a later date. Some will inevitably want more on this aspect, but this would mean the production of another book, which is unfair for the current focus of this study.

Within chapters 7 and 8, Gathercole examines the influence of the Gospel of Matthew and Luke within *Thomas*. In chapter seven, he notices that *Thomas* uses the actual name of Matthew. Since Matthew is a rather hidden figure within early Christian tradition, Gathercole highlights the author's interest in Matthew. Gathercole then points out three instances that exhibit the reception of Matthew (cf. Gos. Thom. 13.3; 14.5; 44). In chapter 8, the author then considers the influence of Luke within *Thomas*. He evaluates seven instances where this is evident (cf. Gos. Thom. 5.2; 31.1; 33.2–3; 47.3–5; 65; 66; 99; 104). Then, Gathercole considers two possible influences of *Thomas* upon Luke (Gos. Thom. 72; 76.3). As with Matthew's Gospel, Gathercole rightly finds that these are more convincingly explained as instances of Luke's influence on *Thomas*, rather than *Thomas's* influence on Luke.

The remainder of *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas* evaluates the influence of other early Christian ideas within *Thomas*. Gathercole looks at Pauline influence, the effect of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and then the "two ways" tradition. In each case, he finds that there is some influence of each of these within the *Gospel of Thomas*. These sections are less developed than his previous chapters. They will, however, provide a jumping off point for further discussion of compositional influence of the *Gospel*.

Gathercole's work is a groundbreaking study of *Thomas*. The results for those studying *Thomas* will likely be affected by this study for many years. This study is significant for those who are interested in the historical Jesus and assessing the influence of *Thomas*. By arguing for a Greek original (*Vorlage*) over against a Semitic one, it implies a later dating of *Thomas*. It also sets the stage for *Thomas* to be more dependent upon the canonical Gospels rather than representing an independent tradition about Jesus.

H. H. Drake Williams, III

Evangelische Theologische Faculteit and Tyndale Theological Seminary
Leuven, Belgium and Badhoevedorp, the Netherlands

Robert H. Gundry. *Peter: False Disciple and Apostate according to Saint Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. xx + 119 pp. £12.99/\$20.00.

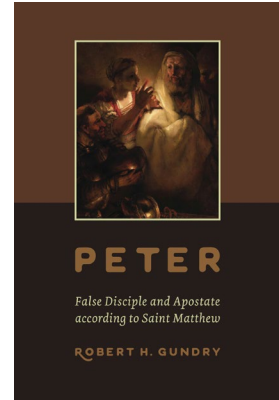
Robert Gundry's commentary on Matthew (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982]) caused quite a stir in certain circles, and forced quite a serious re-think in many others. His new, much shorter but no less provocative book on Matthew's portrayal of Peter continues very much in the same vein, yet I imagine the twenty-first century audience might react more placidly, given more recent trends in evangelical scholarship and readership.

But I hope not. It is with some amount of surprise that even Gundry, in his afterword (pp. 107–08), asks why it has taken until now for someone to explain Matthew's view on (the otherwise "Saint") Peter. Of course biblical harmonization plays a crucial role, as does tradition concerning Peter's martyrdom and (symbolic) status as first Pope; other factors may include pastoral concerns with the forgiveness of wrongdoing, and indeed a (perhaps modern?) aversion to judgement. It is however as an exegete that Gundry reads the Gospel of Matthew and finds there a Peter who personifies the failed disciple of Jesus' teaching.

Gundry examines the appearances of Peter in the gospel prior to Matthew 16, then in the (perhaps) key passage of Matthew 16:13–23, and in the following narrative until the conclusion of the gospel. He also considers the instances where Matthew has chosen to *omit* Peter from traditions taken over from his major source, Mark (a brief note in the introduction states simply that, if Matthean priority is suggested, then Mark, like Luke and John, is involved in the rehabilitation of Peter, p. 4). He then gives somewhat brief overviews of the teaching of the gospel on false discipleship and persecution, well-documented areas of Matthean studies which here only require connections to be drawn to the portrayal of Peter.

Peter is introduced in Matthew (to a Greek-speaking audience of "first-time auditors," p. 4) as a man called Πέτρος, and at no point in the gospel is it claimed that this was Jesus's name for him. The name does not appear at first to carry any status or honor. He is, of course, the *first* of the disciples to be called, but it turns out that many who are first will be last (Matt 19:30). Peter is never to be considered didactically exemplary, and even his addressing Jesus as "Lord" is irrelevant for the issue of his status, as both false disciples (Matt 7:21–22) and non-disciples (supplicants throughout the gospel) use this form of address. Most importantly, perhaps, Matthew's addition of Peter's walking-on-water does not paint our first disciple in a good light: he doubts it is Jesus, *tests* Jesus (not unlike the devil had done in the wilderness), and then doubts again even while experiencing the miracle. Peter has little faith, and it is the other disciples, once the two have boarded the boat, who confess Jesus as the son of God (pp. 10–13).

In Matthew 16 Peter plays catch-up, and we have the foundational "you are Peter" and "on this rock" (16:18). In a detailed analysis of this passage Gundry argues, with perhaps inevitably limited success, that this is not to be seen as a positive evaluation of Peter, and his salvation and status are by no means assured ("ultimate fate is determined by what is done with the privilege, not by the privilege itself" [p. 17]; cf. the list of Judas's privileges that are ultimately revoked [pp. 88–89]). Gundry concludes that the "rock" on which Jesus builds his church is not Peter, rather "these words" of Jesus's teaching (Matt 7:24).



Matthew then proceeds to emphasise Peter's incorrect understanding in his discussion with Jesus, in which he is both "Satan" and "a stumbling block" (Matt 16:23). It is not going well for this disciple, at least.

Peter makes further mistakes as the story progresses to a mountain-top, where he himself (in Matthew) offers to build three tents, but is interrupted in his proposal by none other than God himself in a voice from heaven, "to butt up against Peter's egotistical malaprop as an abrupt and stringent correction of it" (p. 33). The episode (unique to Matthew) of the payment of temple tax is examined and shown not necessarily to be a positive one (pp. 33–35), Peter's idea of forgiveness is shown to be amazingly insufficient (pp. 36–37), and his insistence that he will not abandon his Master (from Mark) is reworked by Matthew to increase the irony and hypocrisy of it all (pp. 39–41). Gundry considers every appearance of Peter in the narrative, and while the arguments do not always convince that the portrayal is consistently negative, they do speak strongly against any idea of Matthew rehabilitating the negative image of Peter he read in Mark.

Not all of the exegesis is equally convincing. Gundry's suggestion, for example, that the attribution of Peter's insight (in declaring "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God") to the Father in Heaven is so that "Peter gets no credit" (p. 16), or the outright denial of some degree of "intimacy" between the two in the episode of "Peter's Penny" (pp. 33–35), show perhaps more of Gundry's creativity than of the evangelist's. Furthermore, the argument against the ultimate rehabilitation of Peter leans heavily on the idea of a mixed church, in which Peter (alone?) represents the bad element among "the Eleven" at the close of the gospel. While it is true, as Gundry argues, that no rehabilitation of Peter is narrated (p. 66), there is also very little to lead one to understand Peter as the apostate at this final stage; hence, perhaps, why the idea has not been proposed until now.

Comparison with Judas arises from Matthew's out-of-sequence positioning of Judas's remorse and suicide right after the account of Peter's denial of Jesus. Peter not only denies Jesus (as Jesus too will deny him, Matt 10:33), but swears an oath, in violation of his Master's instructions (5:34) and even as Jesus himself refuses to do so before the High Priest (26:62–64). This all results in Peter's retreating further and further from the scene of Jesus's trial, until he is *outside*, in the *dark*, and *weeping*; the only thing missing to complete his damnation is the "gnashing of teeth" (Matt 8:12, etc.). His name is missing from the address to the women at the empty tomb, and his presence among "the eleven" on a mountaintop in Galilee is only reflective of Jesus's recurrent teaching of a mixed community of wheat and tares (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43) and of good and bad fish (13:47–49).

Gundry provides a list of possible arguments that could be made for Peter's ultimate rehabilitation and salvation, and he counters each (pp. 52–56). In the end his arguments certainly carry some weight, with the two major obstacles (aside from broader canonical/theological questions) the explanation of $\sigma\upsilon\ \epsilon\tilde{\iota}\ \Pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\varsigma$ at Caesarea Philippi, and the ambiguous position of Peter among the eleven at the Great Commission, which, despite much great exegesis, still remain fertile ground for opposing arguments. Nonetheless, in its relentless focus on the quest for *Matthew's* perspective on Peter, the book provides a stimulating counterpoint to other recent scholarly contributions that have aimed at reconstructing a single *historical/canonical* Peter (Larry R. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012]), or shifted the focus toward the *remembered* Peter of the early church (Markus Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter*, WUNT 1/262 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010]). Gundry reminds us of some of the strengths of the redaction criticism of the 1960s, with its interest in the gospel-writers as authors and theologians in their own right.

In his conclusion Gundry notes that these observations may have repercussions for the date (before Peter's martyrdom?) and location (Antioch, where Paul openly opposed Peter?) of the Gospel of Matthew. The monograph's main contribution, however, is to remind us that diversity and dialogue among canonical texts are not to be overlooked or smoothed over too quickly for the sake of dogmatics; the rich variety of gospel literature surely has great benefits for pastoral theology.

J. Andrew Doole
University of Innsbruck
Innsbruck, Austria

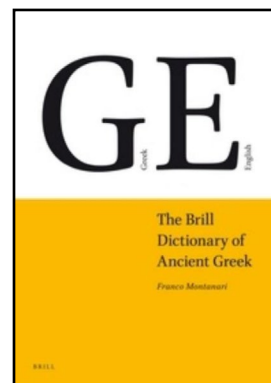
Franco Montanari. *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. lx + 2431 pp. £73.00/\$125.00.

The present volume, produced by Franco Montanari, Professor of Ancient Greek Literature at the University of Genoa (Italy), is based on the third edition of his *Vocabolario della Lingua Greca* (Torino: Loescher, 2013). In his preface (pp. v–vi) Montanari indicates that the scope of his lexicon is not limited to Classical and Hellenistic usage but includes Greek Judaic-Christian literature up to the sixth century CE. He incorporates papyri and inscriptions in addition to literary material, and many proper names.

A second preface is written by Gregory Nagy, Leonard Muellner, and Madeleine Goh, who oversaw the translation and editing under the auspices of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, DC. Here they point out that venerable work of Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ), originating in 1843, is dated despite its revisions and editions. Moreover, it was based on the 1831 edition of Passow's *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*, the original of which dates from 1824. Yet even that edition was based on the *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch* of Johann Gottlob Schneider, published in 1798. Thus LSJ is the product of extensive "cross-fertilization" and has not undergone major revision since 1940. In short the *Brill Dictionary* offers a fresh start with the most recent advances both in terms of accessible sources and lexicographic methodology (notably the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*).

The editors' objective is "an accurate elucidation of each Greek lemma in English, and, accordingly, it is to be emphasized that the lexicon is not a translation of the Italian definitions in and of themselves" (p. vii). This is no small task for the 132,884 words which they seek to render into "as clear and idiomatic modern American English as possible" (p. vii). It boasts the principal parts of 15,006 verbs as well as citations from primary sources in almost every entry.

The prefaces are followed by extensive lists of abbreviations (grammatical terms, glottonyms, authors, works, collections, etc.; pp. viii–lx) before the lexicon proper. Though the layout is very detailed, the editors have included an excellent, color-coded explanatory diagram at the very front of the book where every feature is explained clearly. Each entry is followed by a grammatical tag, translation, comment, example in Greek and English translation, followed by primary source references and many other details. For example, the entry on πληρώω (pp. 1683–84) begins with a list of all its principal parts, followed by definitions in the active, middle, and passive voices. Definitions are clearly indicated in bold print, followed by corresponding references to primary sources.



Montanari calls the Italian version *GI*, the English *GE*, thankfully avoiding the temptation to abbreviate the *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* as *BDAG*! Nor would it be appropriate to consider the *Brill Dictionary* a replacement for *BDAG* or Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, which focus distinctly on Christian usages. Its rival is rather *LSJ*, and the preface has made a compelling case for the outdatedness of that volume. Whether the *Brill Dictionary* does in fact supplant *LSJ* remains to be seen. The incorporation of the vast swaths of data currently available is certainly a step forward, but one wishes the editors would provide some clarity on their lexicographical methodologies—the means by which they derived meanings from the respective sources. This would be valuable both for the curious scholar looking for a succinct distillation of recent lexicographical theory that lies behind such a project, but also the student looking for a basic roadmap of how to do a word study. But perhaps this is to ask too much of a book already compressed into thin pages and painfully small type font. This is an excellent volume well worth keeping to hand for serious Greek exegesis.

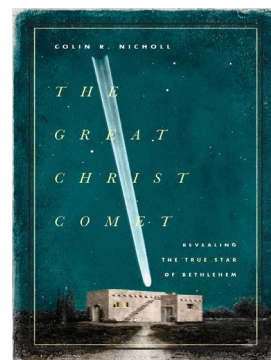
Daniel M. Gurtner
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Colin R. Nicholl. *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 365 pp. £27.99/\$40.00.

How do we explain the star of Bethlehem (Matt 2:2, 9–10)? Is it purely miraculous? Did God orchestrate a natural event to occur at just the right time to herald Jesus's birth? Or should the narrative be understood as myth? Biblical scholars, mythologists, and scientists alike have made many suggestions over the centuries, but none has ever commanded a consensus. Colin Nicholl, a former NT professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary with a Cambridge PhD, has produced an amazing work, mastering the history, mythology, and astronomy needed for the best case yet for a specific hypothesis—the “star” was a spectacular comet in the fall of 6 BC.

Nicholl first clears the deck of alternatives. He provides a detailed argument for the historicity of the narrative of the Magi in Matthew 2:1–12; this is no myth. He surveys previous theories: that the star was the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces in 7 BC, the occultations of Jupiter in Aries in 5 BC, a nova or supernova, one or more meteors, an ordinary star like Alpha Aquarii, a combination of astronomical spectacles in 7–5 BC, or the triple occultation of the bright star Regulus by Jupiter in 3–2 BC.

Nicholl next teaches us in detail the nature of a comet, its elliptic orbits and its appearance from the earth as it nears us, approaches the sun, rounds the sun and heads back towards earth, and finally shoots far outside our solar system. He discusses previous attempts to identify the star with known comets; the dates and phenomena just don't fit the biblical data closely enough. But ancient records—from Greece, Babylon and China—are very fragmentary. Many comets we have since observed would have appeared during their periods of record keeping, yet only a handful are actually mentioned. So Nicholls mounts a formidable case that an otherwise unknown comet could account for all of the relevant data better.



Following Revelation 12:1–5, he traces how a very bright comet, the tail of which on certain days would have spanned the night sky, could have become visible as it passed the earth in late 8 or 7 BC en route to the sun but then began to show up in striking zodiacal locations in the sky in 6 BC. First it becomes visible in Virgo, in the place corresponding to her womb. There it grows in intensity, slowly dropping in the constellation until it appears as though the woman has given it birth. As the comet continues descending toward the horizon near dawn, however, it would appear as though the sun had come to rescue it from the neighboring constellation of Hydra (Revelation's dragon) that threatened to devour it.

The long, narrow ellipse could have resembled a scepter, calling to the minds of Babylonian Jews the prophecies of Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17, already viewed as Messianic, which they could have shared with the Magi. If a meteor storm appeared at the same time it could look as if it were emanating from Hydra's tail and explain the casting of a third of the stars out of heaven. Even the one part of the Matthean story that has seemed to most to require a miracle can be explained. When very narrow comets descend toward the horizon, they can appear to be pointing directly at one location on the surface of the earth, like a building, so this comet could have appeared to focus directly on the house in which the Holy Family resided. Nicholl also shows how his theory could fit the prophecies of Isaiah 7–11, the NT references to Christ as a light, and the later testimony to the "star" in Ignatius and the Protevangelium of James.

I am not competent to evaluate the astronomical calculations on which Nicholl's study is based, though he lays out his evidence in detail. But when John Lennox, one of the world's great mathematicians, endorses it on the back cover, I trust Nicholl has done his homework! As for the biblical scholarship, I could quibble with Nicholl's confidence that most of the guild believe the Gospel writers thought they were writing sober history here. The recent books on the virgin birth narratives by Lincoln and Moyise show the resilience of the view that this was the conscious creation of myth. Nor am I as convinced that an explanation relying on nature must be superior to one involving miracle. Not all of the biblical references Nicholl takes in support of his overall theory, finally, need be alluding to the comet for his theory to prove true.

But these are very minor points. Overall the work is a prodigious *tour de force*. Crossway has appropriately issued the book in hardback with high quality, glossy paper and four-color (as well as black-and-white) replications of photographs, paintings and carvings from numerous eras of human history, along with diagrams to make the science as clear as possible. All this does make for a quite heavy book, given its size, but it is well worth it. Short of the comet reappearing, there is of course no way to confirm Nicholl's theory once and for all, but he has certainly made an extraordinary case for what must surely be the reigning explanation of the Bethlehem star, barring striking new evidence to the contrary.

Craig L. Blomberg
Denver Seminary
Denver, Colorado, USA

Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts. *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. xvi + 202 pp. £14.99/\$22.00.

Textual criticism can be an intimidating subject, especially for students. Having learned just enough Greek to use their New Testament, they find a new language that must be learned to use the textual apparatus. Any help navigating these technical and symbol-laden waters is certainly to be welcomed. Regrettably, this book, despite its positive features, needs to be updated before it can be recommended. Below I offer a summary and then list some of the reasons for this judgment.

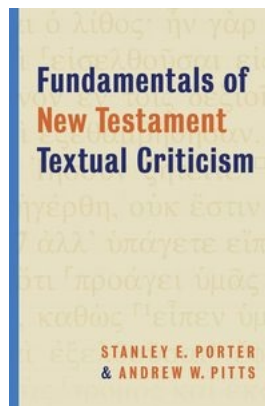
Situated within a new series by Eerdmans designed to take students from beginning Greek through to exegesis, this book situates itself as a “distinctively midlevel textbook” for first or second year students (p. xiii). Aside from this, its novelty is mainly found in the inclusion of chapters on canon and translation theory. I suspect these additions will give the volume a wider appeal than previous introductions. Each of the thirteen chapters is accompanied by a helpful list of “key terminology” and a short bibliography for further reading. An appendix provides a survey of journals, commentaries, and internet resources for further study. Author and ancient text indices are included but there are no manuscript or subject indices.

The first chapter addresses the increasingly contentious question of the goal of textual criticism arguing for the traditional goal as over against the more recent trend to study variants for their sociohistorical interest (sometimes called “narrative textual criticism”). Their criticisms are valid but their use of the terms “autograph” and “the text’s final form” (pp. 2–3) in defending the traditional goal requires clarification.

The second chapter gives a whistle-stop tour of canon lists, catalogues, councils, and codices on the grounds that “the *domain* of NT textual criticism must be established before we can undertake the *task* of NT textual criticism” (p. 9, emphasis original). Unfortunately, there is no reflection on the direct relationship of textual and canonical questions except for their endorsement of the claim that a book rather than its textual form is canonical (p. 29). Given their preference for the “text’s final form” and their proposed relegation of Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11 to footnotes (p. 184), such a discussion would have been valuable.

Chapters three and four consider the various types of evidence used for New Testament textual criticism. Here the reader will find brief overviews of the writing styles, materials, and a small selection of important manuscripts, versions, and church fathers. Chapters five and six cover text-types and the definition of a textual variant. It is a surprising but welcome change to see an entire chapter devoted to this latter issue which has special bearing on how one identifies the text-types discussed in the preceding chapter (although the book could do more to bring out this connection).

The heart of the book is encountered in chapters seven through ten which cover the practice of textual criticism. These chapters cover four possible approaches which they group as (1) the stemmatic approach, (2) the Byzantine/Majority Text approach, (3) two types of eclecticism (thoroughgoing and reasoned), and (4) what they call the “single text model.” As this last method involves adopting the text of a single manuscript it risks being a way to avoid textual criticism rather than one way of practicing it. Despite some hints at preferring this particular method (see pp. 6, 101), they do not describe it in any



detail. Instead, the remaining methodology chapters focus on reasoned eclecticism covering, with the aid of some thirty examples, the various criteria for judging the originality of readings. The work of Bart Ehrman on the “orthodox corruption of Scripture” is given more space than seems warranted in a book this size (pp. 119–26), but the upshot is a welcome caution against appealing to theological motivation when less interesting causes of variation are at hand.

Chapter eleven gives the student a quick history of “critical editions” (a term undefined) from Erasmus up to the recent SBL Greek New Testament. This sets up the largest chapter of the book which gives a very helpful introduction to the NA27/28 and the UBS4/5. Interestingly, the authors are ambivalent about whether a student should prefer the NA edition over the UBS and they show some preference for the NA27 over the newer NA28 (p. 147n1). It should be noted that the abbreviations and sigla on p. 149 are found in the apparatus of the NA27/28 not the outer margin of the NA. Furthermore, the abbreviation *cj* represents the Latin *conjecit* meaning “conjecture” not “infer/infers” and is only relevant to the NA27 since the NA28 dropped all reference to conjectures (pp. 157–58).

The final chapter describes the major English translations along with discussion of translation technique using the now common spectrum of “formal” to “functional.” The authors argue that all translations (in which they include paraphrases) have their value, and they favor of gender inclusive language “where appropriate” (p. 187). A few scattered comments alert the student to the Greek editions behind various English translations but, for the most part, such details are left out.

Overall the book is written with a direct and accessible tone, it is clearly laid out, and the text is unencumbered by footnotes—perhaps to a fault. These are all features that would commend it to beginning students were it not for the number of misstatements, omissions, and factual errors that accumulate by book’s close. In the hope that these might be fixed for a second edition, the following should be mentioned:

There are some problems relating to manuscripts and other materials. The date of the Muratorian Canon is debated, of course, but the authors seem to have reversed the matter in dating the fragment to the second or third century and the list it contains to the seventh or eighth (p. 21). The abbreviations known as *nomina sacra* are “distinctively Christian” and for that very reason they do not help scholars identify “Jewish or Christian” manuscripts (p. 48). It is not clear what the authors mean when they suggest that “there are accents in many early manuscripts” (p. 162). Likewise, the book hands described by Comfort and Barrett are not “found in varying degrees among . . . later minuscule Greek hands” since, as the title of their book indicates, these styles are all forms of majuscule (p. 46). The “textual character” listed for the manuscripts in chapter four is a bit unclear. Some papyri are categorized by text-type but others by their relation to \aleph /01 and B/03 with no explanation for the difference. Exactly what P22 and C/04 are “eclectic” and “mixed” of is not stated (pp. 59, 60). Codex Washingtonianus (W/032) is described as the earliest witness to the Byzantine text (p. 60), but in light of recent questions about its fifth century date that title is better given to Codex Alexandrinus (A/02) and only in the Gospels. The discussion of Tatian’s Diatessaron (p. 64) could be clarified as it seems to suggest that most of our witnesses to this now lost text are from Syriac translations of an original Syriac text! Likewise, the information on the Philoxenian and Harclean Syriac (pp. 65–66) needs to be updated since they have long been known to be separate translations and since they provide the first Syriac translation of only the *small* Catholic Letters and Revelation. The suggestion that “text-types” are “geographically based” (p. 73) requires justification as does the entire concept of text-types given the doubts that have been raised about it. At the very least, the student should be made aware of the important current debates.

The suggestion that χωρὶ [sic] θεοῦ in Hebrews 2:9 is only attested in “later sources” needs to be revised in light of the evidence of the Vulgate, Ambrose, and Origen. Finally, it is quite opposite of the truth of the matter to say that Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11 have “very little manuscript support” (p. 151).

The most significant error relating to manuscripts, however, is the number that is given on p. 50. We are told that there are 128 papyri, 2,911 majuscules, 1,807 minuscules, and 2,381 lectionaries for a total of over 7,000 (a total repeated on pp. 33, 80). But this number is wrong and wildly so. The number of majuscules is overstated by over 2,000 and the number of minuscules is understated by almost 600 (see <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste>). The discrepancy is even stranger given that fact that on p. 48 we are told that there are far more minuscules than majuscules and that the latter only account for about ten percent of the total number of manuscripts. Also problematic is the repetition of now thirty-year-old data from F. F. Bruce comparing the number and date of New Testament manuscripts to those of other ancient literature (p. 50). For example, the reader is informed that there are only eight manuscripts of Herodotus’s famous *History* with the earliest dating only to 900 AD, but a few minutes on the Leuven Database of Ancient Books (<http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab>) reveals 43 manuscripts some of which date almost a millennium earlier. Clearly the statistics need updating.

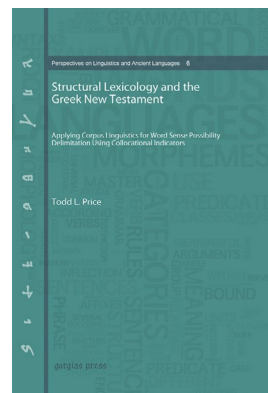
Further problems attend the authors’ understanding of the history of the discipline. The story of a Greek manuscript with the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7–8) that was made to order for Erasmus’s third edition (p. 138) is appealing but it remains unsubstantiated (see the work of H. J. de Jonge). It is also incorrect to suggest that Erasmus himself consulted Codex Vaticanus for his first edition (p. 56) when, in fact, he had only minimal access by way of friends and even that was only just prior to the appearance of his third edition in 1522. Likewise, the AV/KJV was not based on any of his editions but on those of Beza and Stephanus (pp. 139, 182). Richard Bentley and not Karl Lachmann is the one who should get credit for being the first to “set out a program to free NT scholarship from the Textus Receptus” (p. 140), and to say that Eberhard Nestle’s important editions “relied heavily” on those of Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and Weiss (p. 141) gives the wrong impression since they relied exclusively on them until well after his death. The *Editio Critica Maior* is mentioned only in passing (pp. 90, 113, 146, etc.) and, strangely, not at all in the chapter on critical editions. The authors seem to think that this edition is still distinct from that of the International Greek New Testament Project (IGNTTP) despite that they are now an important cooperative effort (p. 146). Unfortunately, the use of these two editions is never explained and, in keeping with their appreciation of Tischendorf (cf. pp. 56–57), students are pointed to his 8th edition instead.

I hope that listing these problems does not appear to be nitpicking; the reason for doing so is to highlight the problem they present for students being introduced to the topic. For better or worse, textual criticism is a discipline that lives and dies in the details. This makes it especially important that a student’s first introduction gets these right. As it is, teachers looking for a midlevel introduction will have to keep waiting. Were a second edition to address these problems, it could prove itself a valued introduction to the fundamental and fascinating world that is New Testament textual criticism.

Peter J. Gurry
Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge
Cambridge, UK

Todd L. Price. *Structural Lexicology and the Greek New Testament: Applying Corpus Linguistics for Word Sense Possibility Delimitation Using Collocational Indicators*. Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Languages 6. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2015. xx + 249 pp. £128.48/\$182.46.

Students in biblical exegesis courses sometimes defend their interpretations of a Scripture passage by citing a lexicon that allows them to define a key word in a particular way. They look over the lexicon's definitional entries as if considering a menu, and they simply select the option most fitting to their tastes. This simplistic exegetical usage is not, of course, the intention of New Testament Greek lexicons. But can lexicons be constructed in such a way as to discourage this cafeteria-like utilization? Modern linguistic studies have much to offer in addressing this perennial problem, so says Todd Price in this revision of his London School of Theology PhD dissertation written under the supervision of Max Turner.



Price utilizes the overlapping disciplines of computational linguistics (applying computer technology to the study of language), computational lexicography (applying computer findings to dictionary writing), and corpus linguistics (collecting and grouping texts for linguistic research). While easily distinguishable (cf. pp. 2–3), these disciplines can be so intertwined in their application that Price simply uses “CL” to refer to any and all of them. Taking his cues from the extensive work of structural lexicology in English and from the initial work of Matthew Brook O’Donnell in *New Testament Greek (Corpus Linguistics and the Greek of the New Testament, New Testament Monographs 6* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005], see esp. 314–96), Price argues that the use of the CL disciplines will greatly improve accuracy in determining the sense of words in the Greek New Testament. A word or phrase can mean something different when it is present with certain other words (*collocations*), when it is used in certain grammatical structures (*colligations*), and/or when it is used with clusters of terms in the same domain (*semantic preference*) (p. 5). Price aims to demonstrate that New Testament exegetes can use CL to examine the structure of a given passage and how the word or phrase in question is used in other comparable literature so as to decide between competing word senses or at least to narrow down the possible word senses.

To illustrate this, Price takes his readers through the process of examining σύν and συνίστημι, investigating the nuances of their occurrences in the New Testament by way of comparison with their uses in a large body of other Greek literature. “CL is based upon the premise that careful, systematic investigation of a well-chosen corpus is essential for observing the behavior and sense of lexical items” (p. 24). So for examination of New Testament meanings, Prices begins with Greek texts dated between 200 BCE and 200 CE plus the Septuagint, amounting to 177 full texts. He expands this primary corpus of comparative texts with an additional 161 texts (mostly Plutarch’s) in a secondary corpus. These corpora are pulled together for electronic access using the texts from the Perseus Digital Library and Logos Bible Software. In laying out his comparative word studies on σύν and συνίστημι, Price demonstrates the value of his CL approach by discussing its exegetical significance for several New Testament passages (e.g., 1 Cor 5:4; 10:13; 2 Cor 4:14; 8:19; 13:4; Gal 5:24; Col 1:17; 3:9; 1 Pet 2:19). A website accompanying the book offers downloadable spreadsheets with all the concordance data for these sample word studies (see <https://structurallexicology.wordpress.com>).

At times Price seems somewhat conflicted about CL. He refers to it as a “new” or “novel” discipline (pp. 7, 15), and yet he traces its history back as far as the year 1262 (p. 7); he complains that CL “has yet to catch on in biblical studies” (p. 15; cf. pp. 17–18), and yet he notes that Cruden “seemed generally aware of the importance of collocations and phraseology” in his 1737 concordance of the English Bible. Of course, the invention and application of computers in the twentieth century has brought a whole new face to CL “in the modern sense of the word” (p. 9). While necessarily touched upon (cf. pp. 29–30), somewhat lacking is Price’s analysis of the computer resources currently available for CL approaches to biblical studies (see now Stanley E. Porter, “Analyzing the Computer Needs of New Testament Greek Exegetes,” in *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015], 29–46).

While laid out like a dissertation, this volume is more accessible than many in this genre; nevertheless, a general interest in linguistics is helpful for enduring the theoretical half (chs. 1–4). Conversely, the application of the method in the second half of the book (chs. 5–8) is so user-friendly that a reader could beneficially begin here. The book suffers from several typographical matters, a few layout issues, and a couple errors of fact, but these do not interfere with the main argument. Those who read footnotes may be frustrated that this volume departs from the guidelines of *The SBL Handbook of Style* and uses short-form bibliographic entries even for first-mention items.

In the end, this volume is a helpful introduction to the CL disciplines of corpus linguistics, computational linguistics, and computational lexicology. The vocabulary that CL provides is helpful for discussing word study methodology; indeed, having more precise vocabulary can improve a discipline. But it is important to note that “applying corpus linguistics for word sense possibility delimitation using collocational indicators” is really not all that new in biblical studies. Rather than introducing something new to New Testament investigation, this book demonstrates a computerized method for conducting word studies in the manner that has been responsibly engaged long before computers. Nevertheless, following Price’s advice will help scholars more quickly, more thoroughly, and more accurately—which are the advantages of computers—determine word and phrase meanings or at least (more modestly) narrow the possible meanings for particular terms in the New Testament. We can only hope that future New Testament Greek lexicons will find ways to encourage their users to follow this methodology.

Douglas S. Huffman
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University
La Mirada, California, USA

W. Andrew Smith. *A Study of the Gospels in Codex Alexandrinus: Codicology, Palaeography, and Scribal Habits*. New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents 48. Leiden: Brill, 2014. x + 384 pp. £106.00/\$163.00.

The fascinating story behind our modern Bibles is, in many ways, the story of its manuscripts, each one with its own part to play. Although often overlooked, Codex Alexandrinus (A/02) sits in the company of the great Greek Bibles which includes both Codex Sinaiticus (S/01) and Codex Vaticanus (B/03). Here (albeit mostly in the Gospels) it takes center stage in the published form of W. Andrew Smith's dissertation completed under Larry W. Hurtado at the University of Edinburgh.

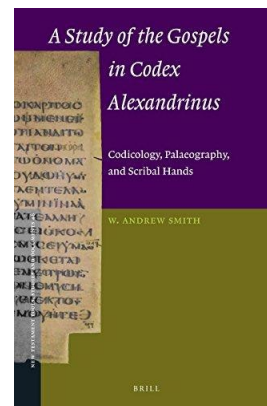
Set in relation to past studies of individual manuscripts like Sinaiticus or Bezae (D/05), Smith aims to introduce quantitative data into the study of "physical, paratextual, and textual features of the Gospels in Alexandrinus" (pp. 1–2). The sheer number of tables, lists, and figures shows just how seriously Smith has taken this new approach. Following the introduction, the study unfolds in four main chapters and a brief conclusion. These are supplemented with five appendices, a bibliography, and three short indices (name and subject, manuscript, and biblical).

The first chapter traces the history of the codex before and after it was given to King Charles I of England in 1627. All the marginal notes are surveyed with special attention given to its uncommon ascription to a woman, Thecla of Egypt who is said to have completed the manuscript shortly after the Council of Nicea. Ultimately Smith concludes that this intriguing attribution is "unverifiable (but unlikely to be true)" (p. 34). Certainly the evidence of later chapters points toward more than one producer of the manuscript.

The second chapter turns to the material makeup of the codex and is the first of three that is heavily data-driven. From careful attention to the foliation and quire numbering, we learn that the current order of books is probably original, that the codex was early on bound in two volumes (though now in four and once in one), that two missing leaves have not been accounted for previously, and that, as others have argued, the missing leaves in John's Gospel would not have had room for the story of the adulterous woman.

Chapter three deals with palaeography and paratextual features of the Gospels. It is also the longest as it encompasses everything from the style of handwriting, the use of color ink, the decorations at the close of each book, the Eusebian apparatus, and the Old Greek chaptering system which is first attested here in Alexandrinus. In the case of the Eusebian apparatus, Smith finds a number of "cascading errors" where the scribe briefly loses track of the Eusebian canon numbers in the Gospels. This along with a clear and well-illustrated palaeographical discussion provides a good case for three different scribes in the New Testament, one of which worked exclusively on Revelation. Strangely, these arguments are given outside the chapter entitled "scribes" and come, with their conclusions (pp. 179–80), before we are given the history of research on the matter (pp. 182–89). A bit of restructuring here would have helped the argument's flow.

The fourth and final chapter considers features ranging from unit delimitation to the use of *nomina sacra* and orthography. The orthographic data is important in overturning the suggestion that it demonstrates an Egyptian provenance. In fact, the Gospels in Alexandrinus are quite typical in their orthography and show no distinctly Egyptian influence. The long section on delimitation affirms that



the Eusebian sections tend to follow the paragraphing, a conclusion that seems unsurprising given the mechanics of codex production (cf. p. 248n1).

A short conclusion reflects on the preceding chapters and offers brief comments on the potential for further work. Over 100 pages of appendices include lists of exhaustive data for the sections on orthography, unit delimitation, and Eusebian apparatus and offer details on the statistical calculations for chapter two. The largest appendix proves the most useful as it links Scripture references, quire numbers, and all three sets of foliation for the entire codex. Anyone who has stumbled their way around Alexandrinus will have Smith to thank for making their way much easier in the future.

As to formatting, the book is impressively typeset and Brill is to be commended for producing such a clear text even with so many tables and figures throughout. The only improvements on this front would have been a more detailed table of contents and a list of tables and figures. Only a handful of typos deserve mention: ἀφιερῶθη needs an acute accent in its three uses on pp. 22–23; there is a tiny discrepancy on the average writing width on p. 53 (19.95 cm vs. 19.93 cm); footnote numbers 75, 76, and 77 are given twice on p. 68; and the first page of Appendix B refers the reader to chapter three when chapter four is clearly meant.

Without question the volume's strength is its statistical analysis, and Smith's desire to strengthen traditional codicological and palaeographic study with quantitative analysis is commendable. Unfortunately, the strength also becomes a weakness. In some cases the sheer amount of data overruns its value and in others the data themselves are problematic. In the first category, quire numbers are certainly relevant for determining scribal hands, but I had trouble seeing the real value of six pages listing their "associated features" (pp. 76–82). In the second category, the use of measurements to delineate scribal hands in chapter two is strained by the fact that (a) the measurements are done on a facsimile, (b) the manuscript has been trimmed, and (c) the influence of the ruling lines is not accounted for. Regrettably, the British Library never granted Smith access to the physical artifact, a fact noted at relevant points in the work.

The volume succeeds as "a systematic, descriptive catalog of features found in Alexandrinus" especially in the Gospels (p. 252). Future studies of other manuscripts and of Alexandrinus will suffer no lack of data with which to compare their own material.

Peter J. Gurry
Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge
Cambridge, UK

Marianne Meye Thompson. *John: A Commentary*. New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015). xlv + 532. £42.24/\$60.00.

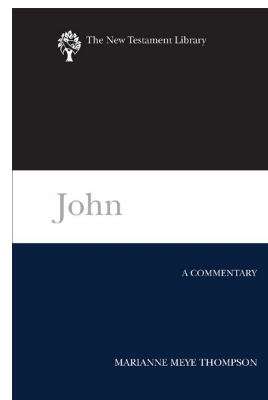
John: A Commentary marks the end of seventeen-year project for Marianne Meye Thompson, George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. Her commentary follows numerous essays and book reviews on John's writings plus three noteworthy books: *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); *1–3 John*, IVP New Testament Commentary 19 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992); and *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

A sizable bibliography of notable past and current Johannine scholarship precedes a substantial introduction followed by the commentary. Even so, Thompson expressly states that her work “is not a commentary about scholarship on the Fourth Gospel” (p. 23). Though she takes into consideration recent discussion concerning interpretation of the Gospel, including archaeology, Jew-Gentile tensions, and possible Greco-Roman sources for understanding John's Gospel, her objective is to expound the Gospel's witness to Jesus by devoting attention to its narrative, its structure, its core themes, and its theological and rhetorical arguments (p. 23). She achieves her aim to “illumine the witness” of the Gospel's narrative by restricting appeal backgrounds to those which aid in the interpretation of the text, without assessing whether these backgrounds are necessarily those of the author or his initial readers (p. 23). This accounts for a commentary that offers explanation of the Gospel's text uncluttered with the frequent engagements of prior commentators found in many other commentaries.

The influence of Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) seems apparent. Thompson explains that “I do not take the Gospel to be a cryptic account of a church at the end of the first century, or of the ‘Johannine community,’” even though the Gospel surely reflects convictions of some earlier believers who came to see Jesus as the promised Messiah (p. 22). She acknowledges that the writer of the Fourth Gospel was doubtless neither unmindful of nor uninfluenced by faith “communities,” but she considers it inconceivable that anyone could “read the history of those faith communities straight out of the Gospel” (p. 22). Instead, John's Gospel reports who one “first-century Christian author understood Jesus to be” (p. 22).

Thompson affirms that John's Gospel “stakes its credibility on an eyewitness who had a personal memory of Jesus, namely, ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’” (p. 17). Even so, again like Bauckham, she does not regard the apostle John to be the author, contrary to ancient tradition. The author is not even one of the Twelve, though she makes the case that the author is intimately knowledgeable of the events concerning Jesus's passion, including his Last Supper, arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Despite explaining well her case for rejecting the traditional view, Thompson does not provide any convincing alternative.

Thompson includes an instructive section in the introduction that distinguishes John from the Synoptic Gospels. After posing the question concerning what accounts for how John composed his Gospel—whether dependent on or independent of the other Gospels—she adeptly demonstrates numerous features that distinguish John's Gospel from the Synoptics. Thompson offers no decisive response to the question, but contends that however one resolves the issue, one is obliged to recognize that the Fourth Gospel exhibits “a creative mind that interpreted received traditions in light of a



particular hermeneutical stance and theological convictions about Jesus and the significance of his ministry” (p. 8).

Thompson scatters excurses throughout the commentary; the initial four occur within the first ninety pages. She identifies nine topics that call for special attention, more than her commentary addresses: (1) Word and Wisdom in John; (2) Son of God, Son, and Son of Man; (3) The Signs in the Gospel of John; (4) Life and Eternal Life in John; (5) The “I AM” Sayings in John; (6) 7:53—8:11 Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery; (7) “The Jews” in the Gospel of John; (8) The Johannine Vocabulary of Faith and Discipleship; and (9) The Holy Spirit in John.

How Thompson treats what scholars of the Fourth Gospel call *aporias* may puzzle, even disappoint them. Because she avoids arcane lingo, giving her commentary greater accessibility, she appropriately points out the literary “seams” without burdening her readers with extensive engagement of the issues. Instead, she comments on them with the grace and skill of one who has carefully thought through the evangelist’s strategy and offers her own simply expressed summary for each *aporia*. For example, concerning Jesus’s abrupt movements between Jerusalem and Galilee in chapters 5 and 6, she states, “Even as the Gospel jumps over large periods of time in order to correlate Jesus’ work with significant festivals of the Jewish calendar, so now it has moved from Jerusalem (ch. 5) to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (6:1)” (p. 139). Thompson succinctly addresses Jesus’s saying, “Rise; let us go from here” (14:31), which seems to end his discourse only to continue at length concerning his impending departure and the troubles his disciples would encounter. John narrates Jesus’s actual departure in 18:1. Concerning this, Thompson offers two brief footnotes to support her pithy explanation: “Jesus’ delayed exit to his death, which has been anticipated throughout the Gospel, underscores the weightiness of the words that he now speaks to his disciples” (p. 318).

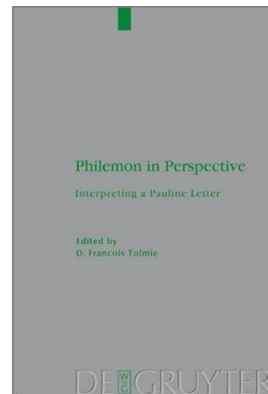
As she explains in her introduction, The New Testament Library commentary series requires individual authors to provide a translation of the original text. This Thompson does as she acknowledges how daunting the task is given the embarrassment of excellent translations. Within the first chapter of the Gospel she makes two text-critical decisions that challenge much of received scholarship. In 1:18, despite the almost universal support (internal and external) for *μονογενῆς θεός*, the reading of NA28, she opts for *μονογενῆς υἱός* because she is persuaded that it “more naturally” follows the statement concerning the Son’s relationship with the Father in 1:14 (p. 27, 34). On 1:34, Thompson accepts *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* (the reading of NA28 on slightly better textual attestation) instead of *ὁ ἐκλέκτος τοῦ θεοῦ* (the more difficult reading) which other commentators on the Gospel accept (e.g., Barrett, Brown, Burge, Carson, Köstenberger, Michaels, Morris).

Overall, Thompson has contributed an excellent commentary to the series, one that will serve well students, pastors, and academic scholars. She has managed to write a wonderful commentary that suppresses technical matters by keeping them to a minimum and relegated to brief footnotes. Thus, it is accessible even for undergraduate students who take courses in biblical studies. I am delighted to add this volume to my burgeoning shelf of commentaries on John’s Gospel.

Ardel B. Caneday
University of Northwestern—Saint Paul
Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA

D. Francois Tolmie, ed. *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 169. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010. xii + 394 pp. £112.99/\$210.00.

There has been a resurgence of recent interest in the book of Philemon. Given the fact that this letter is a mere 334 Greek words long and seems to deal with a mundane matter between a master and his slave, this is certainly surprising. One volume to add to the growing list of works on this tiny letter is D. Francois Tolmie's *Philemon in Perspective*. Emerging out of the International Colloquium on the New Testament held in South Africa, where thirty-six scholars examined the interpretation of Philemon, this volume contains essays written from a wide variety of perspectives, significant exegetical and theological insights, and a rich engagement with the text and secondary literature.



D. Francois Tolmie begins this book with a very helpful essay on the tendencies in research on Philemon among English-speaking and Continental scholars since the 1980s. He highlights the contributions made through papyrological evidence, as well as epistolographic, rhetorical, sociological, hermeneutical, and theological approaches. Even though many contributions have been made in the past, diverging opinions on Philemon remain—a reminder, according to Tolmie, that “much still has to be done” (p. 27). This segues nicely into the essays of this volume, all of which critically interact with these previous contributions.

Jeffrey A. D. Weima's epistolary analysis of Philemon, which centers on the form rather than the content of the text, demonstrates that Paul cleverly crafted every major unit of this letter to place much pressure on Philemon. The apostle wants Philemon to agree with his explicit and even implicit requests. One important contribution Weima makes in this essay is a critical response against those who accuse Paul of employing manipulation.

Peter Lampe analyzes the affects and emotions in Paul's rhetoric through a rhetorical-psychological approach. He reconstructs the wide range of emotions felt by Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon, before determining how Paul's rhetoric steers this messy situation toward an ordered resolution. Nevertheless, his reconstructive imagination, at times, reads too much into the text.

Ernst Wendland's thorough (at certain points, complex!) discourse analysis of the letter attempts to explain the shocking nature of Paul's request, “You will do even more than I say” (v. 21). He concludes that Paul's persuasive argumentative thread throughout the letter would have convinced Philemon to free Onesimus by the time he reached the implicit request for manumission in verse 21. Against many scholars, Wendland argues that Paul wants Philemon to liberate Onesimus.

Peter Arzt-Grabner takes a close look at Onesimus's status as a slave, as well as Paul's practical solution to Philemon about Onesimus, through the framework of ancient legal and documentary sources. Arzt-Grabner contends that Paul wanted Philemon to entrust Onesimus with responsible tasks as a business partner, perhaps even setting up a long-term plan of economic and social stability which culminated in manumission.

G. Francois Wessels deals with the nature of the ancient system of slavery presupposed in Philemon. After a very succinct overview of this much-debated topic and an informed interaction with major players in this discussion, he concludes that slaves were mere tools, socially dead people, and that manumission was not only theoretically possible and socially acceptable but, for Paul, absolutely necessary: “Paul wanted Philemon to set Onesimus free” (p. 164).

With only a few articles on the theology of Philemon, Michael Wolter seeks to relate this letter to “the theological contexts of justification . . . as they are expressed in his [Paul’s] other letters” (p. 170). In the end, Paul’s doctrine of justification, which was developed in the Galatian controversy and expanded in Romans, appears in Philemon as the ethical impact of theological thinking: “faith in Jesus Christ creates a new identity which supersedes every other given identity” (p. 177). One radical implication of applying his doctrine of justification to the social situation in Philemon is that Paul does not urge Philemon to manumit his slave. Instead, he calls on him to treat Onesimus as “a brother and friend” (p. 178).

Pieter G. R. de Villiers considers the way Philemon represents “an ethical application of Paul’s understanding of the gospel as God’s gracious and loving act of reconciliation” (p. 202). He primarily focuses on love; that is, love which springs from faith in Christ and has no regard for social status: “One deserves to be loved simply because of one’s status as brother or sister in the faith. Onesimus’s ‘birth’ in Christ creates a new reality that overturns all existing realities” (p. 202). He, too, insists that Paul did not want Onesimus liberated. Rather, he wanted Philemon to receive him with loving arms as a brother in Christ.

Roberts Atkins recounts the ways Philemon was contextualized in the United States. By connecting public policy with biblical interpretation, he claims that Philemon was used “to support the Fugitive Slave Act and the connection to the continuation of new forms of slavery into the 20th century” (p. 221). But he also reminds his readers of the power of biblical exegesis and interpretation, as seen in the abolition of slavery.

Atkins’s essay serves as a transition into the postcolonial reading of Philemon by Jeremy Punt. He attempts to address the “disproportionate power relationships” between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus (p. 225). According to Punt, Paul emerges from this situation with a stronger social position as an “authoritative yet compassionate apostle,” while Philemon’s status is lowered and Onesimus’s is raised (pp. 245–46). One glaring problem in this essay is that Punt acknowledges the presence of debt and obligation in Philemon without highlighting the reciprocity that occurs between all three parties (four if you include God in Christ). As such, he promotes a one-way relationship, with Paul powerfully and oppressively on top—a typical approach among modern interpreters examining debt and obligation in power relations.

In dealing with the question of whether Paul approved or disapproved of slavery, Pieter J. J. Botha asks the question: “Is it satisfactory—or even responsible—to say that slavery is a historical phenomenon and that Paul was a child of his times?” (p. 252). His answer is a resounding “no.” Botha claims that we can neither simply paraphrase Paul’s statements on slavery nor invoke social acceptance of ancient slavery in order to arrive at a conclusion. The violence of slavery, as well as its undergirding principle of hierarchy, must be considered.

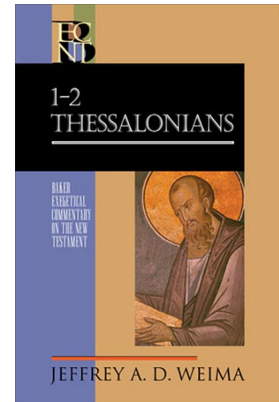
The last four essays reach back to the early church to glean insights on Philemon. Paul B. Decock describes the reception of Philemon in Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine, while Alfred Friedl offers a systematized summary of Jerome’s exegesis, Chris L. de Wet examines the motif of honor in Chrysostom’s exegesis, and John T. Fitzgerald deals with Theodore Mopsuestia’s interpretative handling of two issues: (1) the particularity of Philemon as a letter; and (2) the proper interpretation of Paul’s request to accept Onesimus “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother” (v. 16). Tremendous insight is certainly gleaned from these church fathers.

This edited volume is certainly commendable. It presents a broad spectrum of ideas on Philemon, everything from pre-modern interpretations to post-colonial readings, from feminist hermeneutical approaches to theological reflections. All this affords the opportunity to respect and learn from those who differ from us but also to engage their arguments and arrive at truth—ideally together. That said, I would recommend this volume to students and scholars engaged in high level research, though Wolter’s and de Villiers’s essays would certainly be of interest to those with a theological yet discerning eye. I would add that one area of research in Philemon needs more attention—Paul’s theology of relationships—especially as it relates to his understanding of χάρις (“grace”). Surprisingly, no scholar has made the connection between his theology of grace and relationships in 2 Corinthians 8–9 with this little jewel of a letter. But the results, I think, would be illuminating.

David E. Briones
Reformation Bible College,
Sanford, Florida, USA

Jeffrey A. D. Weima. *1–2 Thessalonians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. xxi + 711 pp. £38.94/\$54.99.

In his preface, Jeffrey Weima recounts how he started out working on this commentary as ‘one who had the vain ambition to write the definitive commentary on 1–2 Thessalonians’ but who is now ‘painfully aware of the shortcomings’ (p. xi) of what he has written. However, I think that the shortcomings are few and that Weima has actually achieved his goal! It is hard to think of a commentary on these two letters that will give Bible teachers and students as sure-footed a guide. Weima has produced an incredibly thorough, carefully-argued and judicious commentary. The great strength of this commentary is the comprehensiveness with which he considers exegetical issues, combined with the carefulness of his own conclusions (well illustrated in his conviction regarding 2 Thessalonians 2:1–17 that ‘one dares not speak more definitively than the text allows’ [p. 491]).



The commentary starts with a relatively short (58 pp.) introduction which concentrates on providing the background to the correspondence. This is the one place in the commentary where I was left wanting a little bit more. So, for example, Weima discusses the question of Pauline authorship of the letters (particularly 2 Thessalonians) across 16 pages. He rightly, in my opinion, argues for Pauline authorship but misses the chance to engage with some of the latest arguments for pseudepigraphical authorship of 2 Thessalonians (and the presence of pseudepigraphy in the ancient world more generally). Partly this is understandable given the target audience of the commentary, but given the prevalence of the contrary view in the literature it would have been helpful to see such an able evangelical scholar engage more thoroughly on the topic. Similarly, a little more on the relationship between the two letters would have been helpful. For example, on the question of the ordering of the two letters, Weima provides just one footnote.

Weima adopts a literary-epistolary analysis to the letters. Each section of each letter starts with a summary followed by a ‘literary analysis’ and then the ‘exegesis and exposition’ section. This middle section is a helpful new addition to this commentary series. In it Weima considers ‘the character of the passage’; ‘the function of the passage’; ‘the extent of the passage’ and the ‘structure of the passage’.

Although busy preachers and teachers may be tempted to skip over this section to get to the detailed discussion of a particular passage, this section, I think, will provide real help in the preparation of sermons and bible-studies in helping the reader think through the overall function of the passage. This section is particularly important on 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16 where Weima argues for a more traditional approach which sees this Paul's defence of himself rather than a newer approach (following Malherbe and Lyons) which understands the passage as having a paraenetic or exemplary function.

In addition to the main sections, there are three excurses. The first discusses the question of whether 1 Thessalonians 1:9b–10 is a pre-Pauline fragment (Weima argues it is not). The second evaluates the textual issue in 1 Thessalonians 2:7—were Paul and his colleagues 'gentle' (*ēpioi*) or 'infants' (*nēpioi*) among the Thessalonians? Weima argues, on the basis of the strength of the external evidence, that the latter reading is correct. The final excursus discusses the identity of the 'restrainer' in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7. Weima provides a comprehensive discussion and makes a very persuasive conclusion (which I won't spoil by revealing in this review!).

In addition to the excurses, Weima includes extended discussions when considering particularly debated passages. So, on 1 Thessalonians 2:16 and Paul's statement that 'the wrath of God has come upon them', he suggests that the prepositional phrase εἰς τέλος be understood temporally and that Paul is claiming that the wrath of God has come upon his people 'until the end', i.e., until the day of Christ's return. Similarly, the command for each man to control his own σκεῦος (1 Thess 4:4) is given a thorough treatment with Weima cautiously concluding that the term refers to the man's body or 'sex organ'. As well as these detailed discussions on debated exegetical points, Weima also provides the occasional theological and pastoral reflection, for example on the wrath of God in 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10.

In short, this is an excellent volume which I think will be the definitive commentary on these letters for many years.

Peter Orr
Moore College
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Jason G. Duesing. *Seven Summits in Church History*. Nashville: Rainer Publishing, 2015. 132 pp. £7.56/\$10.97.

Despite the fact that there is still widespread ignorance of the history of God's people among far too many local churches, only a die-hard pessimist would view the current scene of interest in the Christian past with profound discouragement. We are seeing the production of some fabulous historical scholarship by relatively recent doctoral graduates as well as a flurry of works for a more general popular audience. This new book by Jason Duesing, Provost of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, falls into the latter category and seeks to introduce readers to seven key figures—"seven summits" to use Duesing's mountaineering image—in the history of the church. Five of them are no surprise—Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and William Carey. These are obvious giants. The other two—Balthasar Hubmaier and Carl F. H. Henry—are more idiosyncratic to Duesing's own faith journey and his Baptist convictions.



But as he rightly stresses, Hubmaier, as the doyen of 16th century Anabaptist theologians, has much to teach contemporary western believers whose world is one where religious liberty is increasingly being challenged (pp. 71–72, 78–79). And as Duesing notes, Henry's firm commitment to the authority of God's Word stands behind the remarkable ministry of Billy Graham (pp. 107, 114). Given that both religious liberty and biblical authority are critical issues of our day, Duesing has good reason for including these two lesser known figures.

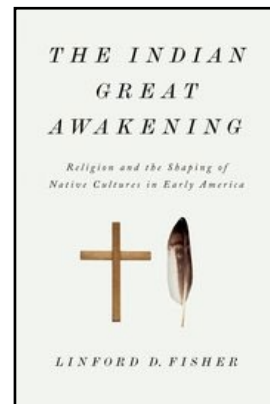
Duesing's chapter on William Carey (p. 93–105) is typical of his treatment of each of these seven figures. After indicating Carey's importance—he "changed the modern world" and his *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) is a landmark book in the history of the Church—Duesing tracks through Carey's life with some lengthy extracts of his writings to give readers an idea of Carey's radical commitment to missions. Notably, Duesing does not shy away from discussing one key problem area of Carey's life—the collapse of his wife Dorothy into insanity. Backing up this substantial overview is Duesing's awareness of the latest Carey scholarship, reflected both in the footnotes and the recommended reading at the close of the chapter. A quote from one of Carey's co-workers, John Fountain, helps Duesing summarize Carey's life: "He keeps the grand end in view."

An opening chapter and conclusion defend the importance of learning church history through biography. This is an excellent tool for the novice to the history of Christianity and also a great reminder for more advanced students that God changes history through people.

Michael A. G. Haykin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Linford D. Fisher. *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 312 pp. £17.49/\$26.95.

Linford Fisher is Associate Professor of History at Brown University, and his focus is in cultural and religious history in Colonial America. *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Culture in Early America* is Fisher's Native-centered account of Indian responses to the Great Awakening. By Native-centered, Fisher means that Natives responded to the Great Awakening with the chief concern of meeting pragmatic and temporal needs as priority to spiritual needs. Facing the threat of being displaced by colonials, Natives sought self-preservation and privileged preserving identity, land, and tradition by accommodating to Christian affiliation. Though Christian affiliation led to dilution of Native spiritual traditions, this syncretistic accommodation lent itself to new opportunities and hopeful expectations of peaceful relations with their new colonial neighbors. Fisher argues: "Native individuals and communities often found missionaries, education, and Christian ideas and practices interesting and useful, but this interest and utility were almost always filtered through the realities of colonialism and a deep and abiding concern with retaining Native land and preserving community, sovereignty, and autonomy" (p. 7).



Over the course of eight chapters, Fisher presents compelling correlations to substantiate this argument. *The Indian Great Awakening* is essentially a chronological survey, with each chapter being governed by a unifying theme, which encapsulates Native life during the period each chapter covers. Chapter one looks at the background of Native and colonial life leading to the Great Awakening. He then examines stimuli to either propagate or be receptive to evangelism in chapter two, followed by a survey of key events and revivalist figures who influenced Natives during the Great Awakening, with an assessment of the Native response in chapter three. Fisher nuances the idea of conversion with a more helpful ascription of affiliation and substantiates this argument with primary source material in chapter four. In chapter five Fisher depicts the Indian Separatist movement by looking at portraits of individual Indian leaders: Samuel Niles, Samuel Ashpo, and Samson Occom. The critical place of education, particularly after the Great Awakening, is given attention in chapter six. The complexity and purpose of mass migration and why some migrated while others chose not to migrate is explored in chapter seven. Chapter eight concludes *The Indian Great Awakening* by looking at those who remained, namely the Narragansetts, who developed a self-sufficient and autonomous church with little outside help.

Fisher does not rely exclusively on eyewitness testimony or published accounts to build his thesis, nor does he neglect these methods. Rather, he examines an array of evidence—from a funerary object (the Pequot medicine bundle) to local church records of baptisms, marriages, and memberships. He leverages this evidence to establish his thesis that Indian responses to the Great Awakening may have more to do with what Christianity might be able to *do* for the Indians than alternate hypotheses.

Motivation is a critical component to the thesis of *The Indian Great Awakening*. In chapter two, Fisher sketches the motives for evangelizers and motives for the evangelized leading up to the Great Awakening. Fisher emphasizes the practical implications for evangelizing Natives. He observes that Christian colonials wished to civilize Natives as they expanded into their territory and grafted them into an Anglicized, Christianized, New World. The Natives were useful to combat Catholics in New France,

helpful to the colonist's survival, and, as King Philip's War exhibited, were a viable threat. Likewise, for the evangelized, the colonists were powerful and had desirable assets. The prospect of English education was the chief asset that aroused Native's interests in Christian affiliation. This motivation became a vital factor for Natives. Besides education, Fisher correlates the Native's response to the Great Awakening, namely their interest in baptism and Christian profession, with an oft-simultaneous appeal for amenities—such as education and resources germane to successful education like clothing, food, property, or permanent facilities. These amenities often accompanied a profession of faith (p. 73). Fisher concludes that economic factors played a substantive role for both the evangelizer and evangelized.

As a historian Fisher steers clear of speculating on subjective realities that are indeterminable. His discussion on conversion in chapter four evidences this principle. Fisher asserts that conversion is not something as easily demonstrable as one might assume. In fact, using this term to describe the Indian's response to the Great Awakening in particular and missionary efforts in general is a misnomer. It is more fitting to ascribe the Indian's response as a realignment of affiliation—one that might be abrogated given appropriate circumstances. These circumstances include not regaining possession of land taken by colonists, or not receiving requested education and the accompanying accoutrements like blankets, English clothing, or other staples (p. 86). Fisher demonstrates the reality of abrogation by examining primary church discipline evidence, while also using this evidence to point out that realignment of affiliation does not typically appear in spaces where prior missionary efforts had not occurred.

As the Great Awakening waned, a declension pattern seems to appear in a number of the Native communities. Fisher argues that declension in devout worship, evidenced by a lack of individuals moving from baptism to communicant membership, indicates that Christianity did not *do* what the Indians assumed or hoped it might.

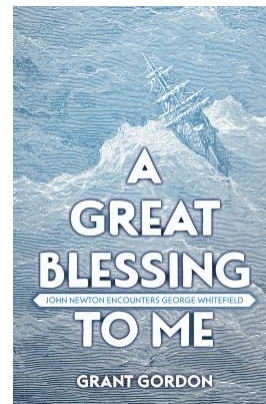
In spite of how vivaciously Fisher argues his thesis, one would not proffer that his thesis is inflexible. He agrees that affiliation is not merely a response to the *usefulness* of Christianity; the Great Awakening was also *meaningful* as well. This is a significant but subtle distinction. Fisher comments that “Christian affiliation were mingled and intertwined with the inner, personal, and subjective elements of religious experience and practice” (p. 106). The very presence and flourishing of Indian separatism indicates how deeply meaningful Christianity became for many Natives. For some, enough of their identity had been built around Christianity, causing them to keep rather than jettison this worldview and revert back to “savagery.” It is likely that the inculcation of Christian thought and Scripture through education must be credited for this flourishing.

The Indian Great Awakening is a helpful foray into the realm of Colonial social history. Readers will gain new insight and perspective that will challenge Whiggish predispositions.

Joseph T. Cochran
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois, USA

Grant Gordon. *A Great Blessing to Me: John Newton Encounters George Whitefield*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016. 220 pp. £8.99/\$14.99.

George Whitefield (1714–1770) has been described as an “evangelist par excellence” and considered by some as the “greatest preacher” of the 18th century Evangelical Revival, while John Newton (1725–1807) has been deemed the “letter writer par excellence” of the revival and known as “the ablest exponent of its pastoral psychology” (p. 2 and 197). *A Great Blessing to Me*, the phrase John Newton used to describe George Whitefield shortly after his death, is the title of Grant Gordon’s most recent work. It records their hitherto untold fifteen-year friendship, neglected in previous scholarship, and demonstrates how Whitefield was a blessing to Newton.



For many years Gordon pastored Baptist churches in Ontario, Canada, and served for a time at Tyndale Theological Seminary in Toronto. Now retired, Gordon continues to publish material that is academically robust as well as spiritually earnest. Gordon has received accolades for this particular work by respected scholars in the field of Evangelicalism including Mark Noll, David Bebbington, Jacob Aitken, and Michael Haykin. Gordon is qualified to write upon the subject having also published *Wise Counsel: John Newton’s Letters to John Ryland Jr* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009).

A Blessing to Me is an accessible work of scholarship covering a mere 220 pages. The work’s appearance is crisp, its content is thoroughly researched, and its style makes the unfolding story both enjoyable and profitable. The narrative begins by recounting the life of both men up until the point where their stories converged in 1755 with a special emphasis on their spiritual development. Whitefield was in London from 6–14 June 1755, during which time Newton was able to hear him preach and briefly met Whitefield in person. Newton described Whitefield’s discourses as “extraordinary and impressive” (p. 58). In 1755 Newton secured the senior customs position of Tide Surveyor in Liverpool. His appointment coincided with Whitefield’s first and only planned preaching visit to the city. This time Newton not only heard Whitefield preach nine times, but he dined with the revival preacher on such numerous occasions that Newton’s friends gave him the name “young Whitefield” (p. 80). Frustrated in his attempt to be ordained, Newton was encouraged to publish his life story, *An Authentic Narrative* (1764), which soon became popular and helped secure him a curacy in Olney. The village had been deeply affected through the regular ministry of Whitefield. Throughout the 1760s Newton continued to correspond with Whitefield and visited him when Whitefield was preaching in London. During this time Newton was drawn deeper into the circles of Evangelicalism.

The final two chapters analyze Whitefield’s direct and indirect impact upon Newton and review their comparative similarities and differences. Whitefield directly impacted Newton through his public ministry (he heard Whitefield preach twenty times in twelve years), which brought him greater assurance regarding his life and ministry. Similarly, Whitefield set Newton on a new trajectory regarding the latter’s understanding of the unity of believers (expressed through the integration of hymns and times of communion in his services). Indirectly, Whitefield impacted Newton by extending his evangelical network and by priming Olney for Newton’s evangelical ministry. Gordon notes the two men’s similarities that included a dislike of denominational and doctrinal conflict, a large vision for the

church, loyalty to the established church, and their celebrity status. They also had their differences, namely the qualities of their marriages and the sorts of ministries they engaged in.

Gordon's work provides an insightful window into the world of eighteenth-century Evangelicalism and the lives of two prominent evangelicals that is helpfully illuminating despite its brevity. For the acquainted reader, Gordon's skilful contextualisation is a good refresher and will hasten one's ability to understand the core material presented. Likewise, for the curious beginner, Gordon's investigation represents an easy access point. Gordon draws out the impact Whitefield had on Newton by inference that leaves the reader clearly aware of the potential personal application. A key point that struck me was just how important the relationships and networks of likeminded evangelicals are to the effectiveness of the mission of the church. Gordon is also realistic in his assessment of Newton's relationship with Whitefield and thus avoids hagiography on the one hand and sterility on the other.

While the core chapters are well developed the introduction and conclusion are lacking. For such a good book the introduction is somewhat anti-climactic, with a brief and vague thesis. The conclusion is also less a summary than it is a reworking of material presented earlier in chapter five. The historiography in the introduction also does not clearly state what the "third manuscript" and "other letters" of Newton's are that have not been available to biographers since 1868 and "some not known at all" (p. 15). While included later, as these play a role in establishing the novelty of the work their statement at the outset would have added to a work that on the whole represents a well weaved historical narrative and evaluation.

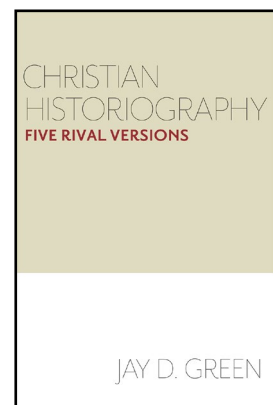
To use a common category of Newton's (2 Tim 2:21), any Christian work ought to be evaluated according to its "usefulness." The spiritual wisdom found within the lives of these two divines should cause the reader to not only learn more about them but the God they proclaimed and His amazing grace displayed in their ministries. For those who enjoy *A Blessing to Me* they can await Gordon's forthcoming work on the relationship between Newton and John Wesley (1703–1791).

Christopher W. Crocker
Bristol Baptist College
Bristol, England, United Kingdom

Jay D. Green. *Christian Historiography: Five Rival Versions*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015. 217 pp. £29.50/\$34.95.

As the title indicates, Jay Green's latest offering evaluates "five rival versions" of Christian history, with a chapter for each, an introduction, and a helpful conclusion. Each chapter surveys one of the five outlined versions, points to its usefulness, and offers substantive criticism. Green indicates that the book is not about a "Christian philosophy (or theology) of history," nor is he trying to determine its "theological meaning." Rather, Green provides readers with a survey of "various ways that formal and informal Christian historiography might be considered Christian" (p. 2).

In his opening chapter Green deals with historical study that "takes religion seriously." With the growth of 20th century secularism, religion had become a focus of study, dissected at the hands of biblical criticism and comparative



religion, but religion didn't permeate other disciplines. In history, studies of the past disregarded religious factors, looking to social forces like economics or politics as clues for meaning. Eventually, due to totalitarianism in the 20th century, many turned to religion for its "humanizing and civilizing power." Whether believer or not, scholars started to empathize with the religion of their subjects (p. 18). This, coupled with the frustration of many Christian historians who felt that their faith was not taken seriously, contributed to the founding of the Conference on Faith and History in 1959 (or 1967, depending on how you read its past).

Chapter two, on historical study "through the lens of faith commitments," is related to the first. The difference is that whereas non-believers can take religion seriously, they cannot interpret the past according to a religious worldview. This "integrationist" approach—standard at many Christian educational institutions—"sees Christian faith as a unique interpretive framework through which believing historians see reality and make sense of the past" (p. 37). Debates along these lines were concerned with the possibility of "objectivity."

Here, Green focuses on the legacies of two significant church historians: Mark Noll and George Marsden (p. 50). Noll urges Christian historians to "speak in and to the profession" while "speaking *in* and *to* the church" (p. 51, emphasis his). Marsden provides a systematic body of work on the integration of faith and history, including numerous essays, and his book *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Marsden balances the worldview thinking he learned at Westminster Seminary with the Common Sense of the philosopher Thomas Reid. In response, Green surveys criticisms of the integrationist approach by historians like Bruce Kuklick who argue that there is no "Christian" approach to anything.

Chapter three looks at Christian history as a branch of moral philosophy, where lessons from great leaders of the past develop into a Christian ethic. Though history as moral philosophy was resisted by the historicism of scholars like Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), it was revived when this scientific approach underwent a crisis with the "return of value-laden history" (p. 71). Progressives sought a usable past based on identity politics, whereas conservatives cast moral judgments on the past in order to uphold and preserve treasured traditions. For instance, Howard Zinn, a historian of the Left, used history to "speak truth to power" (p. 73). On the Right, David Barton advances the notion that American Founders like Jefferson were Christians (p. 83).

A common historical approach is dealt with in the fourth chapter on historical study as "Christian apologetic"—an evidentialist use of history that validates the claims of faith. Because Christianity is historical, it is possible to confirm the historicity of the Bible and its teaching, such as the resurrection. Evangelical historians attempt to "reintegrate the 'Jesus of history' with the 'Christ of faith,'" which stands in contrast to the "demythologization" of the historical Jesus in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann (p. 100). This method is used in ways broader than just proving the truthfulness of Christian Scripture; other historians have used history to prove Christianity's triumph in terms of the development of Western civilization. Notable historians-as-apologists include Edwin Yamauchi and John Warwick Montgomery. Another good example is Stephen Keillor, whose work in American history from a Christian perspective defies categorization, and whose balance between good scholarship and faith commitments Green appreciates, even if he doesn't wholly agree. Green advises that others, like Francis Schaeffer, should be studied with more care. While not a trained historian, Schaeffer's sweeping judgments about the past often didn't stand up to scrutiny. It's curious that N. T. Wright, the leading scholar of the modern quest for the historical Jesus, isn't considered.

The final version of Christian historiography deals with what Green calls “historical study as search for God,” sometimes called “providentialism.” While all Christian historians believe in God’s general providence, providentialist historians canvas the past looking for the hand of God in particular events. After describing providence, which as a Christian Green believes, he traces various providentialist approaches, beginning with Augustine through to more obscure American historians, including a group who host a yearly “Providential History Festival.” The text of Scripture is often a battle ground between providentialist and professional historians, where it is argued that if the objectivity of the professional historian rules out God’s particular providence as an historiographical tool, then what do we do with the authors of Scripture? Green responds that historians don’t have access to the hidden purposes of God, and that the providentialist “ironically weakens and distorts classic theological beliefs about God,” particularly his hidden and revealed will (p. 143).

In the conclusion Green gives his own proposal for studying the past, advocating reflection on vocation. Using William Perkins’s *Treatise of the Vocations or Callings of Men* (1603), he argues that “calling” is distinctly Protestant, imbued with religious significance, and directed by God for the common good (p. 153). Of the many parts in the conclusion worth meditating on, this stands out: “There is deep, God-ordained legitimacy in the tasks of selecting and reading primary sources, asking thoughtful historical questions, consulting the work of other historians, developing interpretive theories, and reconstructing past events using story and critical analysis” (p. 155). The purpose in such historiography is not to detect providence in past events, but to see the hand of God in the historian’s vocation. As such, we see that history is suffused with meaning, is under God’s reign, and that studying history is as much a part of God’s call as pastoral ministry.

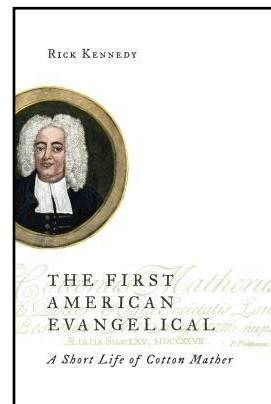
One drawback, though not one that detracts from Green’s overall argument, is that the historians who get attention are largely from the United States. While Herbert Butterfield is mentioned briefly, it’s surprising that David Bebbington doesn’t receive detailed study. This is especially surprising as Bebbington teaches at Baylor University, the publisher of Green’s book. Other historians who could have been mentioned, at least at the level of taxonomy, are the Canadian George Rawlyk, or Edinburgh’s Brian Stanley. While not every historian can be surveyed, when considering the breadth of historians dealt with, it would be reasonable to expect some international treatment.

With this noted, *Christian Historiography* is nevertheless an important contribution to evangelical reflection on writing history. Green provides us a fair and ranging survey that will be useful in historiography courses and should be included on syllabi alongside Ernst Breisach’s *Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), or David Bebbington’s *Patterns in History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). Historians should especially think through how their calling shapes their scholarship, and how it’s integral to understanding their role in the kingdom.

Ian Clary
West Toronto Baptist Church
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Rick Kennedy. *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather*. Library of Religious Biography. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 176 pp. £11.99/\$17.00.

In the newest offering from the Library of Religious Biography series, Rick Kennedy argues that Cotton Mather represents the earliest form of American evangelicalism. In his book *The American Evangelical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), respected historian Douglas Sweeney once described American evangelicalism as a twist that occurred within Protestantism after the collapse of Puritan New England, and for Kennedy, Mather epitomizes that twist. Mather stood at the passing of the old Puritanism of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the rise of the so-called Protestant interest of subsequent generations. The Protestant interest concerned itself not with zealously guarding the spiritual purity of New England, but rather with incorporating New England into the larger British Empire in the name of opposing Roman Catholic nations such as Spain. Mather saw this approach as compromise, not because its advocates were necessarily unorthodox, but because he feared a loss of zeal and piety would result. Mather desired, instead, an all-day-long faith. This faith would take personal holiness and the dramatic working of the divine in human life seriously. He entitled his model the “evangelical interest” and gathered supporters around his cause.



Kennedy surveys aspects of Mather’s life and works to demonstrate his evangelical credentials. Mather called for concerts of prayer and for personal piety in a manner similar to that of the forthcoming Great Awakening; indeed, the narratives featured in Samuel Mather’s biography of Cotton Mather helped to spur some of the Great Awakening’s earliest revivals. Mather approached education in a manner similar to later evangelicals by desiring instruction that took the Bible seriously and sought to affect both the intellect and the affections of the students. He contended against rationalist approaches to Christianity that rejected the possibility or significance of miracles and believed in a world engaged in a cosmic battle between good and evil.

Of course, Mather’s acceptance of the miraculous led to interesting interactions. Most contemporary audiences associate him with the infamous Salem Witches Trials. Kennedy actually seeks to defend Mather on this point, claiming that Mather formulated an approach to demon possession that was much more moderate than the one employed by the magistrates at Salem. Kennedy further explains that even Mather himself believed that the trials proceeded on the basis of mistaken principles and that much modern suspicion of Mather is shaped by unsubstantiated claims raised by Robert Calef, one of Mather’s harshest critics.

In terms of evaluation, Kennedy is not the first to connect Mather with evangelicalism. Richard Lovelace did so in the 1970s, in part by exploring Mather’s interaction with German pietism. Kennedy’s volume is rather unique, though, due to its extensive examination of the historical context in New England, which gave rise to Mather’s evangelical identity. How one decides to define the term evangelicalism is, as always, a difficult point of contention. Kennedy defines it as a populist movement within Christianity that seeks to correct a lackadaisical spirituality. While one might wish for a thicker definition, one based around shared doctrinal convictions, Kennedy’s description appears historically accurate. In this sense, his argument for Mather as a pioneering American evangelical holds.

Also, noteworthy is Kennedy's engagement with Mather's epistemology. Mather relied heavily on the concept of testimony. He argued that one should receive not only the divine testimony provided in Scripture, but also claims made by human acquaintances that are of good character. He deemed such an approach more reasonable than the rationalism favored by his opponents because it did not carry with it an unwarranted suspicion toward the possibility of divine activity in the world.

While Kennedy accurately describes Mather's position, he does not sufficiently critique it. Kennedy desires to connect Mather's reliance on testimony with the rise of the American social sciences, but perhaps one can grant that Mather's critics had a point when they claimed his epistemology coupled with his fascination with the supernatural could lead him to accept extreme positions. Mather, for example, accepted the testimony of his associates as true when they claimed that one girl thought to be demon possessed levitated in the air. He performed an experiment on girls considered demon possessed in which he held books before them in an effort to determine which books demons hated and which ones they did not. At one time he even claimed to have cut with his bare hand an invisible chain that a demon was using to restrain a young victim.

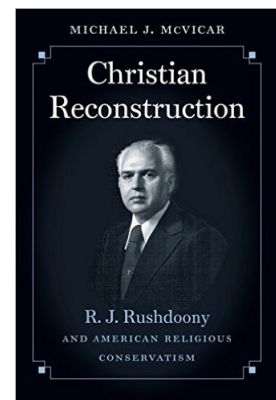
While evangelicals rightly accept the reality of supernatural forces at work in this world and even the possibility of miracles, one wonders if Mather's strong reliance on testimony provided him with enough resources to prevent him from falling into gullibility. Kennedy wishes to deliver Mather from the critiques of his rationalist opponents, and he helpfully disassociates him from the problematic Salem Witch Trials, but Mather's system was itself not above criticism.

Still, Kennedy's book is an engaging and insightful introduction to Mather. It argues well that Mather was a forerunner of American evangelicalism, and it helps to correct some misperceptions regarding the events at Salem. One might wish for a more critical biography of Mather, but that will likely arrive with Reiner Smolinski's forthcoming volume. Even after the release of Smolinski's work, however, Kennedy's book should retain its value due to its accessibility and its interest in evangelical history.

David Mark Rathel
University of St Andrews
St Andrews, Scotland, United Kingdom

Michael J. McVicar. *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 326 pp. £32.50/\$34.95.

Michael J. McVicar, assistant professor of religion at Florida State University, has provided an "intellectual and organizational history of Reconstructionism" (p. 4) in *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism*. Although Rushdoony is the central player in his narrative, the author insists that Rushdoony is not its real focus (p. 11). Indeed, the volume traces the diverse expressions of the movement in thinkers such as Gary North, Greg Bahnsen, John Whitehead, Kenneth Gentry, James Jordan, David Chilton, Gary DeMar, Doug Phillips, and others. Rushdoony, though, was the dominant figure in the movement, and it is therefore proper that the volume outlines his career—beginning with his education at the University of California in Berkeley



and the Pacific School of Religion; continuing with his ministry as a missionary at the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in Nevada and his subsequent pastorates in the PCUSA and the OPC; and culminating with the establishment of an educational institution, the Chalcedon Foundation. Along the way, we are reminded that Rushdoony developed a loyal following while at the same time eliciting intense feelings of dislike. One moderator of the PCUSA general assembly stated that he was a “devil possessed” (p. 56); Franky Schaeffer declared that Rushdoony and his followers were the equivalent of the Taliban (p. 215).

McVicar has served us well by explaining a religious and political movement that is not only controversial, but also “poorly understood” (p. 4). What then is Dominion Theology, and what are its central ideas? Dominion Theology asserts that Christians are to “take dominion” over all spheres of human society—including the state—and “turn them toward explicitly Christian purposes” (p. 4). The “bedrock” of this theology focuses upon the “trine concepts of Christian dominion, biblical law, and postmillennial eschatology” (p. 125). The implementation of biblical law entails the reconstruction of society, which will then lead to the Second Coming of Jesus. In this connection, Rushdoony was a vigorous opponent of statism, believing that there are “two claimants to the throne of godhood and universal government.” There is the state, which claims to be our “savior”; and there is the “Holy Trinity, our only God and Savior” (p. 100).

The most distinctive and controversial element in the project of Christian Reconstruction is the teaching that Rushdoony articulated in *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. He insisted that the Mosaic legal corpus remained “relevant and binding for modern Christians” (p. 105). “Every jot and tittle of biblical law” was to be implemented by Christians at the present time (p. 129). McVicar notes that this position clashed with the teaching of the Neo-Evangelicals, men like Billy Graham and Carl F. Henry. Alternately, they insisted that social change in America would only occur as a result of “the regenerative, transformational effects of individual conversions” (p. 123).

McVicar fails to mention in this connection that theonomy is a major deviation from the Calvinist and Neo-Calvinist tradition on biblical law. John Calvin had maintained that those who insist upon “the political system of Moses” rather than being “ruled by the common law of nations” embraced a position that was “false and foolish” (*Institutes* IV.20.14). Abraham Kuyper was no less adamant than Calvin in his position: “Taking Holy Scripture as a complete code of Christian law for the state, would, according to the spiritual fathers of Calvinism, be the epitome of absurdity” (“Our Program,” in *Political Order and Plural Structure of Society* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1991], 248). McVicar’s silence on how Rushdoony’s teaching related to the Reformed tradition is striking considering the fact that he draws attention to the continuity that exists between Rushdoony and the Calvinist tradition on the issues of sphere sovereignty (p. 133) and postmillennialism (p. 135).

The real strength, though, of McVicar’s discussion of Rushdoony’s theonomic position relates to how he positions Rushdoony in the historical context of the 20th century. McVicar reminds us of the breakdown of law and order in the United States in the 1960s. It was a time of destructive student demonstrations, riots, sexual liberation, recreational drug use, and contempt of traditional social values (p. 107). The answer to the problem, according to Rushdoony, was to be found in the imposition of the Mosaic legal code upon the American populace. A reconstructed America would mean that the state would execute people for blasphemy, propagating false doctrine, homosexuality, and other deviations from biblical law (p. 130–31). This is one of the most helpful points of the book—theonomy was Rushdoony’s response to the “turmoil” of the 1960s (p. 107).

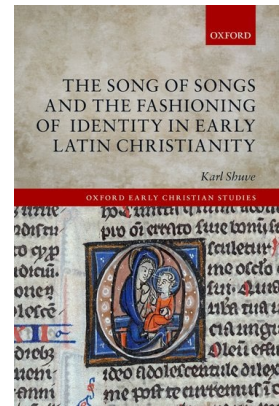
McVicar points out that in 1970 compulsory education laws made homeschooling “nearly impossible” in many states (p. 2). The idea, as Rushdoony put it, was that children “belonged to the state, to be taught the faith of the state, to die for the state, to work for the state” (p. 3). Today, Christian families almost take for granted that they have a right to educate their children in a home school. What made the difference? It was the work of Rousas Rushdoony, along with lawyers such as John Whitehead, who helped to shape legal reasoning in cases across the United States (p. 175–76). This may very well be the most significant and enduring legacy of the Christian Reconstruction movement (p. 230–31).

McVicar has capably presented the origin, development, and constituent ideas of Dominion Theology—a movement that still attracts many adherents from the American evangelical and Reformed community.

Mark J. Larson
Shepherds Theological Seminary
Cary, North Carolina, USA

Karl Shuve. *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 236 pp. £58.50/\$105.00.

Modern exegetes and preachers typically treat the Song of Songs as a problem of one sort or another. Perhaps it is a problem of propriety: *can I really preach that in front of a congregation ranging from preteens to grandmothers?* Perhaps it is a problem of hermeneutics and the history of exegesis: *what do I make of the seemingly fanciful exegesis of so many giants in the Christian tradition?* Modern interpreters have treated the text largely within a historical frame, circumscribing its referents to the realm of the conjugal bed. And, owing to the varied problems attending its interpretation, many have tended not to make too much hay regarding this text. Some, following David M. Carr, have spoken of the recent fate of the Song as being functionally “decanonized” by modern exegesis (p. 5n15).



The exegesis and preaching of early Christians stands in stark relief to modern day experience. In this book, Karl Shuve examines the place of the Song of Songs in early Latin Christianity and the role it played in the Christian imagination (both regarding the communal and the individual identity). He does not focus largely upon commentaries on the text or other treatises that focus at length upon it. Rather, he looks to the way in which the text serves, by citation or allusion, as a baseline to help make sense of other texts or as a lens through which we might view different portions of Scripture. In other words, Shuve shows that early Christians viewed the Song of Songs not as a problem to be solved by other texts, but as a clear and pivotal portion of God’s Word through which we might better perceive the varied difficulties of the rest of the canon.

Shuve’s book is organized into two parts. Part 1 surveys the fate of the Song of Songs in North Africa and Spain, examining its role in the writings of Cyprian and the Donatists (ch. 1), in Pacian, Tyconius, and Augustine (ch. 2), and in Gregory of Elvira’s *Tractatus de Epithalamio* (ch. 3). Part 2 then turns to the role the Song played in Italy, focusing upon its place in the works of Ambrose (ch. 4–5) and then Jerome (ch. 6). In each case, Shuve looks to what he deems “patterns of citation or allusion,” a

phraseology that is perhaps not defined clearly enough (with examples and counter-examples), but is nonetheless worth exploring as an avenue of appreciating the lineaments and architecture of patristic exegesis and early Christian imagination. One wonders if Shuve's argument might not be furthered even more by considering early Christian liturgical allusion or citation to the Song, though such a possibility would involve a nest of difficult questions regarding text availability.

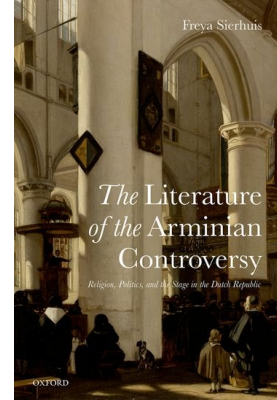
Readers might wish for further help contextualizing these notable yet selective soundings. For instance, Origen typically serves as a baseline (though not a fount, on which see pp. 2–3) to the more individualized and even ascetic reading. Origen famously claimed that the canonical order provides a pedagogical order for the wisdom writings: one must glean the practical wisdom of Proverbs, and then the vanity and insufficiency of this world through Ecclesiastes, before turning to the mystical bliss offered in the Song (see Origen's "Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs," sec. 3). To what extent was this pedagogical and canonical argument shared, corrected, or ignored by those in his interpretive stream? That macro-hermeneutical question does not arise in this text. Similarly, medieval theologians regularly made a distinction between the propriety of illustrating a doctrine via allegory (knowing that it is taught elsewhere more plainly) and basing a doctrine upon an allegory. To what extent were such early scholastic distinctions present already in these patristic homilies and treatises? These two hermeneutical and methodological queries would enrich the value of this specific project, especially as they raise questions regarding Shuve's concern to look wider than the typical Origenistic approach to Song exegesis and would provide a chance to compare and contrast Latin approaches to that Alexandrian model. A third area that could simply use more clarification would be the way in which the author at times speaks of asceticism and in other places of an "ascetic ideology" (especially in ch. 5); sometimes he can speak of one (e.g., Jovinian) who "was not opposed to specific ascetic practices, but rather to the ascetic ideology that privileged monastics over the married" (p. 201). I do not believe the text conflates these terms, but readers would be helped here by some preliminary work on definitions.

Even highly penetrating, well-argued historical analysis such as Shuve's cannot be judged as if it were a constructive argument. Exegetical and hermeneutical arguments would need to be offered for or against the trends or specific strands of early Christian thinking, which are given such careful attention here. Historical excavation may offer a relief, however, from the tyranny of the present by helping to complicate our seeming necessities and clarifying their contingent shape. In this case, Shuve's analysis helps demonstrate the varied pastoral concerns to which the Song may be addressed: either the care of the purity of the congregation (as in the line running from Cyprian through Augustine to Gregory of Elvira) or in the more individual and even ascetic discipline (such as that summoned forth in varied ways by Origen but especially by Ambrose and Jerome). Perhaps more significantly, his multi-faceted, yet beautifully interwoven sketch may suggest that the Song might be more of a hermeneutical lens than an interpretive problem: "for early Latin Christians, the Song was an *explanans*, not an *explanandum* . . . it was a key, not a lock" (p. 3).

Michael Allen
Reformed Theological Seminary
Orlando, Florida, USA

Freya Sierhuis. *The Literature of the Arminian Controversy: Religion, Politics and the Stage in the Dutch Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 264 pp. £60.00/\$99.00.

The question at the heart of Sierhuis's study should catch the interest of students interested in religious toleration in the post-Reformation period: Was the 17th century Dutch Republic characterized by conflict or consensus? Sierhuis rejects any distinction between Dutch "high culture" and a Grub Street-like literary underground (p. 9), asserting, rather, that the two scenes went hand-in-hand. Sierhuis chronicles a Dutch Republic that stood out among its Protestant neighbors for fostering the popular consumption of theology. Unlike England, where even the most basic doctrinal issues would have been censored from discussion without permission, the decentralized character of Dutch political life forbade any division between "establishment" and "underworld," resulting in the volatile public sphere where the debates of the Arminian controversy played out (p. 10). An open literary culture ensured the enduring legacy of the controversy in its increasingly rabid debate over religious toleration, since "all appeals to a fundamental consensus, moderation, and fraternal love were articulated through a rhetoric of toleration which, paradoxically, functioned almost invariably to increase tension and to exacerbate enemy stereotypes" (p. 17).



For Sierhuis, the Arminian controversy (1609–1619) made a lasting impression on the Golden Age of Dutch literary culture, epitomized in satirical works like Samuel Coster's *Iphigenia* (1617) and Joost van den Vondel's *Palamedes* (1625). The Republic's muscular apparatus for polemical print, combined with its uncommonly high literacy rate, produced an abundance of popular polemicists who simplified and appropriated the ideas at the heart of the Arminian controversy. So, Hugo Grotius's cautious plea for moderation in the *Ordinum Hollandiae et Westfrisiae pietas* (1617) became a plea for full toleration by more overtly heterodox personalities, who sympathized politically with the Remonstrants. Contra-Remonstrants draw on the genre of *Geuzenliederen* ("beggars' songs"), songs used to paint the Dutch as God's elect nation during the Reformation, to envisage themselves as fighting the good fight in the Republic's long reformation—combatting, in this instance, not Catholics but Arminians. Biblical drama sent brazen political messages about political leaders, whether Maurits of Nassau (Samson) or Johannes Oldenbarnevelt (Ahab). Pamphlets of satire and lament surround the events of Oldenbarnevelt's execution and the conclusion of the Synod of Dort, events which intermingled in the public eye. Many Remonstrants, faced with the decision either to sign the 'armistice treaty' or to face exile after Dort, choose the latter. "Inevitably," Sierhuis says, "the repression of the Remonstrants generated its martyrology" (p. 170). Amsterdam still roiled with pamphlet warfare over liberty of conscience in 1630. As Remonstrant ideas recurred across media and genres, they were simplified, even amplified. Sierhuis, then, is not mainly concerned about religious controversy, but about what happened when the complex ideas at the heart of the Arminian controversy got thrust outside the protective layers of ecclesiastical, political, and academic authority, into the stew-pot of the Republic's heady literary culture.

Students of Anglophone ecclesiastical history will be interested in a particular example of this phenomenon, the *respublica Hebraeorum* motif, derived from the Remonstrant Petrus Cunaeus's 1617 book of that title. There, Cunaeus held up ancient Hebrew polity as the model of republican governance for the Dutch "New Israel." Though previous Dutch historians took the motif of the Republic as the "New Israel" at face value, Sierhuis cites a growing tendency in current accounts of the period to identify

the Republic as the “New Israel,” not as a unifying meta-narrative of national identity, but as a narrative that exacerbated deep religious and political divisions. The motif did this, she says, by enforcing the appearance of religious consensus when, in fact, the Republic was torn between “radically different visions of church, state, and society” (p. 116). Throughout, Sierhuis shows “how fraught the transfer of ideas from author to author and from medium to medium really was, and how this exchange of ideas was liable to mistakes, misreadings, and strategic appropriations” (p. 261).

Sierhuis challenges several scholarly deficiencies. First, she addresses a theological deficiency, common in political accounts of the period, by analyzing Arminius’s theology, with the aid of his leading present-day interpreters (Stanglin, Muller, Dekker, Den Boer). Helpfully, she indicates in footnotes where scholarly consensus has shifted away from Carl or Jeremy Bangs toward Keith Stanglin, Richard Muller, etc. Second, students of Muller’s scholarship will appreciate Sierhuis’s sensitivity to the formative influence of genre in the transmission of theological content, particularly when a genre is itself shaped by a broader literary culture in which authors are conscious of their political utility. Third, Sierhuis flags up the key Dutch-language scholarship for an English-speaking audience, so that the industrious student may pursue further research on her own.

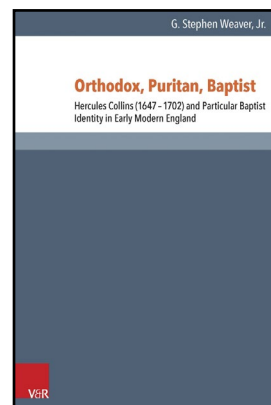
Sierhuis’s splendid analysis goes a long way toward illuminating the heart of the religious and political crises ignited by the Arminian controversy: the related battles over “predestination, the locus of sovereignty in the Republic, the relationship between the clergy and the civil magistrate, and the concomitant debates on liberty of conscience” (p. 10). It models theological precision in political historiography, and will prove useful to students and pastors, as well—not least for reminding its reader to register the dignity and danger of ideas at play in the contemporary public sphere.

Samuel Fornecker
University of Cambridge
Cambridge, England, UK

G. Stephen Weaver, Jr. *Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins (1647–1702) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015. 234 pp. £62.99/\$88.00.

The academy has experienced a recent spike in the focused study of early Baptist figures, with recent offerings highlighting the work of Thomas Grantham, Benjamin Keach, and William Kiffin—to name a few. The interest in these early modern figures has proven to be more than merely academic, reserved solely for PhD candidates eager to demonstrate their own academic prowess. Rather, the scholarship that has developed has proven to be beneficial for the church as a whole, with pastors and laity alike learning from the type of intensive scholarship that leads to a theological biography of those who have served the church in generations past.

G. Stephen Weaver, Jr.’s revised PhD dissertation on Hercules Collins (1647–1702) further solidifies the general value of these studies. Weaver focuses on the life and ministry of one of the lesser-known—though certainly not less important—early Particular Baptist ministers. Weaver expertly interweaves the historical accounts of Collins’s life and writings with pertinent cultural and historical context, aiming to present a full-orbed



discussion of Collins's theological legacy. By all accounts, Weaver succeeds masterfully in his endeavor. The Hercules Collins presented in this volume is an engaging historical figure with a keen ability to insert himself in the major arguments of his day without succumbing to the real danger of losing sight of his primary calling: the oversight of the local congregation. After reading Weaver's account, one cannot help but be rightly impressed by Collins's care for his family, his congregation, and his fellow pastors. His ability to engage the wider community on behalf of Baptist theology, while simultaneously maintaining intimate pastoral oversight, serves as a keen example for the pastor in the 21st century. The fact that Collins did this in the midst of persecution from the establishment only further solidifies both his legacy and the value of this particular study.

Weaver's work not only introduces the reader to Hercules Collins, but it also introduces the neophyte historian to some of the complexities associated with the study of the early modern period in which Collins lived. Weaver deftly tackles the ever-present conundrum associated with defining terms like *Puritan*. While some historians would certainly disagree with Weaver's definitions, no reader can argue that Weaver has been anything but clear. That perspicuity aids the reader in understanding Collins's cultural context and ultimately his legacy, allowing the reader not only to become familiar with Collins, but also to gain wisdom from the minister's life and struggles.

The work, though valuable, is not without its problems. Weaver at times pushes his conclusions beyond the point supported by the cited evidence. One example will suffice, both to demonstrate the problem, but also to show its relatively minor nature. In his discussion of Collins's adaptation of the *Heidelberg Catechism* for Baptist use, Weaver argues that Collins "would follow the General Baptists' *An Orthodox Creed* in adding the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds" to the Apostles Creed originally found in the *Heidelberg Catechism* (p. 77). The basic information in this statement is undeniable and noteworthy. Collins did indeed insert the two creeds in his new Baptist catechism. Despite Weaver providing a footnote with three additional proofs of Collins's dependence on the General Baptist's *Orthodox Creed*, the claim, in this reader's opinion, has been shown only to be a probability. More discussion is both needed and desired—especially given the historical significance if the claim is shown to be warranted. Readers should note that this pressing of the evidence does not occur often in Weaver's work and never in an egregious manner. The rare instances provide places for fine-tuning—rather than massive overhauls—in future work from Weaver. Overall, the publishing is of high quality—though the book's high cost and dissertation feel will put it out of reach for many average readers.

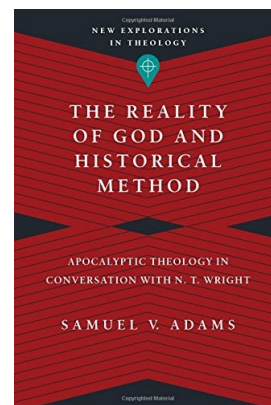
Weaver's work proves to be an extremely beneficial addition to the study of early Baptist history. The work is a must have for all students of the era as it shines a unique light on this previously understudied leader of the Particular Baptists. Anyone who desires to learn from history and to understand the crucible in which Baptist theology was forged will find the work to be an excellent addition to a personal library.

Jonathan W. Arnold
Boyce College
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

Samuel V. Adams. *The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with N. T. Wright*. New Explorations in Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 291 pp. £28.32/\$40.00.

The central claims articulated by the biblical authors concern a saving event within history, and yet since at least the late 18th century many have viewed history as an unstable foundation for theological claims. One of the many reasons N. T. Wright's multi-volume "Christian Origins and the Question of God" has generated so much discussion and will probably be remembered as some of the most important NT scholarship of the late 20th/early 21st century is the result of his attempt to do theology through history. That is to say, Wright believes that the tools of the historian, properly used, enable us to move *from* historical questions and arguments *to* theological conclusions. There is, then, a methodological move from the general and historical to the particular and explicitly theological. Adams asks, however, whether Wright is justified methodologically in moving *from history to theology*. In particular, the volume is devoted to the following question: "What does the reality of God mean for historical knowledge?" (p. 17).



In ch. 1 ("History and Theology According to the Historian"), Adams examines Wright's theological and historical method as programmatically set forth in Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God (NTPG)* and executed with respect to the quest for the historical Jesus in *Jesus and the Victory of God (JVG)*. Wright's entire project is predicated upon the belief that Christianity and its faith commitments are built upon the reality of actual historical events. Wright has concerns, then, with doctrinal commitments that are abstracted from first-century historical events as well as with the twin poles of Enlightenment skepticism and idealism. Wright instead advances a version of critical realist epistemology that seeks to account for real contact between the observer and the thing observed without denying the limitations and biases of the historian. This highlights for Wright the importance of paying attention to worldviews, both our own and that of Scripture in order to see that "all human knowing is caught up in ways of seeing" and that this enables theology to avoid "the twin dangers inherent in an idealist abstraction that would lead away from the concrete reality of God's involvement with history" (p. 63).

But this, then, raises the question that drives Adams' examination of Wright's method: in what way does the reality of God, who is the object of our historical knowledge, "impinge upon and even determine the way in which he is known?" (p. 64). In ch. 2 ("Theology According to the Theologians") Adams suggests that one needs to reverse the order of Wright's method and first present an epistemology that is determined by the reality of God and only *then* examine the meaning of history based upon the material content of revelation. Wright's version of critical realism is only committed to a metaphysics of "external reality," but given that the believing historian begins his or her investigation within "a knowing relationship to the God under question" (p. 74) this ontological reality must dictate the historian's research. Thus, Adams argues that Wright's method "ought to begin with a theological epistemology determined by the object of knowledge" (p. 76). In conversation with T. F. Torrance and

Søren Kierkegaard, Adams attempts to establish an epistemology that replaces Wright's vague external reality with "the actuality of the knowing relationship" between God and the historian as "the starting point for knowledge, especially the knowledge of God" (p. 105).

Chapters 3 ("Apocalyptic, Continuity and Discontinuity") and 4 ("Christology and Creation") seek to extend Adams' articulation of an epistemology determined by the objectivity and reality of God through arguing "that an apocalyptic theology is a truly theological commitment to the reality of God for theology" (p. 109). Adams is emphatic, along with Wright, that we do indeed know Jesus through history, culture, language, and worldview. But history and worldview cannot "provide the context for understanding Jesus apart from the positive act of God unveiling himself *and* providing the condition of reconciled subjectivity to see and to know that unveiling" (p. 119). Revelation is not antithetical to worldview and/or history, but it is epistemologically prior and determinative. The historian or theologian is the one who, along with her worldviews, is contextualized by the irruptive apocalypse of Jesus Christ. In Pauline soteriological terms, "the solution that comes with the Messiah Jesus reinterprets and recontextualizes what Paul had originally thought the plight was in the first place. The problem is learned in light of the solution" (p. 121). The apocalyptic revelation of Jesus Christ, in short, demands that the believing historian and/or theologian start with the irruptive apocalypse of Jesus Christ with respect to history, epistemology, hermeneutics, and theology (p. 140). Adams is quick to emphasize that this does not mean an overturning of the theological significance of creation and Israel, for God's "electing grace is clearly seen in the covenants he has made with his people" and the grace is seen in "God's resolve to love and to redeem, out of which we learn that he has created the world and everything in it" (p. 171). But the meaning of creation and God's election of Israel is only rightly understood from within and not apart from God's revelation in Christ.

In ch. 5 ("History According to the Theologians") Adams argues that a theology of history must be committed to theological continuity due to the continuing presence of God with his people. There simply is no ugly ditch or gap for the apocalyptic theologian. The reality of God means that "the meaning of history be placed in the hands of the one who gives history meaning *and who remains, in his freedom, determinative of that meaning*. This is apocalyptic" (p. 183). Since Jesus is the norm for history, this means that Jesus is not determined by the history of Israel but rather determines Israel's history (p. 200). But what does all of this have to do with the believing historian? Adams offers three theses as a theological corrective to Wright's method. First, Adams suggests that limiting theology to worldviews is a form of methodological naturalism. To be clear, Wright is clearly not committed to metaphysical naturalism, but the limitations he has placed on his historical work mean his method does not escape a naturalistic frame even when discussing the event of Jesus the Messiah's arrival. Said another way, "Theological knowledge is not grounded in the nature of knowledge in the created world, but rather in the reconciling act of God toward that order" (p. 217). Second, Christian theology is determinative for historiography. Third, theological historiography must be shaped by the cross as the hermeneutical center (not Israel or any other worldview). Finally, in ch. 7 ("An Apocalyptic Reappraisal of Apocalyptic") Adams seeks to show how Wright's historical method limits his ability to "consider the claims of apocalyptic theologians, particularly the reality and freedom of God and what this means for historical and theological knowledge" (p. 231). Wright can only understand Paul to be an apocalyptic thinker in terms of his inhabiting a particular Jewish worldview and thereby subordinates Paul's apocalyptic thinking to God's linear and prospective context of God's covenants with Israel. And this results in Wright seeing an incredible amount of continuity between the history of Israel and Paul's theology. And

if “history provides the interpretive matrix, then the actual impact of the irruption of God is minimized, even if acknowledged” (p. 238).

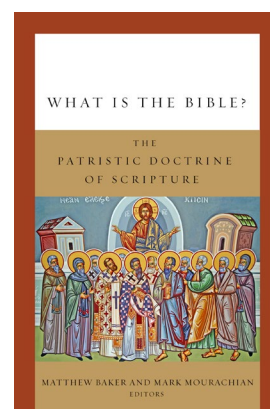
Adams’s volume makes an important methodological contribution to the relationship between faith and history, and its critical evaluation of the work of one of the premier believing historians *and* theologians of this generation is a treat for those who would seek to understand the methodological contributions of Wright to NT research. I confess to being of two minds about Adams’s criticism of Wright or, stated differently by Adams, his attempts to correct and further Wright’s historical methodology. While I have benefited from Wright’s consistent attempts to situate Jesus and Paul within a first-century Jewish worldview, this so-called “worldview” can take on a life of its own in controlling what Jesus and Paul must be saying or must be about. A particular construal of the history of Israel, accessible only to the historian, is thereby often granted an inordinate amount of determinative weight that at times restricts and limits the claims of the biblical texts. That this is not only historically problematic but also theologically disconcerting, I grant to Adams. And while I affirm Adams’s claims that the revelation of God must determine the theologian’s epistemology, I am not sure what it would look like for a believing historian to actually do responsible *history* from the explicit standpoint of the Christ-event. Would this still be *history* in any recognizable sense of the word? Here Adams almost certainly would have benefited from engagement with Murray Rae (*History and Hermeneutics* [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006]), who affirms that the reality of God determines how God is known but gives a stronger place to history as the arena whereby God reveals himself.

Joshua W. Jipp
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois, USA

Matthew Baker and Mark Mourachian, eds. *What Is the Bible? The Patristic Doctrine of Scripture*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. xx + 200 pp. £52.99/\$79.00.

The introduction to this volume asserts that while scholars have written extensively on patristic exegesis, “far less attention, however, has been paid to the fathers’ understanding of the nature of Scripture itself” (p. xi). Accordingly, the volume—growing out of a conference at Princeton sponsored by the Fr. Georges Florovsky Orthodox Christian Theological Society—addresses the question of what the church fathers considered the Bible to be. Seven chapters deal with the way the fathers themselves understood the Bible, and these chapters treat not only patristic writers whose selection is obvious (Origen, Ephrem the Syrian, John Chrysostom, and Maximus the Confessor) but also voices that are much less well known (Athanasius’s friend Sarapion of Thmuis, three monks from sixth-century Gaza, and the many voices of the *Philokalia*). These patristic chapters are followed by four chapters with more of a modern focus, chapters dealing with famous retrievals of the patristic doctrine of Scripture by Georges Florovsky and T. F. Torrance, with the little-known 20th century Serb Justin Popović, and with the history of modern biblical criticism.

One could argue—especially from an evangelical perspective—that the volume does not succeed in its stated aim to deal with the doctrine of Scripture (what the Bible is) rather than with hermeneutics



(how to interpret it). Every chapter actually does address biblical interpretation, and four of them even include a form of the word “hermeneutics” or “exegesis” in the title. In this reviewer’s opinion, however, we should take the failure to distinguish sharply between the doctrine of Scripture and hermeneutics not as a negative, but as a positive. In its very failure to make that distinction, the volume serves to remind the reader that how we approach the Bible is inextricably linked to what we think the Bible is, or contains. This fact shines most brightly in Michael Legaspi’s final chapter on modern biblical criticism, in which he argues that the rise of biblical criticism as a discipline accompanied the rise of an Enlightenment program to use the Bible as a tool for promoting a tolerant society, rather than as a tool for sectarian conflict and even religious war.

The link between the doctrine of Scripture and hermeneutics also appears clearly in the earlier chapters, in which varying (not necessarily complementary) perspectives on what the Bible is mesh with corresponding prescriptions about how to read it. For example, as John McGuckin argues, Origen believes the Bible is about the ascent of the soul to reunion with God, and the biblical writers to whom Origen gives most precedence are the ones he sees as most enlightened. Matthew Baker’s chapter on Ephrem shows that one must view all biblical language as anthropomorphic, since the entire Bible grows out of God’s self-revelation in created categories inadequate to demonstrate fully who he is. Alexis Torrance argues that the monks of Gaza see Scripture as the account of the refracted glory of God: the glory inherent in Christ is refracted onto the saints, granting the interpreter justification for applying biblical passages that are about Christ to the saints as well.

These varied ways of linking the doctrine of Scripture to hermeneutical method give the volume a rich texture that can help open the reader’s eyes to the varied ways the patristic and neo-patristic worlds use the Bible. Ultimately, the crucial point emerges: what we think the Bible *is* leads to how we *approach* it, which leads to what we *do* with it. Accordingly, this volume is profoundly valuable for evangelical readers, because it shows us a different vision of the Bible than most of us possess (I would say *several* different visions, because I am not convinced about the underlying unity beneath all the visions presented in the volume). In doing so, the volume forces us to ask the question, What do *we* think the Bible is? We evangelicals are quick to proclaim the truthfulness of the Bible, to develop methods to study it, and to insist that we should apply it to our daily lives. It is, however, one thing to say that the Bible is true, and quite another to affirm what it actually is. Do we believe the Bible is a true account of people’s experiences with God? Do we believe the Bible is a true manual for the soul’s return to God? Do we believe the Bible is the true account of God’s descent to humanity? This volume forces evangelicals to ask this crucial question, and thus to ask what *we* are doing with the Bible that we affirm so highly.

If this is the volume’s major contribution, then I would venture to suggest that it might have made that point even more clearly if it had been structured differently. I believe that Legaspi’s chapter (the final one, described above) would have served even better as a *first* chapter that could have attuned the reader to the fact that biblical criticism in the past 250 years has altered the Bible from a text whose message is to be heeded in itself to a text put to the service of a different social aim. With this provocative starting point, the volume could then have asked what the Bible’s actual aim is (encompassing what it is, how we should approach it, and what we should do with it), and then proceeded to give its varying answers to that question. Most evangelicals sense that there is something fundamentally wrong with the way the Bible is studied in the liberal academy today, but we may not be able to put our collective finger on what the problem is (other than stating the obvious: that the liberal scholars do not believe the

Bible the way we do). This volume helps us greatly in understanding more precisely what is wrong with liberal biblical studies, and I believe it could have done so even more forcefully with the re-arrangement I propose. In any event, it is a thought-provoking and valuable contribution to the question of what the Bible is, one that evangelicals as well as Orthodox should consider carefully.

I would like to close this review by lamenting, as the volume itself does, the tragic death of one of its editors, Fr. Matthew Baker. This is the second volume (that I know of) edited by Matt to have appeared since he died, and its publication reminds me yet again how much we miss him.

Donald Fairbairn
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Douglas M. Beaumont. *Evangelical Exodus: Evangelical Seminarians and Their Paths to Rome*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016. 286. £12.64/\$17.95.

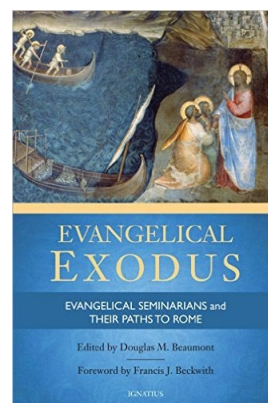
Evangelical Exodus is a compilation of the “conversions” to Roman Catholicism of nine evangelicals, all of whom were connected to Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES). The essays are irenic in their various explanations of these “conversions.” There is no vitriol or substantial invective against SES. All of the authors respect their former seminary and the teaching they received there.

When I first heard of this book, my interest was piqued, in part, because of my own background. I was raised in the Roman Catholic church, and then was converted in the context of dispensational evangelicalism. Because of this background, I was curious how someone could justify moving from evangelicalism to Rome. I detected three significant aspects to this movement from SES to Rome.

First, there is a unifying theme in each of these essays that almost every author recounts. It is explained in the introduction this way:

You may be thinking: How is it possible that such an august group of Catholic converts can arise from one small Evangelical seminary in one geographical region of the United States over only a few short years? One of the reasons, and certainly a very important one, was the type of theological formation that drew many of them to SES. As is well known in the Evangelical world, SES founder Norman Geisler is a self-described Evangelical Thomist, a follower of Saint Thomas Aquinas . . . perhaps the most important Catholic thinker of the second millennium. What Geisler found in Saint Thomas was a theologian whose view on God, faith and reason, natural theology, epistemology, metaphysics and anthropology were congenial to his Evangelical faith. (pp. 13–14)

The emphasis on Thomistic studies at SES led these students and faculty to pursue Thomas beyond the selective bounds of the SES curriculum. “What [these students] discovered is that one cannot easily isolate the ‘Evangelical-friendly Aquinas’ from the ‘Dominican friar Saint Thomas.’ There was no ‘historic Thomas’ with ‘Catholic barnacles.’ There was just Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic priest” (p. 14). The book is dedicated to “The Dumb Ox” himself.



This testimony is echoed in virtually every contributor in the book. One author says that “for all intents and purposes, Saint Thomas Aquinas was the seminary’s ‘patron saint.’ Another author admits that “the first thing that brought me to Catholicism was the Thomism at SES” (p. 167). The notion that one could take only a part of Thomas’s teaching and leave the rest was suspicious to these evangelicals (p. 114; see also pp. 139, 156–57, 194).

The second theme that was not as prominent in each author but nevertheless contributed to their “paradigm shift” (p. 19) from evangelicalism to Rome was an almost total lack of church history in the SES curriculum (pp. 27, 98). This lack explains the contrast that one author saw between the individualism of evangelicalism, and the community offered by Holy Mother Church (p. 66). Without an adequate knowledge of church history, one might think that these are the only two options available. For example, the appearance of bishops, presbyters and deacons in early church documents was interpreted by at least one author as a defense of apostolic succession (pp. 55–56). A couple of authors quote John Henry Newman approvingly, “to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant” (pp. 80, 204). Another author notes that his interest in moving from Dispensationalism to a more “communal” view brought him to church history (p. 171). But his movement to a study of church history was viewed in the context of the church as an authority alongside Scripture.

The third aspect of these “conversions” is both most obvious as well as most troubling—the utter insufficiency of the theology taught at SES. This insufficiency, it seems to me, explains each and every “conversion” experience in this book. Though all authors would agree with this insufficiency, their analyses and critiques of it are themselves insufficient, since it motivated their conversion to Rome. Examples abound in the book (and this aspect could fill a book of its own), but we will have to be content with highlighting three of the most significant points.

The first insufficiency that these authors imbibed at SES is apologetic, or perhaps better, epistemological. The Thomism embedded in the SES curriculum spawns a rationalistic evidentialism for a Christian apologetic and as an epistemological base. So, as one author puts it, “Reason was on prominent display. No questions of theology or morals were left untouched by the power of apologetics and rational demonstration” (p. 113). This is no minor problem. With this method “on prominent display,” for example, the Bible itself is subjected to an evidential epistemological foundation. For example, the founder of SES, Norman Geisler, argues that, though the Word of God is self-authenticating, the Bible is not: “For there must be some evidence or good reasons for believing that the Bible is the Word of God, as opposed to contrary views” (“Reviews,” *Christian Apologetics Journal* 11.2 [Fall 2013], 173). The evidential arguments used to “prove” the Bible to be the Word of God require that those arguments be the evidential foundation for biblical authority. Thus, biblical authority, by definition, is a derived authority. So also for Christian faith more generally. As one author, reflecting on his training at SES, says, “I had been trained to think that faith was bound up with inferences in such a way that the arguments were what secured faith” (p. 92). (It is worth noting that this particular author recognized that these arguments could only produce probable conclusions and were, thus, insufficient for Christian faith.)

In line with this, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, in chapter one, section four, recognized that there are, at bottom, only two options when it comes to biblical authority.

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

Either authority is conferred by some person (e.g., evidences) or church (i.e., Roman Catholicism), or Scripture is authoritative “because it is the Word of God.” (For a recent helpful defense of this view, see John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016]). If one is trained to believe that authority comes from something outside of Scripture, it is a very short step from “evidential” authority to the authority of the church. In a switch from mere evidences, to churchly authority, Scripture is still dependent on something outside of itself so that one’s epistemology remains intact, but it is now “baptized” by the church. This “evidential” approach even leads one author to affirm the Roman teaching on the “Assumption of Mary” because “no body parts of Mary have ever been found” (p. 196)!

The second insufficiency of the training these authors received is in the notion of “Free Grace” that is prominent at SES (e.g., pp. 17, 140). The notion of “free grace” typically teaches that one can have Christ as Savior, but not as Lord. Thus, “to believe” in Christ has no necessary implications for Christian obedience. Specifically, “free grace” includes a couple of ideas, one that is conducive to Rome and one that, they think, Rome corrects. In agreement with Rome, these authors were taught that “God is not a divine rapist” (p. 53); conversion is not a monergistic work of God, but is synergistic. However, what Rome appears to these authors to correct is the separation between justification and sanctification that this notion of “free grace” requires. Many of these authors rightly saw this separation as unbiblical (p. 60). So, they conclude that Rome’s view of justification that includes *both* Paul *and* James—both faith and works—is the only biblical option (p. 62).

The third insufficiency of doctrine these authors were taught is dispensationalism. They don’t mention it as often as they might, but as I read their many reasons for converting to the Roman church, dispensationalism was between every line (see, for example, pp. 17, 39, 62, 66, 97–98, 102, 171, 250–51, 257). As one who was taught dispensationalism, I can testify that its effect is to so minimize the church such that it is practically irrelevant to one’s Christian life. The church’s “parenthetical” status in the dispensational plan of God, on its own terms, can never allow for vibrant Christian worship. These authors think they found such vibrancy in the mass and the sacraments.

There is so much more to say about this book. It concludes with appendices dealing with the canon of Scripture, the notion of Christian Orthodoxy, of *sola scriptura* and of *sola fide*. None of these appendices offer anything new to anyone familiar with discussions of these ideas. The book concludes by noting, surprisingly, that there are already enough converts to Rome from SES to fill *two more books of this size* (p. 209), so we likely haven’t heard the last from this group.

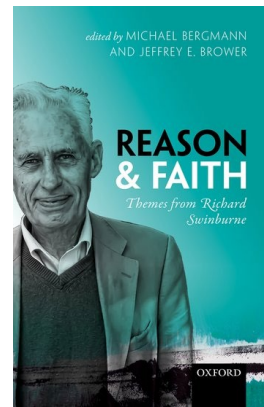
As I read those who moved from evangelicalism to Catholicism, I couldn’t help but think of my own experience. As one who moved from Catholicism to evangelicalism, I have to agree with the authors’ assessment of the insufficiency of evangelicalism. But the proper movement is not to Rome, but back to Scripture. The best and biblical option in the face of these “conversions” is embedded in the beauty of Reformed theology. A proper understanding of the self-authentication of Scripture, of union with Christ (from which *both* justification and sanctification necessarily flow), of the church as God’s chosen vehicle of the means of grace (the Word, sacraments, and prayer) for all who are in Christ, brings a biblically rich and glorious response to anyone who would contemplate “swimming the Tiber” (p. 23).

The most natural transition for evangelicals is not to Rome, but to the glorious truths that flowed from the Reformation, where alone can be found the self-authenticating Christ of Scripture.

K. Scott Oliphint
Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower, eds. *Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xv + 247 pp. £40.00/\$65.00.

Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne consists of ten papers presented by distinguished philosophers of religion at a conference held in September 2014 at Purdue University, in order to reflect upon Swinburne's work and honor him on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. The collection is edited by two distinguished philosophers on faculty at Purdue. Richard Swinburne is one of the two most influential philosophers of religion in the past fifty years (the other being Alvin Plantinga). He served as the Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oriel College, University of Oxford from 1985–2002, and continues to maintain an international presence in lecturing and teaching. A steady stream of substantive monographs on just about every important topic in the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology has issued from his pen, including works defending the coherence of theism, the existence of God, the compatibility of faith and reason, the relation between body and soul, and the Christian doctrines of responsibility and atonement, revelation, the Trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection, and the moral perfection of God in the face of evil and suffering. Indeed, since 1968 he has published 16 monographs (13 with Oxford University Press), and 159 articles in leading academic journals of philosophy. As Swinburne himself remarked during the conference (which I attended), "One difficulty I have in defending myself from criticisms is that I have written so much, and I sometimes forget exactly where I said something!"



The papers cover seven distinct areas of philosophical inquiry: faith, theistic arguments, and divine power (two papers each, grouped under "natural theology"), and atonement, liturgy, immortality, and body and soul (one paper each, grouped under "philosophical theology"). The contributors are themselves published experts in the topics they address, and make it known how their work is profoundly influenced by Swinburne's own contributions to their subject, even when they sharply disagree with him (as they do at many points).

Jonathan Kvanvig scrutinizes "The Idea of Faith as Trust: Lessons in Noncognitivist Approaches to Faith." In the course of examining views of faith as "trust" and "belief" (including Swinburne's trust account), he argues for an alternative, much more "active" understanding of faith as the orientation of a person in the service of an ideal, which involves a disposition to actively pursue the goal to which you are attracted. However, one cannot undercut the cognitive element of faith—as Kvanvig seeks to do—by saying that "Abraham, Moses, Job, and even the Apostles" wouldn't have believed the Athanasian Creed (p. 7), since clearly they believed *something* about God that distinguished them from unbelievers. The Hebrews 11 account of the faith of Old Testament saints specifically refers to its cognitive content (cf.

vv. 3, 6, 19, 20, 21, 26, 28). In all these cases their faith was trust in divine promise with respect to their situation, and that involved belief in what God had said (cf. v. 1, faith as “assurance” and “conviction”).

John Schellenberg, in “Working with Swinburne: Belief, Value, and the Religious Life,” articulates an account of religious faith that endures *without* belief in religious truths, precisely because the emotional and evaluative side of religious faith comes to the fore and sustains a vibrant, constant religious practice. This is set in contrast to Swinburne’s account of religious belief as involving a judgment about the relative likelihood of creedal alternatives. Left unstated is *why* I would continue to love the religious goals I am pursuing, or think them worth loving (p. 41), if I have no beliefs on these topics?

Paul Draper discusses “Simplicity and Natural Theology,” and argues that the criterion of simplicity—famously used by Swinburne to assess the inductive probability of causal explanations like theism—is grounded in a *prior* criterion of coherence, and this dependence is said to undermine Swinburne’s whole program of natural theology. On Draper’s view, necessary truths are maximally coherent whereas necessary falsehoods are maximally incoherent, but between these extremes there can be degrees of coherence, since “there may be inductive support relations between the parts of a hypothesis . . . that hold independently of data and background information” (p. 53). That seems right, but if our inductive judgments proceed according to a criterion of simplicity (as Swinburne and many others have argued), then Draper’s criterion of coherence *presupposes* the application of the criterion of simplicity, in which case Draper’s argument proves the opposite of what he wants.

In “Swinburne’s Aesthetic Appeal,” Hud Hudson endorses the (now popular) skeptical theist strategy of responding to the problem of evil: just because we can’t discern God’s likely reasons for permitting evil, is no reason to think God doesn’t have such a reason. Arguing that “skeptical theism is a double-edged sword” (p. 69), Hudson articulates a “near relative” to it (“aesthetic skepticism”) that threatens to undermine any arguments for God from the aesthetic fine-tuning of the universe. This parallels the application of skeptical theism to block theistic arguments from fine-tuning for embodied, conscious, intelligent, sentient life. (It should be noted that Swinburne would part ways with Hudson on the cogency of the skeptical theism strategy, for reasons he gives in chapter one of *Providence and the Providence of Evil* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998]).

Dean Zimmerman takes a turn at “Defining Omnipotence,” offering not only a major review of the relevant literature from the past fifty years, but also making a substantive contribution to it. Inspired by Swinburne’s careful treatment of the topic in *The Coherence of Theism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1993], Zimmerman develops a “range-theory” of omnipotence and defends it from a barrage of counterexamples along the way. He gives special attention to challenges posed by the libertarian free will of creatures, and by the possibility of radically weak persons (such as the venerable “McEar” and his close cousin “Negative Nelly”). Zimmerman’s contribution is one of the best in the volume, exemplifying how Swinburne’s *method* in philosophy of religion—and not just his specific conclusions—has proven to be immensely influential on the next generation of religiously-interested philosophers.

Alvin Plantinga examines “Law, Cause, and Occasionalism,” arguing for a “weak occasionalist” understanding of God’s causal relation to the universe, according to which God is the only causal power in the universe, with humans who agent-cause their choices being the only possible exception to this. Along the way Plantinga accounts for the necessity of the laws of nature from a theistic perspective, and distinguishes between three ways of relating God to the laws of nature (secondary causalism, decretalism, and counterfactuals of divine freedom). While the presentation is quite accessible and loaded with insight, one central contention seems implausible: the idea that we have a clear conception

of divine causality but (following David Hume) a “wholly obscure” conception of creaturely causality. If the standard for a clear conception is that it involves “just logical necessity” (p. 140), then with this notion we can construct just as serviceable a conception of *creaturely* causality: necessarily, if the creature wills p , then p occurs, except if God wills *not- p* .

In “Love and Forgiveness,” Eleonore Stump argues against Anselmian “satisfaction” theories of atonement, which endorse the idea that Christ’s life and death on the cross are needed in order for God to forgive us. She appeals to some intuitions in moral psychology and to Aquinas’s account of love, to make the case that “love is necessary and sufficient for forgiveness” (p. 156n16). On Swinburne’s view, it is good for God to only forgive in response to the sinner’s repentance, reparation, apology, and penance, and Christ’s death is the needed means of our penance (as we offer the life and death of Christ to God on our behalf). But on Stump’s view, it simply follows from God being loving that he forgives everyone, no further conditions needed. While many readers will not agree “that we still lack a workable explanation of Christ’s role in solving the problem of human sinfulness” (p. 169), Stump gives an extensive and convincing argument to the effect that divine hatred and wrath, even if it leads to retributive punishment after death, can be a form of God’s love to the impenitent sinner.

Nicholas Wolterstorff examines “The Liturgical Present Tense,” the fascinating phenomenon of past historical events being described in Christian liturgy by way of present-tense language. (Three examples include: “Christ is born in Bethlehem,” “O sacred head, now wounded,” and “Christ the Lord is risen today.”) Wolterstorff considers and rejects the idea that this linguistic tendency reveals the worshipers’ belief that these events are being literally “reactualized” in the present (or, following Mircea Eliade, that some remnants from archaic rituals about “mythical time” are influencing Christian worship). The reactualization view is argued to be literally false, and perhaps even uncharitably attributed to the liturgical sources in which it is (allegedly) found. Rather, the “liturgical present tense” is a figure of speech, an instance of the “as-if” trope in language use, because there is a resonance to using present-tense language to describe past-tense events that captures their relevance for us today. In the end, we Christians value immediacy when it comes to singing about Christ’s birth or resurrection, and the “as-if” trope makes these events present to us rather than distant from us, even if they do not make them present again.

In “The Rev’d Mr Bayes and the Life Everlasting,” Peter van Inwagen examines whether Doomsday reasoning—a form of Bayesian argument that concludes it is unlikely our species will survive for a long time—can be adapted to argue against religious views of an afterlife (of infinite or at least very long duration). He concludes that it is impossible to complete the calculations if the argument is about eternal life, since it will require division by zero. And if the argument is instead about a “vast but finite afterlife” (p. 213), then a crucial assumption of the argument is false: I shouldn’t regard the present moment as a moment chosen at random from the years of my existence, since the moment at which we consider these kinds of arguments is likely to fall within the first century of our existence. The chapter uses probabilistic Venn diagrams, the Mean Value Theorem, and a dose of real analysis in mathematics, perhaps putting it outside the expertise of the average philosopher of religion. (Thankfully, the whole business is summed up at the end by way of an entirely accessible parable in the style of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.)

“What about Hylomorphism? Some Medieval and Recent Ruminations on Swinburne’s Dualism” affords Marilyn Adams opportunity to apply her considerable proficiency in medieval metaphysics to the question of human nature. According to Adams, medieval hylomorphism (in which the soul is the

form of the body) enjoys several theoretical advantages over Swinburne's substance dualism (in which the soul is a substance distinct from the body). She expounds and contrasts the views of Avicenna, Aquinas, and Scotus (on the one hand) with the views of Swinburne and reductive materialists (on the other). Despite their obvious differences, the latter two groups share the conviction that there could be no *natural* explanation of how the mental relates to the physical, whereas the medieval hylomorphists grant a functional integrity to the body/soul composite and a metaphysical necessity to the natural kind "rational animal." In addition, Adams argues that substance dualism makes the problem of evil worse, since if God could create us without the body and its attendant sufferings, why didn't he?

As Eleonore Stump mentions in her own contribution, no other contemporary philosopher besides Swinburne has attempted the massive project of defending all the central doctrines of Christianity, and these papers are testimony to the influence he has had by way of content and method. The fact that so many philosophers of religion can write so substantially and profitably on diverse themes articulated by a single philosopher is confirmation of Swinburne's importance to the discipline. The authors disagree with him more often than not, but it is with a united voice that they say "Thank you" on this birthday occasion.

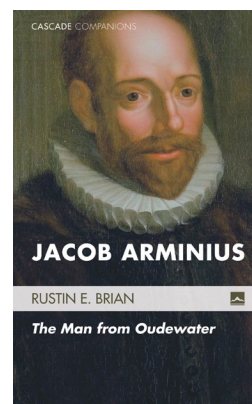
Greg Welty
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, North Carolina, USA

Rustin E. Brian. *Jacob Arminius: The Man from Oudewater*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015. xii + 113 pp. £11.00/\$15.00.

One of the latest contributions to the revival of Arminian studies is this biographical "companion" from the Cascade series. The author, Rustin Brian, a pastor and theologian with a keen interest in Arminius's personal experiences and how they formed his thought. The stated goal is that the reader "might discern what it means to stand in the 'Arminian' tradition today" (p. xi). This brief but thorough work is divided into three parts: the life of Arminius, the theology of Arminius, and what it means to be an Arminian today.

From the outset, tragedy plays a significant role in this biography. Yet a rise in sympathy does not seem to be the author's intent as much as his way of explaining Arminius. Nonetheless, the grim scene of the massacre at Oudewater, including Arminius's family, is bound to gain some sentiment from the reader. The author's conclusion may not gain so much sympathy from non-Arminian readers—because of its traumatic conception, the author writes, "Arminian theology provides a far more faithful and rich account of theodicy than does highly Reformed theology" (p. 24).

The author's treatment of Arminian theology in a brief space is surprisingly thorough. Brian packs quite a breadth of Arminian thought into three chapters. The first of these is Scripture. Arminius was both "scholastic and Reformed" (p. 40) and faithful to the Reformation (p. 50) in his view of Scripture. There is little controversy here until the author compares Arminius's view of the perfection of Scripture with a view commonly held in his own Church of the Nazarene. When describing Scripture as "perfectly inspired," Brian means that "Scripture perfectly accomplishes its task . . . despite all the while containing



imperfections of various sorts, such as misspellings, mistranslations, misunderstandings, and even contradictions” (p. 46). This leap from “scholastic and Reformed” to strangely “Nazarene” is both anachronistic and simply mistaken.

The chapter on Christology and Trinity explores Arminius’s theological method, which is “christologically driven” (p. 45). Arminius “seeks to interpret all things in light of the salvation of God in Christ” (p. 50). In anticipation of the following chapter, Brian describes the election of Christ as “the anchor that holds Arminius’s entire system together” (p. 65). Such an evaluation seems appropriate; the assertion that Arminius’s theology “is more christologically focused than Calvin’s, and certainly Calvin’s followers” (p. 50) is not so clearly true.

The third and final chapter on Arminius’s theology concerns the doctrine of grace. Brian is in agreement with what has now become a common portrayal of Arminius as a theologian of grace. “It is here, more than any other place, that Arminius left his mark upon the church” (p. 58). It is not surprising then that the role of grace occupies much of the final chapters of the book. In the final third of the book, the author engages in comparative theology viewing Arminian theology in regard to Pelagius, John Wesley, and Karl Barth and comparing and contrasting their respective doctrines of grace and predestination. Brian portrays Wesley’s Arminian theology as a mediating third choice between Pelagius and Barth. John Wesley is “the faithful Arminian” though, unfortunately, the author describes the universal role of grace in Arminian theology as “novel” (p. 93), echoing nineteenth-century objectors who attempted to show that the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace was novel, and therefore false. Finally, Brian finds a similar role of Christology in the Arminian and Barthian theological methods.

In his conclusion, Brian identifies five key qualities of Arminian theology today: it is biblical theological, christologically focused, pastoral, ecumenical, and emphasizes grace, election, and predestination.

I believe Brian achieved the goal of providing a brief companion to Jacob Arminius. His ability to weave some comparative theology into this theological biography is impressive. For the most part the description of Arminius’s approach to Scripture and his theological method is accurate and insightful. The concluding points provide a positive account of what it means to be an Arminian today. And though they are broad, they describe the core values of being an Arminian.

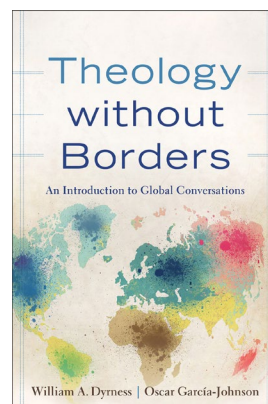
Beyond the few minor criticisms I have already mentioned, there is one theological flaw in the description of Arminius’s doctrine of prevenient grace. The mistake is in the author’s description of what grace does. All who receive grace, he writes, “are given the ability to respond positively to God, as well as reject God.” He continues, “Interestingly, to be able to reject God, then, requires God’s grace” (p. 69). And again, “Salvation and damnation, then, are properly understood as reliant upon God’s grace” (p. 69). I see this as a fatal description of the Wesleyan Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace that is both a *non sequitur* and nowhere confirmed by Arminius. The flaw is the creation of an internal inconsistency. The anti-Arminian may conclude, as a result, that the Arminian view of grace is not grace at all because by it many will be damned. If this view of grace is true, sinners would have been better off without it. In correction, Wesleyan Arminians have affirmed that the sinner (even apart from prevenient grace) is able to reject God. We do not need grace to reject God; we do that quite naturally. Prevenient grace, rather, restores the ability to accept grace. This is a different assertion from what Brian makes here. Stanglin and McCall (*Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* [Oxford: New York, 2012]) properly identify the purpose of prevenient grace: “whatever freedom remains to humanity after the fall,

it is not sufficient in itself to turn to God. Divine grace must intervene” (p. 151). Grace is needed for salvation and a desire to seek God, but not for rejecting God.

David T. Fry
The Frankfort Bible Holiness Church
Frankfort, Indiana, USA

William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson. *Theology without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. x + 181 pp. £14.49/\$21.99.

This book is a wonderful addition to the growing library of books on the topic of World Christianity. Where it distinguishes itself from the rest of the literature in the field is in its attempts to not be reductionistic. Navigating between the two extremes of a close-minded “The West is best and normative” mentality and a triumphalistic “Christianity in the Majority World is thriving while Christianity in the West is dead” approach, Dyrness and García-Johnson issue a call for cooperation. They take a more nuanced look at how growth has transpired, directional patterns that have caused it, and what practical implications this has on the world church today. The biggest problems, as they see it, are that despite the shift in the center of gravity of Christianity to the non-Western world, the West still dominates world theology, and additionally Majority World theologians are not in conversation with one another.



The authors provide two voices, one from the Global North (though informed by time living in the non-Western world) and one a self-described “hybrid-*mestizo*-borderline person” originally from the Global South, embodying the call to “mutual interrogation” as described in their book. They attest that overly simplistic caricatures do not work in the world church, and often there are realities that defy categorization. With penetrating incisiveness, the authors remove the blinders and call for equal voices at the table, for a new way of theologizing that represents polycentricity instead of a univocal approach. They are calling for a move away from occidentalism toward a “transoccidentality” that eschews dependence on the West and empowers the non-Western people to not only be able to think for themselves, but to have the confidence and self-worth to do so, all the while recognizing that the influence of the West is inescapable.

Using personal stories and historical examples from various continents, both Dyrness and García-Johnson employ sharp scholarship as well as exemplify the humility they prescribe. They attempt to remove misunderstandings in order to diminish fear, reveal our own limitations as creatures constrained by culture and sin, and highlight theological contributions from the non-Western world that are outside the perspectives of the Western church. They practice what they preach in putting Western theologians like Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, and Richard Bauckham, in conversation with African, Latin American, and Asian theologians like John Mbiti, Elsa Tamez, and Kazoh Kitamori, ultimately attempting to construct a global theology.

This volume is so welcome because it goes beyond the three-selves of the church (self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating) to the fourth self: self-theologizing. Until Majority World Christians do this as a regular course of action, the minority in this world (the West) will continue to dominate

the theological discourse and control the discussion and topics. The tension between the universality of theology and its inherently contextual nature has been a conundrum which has continually vexed theologians. What is important is to note that *all* theology is contextual, even Western theology, but in the midst of that there is a perennial nature about all of it as well. It is in the deconstructing of stereotypes that global Christianity can grow and benefit, so that each side can be seen truly for what they are. Western theology must be stripped of its imperialism and its self-pretensions of importance by revealing its propensity to pigeonhole all other theologies as relativistic, while Majority World theology must be given a place at the table without dismissing the contributions of the other lest it become reverse-paternalism. As we move toward a future global—or glocal—church, we would all be better off for taking seriously the recommendations and admonishments present in this volume. This is a good start to thinking of how we can continue to work and think together as the body of Christ, taking seriously the apostle Paul’s charge in 1 Corinthians 12:24–26: “But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

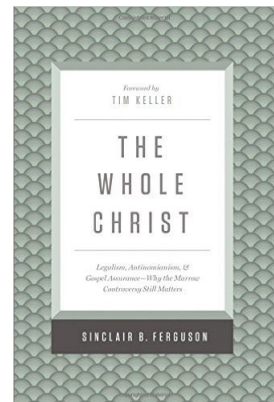
Allen Yeh
Biola University
La Mirada, California, USA

Sinclair B. Ferguson. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 256pp. £17.57/\$24.99.

Decades ago, Sinclair Ferguson gave a short lecture series, “Pastoral Reflections on the Marrow Controversy” (online: <https://www.monergism.com/pastoral-lessons-marrow-controversy>). These lectures on this episode of Scottish church history helped many Reformed Evangelicals (some more recently) gain renewed gospel clarity by refreshing our understanding of the scriptural relationship between law and gospel in Christ’s person and work, and the Christian’s life. After numerous requests to write on the topic, Ferguson’s *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* is the long-awaited result.

The volume opens with a foreword by Tim Keller, who warmly commends *The Whole Christ* by sharing insights gleaned for personal life and ministry from it. Though the full title of the book may raise the expectation of a concise historical theology and application of the Marrow controversy, Ferguson notes that his aim “is not an historical analysis of the . . . Marrow controversy . . . nor is it a study of the theology of Thomas Boston” (p. 19). Those expecting a comprehensive clarity on the historical narrative and theology of the Marrow controversy are best directed elsewhere.

So then, what is the book about? Spring-boarding from some of the Marrow Controversy’s themes, *The Whole Christ* focuses on the completeness of the person and work of Christ in relation to law and gospel, legalism, antinomianism, assurance, and more. The result is a number of very helpful, pastorally oriented discussions that point us to our all-sufficient Christ. The book sagaciously guides us to see a variety of dangers, some subtle, others not, that draw us away from him.



While pointing out detractions from the Christ of the gospel, the volume is not negative in its orientation. The tenor is positive, winsome, and Christ-centered, with the occasional poke and rebuttal tucked in along the way. One example of the latter is Ferguson's warning against a kind of theologizing which, while in love with solid scholasticism and careful definition, loses the centrality of union with Christ, and a clear view of Christ himself.

Ferguson reflects a similar caution regarding experiential paradigms of conversion, as popularized among English Puritans and their heirs who, in some cases, "encouraged a preparationism that in effect became an obstacle to the free offer of the gospel" (p. 57). Dedicated supporters of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* may be surprised by Ferguson's sympathy to C. H. Spurgeon's critique of Evangelist's counsel to Christian. However, his case, like Spurgeon's, is that Bunyan's graphic narrative of the conversion of Christian, as "the pilgrim" of *Pilgrim's Progress* held sway in popular imagination (despite the later story of Christiana), fostering a belief that conviction or the forsaking of sin "constitutes the warrant for the gospel offer" (p. 59).

Ferguson sees Bunyan's writings as more widely presenting a case for not obscuring Christ even as we pursue genuine repentance and sanctification. Digging into the fascinating use of visual illustrations of the doctrine of salvation in the ocular catechisms of William Perkins and John Bunyan, he notes that the person and work of Christ are explicit in the former, implicit in the latter (p. 60). "In the case of Perkins's *Golden Chaine* the central significance of Christ and union with him is obvious; in Bunyan's chart this is not so. In Perkins every spiritual blessing is related to Christ; benefits are never separated or abstracted from the Benefactor. In Bunyan's map, in fact they are" (p. 61). The danger that concerns Ferguson is the influence this can have on our approach to gospel preaching, causing us to focus on "abstracted and discrete blessings . . . and then the question of how we receive them," with the ultimate tendency of turning ourselves inward, rather than Christ-ward (p. 61). Ferguson provides a healthy reminder that congregations hear what we say, in the priority and proportions we say it. They do not hear all that we have in our minds. Emphasis matters.

The theme of our need for Christ himself is steady throughout the volume. Where Ferguson addresses the remedy for legalism, he notes that we need grace, but not "'grace' as commodity, grace as substance" (p. 134). We need grace in Christ; we need Jesus Christ himself. "God's grace to us *is* Christ" (p. 134). Ironically, preachers can repeat the words "grace" and "gospel" while missing Christ. As a result, their proclamation of "grace," forgiveness, new life, and new obedience, remains graceless. Their people remain impoverished, because they are not feeding on Christ. This is no negation of law or gospel. Just as to preach Christ is to preach the gospel, Ferguson upholds the moral law's enduring place as the law of Christ. The right preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ also answers the error of antinomianism: "conformity to [the law] is the fruit of our marriage to our new husband Jesus Christ" (p. 154). The reminders and insights for our lives and ministries in these chapters are well worth the purchase in themselves.

There is much more packed into the book. In passing, Ferguson addresses current intrigue with hypothetical universalism among some Reformed historical theologians. He accurately maintains that Boston and the Marrow brethren were particularists who proclaimed the free offer of the gospel of Christ to everyone. They read the text of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* accordingly, and presented a good case for doing so. Ferguson devotes an intriguing footnote in response to a key aspect of Jonathan Moore's *English Hypothetical Universalism* and the conclusions he draws respecting Edward Fisher and the use of his writing in Scotland (p. 41). Elsewhere, Ferguson weaves in assessments of the new

perspective on Paul (p. 89), New Covenant and Klinean formulations of covenant theology and views of the moral law as given at Sinai (cf. p. 162–173), providing more food for thought.

Ferguson’s final chapters deal with assurance. He gives mature pastoral guidance on assurance, though by this point in the book he has largely left the Marrow controversy and the Marrow brethren’s views of assurance outside of the discussion. These final chapters in many ways epitomize *The Whole Christ*: a pastorally rich, clarion call to Christ in all his completeness, drawing on, but only giving us a scattered and incomplete glimpse of the Marrow controversy. While the volume may better have been titled, *The Whole Christ: Reflections on the Law and Gospel in Christ*, every pastor should read and benefit from this book.

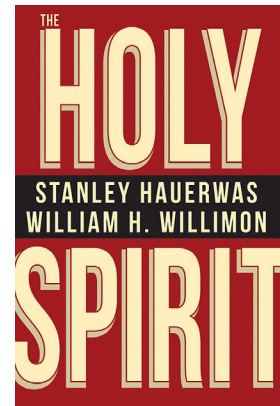
William VanDoodewaard
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon. *The Holy Spirit*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2015. xi + 100 pp. £8.99/\$13.99.

Stanley Hauerwas (Gilbert T. Rowe professor emeritus of divinity and law at the Divinity School of Duke University) and William H. Willimon (professor of the practice of Christian ministry at the Divinity School of Duke University) offer a concise but compelling confessional presentation of the Church’s confession of the Holy Spirit. They reflect pastorally upon the third article of the Apostle’s and Nicene Creed to provide structural flow to this volume (they provide the text of the Creeds on pp. 93–95). The refrain throughout this volume echoes the rhetoric of application: Come, Holy Spirit!

Hauerwas and Willimon have written from within the Methodist tradition (of which they belong) and target this tradition with specific remarks regarding the need for direction in reflecting on the person and work of the Spirit. However, their work is applicable to the wider church (by reflecting within the broader Wesleyan tradition and even addressing the growing Pentecostal movement) and deserves a broad reading that is not hampered in the slightest by their address of Methodism, but enhanced by their direct approach. The pastoral concerns espoused in this volume point to liturgical and devotional application by returning to the practices of the church. Further, this volume allows for tensions, difficulties, and ambiguities which have arisen in the church’s response to the revelation of the Spirit whether in discussing the embodied nature of the Spirit in the Church, the Spirit in the world, or the work of the Spirit in baptism.

The volume is broken up into four chapters: “Trinity” (pp. 1–32), “Pentecost: The Birth of the Church” (pp. 33–60), “Holiness: Life in the Spirit” (pp. 61–84), and “Last Things” (pp. 85–91). The first chapter offers a succinct theological and biblical reflection on the Spirit in historic trinitarian reflection. Chapter two points to the mission of the Spirit as the mission of the church and thus as Christ present in and with his church. It also addresses the Spirit as not restrained by the church nor as the Spirit simply for the church. The Spirit points to Christ Jesus (who points to the Father) and is at work to redeem and restore, teach, guide and judge. Chapter three treats sanctification as that work of the Spirit to make saints. For Hauerwas and Willimon, “[to] be sanctified is to be drawn into a way of life so compelling that



our worry that we may not be doing enough for God is lost" (p. 63, original emphasis). This Wesleyan perfecting is the life of the Spirit lived in the life of the Church as a compelling vision of that which has been separated being set apart and joined together for the redemption of the world. In their final chapter, Hauerwas and Willimon reflect upon the eschatological significance of the Spirit who has made the kingdom of God present (though not yet fully realized).

This book would serve well as a study for a small church group, as pastoral enrichment, or possibly as supplemental reading in an undergraduate course studying the person and work of the Holy Spirit. If anything would be hoped to be improved in this volume it is its size. While the smallness of this volume will appeal to small groups that are looking for a readily accessible work on the Spirit (which they will certainly find here), one wishes there was further development of each of the themes by these careful and word-wise pastoral theologians. Their work provides a means of confessing with the church historic and universal what the Scriptures confess concerning the Holy Spirit. And the church says to the Spirit, "Come!"

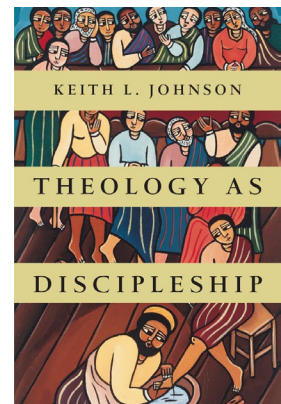
Rick Wadholm Jr.
Trinity Bible College & Graduate School
Ellendale, North Dakota, USA

Keith L. Johnson. *Theology as Discipleship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. 191 pp. £14.16/\$20.00.

There are few laments more frequently raised in the evangelical academy than the divorce between the academy and the church, or between the life of piety and that of theological scholarship. Indeed, it is not uncommon for pastors to admit that seminary was one of the most spiritually difficult times in their lives, precisely because the pursuit of academic rigor in theology, by its very nature, seemed to choke out the spiritual life. Moreover, the relevance of the theological task seems distant from the life of faith for the average congregant.

Drawing on years teaching theology to undergraduates, in *Theology as Discipleship*, Wheaton College professor Keith L. Johnson attempts to articulate a vision for the theological task as "integrally related" to the life of discipleship to Jesus Christ (p. 12). Aimed at introductory theology courses, pastors, and interested lay-people, the result is an elegant, biblically-attuned, classically-oriented, yet uncluttered text inviting the novice (as well as the seasoned initiate) to view theology in the sweep of God's saving economy to renew all things through Christ and the Spirit.

Johnson's argument proceeds in seven chapters. In the first chapter ("Recovering Theology"), Johnson sets the scene for the rest of his argument, telling a story about "what went wrong" as the work of theology shifted from the church to the academy (pp. 24–33). This shift brought along with it new assumptions as to what constituted properly scientific scholarship (universality, etc.), a new sense of the dual responsibility of theology to the church and academy, as well as a shift in the spirituality surrounding the practice of theology. Not all of these shifts were salutary, and so Johnson sets himself the task of resituating theology's presuppositions, responsibilities, and spirituality.



Chapter 2 (“Being in Christ”) begins Johnson’s positive case for reconceiving theology as an act of discipleship by suggesting it must start with God’s self-revelation in Christ, avoiding idolatry by taking its cues from God’s eternal plan to redeem us in Christ (outlined from Eph 1). We know God properly only as adopted children in the power of the Spirit who allows us to view reality and history through the incarnate life of Christ. “To know reality in light of Christ is finally to know the way things are, and to interpret history within the context of his eternal life is to see the meaning and significance of every event from the perspective God’s wisdom rather than our own” (pp. 59–60).

From there, in chapter 3 (“Partnership with Christ”) Johnson outlines a theology of the created, fallen, and redeemed *imago dei* suggesting there is an intended “pattern of partnership” to our life in God. Indeed, the history of God’s covenant dealings from Abraham to Christ is the narrative of his restoration of our partnership with God (p. 70). This partnership involves communion and conformity to the image of Christ as part of our restoration, taking on the family likeness in the power of the Spirit. Theologians are called to contribute to this by “bringing order to the church’s language” in order that it might be conformed to the being and character of God and avoid deforming idolatry (pp. 77–78).

Chapter 4 (“The Word of God”) explores the place the Bible plays as Holy Scripture in God’s plan to adopt us and conform us as his children. Here we find a nuanced theology of Scripture as human words inspired and set apart by God to be his Word to us about his Son. Johnson deftly threads some important needles here regarding the complexities of divine and human agency, as well as the ordered role Scripture plays in the economy of redemption. What’s more, he stakes a strong, evangelical emphasis on the Christological content and intent of all of Scripture through a careful test-case in Jesus’ debate with the Pharisees in John 8 (pp. 98–103). For Johnson, “The Bible does not just tell us true historical things; it proclaims the true history, and it does so by directing us to Jesus, the one by whom all history is defined” (p. 106).

Chapter 5 (“Hearing the Word of God”) is Johnson’s account of interpreting Scripture in the community of Christians, as well as the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination, which takes cues from Augustine’s two-commandment hermeneutic offered in *On Christian Doctrine*. He also treats the issue of doctrinal disagreement with another, similar test-case, that of circumcision in the early church, in which the Judaizers in Galatians failed to interpret Israel’s covenant history in light of Christ (p. 128). Johnson suggests the church today imitate the same process of reading all of Scripture in light of Christ as well as the work the Spirit is currently doing in the life of the community of God (p. 129).

With this framework set forth, Johnson turns in chapter 6 (“The Mind of Christ”) to expound theological practice as an exercise of participating in the mind of Christ. The chief pattern he appeals to is the cruciform humility of Christ as set forth in the hymn in Philippians 2, seeing it as the pattern of activity that “corresponds to the divine being and character” (p. 138). By the Spirit we are conformed to this pattern when we make our theological efforts in the context of a life given over to “humble service of others” (p. 147). Theology, undertaken in this way, is dependent on Christ, and is itself a practice of humble service to the church (p. 149).

In his concluding chapter (“Theology in Christ”) Johnson outlines nine characteristics that will mark theologians whose practice is in line with a life of discipleship to Christ. These range from a connection to the life of the church, attitudes of humility and service, as well as our approach to interdisciplinary work. As a young, graduate student myself, I must say I found this chapter the most valuable and a fitting capstone to the work as a whole.

I have little more than a couple of brief comments by way of criticism of Johnson's work. First, while I deeply appreciate Johnson's carefully-worked, evangelically Barthian, revelation-centered theological method, a small section on the proper place (or impropriety) of both apologetics and natural theology might have been appropriate in an introductory volume of this nature.

Second, I worry that while his exegetical test-case focused on the Judaizers gives us a good pattern for discerning positive theological advances in the Spirit's work in the history of redemption, it might have been helpful to contrast it with a pattern of false "discernment" of the sort found in the Corinthian church's antinomianism. This sort of balance in positive and negative parallels is particularly relevant given the church's current crisis in sexual ethics.

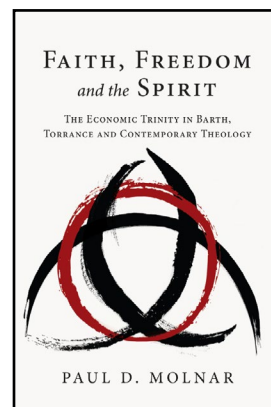
These criticisms aside, though, Johnson has given us a gift with this work. I highly commend it both to theological educators looking to introduce their students to the theological task, as well as those looking to be reminded of their own call to discipleship.

Derek Rishmawy
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois, USA

Paul D. Molnar. *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. 448 pp. £31.86/\$40.00.

Recent years have seen the rise of a kind of mini-controversy concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. At its finest point, the discussion has circled around differing interpretations of the theology of Karl Barth. On one side of this conversation are figures such as George Hunsinger who argue that Barth stands fundamentally within the broad stream of catholic reflection upon the doctrine of God. While Barth's understanding of the Trinity bears the marks of his own distinctive appropriation of the tradition in response to Protestant liberalism, these interpreters say his description of the doctrine does not differ *fundamentally* from the stream of orthodoxy with which he so vigorously and determinedly engaged. On the other side of this conversation are theologians such as Bruce McCormack who argue that in Barth's later work we see the outworking of his earlier commitments to reworking the doctrine of election such that Barth introduces a radical innovation in his conception of the relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity. In this view, the economic missions do not simply reveal the processions that exist within God's eternal life; rather, the Father's decision for humanity in Jesus Christ actually logically *precedes* his existence as Trinity.

That is the finest point of the conversation. But the underlying issues of this particular discussion are not simply an outlier within contemporary reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity, but are rather symptomatic of deeper uncertainties and discomforts about the relation between the triune God's inner and economic life, the nature of God's freedom in relation to humanity, and how reliable knowledge of God is obtained and what characterizes this knowledge. This discussion is one that St. John's University professor Paul D. Molnar has been involved in throughout his theological career through his earlier work *Divine Freedom and the Immanent Trinity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2002) and his theological



biography of contemporary theologian T. F. Torrance, and he returns once again to this conversation in the recently published *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance, and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

Molnar intends the volume to be “a discussion of just how a properly conceived pneumatology would assist theologians speaking of the economic Trinity to think more accurately about divine and human interaction in the sphere of faith and knowledge within history” (p. 7). The volume builds to that end, beginning in the first two chapters with a discussion of the nature of knowledge of God. Molnar first examines the place of faith in knowledge of God, arguing not only that true knowledge of God is impossible without faith but that faith is grounded in the Holy Spirit’s work. Molnar has in his sights not only natural theology broadly conceived, but in particular theologies that appeal to and are ultimately grounded upon human experience. Knowledge of God that is grounded upon human experience, such as that found in the theology of Karl Rahner, is a knowledge of God that Molnar says is “possible without any specific reference to God the Father, through God the Son and by means of his Holy Spirit” (p. 80) and is thus less than Christian. The second chapter presses Molnar’s concerns about the knowledge of God further by arguing for a fuller account of the Holy Spirit’s place in mediating knowledge of God by way of the theologies of Barth and Torrance.

In the third chapter Molnar turns from pneumatology and the knowledge of God to the issue of God’s freedom. The aforementioned debate about Barth’s theology takes center stage here, and Molnar provides a neat summary of the various proposals for understanding Barth, the Trinity, and election as given first by Bruce McCormack and later developed in various ways by Benjamin Myers, Kevin Hector, Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul Nimmo. Molnar argues that in each case the decision to reverse the logical order between Trinity and election does fatal damage to the doctrine of God “and in some measure what we then have is a dependent deity; a deity whose very being is constituted, shaped or transformed by created history. But a dependent deity is truly incapable of acting decisively for us in history as the living God actually does” (p. 186). The fourth chapter builds upon this discussion by putting forward Torrance’s particular construal of the relation between time and eternity as an example of a construction of the doctrine of God which properly preserves God’s immanent life and aseity.

The fifth and sixth chapters consider another issue related to Barth’s construction of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity—the concept of a “historicized Christology.” Here McCormack, arguing by way of his interpretation of Barth’s later theology, states that the human history of Jesus actually constitutes who God is as the second person of the Trinity. It is not only the case that the human history of Jesus is revelation, but that this revelation is actually constitutive of who God is. Molnar argues that there are a number of errors in McCormack’s argument, not merely in his interpretation of Barth but also in McCormack’s construal of God’s impassibility and the relation between epistemology and ontology. Robert Jenson appears in the discussion as an object of Molnar’s criticism, and once again Torrance is discussed as a figure who properly distinguishes between God’s immanent and economic life. Molnar goes on to rebut McCormack’s interpretation of Barth, arguing that the Swiss theologian did not depart from the classical tradition as radically as McCormack presents.

In chapter seven, Molnar examines the idea of the subordination of Jesus Christ in his economic activity as it relates to God’s immanent life. Molnar has concerns about Barth at this juncture, and Torrance serves as a foil and an example of a theologian who has many of the same commitments as Barth but who avoids Barth’s final positions. Barth argues that the Son’s *ad extra* subordination to the Father is also in a qualified sense an *ad intra* reality. While Torrance agrees with Barth that who God

“is toward us he is eternally in himself, and what he is eternally in himself he is toward us” (p. 314), Torrance does not speak of the subordination and condescension of the Eternal Son of God in the same way that Barth does. Molnar sides ultimately with Torrance in his refusal to read the Son’s economic condescension into the immanent Trinity in ways Molnar understands to be improper.

In the eighth and final main chapter Molnar presents a constructive proposal for the relationship between divine and human freedom based on the convictions that emerged from the previous chapters. Molnar understands his project to be one which affirms “that the freedom of Christians is enabled by God’s freedom for us in his Word and Spirit” (p. 419). Built upon God’s aseity, his election of his people in Jesus Christ, and a proper distinction between the immanent and economic Trinities, Molnar situates his proposal within the discussions of modern theology but at the same time very much in continuity with certain classical commitments to the doctrine of God.

The most significant question regarding Molnar’s proposal is precisely how modern of a project it ends up being, despite his resistance to the more radical interpretations of Barth. While Molnar resources theologians such as Barth and Torrance who were conversant with the pre-modern tradition, Molnar’s proposal is very much preoccupied with modern questions regarding the doctrine of God. A number of interesting questions could be asked of Molnar’s proposals by recent interpretations of the doctrine of God such as Lewis Ayres (*Nicea and its Legacy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]) or Stephen Holmes (*The Quest for the Trinity* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012]). For those who are convinced of the classical tradition’s handling of the doctrine of the Trinity, this kind of engagement would be as informative as that provided by McCormack and Jenson. In what ways are the questions of modern theology a faithful appropriation of the Gospel for our time, or in what ways has modern theology been formed by preoccupations that warp the Gospel witness? Molnar’s argument could be strengthened by this kind of engagement.

Nevertheless, Molnar’s *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit* provides an excellent summary of the current state of the debate of the doctrine of the Trinity and a compelling proposal for how one might faithfully answer these challenges. It is a volume that seminarians, graduate students, and academics would do well to consider thoughtfully.

Joseph H. Sherrard
Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church
Signal Mountain, Tennessee, USA

R. T. Mullins. *The End of the Timeless God*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, xxix + 248 pp. £65.00/\$110.00.

The End of the Timeless God is a sustained argument that divine timelessness ought to be abandoned. Mullins argues that the view that God is timeless conflicts with the best theories about the nature of time and with core Christian commitments. He draws on both philosophical theology and historical theology to make a strong case for his thesis.

Mullins's book contains seven chapters. In the introduction, he argues that any Christian research program must be committed to central Christian doctrines. These include the Trinity, creation ex nihilo, God's activity in history, the incarnation, and the notion that God has revealed himself to us meaningfully.

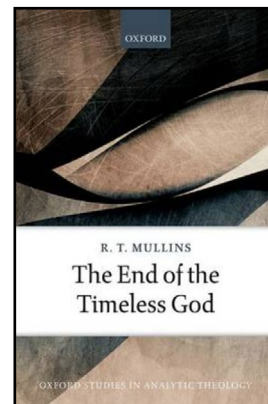
Mullins begins building his case with a chapter on the nature of time. He aims to sort out various distinctions that make up the differences between the A and B theories of time (best characterized by the views *presentism* and *eternalism*). Presentists think only the present exists, while eternalists hold that past present and future are all equally real. There is much to admire in Mullins's treatment. He manages both to orient a new reader to the philosophy of time and to avoid oversimplification.

The next chapter takes up what it means for God to be timeless. One implication is that God is immutable. That is, "God cannot under go any intrinsic or extrinsic change" (p. 51). If God undergoes any change, there is a before and after in God's life, and God would be temporal. That God is absolutely unchanging is connected in the tradition with the doctrine of divine simplicity. Each attribute of God is identical to God's own essence. There are no real distinctions in God. It is clear that simplicity entails timelessness, and these two doctrines are linked throughout the Christian tradition.

The bulk of Mullins's argument comes in the next three chapters. He argues persuasively that the classical Christian theologians who held to divine timelessness also held presentism. Many writing on God and time today take it for granted that timelessness implies some kind of eternalism. It is an important contribution to remind contemporary philosophers that the Christian tradition had a different view. Mullins shows that these thinkers reconciled God's unchanging nature with changing temporal reality not by denying that change was fundamental to reality (that is, not by denying presentism), but by denying that God is genuinely related to creation. Mullins calls this position "the Augustinian Option." The challenge to the Augustinian option comes in its tension with fundamental commitments of any Christian research program. God's creating and sustaining the world, his incarnation and redemption in Christ all require a real relation to the world. The combination of timelessness, presentism, and Christianity turns out to be incoherent.

Mullins goes on to argue that the rejection of presentism and the adoption of eternalism will be of no help to the Christian thinker. The result of eternalism is that the universe is co-eternal with God. Furthermore, if the proponent of timelessness holds to divine simplicity, we get the further problem that all modal distinctions collapse. Things we consider to be paradigmatic of contingent things turn out to be necessary.

In the final substantive chapter, Mullins argues that the doctrine of the incarnation cannot be reconciled to divine timelessness. Any view fails that attempts to attribute the temporal properties of Jesus to Jesus "qua man" while the timeless properties apply to Jesus "qua God."



In a brief conclusion, Mullins discusses areas that require further work. In addition he discusses the role of Scripture in the timelessness debate. Many think Scripture underdetermines this issue, even if a straightforward reading of nearly every text points to a God in time. What is important about Mullins's discussion is that it points out some crucial methodological issues in analytic theology. Mullins acknowledges the role of Scripture in doing analytic theology well. He also recognizes how the scriptural discussion of this particular issue has unfolded in the tradition.

I want to register one caution about Mullins's work. Is the connection between God's timelessness and divine simplicity as tight as the tradition makes it? It is not clear to me that timelessness entails simplicity. Mullins makes only a passing comment about the possibility of making a distinction here. Some of the incompatibility of the timeless research program with the core commitment of Christianity is a function of the connection of timelessness with simplicity. Pulling these apart may open up room for timelessness within an explicitly Christian framework.

This being said, Mullins's book is a model of careful argumentation and respectful inquiry into the broader Christian tradition. It is exactly what the best in analytic theology ought to be. I highly recommend it!

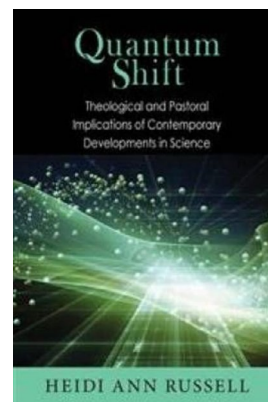
Gregory E. Ganssle
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University
La Mirada, California, USA

Heidi Ann Russell. *Quantum Shift: Theological and Pastoral Implications of Contemporary Developments in Science*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015. xxvi + 207 pp. £15.99/\$24.95.

Quantum Shift consists of a summary of a number of mostly cutting edge topics in contemporary physics, along with analogical pastoral applications. The list of topics is quite impressive: relativity, wave particle complementarity, entanglement, complexity theory, the Big Bang, the possibility of a multiverse, cosmic death and resurrection, and superstring theory/loop quantum gravity. Pastoral applications relate to a range of subjects, including relationship, the overthrow of black and white thinking, immanence and transcendence, the whole is greater than the parts, the importance of social sin and justice, God brings order out of chaos yet complexity remains, and so on.

For a theologian who does not (apparently) have a background in physics, the theme of this book strikes me as an ambitious project to undertake. With a book like this, one might anticipate simplistic representations of contemporary physics with applications that are a stretch, but that is far from what we find. The physics that is represented has been accurately portrayed for the most part, and the pastoral implications, though not always compelling as coming from the physics, are far from trivial and always carefully represented as "analogy." Let me add at this point also though, that for the evangelical reader, relatively few of the applications will prove to be of interest. This stems largely from the fact that they have been motivated from contemporary Catholic theologians, from Karl Rahner to William Stoeger, with the baggage that comes along.

Russell represents the physics well for the most part, carefully quoting or paraphrasing professionals who popularize the field. However, part of the problem is in choosing what to quote, or what not to



quote. For example, in explaining the twin paradox, Russell quotes Brian Greene as saying “the combined speed of any object’s motion through space and its motion through time is always precisely equal to the speed of light” (p. 4). While Greene has a point in making this statement (found in four dimensional physics), a usual speed relates space to time and physicists don’t generally think of traveling through time as speed. The real point would be that it is possible to find a shorter distance through time if you also travel through space. A second and more subtle issue has to do with the use of the word “chaos” in chapter 4. It is sometimes used in its technical sense within complexity theory, but other times it just means randomness, and it is difficult from the context to tell the difference. A third illustration, and perhaps the most egregious, is in the discussion of entanglement. Quoting Robert John Russell (p. 61), the author implies that the mystery lies in the fact that measurements of a spin variable must be equal and opposite when measured along the same axis. This however simply follows from classical physics. The mystery actually resides in the fact that when you measure the spin of an electron, the measurement can only take one of two discrete values no matter what measurement axis is chosen. This leads to a nonintuitive result when measuring spin variables along *different* axes, although none of that comes through in the author’s discussion. Though a bit technical, this illustrates that the physics is not always accurately represented.

Though I don’t have room to discuss all of the pastoral applications offered, let me describe two of them—the most intriguing, and the most problematic from my perspective. By far the most intriguing is the chapter on particle wave complementarity. In this chapter, Niels Bohr is portrayed as saying that the wave in quantum mechanics represents a potential, which is actualized as a particle when measured. Thus the wave describes the probabilities/possibilities for all outcomes, whereas the measurement actualizes a particular outcome. As Russell tells us, Karl Rahner expressed a similar outlook in relation to spirit and embodiment. Spirit represents our potential to decide concerning a range of possibilities, and a decision actualizes one of them. Whether this is good theology, it is certainly intriguing to think about the analogy between the different possibilities, each realm unfolding as possibilities are actualized, whether concerning particle measurements or human decisions.

Most problematic was the chapter on Cosmic Death and Resurrection. The expected end of our universe from the scientific perspective is that ultimately everything will end in a “heat death” where the whole universe is in equilibrium at a very low temperature. Picking up on the chapter on multiverse with the analogy of potential universes as choices, she says that the resurrection of mankind can be seen in analogy with the death of one universe and the re-creation of another, with essentially no reference to a personal resurrection. Russell is suggesting that the resurrection of mankind should be viewed more in the general context of beginnings, endings, and ongoing life in general rather than the hope of the resurrection of the dead in particular. Indeed, she says, “Theologically, when we think about the end of time, we use the image of a new creation—a new heavens and a new earth—but we do not imagine that there is literally going to be a new planet created on which we start over” (p. 155). Rather, “Our great hope in God can be that we are *not* the end of the story of creation, that creation continues after the extinction of humanity, after the death of our sun and solar system, after our galaxy becomes a black hole, perhaps giving life to a new universe in the process, and after our universe itself comes to an end” (pp. 161–62). This doesn’t square well with Paul’s statement, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:19 NIV). Although Russell quotes Moltmann to support her views (p. 158), she has likely misunderstood his theology at this point.

Though I could raise other criticisms, in summary, for those who like to keep up with what people of other persuasions are saying, *Quantum Shift*, might constitute intriguing and thought provoking reading. But to learn the physics per se, or to find appropriate analogies for pastoral use among evangelicals, I would suggest looking elsewhere.

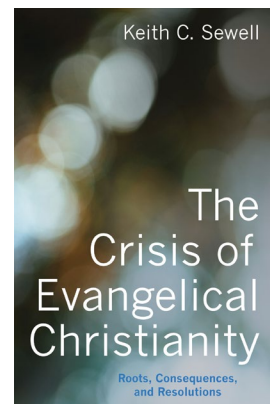
Donald N. Petcher
Covenant College
Lookout Mountain, Georgia, USA

Keith C. Sewell. *The Crisis of Evangelical Christianity: Roots, Consequences, and Resolutions*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016. xi + 292 pp. £25.00/\$36.00.

The title only remotely describes what the book is about. It begins, though, in a promising way. Its premise is that throughout the West, church attendance has “declined massively” (p. ix). This is but the end point of a “malaise that has been generations in the making” (p. x). The symptoms of this malaise are the loss of serious biblical preaching, compulsive singing of worship songs that are empty, and a lost capacity for reading serious literature. Is evangelical Christianity, Sewell asks, in “inevitable terminal decline” (p. x)?

This is not, however, the question that is then taken up. Rather, the reader is taken into a long and somewhat quirky recounting of church history. It begins with a section that runs from the patristic period to the Reformation (pp. 9–25). Then the author takes up divergent views among the Reformers on Scripture (pp. 26–38), their views on science and then the lingering effects of scholasticism (pp. 38–54), followed by the English and Scottish Reformations (pp. 55–76). Then there are discussions on pietism and the Wesleyan revival (pp. 77–94), the emergence of liberalism, fundamentalism and Pentecostalism (pp. 95–135). This brings the author to what he calls “crusading neo-evangelicalism” (p. 136–78). It is an account of the most prominent developments in post-War Western evangelicalism, such as the charismatic movement, evangelicalism’s foremost institutions, and some of their leaders. Yet, in all of this, there is no attempt made to connect this history back to the question with which the book begins. This does not happen until chapter 11 where he again makes the assertion that contemporary “evangelicalism is in deep trouble” (p. 178). But even here the issues are not pursued very carefully or thoroughly. He then concludes by asking if renewal is possible.

What has gone wrong with evangelicalism is that it has become worldly, lacks seriousness, and is simplistic. Evangelicals “have *reduced* the gospel to something much less than the good news concerning the kingdom of God” (p. 179). They have focused solely on personal salvation and ignored the “order of creation” (p. 6). He gives no explanation for why this happened or even how it came about. What he wants, by contrast, is the kind of Christianity that has at its center a world and life view, is “biblically directed,” and is serious. This is what is epitomized in the Kuyperian tradition of thought especially, perhaps, in Dooyeweerd’s thought. This, apparently, is what he meant earlier in the book when he said that the Reformation did not go far enough (p. 39). So, it is in this strand of Dutch Reformed thinking that there lies the answer to all that ails contemporary evangelicalism.



The question with which the author, a retired history professor, begins the book is a good question and we need to answer it. Indeed, there is much that has been written about it though none of this literature is engaged here. But aside from pointing to this stream of Dutch thought, there are no other answers.

And there is some questionable theology in this book. The author thinks that theology is a worthless undertaking because it is always corrupted by philosophical ideas (p. 42). This has happened but the author seems not to have noticed that the work done by evangelicals in the last five or six decades, much of it Reformed, is of an entirely different order. Further, he says that we do not have a knowledge of God since he cannot be investigated as can the creation (pp. 40–41). This is most curious since the premise of all Reformed thinking is that in Scripture we have God’s *self*-revelation. Our knowledge of God through Christ is not our discovery but a divine disclosure and a divine gift. To read Scripture is to be in the place where we can receive truths about God, his character, will, and ways. The author also thinks that “Christianity is not directly God-given, but our creaturely response to the gospel message” (p. 15). But are its truths not God-given in Scripture? And are we not committed always to reforming our ideas and practices in the light of God’s Word? Are we always left with nothing but our own stumbling, fumbling responses? Do we never know God’s truth?

This was a worthy project to undertake but this book is not a serious, or helpful, answer to the issues with which it starts. What is missing is a central, coherent, informed argument as to why the evangelical world has fallen on hard times. Without it, we are just left with the book’s many disparate pieces.

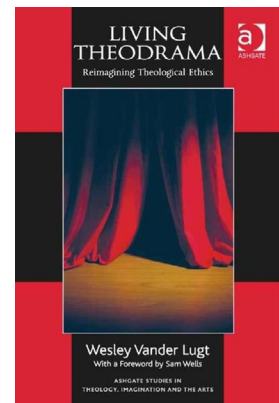
David F. Wells
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, Massachusetts, USA

— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Wesley Vander Lugt. *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. xii + 241 pp. £95.00/\$149.95.

Text. Doctrine. Application. For traditional Protestants, much of twentieth century interaction with Scripture can be encapsulated in these three stages. The first stage is a thorough, scientific examination of the text, wherein the biblical scholar seeks to understand the mind of the author within the world behind the text. The text is a product of an author saying something to some group at some particular place in time; therefore, if we can understand the historical issues surrounding the writing of the text and the occasion for that writing, we can understand what the text means. The second stage turns to doctrine and the theologian. The theologian draws out the timeless doctrinal truths of the text. Then, lastly, the pastor takes up the third stage and applies the timeless, doctrinal truth for his congregation in the present.

For many, the great disadvantage of this model is the distance that it creates between the Bible and the Christian life. Even if few are willing to say so, the effect is a tendency to view reading the Bible as reading someone else’s mail and attempting to moralize it. For the church, ethics becomes something



distinct from direct Scripture reading and theology. It is a separate step, often taking a leap of faith to understand how one may find ethical application from such core beliefs as the doctrine of the Trinity: how does God's being triune make a difference for my response to a lost job or the death of a loved one? A significant response to this problem has been what some theologians have called the "turn to drama." This growing movement seeks to use the model of live-action theater to describe the entire dynamic of Bible-theology-ethics in terms of the primary creative and redemptive actions of the triune God. Rather than see a great divide between today's church and the Bible, the turn to drama sees Scripture as God's instrument to reveal the nature and character of his ongoing actions in the world and the means to draw his creatures into participation in his "theodrama." In *Living Theodrama*, Wesley Vander Lugt takes up this task, describing Christian ethics as a function of living in this drama, playing the part God has given to humanity made in his image.

On the way to his goal of providing a closer connection among Bible, theology, and ethics, Vander Lugt labors on two primary fronts. First, he seeks a description of ethics that is *inherently* Christian. He believes that the theater model can helpfully illuminate Trinitarian action with respect to the world since it allows for unity of will and purpose through clearly distinguished roles: the Father authors the drama, the Son takes center stage as lead actor, and the Spirit is director-producer, ordering the drama on its course. That the Son takes center stage also testifies to the Christological character of the drama. All other actors—that is, the rest of humanity—play faithful roles in the theodrama insofar as they embrace supporting roles to Christ. Scripture serves as witness to the drama, a transcript of what God has done, especially in Christ, and a prescript of ethical paradigms by which we order our supporting roles. We look to Scripture—directed by the Spirit—to demonstrate possibilities for our actions and to form our imaginations to perceive the world always in terms of the drama of Christ. Vander Lugt resists the idea that Scripture is a script, for he fears this would undermine how we engage as supporting actors—that is, we act in wisdom, discerning faithful action through Scripture shaping our hearts, minds, will, and desires, not by finding in Scripture precise instructions for our every act. In this way, Vander Lugt resists the mode of application through bridges that transfer timeless truths to present contexts. Instead, he affirms transformation of one's identity through inhabiting the ongoing drama of God made known in Christ. Theology bears upon ethics in the way that one's role in the drama bears upon one's action in the theater, specifically by naming who we are in God's purposes.

Second, Vander Lugt is intent to demonstrate the great benefits in turning to the theater model. He does not slavishly join God's action to the theater model as if the latter fully captures the former. Neither does Vander Lugt believe that just any theater model works. He evaluates a number of types of live-action theater and several performance methods, seeking what most befits the biblical account both of God's free action and of authentic human response. Most significant of his conclusions is his identification of improvisational theater as the type of best fit. Vander Lugt is quick to note that improvisation is not the same thing as impromptu, for the former requires practice and habituation and a keen understanding of where the story is going. In improvisational theater, one does not simply do whatever she wishes. Rather, she seeks acquaintance with the story and her place in it in order to discern the most appropriate way to act in accordance with her role.

In the final evaluation, Vander Lugt proves successful in demonstrating the pedagogical strength of the theater model without slipping into the potential pitfall of reducing the great actions and story of God to the walls and stage of the theater. He builds upon the strong work of his predecessors such as Kevin Vanhoozer, who have primarily focused on the implications of this model for hermeneutics and

descriptions of theology. Vander Lugt's contribution is the depth to which he dives in the ethical side of the dramatic pool. His treatment is certainly the most comprehensive in the area of Christian ethics and the most satisfying apologetic for all that the dramatic model can offer. For anyone wishing to explore Christian ethics in Christian, theological terms—regardless of commitment to the theatrical—*Living Theodrama* is a must read.

Ashish Varma
Moody Bible Institute
Chicago, IL, USA

Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo. *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. 176 pp. £10:38/\$14.99.

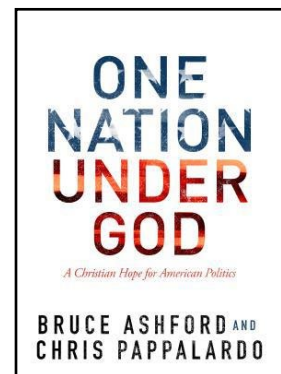
The political scene in contemporary America is tragicomic. Every hard-fought victory is expunged by twice as many glib losses, or so it feels anyway. American political discourse includes a tremendous amount of noise *about* hope, but little in the way of *actual* hope. The many varieties of despair parade like garish celebrity floats through our social consciousness, vapid and unending.

We therefore have Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo to thank for offering us this compact primer, *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics*. I stress the word “hope” because that is the express aim of the authors: to inspire *hope* in a Christian readership. All is not lost. Quite the contrary, the church has a powerful, irrevocable mission to bring a message of hope—the good news in Jesus Christ. The enduring challenge, of course, is how best to express that news within our respective political orders. *One Nation Under God* represents one such expression, so allow me here to explain what the book does and how it goes about doing it.

The book is divided into two parts. A concise summary of the first part might go as follows: All politics is theological. That idea is a presumption of political theology today—there is something political about theology and something theological about politics. Ashford and Pappalardo similarly assume that politics is theological all the way down. Our soteriology doesn't just tell us something about the nature of our redemption in Christ, for example, but also about the very essence of justice itself. In so many respects Christian theology *is* a political story, beginning and ending with Christ Jesus.

Politics requires theological interpretation, however, and the pre-requisite to theological interpretation on the authors' account is an understanding of meta-history with four acts—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. The church derives its understanding of politics from the wider story of God's purposes for the world, which in turn rightly orients the faith community to the order of the world.

But it's never just “a world” we encounter. Our world is also the site of our respective publics and politics. The church itself, in all its localities, shares a relation to the public and to the politics governing it. According to the authors, a distinctly Christian understanding of politics allows neither for absorption or withdrawal, but instead stresses a renewal and restoration of politics. Our publics are a context for just and charitable actions—for the undertaking of good works, and thus when Christians act faithfully in the world they demonstrate that the fundamental truth of Christianity transcends subjectivity. No



faith worthy of the name can be reduced to quaint personal opinion. Christianity makes *claims*. The gospel itself, Ashford and Pappalardo inveigh, doesn't just contain truth—it *is* true, and its universality pervades all particulars of Christian existence. Christianity is by necessity a public faith.

Because the Church is public it bears some relation to the state. The way to put the question is “how Christians bring their faith commitments to bear in politics?” (p. 33). Answers to such a question will depend, of course, on historical, geographic, and other contingencies. The church's relation to the state is never static. The authors outline responses of Jesus, Paul, and Peter to the question of church and state. Stress is placed on the organic rather than institutional nature of the church. The membership and mission of the church far surpasses earthly politics wherever and whenever the church dwells upon the earth. One cannot be an American Christian, in other words, but a Christian who just happens to be American.

Ashford and Pappalardo underscore the importance of persuasion in public life, which in a post-Christian context will require forms living and speaking that grasp the conditions of contemporary pluralism. On this point chapters 5 and 6 dovetail to explain both the kind of pluralism we've inherited and to extol the wisdom and virtue needed to live faithfully within it. These constructive sections reinforce the modest proposal of dwelling in the polis with civility. The Christian should be realistic about where she finds herself, about seeking the city's good, and about how best to articulate the truths that most need public articulation, all on the “long view” of Christ's completion of all things.

The second part of the book represents an effort to apply the principals of the first part to a select sample of contested policy issues: life and death, marriage and sexuality, economy, creation care, racial diversity, immigration, and warfare. Each chapter sketches the general contours of an issue and concludes with a few discussion questions (for groups) and some recommendations for further reading. One of the overarching (and much appreciated) purposes of this second part is to redress trite polarities of contemporary debates by carefully recasting the terms of discourse. Formulating clear responses requires that we first get the questions right.

It is important to bear in mind that although the topical sweep of this book is rather broad, its aims within that scope are comparatively modest. The kingdom of God orders the political life of the church both internally and externally. Christ's jurisdiction is all encompassing. The church is a people living in collective deference to Christ's rule, and that truth inspires hope for politics. This means there is no ready-made algorithm for Christians living between the times. We cannot anticipate all the challenges that may arise or portend how modern society will reckon with them, and so the church relies upon God for the faith, hope, and love necessary to represent Truth in the world.

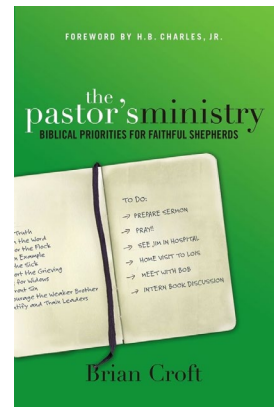
Now, not every issue-sketch offered in part two is wholly convincing. The chapters on economy and ecology, for example, are somewhat oversimplified and don't advance ecclesial discussions quite as well as other chapters. It would also have been helpful to hear a bit more about what it means to *be* public. Someone who may wish to be public is never granted audience, and likewise someone who wishes to avoid publicity is spotlighted by accident. These sort of disjunctions happen all the time. But books of this nature tend to have an exposed flank or two, and in identifying a couple of them I mean primarily to underscore the authors' narrow aims: to approach politics with a theological sensitivity that inspires

hope in the people of God for their God. After all, being under the authority of God is humanity's only hope.

Matthew Arbo
Oklahoma Baptist University
Shawnee, Oklahoma, USA

Brian Croft. *The Pastor's Ministry: Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 185 pp. £10.99/\$16.99.

As I write this, there are a host of issues swirling about me culturally, in my church, and in my own heart, many of which are quite complex and are overwhelming both for me and the people I shepherd. How should I pastor my people to think and live in light of the gospel in this cultural moment? What are the lane lines that guide my vision as a pastor? Our church has also just begun our first building campaign under my leadership. These moments have glories and also controversy. What do pastoral ministry and fundraising have to do with each other? I am still sorting that out. Finally, as a man, a regular, fallen, and finite man, I have my own issues that I bring to the table. I do not wear a cape. I am a man with clay feet, called by God, to serve as a pastor. My own shortcomings often obscure my call. Then there are the myriad of books on my shelf that try and tell pastors what to do with the majority of their time and talent. There is insight in each book, but sometimes one feels like certain types of books don't quite square up with the glorious passages of a book like 2 Corinthians or 2 Timothy.



The culture will evolve, my church situation will change, I will continue to grow and mature, and books will be pumped out opining on the real role of the pastor. But the one thing I have come to embrace is that the pastor must keep to the *basics* of a healthy and fruitful ministry. There are a handful of priorities that a pastor must keep to, vigilantly, over a lifetime. Staying to the basics is the heart of the pastoral ministry and this line of thought is the main argument of Brian Croft's recent book, *The Pastor's Ministry: Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds*.

It is clear that Croft's writing has been the fruit of several years of practice and study, as he is both a working pastor and is the senior fellow of the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. Between the sociological and theological nuance of a book like *Center Church*, by Tim Keller, and the myriad of theologically light manuals on leadership and church growth, there needs to be some solid go-to's on the basics of ministry and I think Brian Croft has achieved this. In the tradition of ministries like *9Marks*, Croft has thoughtfully yet straightforwardly laid out a classic and biblical vision of these basics. The author highlights ten pastoral priorities and does so under the book's three main divisions: foundation, focus, and faithfulness. Part one (foundation) focuses on the teaching and interceding ministry of the pastor. It includes chapters on guarding the truth, preaching the Word, and praying for the flock. Croft could have chosen to put all of the prophetic elements of ministry in this section, but I found it compelling that he added the non-hortatory element of prayer. The prophetic and priestly should be held together. Part two (focus and faithfulness) stress the relational aspects of ministry, the long and heart-consuming task of shepherding. This section includes the priorities of modeling, visitation, grief care, and caring for widows. Part three

concludes the list of priorities with the call to confront sin (church discipline), encouragement of the weak (counseling), and ministry training.

I am not sure why Croft chose how he filed each priority under each main pillar, and I think they could have been hung together in more closely associated categories. At times I would have liked an arrangement of the ten priorities to hang off some core values, like Word-ministry, or personal ministry, etc. The three file folders of foundations, focus, and faithfulness are memorable but do not have an obvious conceptual link with the priorities named under each one. But, that is a minor critique and that lack of obvious organization did not hamper the overall thrust nor the content of each priority. Certainly the ten overall priorities are biblical and thus important. As the book unfolds, Croft's thesis is clear: ministry should keep to the main things, the basics. And, perhaps the value of the list as it stands is that it keeps these priorities together, rather than as a buffet of choices that men who have teaching gifts can pick at versus those with counseling gifts can selectively choose. Croft is spot on that each must find some place in the pastor's life. Now, I would add that some are non-negotiables as a weekly pattern. Visitation may not happen each week, but biblical teaching should. I think it is assumed in his presentation that this is the case, but one must keep that in mind.

Is the book pushing the envelope of pastoral theology? Will it push you in theological directions that you find insightful or creative? No. But, that is not the point, and those are often the books that go off the rails very quickly. I suspect the point of this book for Croft is a no-nonsense, yet thoughtful, reminder to keep to the basics. A book like this is more of a workshop than a theological exploration of the pastor's narrative. I think the strength of the work is that it does not pretend to do more than it actually does, and so I was left reminded and edified and directed back to the basics.

If you have several books of this type on your shelves already you may wonder why invest in yet another? First, you may find that each book brings a slightly different nuance. You may find a few kernels that no other book has. And second, certain books are quite useful for training others. In fact, I was struck that the value of a book like this is something Croft focuses on in his last priority, namely, training. Whether for pastoral residents, interns, or even lay people in ministry training, this is a solid resource to use as a workshop or seminar resource. I would think a book like this would be a great introduction to pastoral ministry, especially for churches that have a training vision marked by the basics. Croft begins each chapter with the biblical basis for that priority, he weaves in personal stories to illustrate, and he gives practical applications that any pastor, in any setting, at any time will face. Some of the more sociologically and organizationally technical books are wonderful for urban settings that focus on highly educated and vocationally successful urbanites, or they are very beautiful narratives yet quite vague in practical import. However, *The Pastor's Ministry* is genuinely helpful in that it is both basic in its concepts and basic in its presentation. Basics, when biblical and thoughtful, actually empower pastors to lead people into the eternal and infinite glories of the gospel.

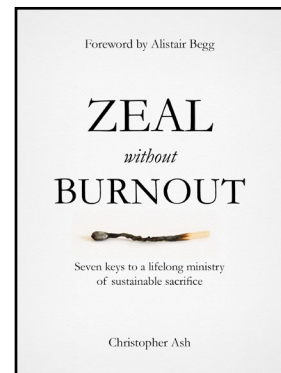
One pastor I respect once said that the key to a life that will change the world is not doing a lot of things superficially, but rather doing a few things with all your heart. This book attests to that truth. We live in an increasingly complex world. Our churches will face dynamic moments of leadership challenge, and our own hearts can be prone to stray from the course marked out for us in Scripture. It is good to

have a solid reminder on how to keep to a lifelong and faithful ministry—to the basics—those things we should do with full resolve.

Jay Thomas
Chapel Hill Bible Church
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Christopher Ash. *Zeal without Burnout: Seven Keys to a Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice*. London: The Good Book Company, 2016. 125 pp. £7.99/\$12.99.

The subject of burnout is a reality that many pastors have experienced firsthand or in their ministry circles. It is a real danger about which all ministers should be aware and need help to avoid. Christopher Ash, former director of the Proclamation Trust's Cornhill Training Course in London, discusses the subject of burnout and how to prevent it in this short book that builds upon the insights Ash shared at *The Basics* pastors' conference at Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio in 2014. Ash draws upon his own experience, as on at least two different occasions he has come to the point of burnout (p. 15), and that of others, with the book featuring numerous stories of pastors and Christian workers who have experienced burnout.



The book begins with Ash introducing the subject of burnout and offering images of what it looks like. Ash clarifies, “Sacrifice is not the same as burnout” (pp. 23–27). Christ does call us to sacrifice and self-denial, so ministry should not be easy. This does not mean, however, that one should sacrifice to the point of burnout, as burnout actually impedes ministry and forces others to help one recover. Therefore, ministry is to be a “sustainable sacrifice” (p. 26). Ash then introduces a truth that serves as the foundation for the seven keys that he discusses: “We are creatures of dust” (pp. 35–41). This means that every human has limits—these limits might differ from person to person, but limits are still there.

The first four “keys” are implications of our creaturely limits; unlike the creator God, we need (1) sleep, (2) Sabbath, (3) friends, and (4) inner renewal by the Holy Spirit. The final three “keys” differ from the first four in that they deal more with motivation: (5) we must be on guard against a “celebrity” mindset that cares about the opinion of others; (6) we need to remember our labors are not in vain; and (7) we need to remember God’s grace and not just look to the ministry gifts that we have been given. After Ash’s conclusion, which urges the reader to put into practice these truths, is a section describing burnout by Dr. Steve Midgely, a pastor and professor who was trained as a psychiatrist (pp. 117–23). Midgely helpfully notes that burnout is not a medical diagnosis, it can manifest itself in various ways (such as depression, fatigue, sleeplessness, and poor judgment), and it emerges from a life lived at high stress for too long, with the result that one is no longer at his or her point of best performance.

The book’s insights are not groundbreaking but important and need to be heeded. The inclusion of stories of people in ministry on the brink of or at the bottom of burnout offer examples both what it looks like and how to deal with it. Moreover, I found the term “sustainable sacrifice” helpful, as I have personally wrestled with the question of how sacrifice relates to “self-care.” A way to strengthen the book might be to include or refer to Midgely’s discussion on burnout in the opening chapter to make

sure the reader knows what burnout is and looks like, lest one misunderstand what is being said. In addition, I wonder if there would be value in not labeling the book as “Seven Keys” since they are not parallel; perhaps one could describe the book as a “pathway to sustainable sacrifice” rather than “Seven Keys.” Finally, while Ash states that the book is geared “especially for pastors and Christians leaders,” he states that it is also designed for “all zealous followers of Jesus,” including those who have regular jobs in addition to their labors in ministry (p. 14). The book definitely has value for pastors and full-time Christian workers, but it could use more reflection on what these practices might look like for lay Christians who might have more difficulty finding Sabbath time or implementing other practices in light of the nature of their ministry done in their “free time.” Even if these leaders do not read the book themselves, such insights could help pastors think through how to help prevent burnout among lay leaders, something that would also help to maintain a sustainable ministry.

Overall, this is a welcome addition to the topic of ministry that hopefully will help cultivate “sustainable sacrifice” among Christian workers. Ash strikes the right balance between the call to sacrifice and suffer as a follower of Christ and the reality of burnout. The book’s brevity makes it accessible for those who might feel overwhelmed and perhaps most in need of the insights from the book, and its practical points are easy to remember. Hopefully, the experiences of Ash and others will lead readers to implement the keys Ash has laid out so that they can cultivate a ministry of sustainable sacrifice and avoid being a further addition to the number of people leaving the ministry.

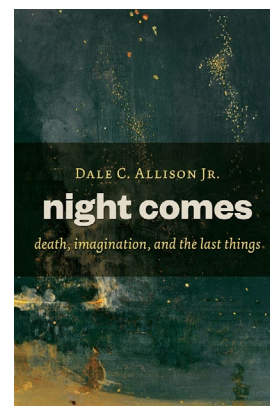
Brian C. Dennert
Faith Church
Dyer, Indiana USA

Dale C. Allison Jr. *Night Comes: Death, Imagination, and the Last Things*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 186 pp. £12.66/\$18.00.

Night Comes defies neat categorization. It is part historical reflection, part theologizing, part autobiography, and part integration of science into his own field of biblical studies. Throughout, the book wrestles with the great existential questions that loom over our frightfully transient existence.

Dale Allison, an accomplished Gospels scholar, is Richard J. Dearborn Professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary. As an ordained PCUSA minister he self-consciously writes out of the mainline Protestant tradition (pp. 46, 85). I can only assess the book from where I stand, in alignment with the TGC Confessional Statement, and thus situated somewhere between the fundamentalist Dispensationalism Allison considers silly and the mainline church to which he appears to be writing. I say he appears to be writing for fellow mainliners due to comments sprinkled throughout such as the observation that many pastors don’t preach on heaven because they don’t really believe it exists (p. 121), or in appealing to the mainline acceptance of angelic transmogrification (p. 132), or in the popular eschatological ignorance that is insufficiently engaged “in mainline pulpits and seminaries” (p. 85).

I will try to review this book with realism and charity. At the same time I can only review it honestly, believing that swallowing this book wholesale is intellectually confusing and spiritually dangerous.



The writing of even a short book like this one requires a mountain of effort and deserves due appreciation. It is not difficult to find praiseworthy elements in *Night Comes*. First is the pervasive theme reflected in the title. Death is coming, and it is coming to all, heedless of the infinite human resources distracting us from this unpleasant but unavoidable fact. “[I]f one thing seems assured, it’s that we have no power in the face of death. We may, with diet and exercise or whatnot, fend off the sickle for a bit, but the hour comes when none of us will work” (p. 42). The reminder is ever salutary.

Second is the way Allison writes, reflecting a literary craftsmanship honed over a lifetime of writing. Judgment upon death is “that resting place . . . when lame self-justification will halt” and we will finally be able to view ourselves “from a perspective that transcends and shatters our absurdly partisan self-perception” (pp. 62–63). Or: “If death is the end, then we’re all snow: we arrive, we melt, we are no more” (p. 88). Or: “Human beings aren’t unidirectional vectors but bundles of contradictions. Saints are sinners; sinners are saints. Everyone is Jekyll; everyone is Hyde” (p. 117). Well said.

Third, one appreciates Allison’s honesty and candor. He does not hide behind his scholarly reputation, afraid to voice his questions. His admirably transparent queries lend to the reader a certain openness to hearing him out.

Fourth, the breadth of reading informing the book astonishes. Allison meanders reflectively from the church fathers to the reformers, from Tolkien and Lewis to Pannenberg and Moltmann, from *Hamlet* to *It’s a Wonderful Life*, from the natural sciences to the fields of psychology and NDEs (near death experiences). At times the sheer number of quotes becomes cumbersome, but the range of reading is commendable of the author and deepening to the reader.

Finally, the actual content at times carries refreshing and eye-opening insight to the reader. One example is the discussion of judgment versus justice and the way contemporary culture views the former as negative and the latter as positive, and how this is out of accord with Scripture’s use of these terms (pp. 47–49). Another example is the way eschatology fuels ethics: what one believes about the next life necessarily informs how one lives this one (pp. 73–77). Yet another is Allison’s useful reminders throughout the book of the restraint needed regarding how much we can really know of the next life (e.g., p. 89). We should let the mysterious remain so. If that leaves us with some measure of discomfort, so be it. We shall be that much the humbler.

For these reasons and more the book holds one’s attention throughout, with occasional pockets of highly enjoyable reading. It is therefore saddening to acknowledge that *Night Comes* is a deeply unchristian book.

By this I do not mean that Allison rejects wholesale the Christian gospel. He holds various historic Christian convictions. But his approach to death and the afterlife fundamentally approaches his subject from below, not from above. Human learning, not divine revelation, forms the basis for Allison’s claims. This book walks by sight, not by faith.

One way we see this is the repeated inclusion in each chapter of affirmation of Allison’s points from other world religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, and even New Age thought (p. 128) are brought in as further vindication of Allison’s experientially-based thoughts on the afterlife. To be sure, we ought to expect to find strains of truth in other religions due to God’s common grace and the *imago Dei*, but Allison seems to put all religions on equal footing.

The main reason I call this book “unchristian,” however, is its unstated but pervasive bibliography. Toward the beginning of the book, for example, Allison asks why we fear death. “The obvious answer is: genetic programming. Our recoil is a biological reflex, bestowed by an evolutionary process that instills

the instinct to survive” (p. 5). Why not reflect on the Bible’s teaching on death to answer this question? The next page answers: “the Bible is, despite the latest covers, old and distant, and it gets older and more distant with each passing day” (p. 6).

Throughout the book Allison bows to “the irrefragable results of modern science” (p. 33) in an undisguised privileging of post-Enlightenment thought that causes his admittedly broad historical reading to be unhelpfully selective toward his own case. Thus he argues that the traditional doctrine of bodily resurrection has been losing widespread assent the past few centuries (pp. 27–35), yet nowhere acknowledges the alternative and major swaths of Christian thought that have held strongly and clearly to the doctrine of a physical resurrection. One thinks of Robert Yarbrough’s *The Salvation-Historical Fallacy?* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2004), which demonstrates with ample evidence the continued belief in the traditional doctrine of the final resurrection during the heyday of Wrede, Harnack, and other vocal voices within German higher criticism. Liberalism wasn’t all there was. Indeed, students of post-Enlightenment biblical criticism will notice that Allison’s approach is precisely the difference highlighted when Schlatter joined Harnack at the University of Berlin in the 1890s. One scholar stood under the Bible, the other over it.

Problematic suggestions arising from Allison’s unchristian approach include:

- The rejection of physical resurrection (pp. 40–42) and of this planet as part of the new earth (pp. 126–27). A useful recent corrective here would be Richard Middleton’s *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*, which, though downplaying the invisible/soulful dimension of sin and redemption, is crystal clear on the corporeality of biblical eschatology.
- A one-sided view of God, making the same mistake Doug Campbell does in his widely acclaimed *The Deliverance of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), receiving the loving and benevolent side of God while stiff-arming the judging and retributive side (66–67, 118). The answer is that God is more complex than Allison allows. What he makes an either/or is a both/and.
- His understanding of marriage, including the suggestion that if humans start living significantly longer (he suspects that in the future we will live as long as the saints of old, upward of several hundred years), we will have to make divorce permissible. He wonders: “How many people are going to confine themselves to one matrimonial adventure before their 500th birthday?” (p. 8). Never mind that he contradicts this later on (“As a general rule, the more time I’ve spent with a friend or family member, the more profound and meaningful the relationship has become” [p. 87]). Is not the Christian understanding of marriage that of sacred union before God, reflecting the unbreakable union of Christ and the church? Moreover, do not the best marriages confess that the relationship gets better with time (my own parents come to mind)? Why wouldn’t this trajectory of an increasingly strengthening bond continue over centuries, as over decades? I wonder how Allison’s wife feels about his argument.
- An extended argument that deceased humans turn into angels based on less than careful readings of biblical and intertestamental Jewish texts (pp. 127–34). Even the texts cited consistently say the deceased will be *like* angels, not become angels. And there is no interaction with Hebrews, the argument of which depends on a clear distinction between angels and humans.

- A noncommittal stance throughout that feels more like an adolescent's journal than the published work of someone who has been teaching the Bible to pastors-in-training for decades. Thus he "ardently hopes" universalism is true (p. 118) and quotes universalists for support while refusing to say outright whether he believes it. Nor does he interact with the many books arguing for the traditional view of an eternal hell (though he names several titles of such books at one point, indicating his awareness of them). With this book Allison flirts with the danger of "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:7).
- Perplexing comments claiming to speak for the whole Christian church. For example: "More than a few Christians expect nothing beyond this world" (p. 70). I can only ask what, to Allison's mind, *is* a Christian? If many of them disbelieve in an afterlife, what do they believe? Jesus's moral teaching? I am reminded of Machen's critique of Liberalism almost a century ago in *Christianity and Liberalism*. *Night Comes* is not so much a leftist form of Christianity as it is something other than Christianity that retains Christian language. This is an alternative religion. Unlike that with which Machen locked horns, Allison is not antsupernaturalistic. He goes in the other direction. His supernaturalism is a mishmash of personal experience (see esp. pp. 147–49), accounts of near-death experiences, the natural sciences, and ancient literature (Second Temple Judaism no less than Christian Scripture, as "Scripture offers no consistent teaching about life after death" [p. 148]).
- Connected to the question of what Allison thinks a Christian is, one wonders what he understands the gospel to be. With assumptions reminiscent of Rob Bell's *Love Wins*, Allison compares Pol Pot to Mother Teresa (p. 116), suggesting that we can conceive of the former in hell but not the latter, and rejects the thought that "kind, attentive" Hindus could go to hell (p. 106). The problem is that this is implicit works righteousness. Allison assumes that the goodness of nice people merits heaven and the badness of Pol Pot deserves hell. But the message of the gospel is that people are saved by grace, by God's gifted goodness through his Son, not through human goodness. At this vital point too, then, *Night Comes* is unchristian.

I am therefore at a loss as to any real usefulness for this book. The methodology is deficient, the history selective, the suggestions at times bizarre, the tone noncommittal, the arguments occasionally contradictory, the Bible eviscerated of authority, and the gospel confused.

Dane Ortlund
Crossway
Wheaton, Illinois, USA

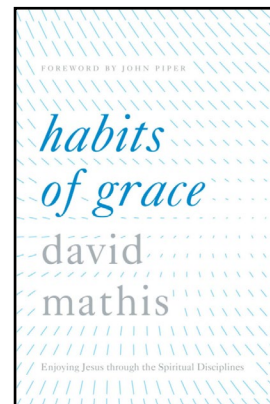
David Mathis. *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 240 pp. £9.99/\$14.99.

Avoiding books on the spiritual disciplines is a natural response when you already find making time for plain old prayer and Bible reading a struggle. It doesn't feel possible to memorize, study, journal, pray, and fast. To those who have struggled, as I have, to practice several spiritual disciplines at once, this book will provide a refreshing perspective. Rather than overwhelm with a wide variety of disciplines to keep in tandem with one another, Mathis offers the gift of simplicity, focusing on a few key conduits of grace, and then allowing the specific ways in which these conduits can be fleshed out to be creative and realistic for each individual's season of life.

Mathis helpfully streamlines the disciplines into three pathways of grace: "hearing God's voice, having his ear, and belonging to his body" (p. 26). The first pathway refers to the ways in which we receive God's Word: reading, studying, memorizing, mediating, and learning from other teachers. For Mathis, biblical meditation is the pinnacle of Scriptural intake. The second pathway refers to the ways in which we speak to God, and includes private prayer as a "test of authenticity," as well as corporate prayer, journaling, and fasting. The third pathway involves the grace we receive as we participate in the life of the body of Christ. This includes corporate worship, listening (to others and to God's voice through the pulpit), communion and baptism, and rebuke received and given through the process of church discipline. Mathis includes a closing "coda" in which he discusses evangelism, money, and time stewardship.

Habits of Grace makes several unique contributions. First, Mathis helpfully establishes the theological foundation that undergirds his understanding of the spiritual disciplines. Receiving God's Word, speaking to God, and participating in corporate worship are the normal ways that God mediates his justifying, sanctifying, glorifying grace into our lives and hearts. Second, by viewing these disciplines as conduits for grace, Mathis maintains a gospel-centered focus that is too often lacking in books on spiritual disciplines. Third and most notably, he incorporates a community element to the spiritual disciplines, whereas previous books have focused primarily, and at times exclusively, on the individual nature of each discipline. This communal emphasis allows Mathis to present giving and receiving rebuke as a new category of spiritual discipline, and include baptism and communion in the corporate disciplines as well.

Mathis's emphasis on meditation as the "pinnacle" of hearing God's voice provides a projected "meeting place" for the mind (as it processes the words of Scripture) and the heart (as the Spirit moves the heart to receive and live the Scripture). Meditation "bridges the gap between hearing from God and speaking to him. . . . We go deep into God's revelation, take it into our very souls, and as we are being changed by his truth, we respond to him in prayer" (p. 59). Meditation creates a space for communing with God. And by striking a balance between reading Scripture (breadth) and studying Scripture (depth), Mathis points out the value of both approaches. Perhaps there would have been added value in spending time on a few key, tested methods for interpreting Scripture (or recommending some good resources for this), since some readers may feel ill-equipped to answer the questions that arise when they begin to study the Bible in-depth.



One of the most valuable parts of *Habits of Grace* is the author's practical ideas for how to incorporate the disciplines into our lives. For example, Mathis offers the following suggestions for being a lifelong learner: vary sources for education in differing seasons of life, redeem space and time for education during the mundane moments of life, switch mindless time into meaningful learning time, adapt to new media formats, and assume the identity of a learner (pp. 86–89). To add further strength to this section, the author could provide a brief explanation of some specific areas to consider for education (e.g., biblical and systematic theology) or a few key resources for learning more about specific books or topics in Scripture. Further clarification on the place of theological studies (both formal and informal) in hearing God's voice or in continuing education could also provide potential benefit.

The chapter on lifelong learning contains a quote which well sums up Mathis's emphasis on pursuing God the Person, as opposed to simply pursuing knowledge or performing the disciplines as duty:

[T]he focal point of our lifelong learning is the person and work of Christ. . . . The heart of lifelong learning that is truly Christian is not merely digging deeper in the seemingly bottomless store of information there is to learn about the world and humanity and history, but plunging into the infinite food of Christ's love, and how it all comes back to this, in its boundless breadth and length and height and depth, and seeing everything else in its light. (p. 85)

One of the great values of this book was communion with God as the goal of the disciplines.

Some may question Mathis's placement of communion and baptism as spiritual disciplines—particularly baptism, since it is a one-time event rather than a repeated practice. However, Mathis frames the disciplines as a means of grace to the believer, and it works well in that context. Believers experience fresh grace in the gospel through the celebration of the Lord's Table and through observing baptism (both our own and that of others).

Some readers will also question whether or not “rebuke” works as a spiritual discipline. At first glance, it raises questions as to why this “one another” command is elevated over similar commands, such as serving one another (Gal 5:13), encouraging one another (1 Thess 5:11) and singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19). However, given our society's reticence to receive correction or to open ourselves for input, this discipline addresses a needed growth area and a timely word that could help us root ourselves more deeply in our identity in Christ, as well as encourage and challenge one another to grow in faith and holiness. Mathis's guidelines for giving and receiving a rebuke provide help for those who are concerned that they do not have what it requires to give (or take) a rebuke. He writes, “The love of Christ for us is the key to unlock the power of rebuke. . . . Only in Jesus can we find our identity not in being without fault, but in being shown love by God when we're still sinners” (p. 188–89).

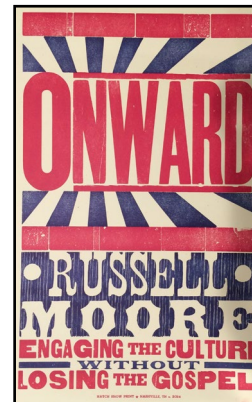
All in all, *Habits of Grace* is likely to do just what its title suggests: help the church to cultivate communion with Christ, through grace, as we welcome simple habits into our daily routines.

Kristin Tabb
Bethlehem College & Seminary
Minneapolis, Minnesota USA

Russell D. Moore. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015. 224 pp. £17.25/\$24.99.

If Christians once served as the core of a moral majority in America, it is now clear that day has passed. It is no longer just the miracles and the cross that seem strange to our culture; it is the Christian ethic that now seems “freakish.” The question being asked by Christians, even more so post-Obergefell, is “what should we do?” This is a central question being answered by Russell Moore in *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*.

The introduction and opening two chapters provide an overview of the current situation Christians find themselves in within the culture and points forward to Moore’s overall approach. Moore recognizes that there is no turning back to what seems to some the “good ol’ days,” characterized by “God and Country” Christianity. The Bible Belt is crumbling, and Moore says “good riddance” to the cultural Christianity that came with it. His concern is that “values” were emphasized over gospel and thus, “Christianity became a totem to secure a happy marriage, a successful career, well-behaved children—all that, and eternal life too. Such a Christianity doesn’t have a Galilean accent—but rather the studied clip of a telemarketer. It sought to normalize Christianity by finding a goal that the church and the culture could agree on, even if Jesus were resting comfortably in his borrowed grave” (p. 30).



Chapters three through five offers theological application on the topics of kingdom, culture, and mission. This leads to chapters on specific cultural issues (human dignity, the family, religious liberty, and the family). Finally, before concluding, Moore includes chapters on the importance of striking the right tone and what he labels a “Gospel Counter-Revolution.”

According to Moore, the answer to the question “what should we do?” is not to retreat, but neither is it to just continue doing what we have always done, except louder. Instead, the church must cultivate consciences that are burdened to proclaim the gospel, to recognize injustice, to mourn over unbelief and unrighteousness, and to move *onward* in embodying the Kingdom. He urges believers to not cave to cultural pressures but rather keep Christianity strange. And we are to do this with “voices shaped by the gospel, with a convictional kindness that recognizes that winning arguments is not enough if one is in the cosmic struggle with unseen principalities and powers in the air around us” (p. 221).

Moore could lightheartedly be described as Johnny Cash meets Abraham Kuyper meets Billy Graham. While citing Scripture, quoting country music lyrics, calling for repentance, and telling personal stories from the Bible Belt, Moore combines a knack for turning a phrase with serious theological reflection and penetrating application. His wit and insight are on display when, for example, explaining why the New Testament does not deal directly with the external moral climate of the Roman Empire: Rome, after all, was governed by an emperor, and the people of God had not say in the decisions made at the height of power. The pastoral epistles don’t direct the churches politically directly for the same reason that Philip gave no directions on marriage or sexual morality to the Ethiopian eunuch” (p. 107). To offer one more example of his wry sense of humor used to make an important point concerning tone and rhetoric, he writes,

If all we have to go on is what we see around us, then, of course, we will become scared and outraged, and our public witness will turn into an ongoing temper tantrum,

designed just to prove our opponents, and to ourselves, that we are still here. And in doing so we would employ the rhetorical tricks of other insecure movements: sarcasm, vitriol, ridicule. But we are not the voice of the past, of the Bible Belt to a post-Christian culture of how good things used to be. We are the voice of the future, of the coming kingdom of God. The message of the kingdom isn't "You kids, get off our lawn." The message of the kingdom is, "Make way for the coming of the Lord." (p. 203).

This last quote also displays another characteristic of this book, namely, *balance*. Moore challenges the either-or fallacies of cultural engagement. As if, to note just one major example, the church should choose between social justice *or* evangelism. The gospel framework cannot be kept separate from things the culture has deemed to be social or political issues. With this kind of "both-and" approach, Moore's model has the potential of bringing different evangelical camps together. And yet, it also will undoubtedly cause uneasiness and even umbrage from those who are deeply embedded in their own tribe's bunker. For some traditionalists who have embraced the hope of re-establishing a "Christian nation" and have grounded a discourse characterized by anger and resentment in a narrative of injury, Moore will likely come across as a sell-out. For those who have embraced a form of the social gospel—committed to humanitarian efforts but embarrassed by the call for personal conversion, talk of angels and demons, and the Bible's sexual ethics—Moore will come across as an "old fashioned fundamentalist." They, of course, would not mean this as a compliment. Moore, however, would likely take it as one.

On to a few minor quibbles. Some of the material feels slightly redundant. Perhaps this was because the book began in seed form as independently given articles and lectures. Admittedly, part of effective communicating is repetition, and the line between repetition and redundancy can be fine. But, some readers might sense that some of the points have already been sufficiently made. Also, Moore could have integrated more footnotes. Granted this was not written primarily for a scholarly audience, more often pointing readers to his conversation partners would have provided direction for further study, would have allowed him tip the hat to those who impacted his thought, and—for those more familiar with similar literature—would have provided a certainty concerning who in particular he is engaging or critiquing.

Onward is an outstanding book and deserves wide readership. Throughout the book Moore gives Christians reasons, despite the cultural trends, to be encouraged. Moore's leadership, expressed in this book and more broadly in his work with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, is another reason believers should be encouraged.

Joshua D. Chatraw
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia, USA

Philip Turner. *Christian Ethics and the Church: Ecclesial Foundations for Moral Thought and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. xiv + 320 pp. £18.97/\$26.99.

While many texts in the discipline of ethics focus on issues or individual responsibility, Philip Turner offers a different approach in *Christian Ethics and the Church*. As the title implies, this work focuses on the ecclesial community as the foundation for understanding ethics. In fact, Turner rarely deals with issues that are prevalent in our culture; instead, he wants his readers to focus on how they think and live within the community of the church.

Before embarking on his quest to build a church-based ethic, Turner offers three historical perspectives on the focus of Christian ethics. Each of the first three chapters is devoted to a particular thinker: John Cassian, Walter Rauschenbusch, and John Howard Yoder. Each of these offers an approach to the ethical life from a different perspective. Cassian, the late fourth, early fifth century monastic writer offers a focus on “the life of the soul.” Rauschenbusch, the early twentieth century proponent of the social gospel, proposes to focus on “the life of society.” Finally, Turner summarizes and ultimately adopts “the life of the church” focus of Yoder, the twentieth century Mennonite scholar (p. xvii).

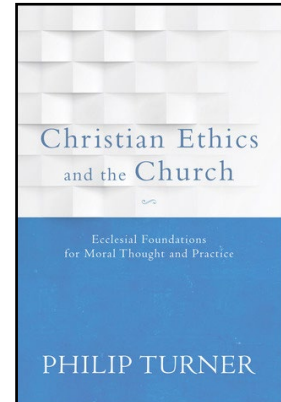
The main contribution of the book comes from part two in which Turner expounds upon the ethical implications for life together in Christ found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Over the course of these two chapters, he sets up the biblical case for a life in the community of the church as the foundation for ethics. Turner notes, “A close reading of the relevant New Testament texts establishes that the focus is properly the common life of the church rather than the sanctification of individuals or the redemption and reform of a corrupt social order” (p. 61).

Turner proposes that unity is the ultimate purpose of creation; therefore, the church’s goal is to manifest that unity in the common life (pp. 66–67). In his explanation of this unity of the common life, he addresses different components of the common life from Ephesians. These components include the rule of God in creation, the gifts of the church, authority structures in church and home, and spiritual combat.

The third part of the book offers a look at two possible exceptions to the paradigm Turner proposes. These exceptions are the self and the society. In the chapter on self, he contrasts his interpretation of Ephesians with the first seven chapters of Matthew. In due course, he suggests that Matthew does focus on the individual’s path to holiness but that the Gospel writer “locates the royal way within the life of a people that has a particular calling under God” (p. 124). In the chapter on society, Turner uses Luke’s Gospel to draw out the question of the role of a Christian in society. While he concludes that Luke focuses more on Christ’s final rule over all creation, this chapter sets up further discussion regarding the ecclesial life in civil and political society.

Turner explores the practical applications of his work in the final part of the book. This is not a discussion of particular issues in ethics, but it is a way of looking at the ecclesial life in several different contexts. The goal of this ecclesial life is “to provide a manner of life that unites what is right to do with what is good to do” (p. 155).

The most interesting application of the ethical life that Turner explores is Christian interaction with society. The author adopts an Augustinian, two cities approach to public life whereby Christians



find themselves as citizens of both an earthly city and a heavenly city. Their allegiance is primarily to the heavenly city. Departing from Yoder, however, Turner considers the proper place for Christian engagement with the political process and government. He even suggests that some Christians may rightfully find their vocation in politics.

The last note of interest is that Turner on multiple occasions applies his ethic to marriage. Marriage “serves . . . as a form of corporate witness through which Christian belief and practice are made socially visible. No social institution provides a better view of the assumptions of a society than that of marriage” (pp. 211–12). Turner goes on to condemn the contemporary church’s view of marriage as being conformed to the world. He concludes,

The possibility of a social witness on the part of the Western churches that express a faithful form of belief and practice in respect to marriage is tied to their ability to provide an alternative to the current beliefs and practices of the larger society of which they are a part. It is hard to escape the conclusion that at present their energies are directed to adapting to that culture rather than providing an alternative to it. (p. 214)

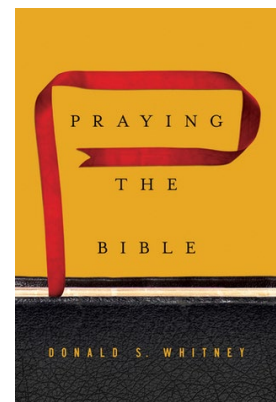
Turner’s work is a welcome focus on the communal aspect of the Christian. He does not succumb to the temptation of some who delve into a community-based system of ethics to derive truth from community. His source of truth is clearly the text of Scripture. Even though he admittedly does not explore the Old Testament contributions to ethics, his New Testament ecclesial foundation for ethics is an interesting perspective that deserves consideration. This book serves as a great reminder of why the church is central to the life of the Christian and how it can function in the development of ethics.

Evan Lenow
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Donald S. Whitney. *Praying the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 112 pp. £9.99/\$13.99.

Many Christians—even those of us who serve as pastors—would confess that our prayer lives are not what they ought to be. Despite our best intentions and most recent resolutions, we often find that the discipline of daily prayer leads to frustration and guilt rather than freedom and joy. How does something that ought to be considered a privilege become a begrudging obligation? How is it that we, in the words of Donald Whitney, “can be talking to the most fascinating Person in the universe about the most important things in our lives and be bored to death?” (p. 12). In *Praying the Bible*, Whitney argues that the problem may be as simple as this: we tend to pray the same prayers about the same issues over and over.

According to Whitney, many Christians struggle with prayer because they rehearse the same, worn-out lines every time they go before the Lord. Add the inevitability of praying for similar concerns on a regular basis and the result is, unsurprisingly, boredom and frustration. Whitney warns, “Prayers without variety eventually become words without meaning” (p. 17). The solution to a boring prayer life is an adjustment in method that centers on the text of the Bible. As Whitney seeks to



demonstrate, praying through a passage of Scripture is a simple way to fight distractions and enhance your daily prayer life.

He describes the process as follows: “To pray the Bible, you simply go through the passage line by line, talking to God about whatever comes to mind as you read the text” (p. 33). By using the text as a guide, you never run out of things to pray about and you never pray the same prayer twice! The Psalms are particularly helpful for this approach because they were originally inspired to be sung back to God and because they cover the full range of human emotions. As Whitney points out, “God has inspired a psalm for every sigh of the soul” (p. 54). He advocates for a systematic approach to working through the Psalms that involves skimming five chapters each day and then choosing one to guide you through prayer. This method exposes you to the full Psalter over the course of each month and helps reinforce the applicability of the Scriptures to everyday life.

After describing how to pray through the Psalms, Whitney provides additional instruction for praying through other genres of Scripture before challenging the reader to put down the book and put this method into practice. He implores his readers to take him up on this challenge because he knows that praying the Bible is best learned through experience. He has presented this material in churches around the country and has observed how helpful it can be. A full chapter outlines the typical reactions people have to praying the Bible for the first time, which serves as additional encouragement for readers to try it themselves.

The most controversial aspect of Whitney’s approach to praying the Bible is likely to be his contention that you are free to pray about *whatever* comes to your mind as you read, even if it is not an appropriate application of the passage itself. Some may fear that this allowance subtly provides grounds for unfettered eisegesis, but this concern is unfounded. As Whitney demonstrates, there is a difference between *interpreting* the Bible and *praying* the Bible. The former is concerned with ascertaining God’s intended meaning for the text, whereas the latter is “merely using the language of the text to speak to God about what has come into your mind” (p. 36). As Christians, we are free to present all our concerns to the Lord and could feasibly use any biblical passage to guide us through this process.

Whitney aims to be practical rather than exhaustive in this brief volume. When readers raise questions not addressed in the text—what about the role of God’s judgment in hindering one’s prayers (1 Pet 3:7), for example—it is helpful to recall this purpose. The book’s simplicity does not weaken its effectiveness though. It is intended to underscore the sufficiency of the Scriptures for informing and inspiring spirituality.

Written in an engaging style with a pastoral tone, *Praying the Bible* could easily be completed in a single setting but its wisdom can be applied for years to come. Whitney reminds believers that God has not intended the experience of prayer to be complicated or boring. By targeting the practical challenges to consistent prayer, he has produced a book that is likely to benefit young Christians as much as seasoned saints. As someone who has personally benefited from praying the Bible using Whitney’s method for years, I am thankful to see this resource available to a wider audience.

Matthew D. Haste

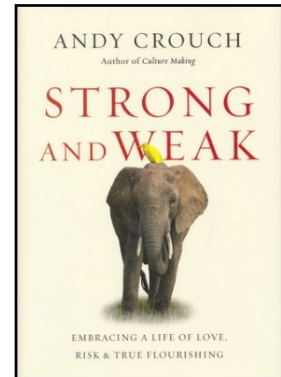
Columbia International University Seminary & School of Ministry
Columbia, South Carolina, USA

— MISSION AND CULTURE —

Andy Crouch. *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 192 pp. £14.07/\$20.00.

I was on an airplane drawing a two by two grid on a napkin. Next to me sat a longtime friend who was the president of a small business. My napkin chart was an attempt to summarize a lecture by Andy Crouch that I heard two years before, on the subject of biblical power. My friend could immediately see the relevance these ideas had for his business and his personal life.

In a culture that vacillates between both the fear and worship of power, Crouch's reflections on biblical power were fresh and transformative. Since hearing them, I had preached two series on the topic for the church I pastor: first for the young adult community, then for the men's ministry. *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing* is the written version of that lecture.



The heartbeat of this book is the method by which humans can flourish: to be fully alive as God intended. Crouch suggests this is only possible by embracing a paradox of being strong and weak at the same time. A two by two matrix explains that concept. The vertical axis represents authority or “the capacity for meaningful action” (p. 35). What most people normally think of when they refer to power is the ability to influence events and control circumstances or possess the knowledge or position to do so. However, flourishing only happens when authority is combined with what is sometimes thought to be weakness—vulnerability, defined as “exposure to meaningful risk” (p. 40). This kind of vulnerability is not simply emotional transparency. Crouch summarizes: “True vulnerability involves risking something of real and even irreplaceable value” (p. 42).

The matrix created by the axes of authority and vulnerability results in four separate quadrants, each of which receives a chapter length explanation. The bottom right represents low authority with high vulnerability. This is suffering—experiencing pain without the capacity to change the circumstances. The bottom left is low authority with low vulnerability. This is withdrawing—escaping choices in fear of their consequences. The top left, summarized as exploiting, is the realm of dictators and tyrants—high authority with low vulnerability. Most people are tempted toward this corner when they use authority to reduce vulnerability.

However, flourishing occupies the top right—high authority combined with high vulnerability. When people live in this quadrant they and their communities benefit. Risks are embraced. Leaders develop humility. Control is released. Confrontation results in transformation. Flourishing in a relational sense is the condition that is sometimes referred to as love. “This is what love longs to be: capable of meaningful action in the life of the beloved, so committed to the beloved that everything meaningful is at risk. If we want flourishing, this is what we will have to learn” (p. 48).

The rest of the book aims to do just that: help the reader learn how to flourish. Two journeys must be taken to arrive at flourishing. The first is the task of a leader—living with vulnerability of which no one else is aware. Vulnerability is hidden not to protect the leader but the community that he or she serves. The second journey is that of voluntary exposure to pain and loss or what Crouch calls “descending to

the dead.” Only by embracing loss can humans ultimately be set from their idolatry of authority without vulnerability and arrive at true flourishing.

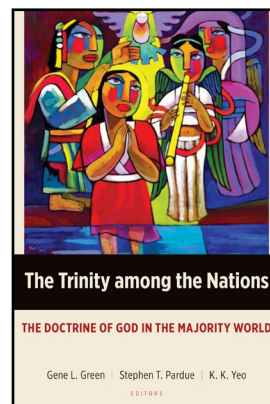
If there’s a weakness in this book, it’s that some of the ideas can be technical and abstract. Keeping track of the matrix scheme, understanding the diagonal of the false choice, grasping the paths of hidden vulnerability and descending to the dead, and applying each of these to real life situations can be challenging. However, Crouch writes with a touch of humor and mixes numerous personal stories with references to cultural issues such as racism and poverty. His style helps make this a practical book with relevant application. But it is also a deeply theological book. Combining vulnerability with authority is not only the path for humans to flourish, but the path that God himself took to create and redeem the world.

There are very few books that speak candidly and biblically about the nature of power. Christians tend to err in one of three directions with regards to power. Either they worship power as the ultimate goal; they naively deny the power they are capable of and responsible for; or they avoid leadership for fear that power might corrupt them. *Strong and Weak* gives a theologically grounded approach for a biblical alternative. By embracing vulnerability while exercising authority, power can be used to serve the kingdom of God. This is a worthwhile and needed encouragement for the church and its people.

Paul Taylor
Peninsula Bible Church
Palo Alto, California, USA

Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K.K. Yeo, eds. *The Trinity Among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the Majority World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. vii + 174 pp. £8.99/\$20.00.

Theology in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has been marked by two trends. The first is a revival of Trinitarian theology. This trend has attempted to place the Trinity at the center of theology and church life. The second is a turn towards the majority world. It has been well documented that in the 20th century the church experienced explosive growth in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, whereas the “Western church” has dwindled. From this growth in the majority world church we are beginning to witness a shift in how theology on the global stage is being done. In *The Trinity Among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the Majority World*, editors Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo bring these two trends together to produce a volume that “brings the global church to theological dialogue regarding kaleidoscopic understandings of the Trinity” (p. 2).



The editors have brought together nine evangelical authors from five different contexts: Anglo-American, Indigenous North American, African, Latin American, and Asian. Following a brief introduction by K. K. Yeo, Gerald Bray represents the Anglo-American context and attempts to create space for new ways of expressing Trinitarian doctrine while staying true to the substance of the traditional teaching of church. Randy Woodley writes on behalf of a severely underrepresented group in Christian theology: Indigenous North Americans. He argues that Western Christianity has been too

preoccupied with substance ontology when dealing with the Trinity and that indigenous understandings of community could help the church develop a communal ontology.

The African representative in this dialogue, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, gives an overview of the doctrine of the Trinity in African history, stretching back to the founding of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He encourages the African church to return to its roots and emphasize the Trinity in its theology and practice. Chapters four and five are written from the Latin American Perspective. Antonio González makes a case for monotheism being about the exclusive rule of God. The fact that Jesus shares this exclusive role with God has interesting implications for our doctrine of the Trinity. Rosalee Velloso Ewell describes the implications that the doctrine of the Trinity has for the prophetic role of the church.

The final three chapters are written by authors in Thai, Japanese, and Chinese contexts respectively. Natee Tanchanpongs examines the theology of four Asian theologians and evaluates them in light of an evangelical framework. He proposes a “context-to-text” model for measuring their evangelical faithfulness. Atsuhiro Asano notes that most theology has focused on the metaphor of God the Father and has neglected the motherly aspects of God. In the final essay Zi Wang tackles the “Term Question,” the debate about whether God should be translated as *Shang-Ti* or *Shin* in Chinese language Bibles. She proposes that the answer to the “Term Question” may provide a way forward for answering questions about the relationship between individual cultures and the universal claims of Christianity.

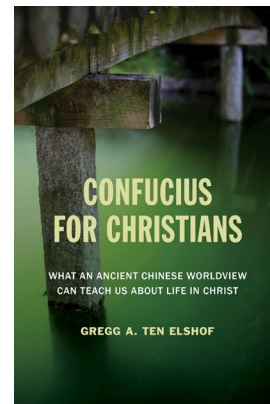
It has often been said that the greatest theological thinking has been birthed out of mission. This is certainly true, for when the gospel encounters new cultural contexts new questions arise about God’s nature and identity along with how he interacts with people. The editors of this volume have done a fine job in showing how such cultural encounters can shed new light upon issues related to the Trinity that have yet to be explored in a traditional Western context. Not only have the editors shown how the various cultural voices can contribute to the church’s understanding of the Trinity, but they have also provided readers with fodder for missiological thought and action. For instance, Woodley’s essay will force some readers to deal with the issues that come with *praeparatio evangelica* and whether one can formulate a doctrine of the Trinity from natural theology. Tanchanpongs’s essay might serve as a valuable resource for those attempting to define syncretism. His account provides a nuanced and non-formulaic way to discern whether a particular theology is outside the bounds of the gospel. Kunhiyop’s essay will be of service to those who find themselves working in Africa. More than any other essayist, he provides concrete suggestions for strengthening awareness of the doctrine of the Trinity among local churches.

Despite these strengths, the book has its weak spots. The essays by Asano and Wang come to mind; both address the doctrine of God but fail to engage the doctrine of the Trinity in a substantial manner. Wang’s essay is clearly an essay on monotheism, and the aims of Asano’s essay are unclear. Is she merely arguing for motherly aspects of God’s action in the world (economic Trinity), or is she suggesting something about how we should understand God the Father within the immanent Trinity? Can and should the two even be separated? Despite two essays that do little to contribute to our understanding of the Trinity, however, this book is a prime example of how the perspective of Christians from different global contexts can enrich our understanding of the Triune God Christians around the world worship.

Christopher G. Woznicki
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, California, USA

Gregg A. Ten Elshof. *Confucius for Christians: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. £9.99/\$15.00.

“One man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” Such was my first impression when I read Gregg Ten Elshof’s recent book. With the secularization of Western society, while many churches in Europe and North America experience decline, eastern religions such as Buddhism have gained extreme popularity in Western culture. Ironically, in East Asia, where religions like Buddhism originated, the church is experiencing growth and revivals, as people flood into the church and seek the God whom once they thought was a foreign deity. Scholars in the West are gradually recognizing the significance of global Christianity, and learning to place the Western church into the mosaic of the catholic church. However, the vital question that needs to be asked is how do we regard the church, culture, and foreign religions in a foreign country like China? Richard Madsen (*China and the American Dream* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995]) and Daniel Bays (*A New History of Christianity in China* [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011]) point out that one of the major reasons why many North Americans are passionate about the Chinese church is their hope that Communist China will adopt the “American Dream,” and eventually become a “Christian nation.” But if we really want to understand Chinese culture and religion, and thus the way the future of China might unfold, it is vital to understand its framework and context.



Ten Elshof begins by explaining how he as a Western Christian was exposed to Confucianism while on a trip to China and held a conversation with a Chinese churchman who claimed to be both Confucian and Christian. As his interest in Confucianism increased, and after reading Confucian texts like the *Analects*, Ten Elshof concluded that Confucianism is more “a deep and influential wisdom tradition” (p. 6) than a religion. For Ten Elshof, this book thus “seeks to experiment with reflection on perennial questions of human interest with the teachings of Jesus and Confucius in mind” (p. 6). In other words, this book is about how to live a good life with the ideas of Confucian tradition in the “Way of Jesus”—Christianity, Confucian-style. In the chapters that follow, Ten Elshof explained how Christians can learn from Confucian wisdom in the areas of family, learning, ethics, and ritual. As one who grew up in China and later became a Christian in Canada, I found Ten Elshof’s definition of Confucianism unpersuasive.

Though Ten Elshof has elegantly presented Chinese Confucianism and its texts to his Western readers, his understanding of Confucianism as a wisdom tradition is confusing, problematic, and misleading. For example, sociologist Anna Sun (*Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013]) has argued that Confucianism is much more similar to Greek and Roman religions prior to Constantine. In other words, Confucianism is less institutionalized as Christianity or Judaism, as there is no membership or sacraments required for Confucians. Furthermore, Confucianism is neither monotheistic nor monolatrous. Sun observes that it is common for a Confucian to worship Taoist Caishen (“god of wealth”) and Buddha together. Thus, it is syncretic for Ten Elshof to propose the identity of “Confucian Christian.”

Ten Elshof’s view of wisdom and revelation is also problematic. As wisdom relates to dealing with daily human experiences in the world, wisdom necessarily focuses on particular images of human flourishing, and thus expresses certain worldviews. Christians believe all wisdom comes from God, as he reveals his will and himself in two ways: general and special revelation (i.e., through Jesus Christ

and the Scripture). Confucian wisdom has to be placed under the former category. It is true that in the Western Protestant tradition, many have neglected the importance of general revelation. The Confucian tradition is one from which people may draw practical application to live an excellent life in this world. However, this does not mean Christians should place general revelation on the same level of special revelation. In Ten Elshof's book, by valuing Confucian *Analects* and the Scripture as equal, he fails to distinguish properly general and special revelation.

In chapter two, Ten Elshof's anthropology also raises questions. Radically different from biblical Christian teaching, the disciples of Confucius (551–479 BC) did not agree on the fundamental nature of humanity; some believed in the innocent nature of humanity, which others rejected. It appears that Confucians later adopted Mencius' (372–289 BC) view of the innate goodness of the individual. It seems that Ten Elshof has adopted an optimistic anthropology, and such a view affects his view of the family and filial piety. He explains that as for Confucians, "a human person *just is* a being in-relationship" (p. 12, emphasis original). Family becomes then "the primary venue for growth into the full expression of being human" (p. 13). Such is the reason why filial piety is vital for Confucian worldview. As Ten Elshof states, "God is not your father. Your dad is your father" (p. 26). Thus he urges Christians ought to practice filial submission, since it "will make you a better Christian" (p. 28). Elshof's view prioritizes the horizontal relationship over the vertical relationship, which exacerbates the problem of hyper-individualism in churches today. On the other hand, many East Asians who have been converted in North America are deeply committed to the church. The reason is not because they have abandoned their cultural view of individual families; rather, they understand that they are sojourners, and the church is their family, and community.

Ten Elshof's Confucian anthropology runs through later chapters as well. As he argues on issues relating to learning, ethics, and ritual, Ten Elshof's own view has radically left behind an orthodox biblical view on humanity, salvation, and even virtue. For instance, in his chapter on learning, after presenting a Confucian perspective on this, Ten Elshof expounds on the biblical narrative of creation and fall. He asserts that Adam was "designed to be relatively impotent, submissive, dependent, unknowing—to be the follower" (p. 34). But after the fall "our obsession with knowledge has blinded us to the beauty of unknowing, impotence, submission, and dependence" (p. 34). And yet for Ten Elshof, it is possible to "find our way back" by simply "reflecting on the Confucian emphasis on the love of learning" (p. 35). Although Ten Elshof does not discuss *imago Dei*, readers might misunderstand him to imply that learning can restore *imago Dei*.

With regard to ethics, Ten Elshof's Jesus is also quite different from the biblical portrait. Ten Elshof portrays Jesus as merely a man whose work was to make people follow his way to distinguish justice and love. Furthermore, Ten Elshof praises Confucian ethics as it "might help us out of the attempt to extract a collection of moral principles or rules for governing behavior in any and all circumstances from the teachings of Jesus" (pp. 63–64). "It frees us," he adds.

Although I disagree with Ten Elshof's optimistic view of Confucianism, I deeply appreciated his brief introduction of an Eastern tradition to this reader. The Apostle Paul wrote that believers are to remember "all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor 1:2). It is helpful for the Western churches to know more about the political, cultural,

and religious contexts of the East, that we may understand and bear our brothers' and sisters' burdens in the East. We must be contended "for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Baiyu Andrew Song
The Andrew Fuller Centre for Baptist Studies
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History. Volume 7, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and South America (1500–1600)*. History of Christian-Muslim Relations 24. Leiden: Brill, 2015. xii + 963. £178.00/\$323.00.

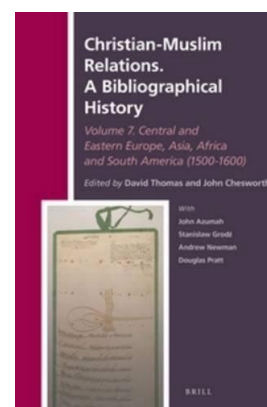
At the moment, few observers of international Christian-Muslim affairs are upbeat about the trajectory. Many books have been written about the blood-soaked separation of Christians and Muslims throughout the centuries. Their irreconcilability has been endlessly debated. The current trend appears as though it is not going to be reversed anytime soon, if ever. This legacy of partition is grim.

This new volume, however, is cause for celebration among those who explore Christian-Muslim relations around the world and throughout time. Lucidly written and based on extensive scholarship, this volume details many aspects of these diverse and far-reaching religious movements. Shifting effortlessly over four continents and an entire century, this account moves briskly, ranging from Jesuits to Protestants, imams to caliphs. In fact, it is part biographical, part travelogue, part literary history, and part religious analysis.

The over 100 contributors collectively seem to have read every primary source (in these regions, at least) about Christian-Muslim relations during the 16th century; even though there are still several notable omissions, such as John Calvin. With hundreds of entries on display, this catalog is surprisingly even balanced. Each chapter follows a rigid organization: (1) basic biographical details concerning the author(s), (2) a sampling of primary and secondary sources for further reading, (3) a description of the contents, and (4) a discussion of how it affects the history of Christian-Muslim relations.

There are many parallels and echoes between the history of Christian-Muslim relations and the present situation. Limited by space considerations, only a few examples will be highlighted in this review. The first relates to Muslims following the model, mission, and mandate of Muhammad, in punctilious detail. They continued the tradition of mimicking the conquering state of Muhammad. War, slavery, and beheadings were the norm. Clear instructions and endorsements were given to Muslims for fighting Christians and non-Muslims until they paid the "jizya" (tax) with willing submission (Quran 9:26). In 1517, after trying to get a man who had previously accepted Islam to revert to his Muslim creed, "the Muslim populace collected wood and made a bonfire" in order to execute him. While being burned, he was decapitated. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī compiled a work, "Forty Hadiths on the merits of jihad," for the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in order to celebrate the conquest of Constantinople.

I found no entry of any Muslim standing up and stating that any of these acts or groups were not Islamic, or that they were just some radical version of Islam. The reality is that all of this is very Islamic, and derives from coherent and learned interpretations of Islam. Muslim voices opposing violence or



making any peaceful concessions in the 16th century were lonely ones at best. Ibn Kemal, in one of his fatwas, stated that it was licit by necessity, not by honor, for a Muslim to greet a non-Muslim in daily interactions.

The next comparison relates to diplomacy. If bloodshed was inevitable, its shocking extent had much to do with stiff-necked countercharges and failed policies, which doomed millions to helter-skelter migration. The horrors—which amounted in many cases to massacres—are broadly set forth. Insults large and small, perceived and real, cut deep. Granted, not all the military conflicts between these groups were motivated by religious differences. Rather, many were due to competition for the control of trade and land. The Indian Muslims and Portuguese Christians provide one such case study.

While many people continued to fight, others attempted to mediate. Take the Jesuits. They often handled the violence of partition expertly. They did not get stuck in the weeds or fly too far overhead. One such instance was when the Jesuits went on a mission to the court of Akbar in the Mughal capital. The emperor ultimately listened to them and opened up the door for religious discussions between the Jesuit fathers and Muslim scholars.

Aside from public disputations, the priests also had private audiences with the emperor. . . . Muslim scholars were confounded by the priests' knowledge of the Qur'an used in debate, particularly when they raised the issue of its contradictory remarks about the death of Christ. . . . Not all Muslims, however, approved of the presence of the Christian priests and Akbar's generosity toward them. (p. 919)

Increasingly, the Jesuits were joined by other Christians, seeking ways in which to promote religious liberty, not to mention their Christian faith. In fact, other Christian leaders, like Martin Luther, openly opposed war against Muslims since God's judgment could only be met with repentance, not with a sword. This missionary legacy continues among many Christians to this today.

Unfortunately, certain authors of this volume seem to lack an accurate—or at least more academically nuanced—understanding of the so-called “Christian crusades.” For example, Christians are negatively described on occasion as having a “crusading zeal/spirit/fervor,” without even considering or noting the broader context. The Christian crusades were often just (largely unsuccessful) attempts to turn back Muslim conquests and restore the lands back to their previous, non-Muslim owner(s). They were hardly ever a display of unprovoked aggression as several authors insinuate.

In sum, these stories of the past are fascinating, and people groups and countries still rely on some kind of interpretation of the accounts to set the rules by which they live. The elaboration of these narratives, and their collisions with reality, certainly deserve study. This offering, then, is timely and powerful. But it is probably too laborious for most readers. It is replete with so much minutiae that the general reader might become a bit bemused at times. Nevertheless, the committed reader comes away from this volume persuaded that what we see today is nothing new, and that the lack of religious liberty in Muslim dominated areas makes for intolerable conditions. But the questions of how far Christian-Muslim relations can be moderated without perverse consequences are still far from settled.

Brian J. Wright
Ridley College
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia