



# themelios

*An International Journal for Students of  
Theological and Religious Studies*

**Volume 35 Issue 3 November 2010**

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**THE GOSPEL COALITION**

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*Themelios* is an international evangelical theological journal that expounds and defends the historic Christian faith. Its primary audience is theological students and pastors, though scholars read it as well. It was formerly a print journal operated by RTSF/UCCF in the UK, and it became a digital journal operated by The Gospel Coalition in 2008. The new editorial team seeks to preserve representation, in both essayists and reviewers, from both sides of the Atlantic.

*Themelios* is published three times a year exclusively online at [www.theGospelCoalition.org](http://www.theGospelCoalition.org). It is presented in two formats: PDF (for citing pagination) and HTML (for greater accessibility, usability, and infiltration in search engines). *Themelios* is copyrighted by The Gospel Coalition. Readers are free to use it and circulate it in digital form without further permission (any print use requires further written permission), but they must acknowledge the source and, of course, not change the content.

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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

## Contrarian Reflections on Individualism<sup>1</sup>

— D. A. Carson —

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Not many voices are raised these days in support of individualism. The left will not help, of course, for rugged individualism is associated in their minds with nineteenth-century robber barons and other greedy swine. Goodness surely lies in communitarianism, not individualism. Those like Thomas Sowell who complain that this popular analysis of the nineteenth century does not stand up very well to sober facts are not paid much attention.<sup>2</sup> If the right rejoices in the individualism that ostensibly characterizes an uptick in Western productivity and bemoans increasing statism, it is soon told that those early years were far more communitarian than people imagine; it is the present that is disturbingly individualistic.<sup>3</sup> Sociologists like Wuthnow and Bellah chart our individualism, and many conclude that Generation X is particularly individualistic.<sup>4</sup> Individualism has debased evangelicalism into a kind of syncretism;<sup>5</sup> spiritually, we need instruction on how to meet the challenges.<sup>6</sup> In a recent and generally excellent book on ecclesiology, Jonathan Leeman devotes not a few pages to denouncing the individualism which, as he sees it, is one of the evils that blinds many people, especially in the West, from seeing how important the church is in the Bible.<sup>7</sup> In short, on all sides we are being taught that individualism dominates Western thought, and it is bad.

Without doubting that there is a fair bit of truth in these analyses, I wonder if a few questions should not be raised. Are cultures widely regarded as fostering little individualism intrinsically better places for the gospel to flourish? Is it not the case that tightly knit cultures that encourage various kinds of group think are often less hospitable to conversion and evangelistic enterprise than is the West? These can vary quite a lot, of course. But many gospel ministers and missionaries in Japan would like to

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a lightly edited manuscript of a talk delivered on November 20, 2010 in Atlanta, Georgia at the [Tyndale House](#) breakfast coinciding with the annual meetings of the Institute for Biblical Research and Society of Biblical Literature.

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> So Barry Alan Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: University Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: "Generation X" and the Search for Meaning* (London: DLT, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> So Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham: UPA, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rice, "The Challenge of Spiritual Individualism (and How to Meet It)," *AUSS* 43 (2005): 113–31.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (IX Marks; Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

inject a little *more* individualism into the people whom they serve. A tightly ordered society like Saudi Arabia is pretty hard to break into. Yes, I know, the issue there is not simply cultural cohesion but the active Muslim opposition to all things Christian. But a very open country like Australia, in which the “cut down the tall poppy syndrome” flourishes, allows plenty of freedom for gospel ministry but really dislikes individuals who stand out too strongly—and it too is not very hospitable to the gospel. Isn’t *something* to be said in favor of individualism?

Here at home, I wonder whether individualism is in reality as highly prized as some think. One could make a case that many people want to belong to *something*—to the first group that manages to purchase an iPhone, to the “emerging” crowd or to those who want little to do with them, to the great company that can discuss baseball or cricket or ice hockey, to those who are up-to-date in fashion sense, to those who are suitably green or those who are suspicious of the green movement, to various groups of “friends” on Facebook, to those who tweet, and so on. If you say that most of these groups do not foster deep relationships, I shall agree with you—but then the problem lies in the domain of shallow relationships of many kinds, rather than in individualism per se. Meanwhile in politics, business, and even religion, many voices call for leaders who can build various kinds of cohesive movements or institutions, not develop individuals. Do not many of us bemoan the massive cultural pressures toward various kinds of political correctness? By and large, individualism does not seem strong enough to laugh off the silliest of these siren calls to conformity. On most university campuses, I could devoutly wish for a little more individualism.

When we turn to the Bible, we find more balance on these matters than we find in the endless unqualified condemnations of individualism in the West. On the one hand, of course, there is plenty of material that underscores the importance of the church, the community of the new covenant. The many “one another” passages (love one another, forgive one another, bear with one another, and so on) necessarily conjure up the supreme importance of relationships, many of them reciprocal. If the world knows that we are Jesus’ disciples because we love one another, then the demands of world mission are best served where we are working hard at mutual Christian love. The body metaphor in Paul functions in two rather different ways, but one of those ways emphasizes the interdependence of the various parts of the body (esp. 1 Cor 12). One of the images of the consummated glory still to come is of a city, the new Jerusalem—and that is a *social* vision, not a vision of a rural hut in a green valley nicely removed from prying neighbors. Of course, the symbol-laden value of the new Jerusalem turns on the fact that it is the city of the great King, a city built like a cube so that it has become the Most Holy Place, with foundations and gates numbering twelve to remind us of the links to twelve tribes and twelve apostles, and more of the same. Yet the vision of a city is built into the Apocalypse at multiple levels. More than one author notes that the entire book could be labeled “A Tale of Two Cities”: one belongs to Babylon or to the new Jerusalem, both visions social. We sin together or we are righteous together, for both sin and righteousness are heavily tied to relationships. Certainly we urgently need to recapture the importance of the church in the gospel plan of God: here Jonathan Leeman makes many important contributions.

On the other hand, the Bible applauds the deeds not only of many individuals, but of a certain kind of individualism. The two spies who stand out against the opinion of the crowd, the Caleb who cries, “Give me this mountain,” the heroic stances of lonely prophets who position themselves athwart their own decaying cultures, all speak of God’s use of individuals who live their lives with God alone as their shield. For all that Jesus is sometimes mobbed by crowds and devoted to training his own disciples, there is a human aloneness to him that cuts against the grain of social conformity. If he is not alone,

it is, as he says, that “[t]he Father has not left me alone.” He himself insists that those who follow him must “hate” their mother and father—an unambiguous demand that even family ties cannot be allowed precedence over allegiance to the kingdom and the king. The great apostle of the church, Paul, knows what it is to suffer rejection by some of the churches he helped to found, but this did not deter him from gospel loyalty, even if it meant confronting another apostle against the prevailing winds in the church he was then serving (Gal 2:11–14). Both when churches press on toward faithfulness and when they drift toward lethargy or stubbornly pursue wickedness and idolatry, the exalted Christ challenges *individuals* within such churches to be “overcomers,” to be faithful (Rev 2–3). Where would the church be today without its God-given gifts of Athanasius and Luther?

Yet when I reflect on this complicated array of evidence pointing in divergent directions, four reflections come to mind.

*First*, I begin to suspect that the problem lies in resting so much weight on the *category* of individualism. The sad fact is that we human beings will corrupt anything and everything we touch, including *both* individualism *and* communitarianism/collectivism. To fasten all the negative associations on one pole or the other is frankly naive, biblically and historically short-sighted. Clearly an emphasis on individualism *can* be of the very essence of sin: to insist on doing things *my* way is to de-throne God, to shape myself into a twisted idol; equally clearly, an emphasis on communitarianism *can also* be of the very essence of sin, as we build a Babel and call it progress. Clearly an individualism that is sold out to Christ *can* be of the very essence of godly self-sacrifice and faithful service to the gospel; equally clearly, an emphasis on communitarianism that demonstrates the intra-Trinitarian love of God within the life of God’s blood-bought people *can also* be of the very essence of faithful Christian existence (John 17), reflecting God himself in this loveless world. The fundamental issue is not the priority of the individual over against the community, or the reverse. The fundamental issue is whether individuals and communities live their lives in this broken world, by the grace of the gospel, in joyful submission to our Maker, Redeemer, providential Ruler, and coming Judge. To displace this basic theological analysis by turning individualism into the primary bogeyman—or, in some cultures, by elevating individualism as in itself a heroic good—is to lose sight of the Godward dimension that must determine Christian understanding of what is fundamentally right and wrong.

*Second*, another way of getting at the same thing is to distinguish individualism from selfism. In his book *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope*,<sup>8</sup> Andrew Delbanco outlines the spiritual history of the United States in three categories: (1) “God,” which in his analysis runs from Puritan New England to the rise of democracy, a period during which many men and women kept in view the vastness of God’s glory; (2) “Nation,” running from the rise of democracy until the Great Society visions operating after WWII, a period during which more and more people turned away from the ideal of a vast God and anchored their hopes and aspirations in a great nation; and (3) “Self,” running from the Great Society to the present time, a period in which so many have lost both the vision of a vast God and the vision of a great nation, such that all their hopes narrow down to the petty horizon of Self, a goal that is vanishingly small and incapable of sustaining America’s communal life. I suspect a similar analysis could be offered of the United Kingdom, stretched over a slightly different time scale, with the second category, the Great Society, displaced by the British Empire.

Like all such analyses, of course, this one, even while it is convincing on numerous fronts, is a bit too neat. Various forms of selfism can happily, or miserably, co-exist with broader visions: even in the

<sup>8</sup> Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

shadow of Sinai the sons of Korah may lust for Moses' role, and even while Jesus is heading to the cross his disciples may squabble over who will sit on his right hand or his left in the kingdom. Even if it is true that much of contemporary Western culture is currently self-absorbed, with few goals other than personal power, personal wealth, and personal pleasure, the fact remains that such goals were not exactly unknown under the British Empire. Conversely, in the age of Self, such goals may be repudiated by some ordinary people today, many of them Christians, who want to make their lives count for something of more transcendental significance than hedonism.

But the larger problem with this analysis is twofold: (a) Selfism is not necessarily the same as individualism, even though the latter is frequently tarred with the brush of the former. Selfism sounds intrinsically selfish; individualism may or may not be selfish. (b) In particular, the selfism of the Delbanco analysis frequently hides itself by pretending it fosters rugged individualism, whereas in fact it induces a herd mentality that has much more in common with a sort of socially encouraged communitarianism. Before cigarette advertising was all but banned, the image of the Marlboro Man—tough, lone, tanned, fit, hunkish cowboy—appealed to all the stereotypes of the American ideal of rugged individualism, and Marlboro sold millions of cigarettes to all those would-be hunks hankering to conform to the ideal. Car manufacturers parade their products by trying to convince you that their vehicle will bring out the real you—and of course the cars in question are mass produced. In other words, the emphasis on self-fulfillment in advertising often plays to rugged individualism that has a sort of iconic appeal, even while the brute fact is that this is an appeal to the masses to conform to a mythical, community-shared construct.

In short, we need to re-think the link between individualism and selfism. Unless your name is Ayn Rand, selfism is unlikely to be a good thing; individualism may or may not be a good thing.

*Third*, we need to reflect a little more on the bearing of truth on our topic. Begin with an essay by Phil Myles, "Of Truth, Tolerance and Tyranny."<sup>9</sup> Myles begins by outlining one of the central myths of our time. According to this myth, a society is likely to be most tolerant if it holds to flexible, non-dogmatic, even multivalent notions of truth; conversely, a society is likely to be most *intolerant* where it holds to absolute truths, truths that are inflexible, unbending. In other words, tyranny and tolerance find themselves in a perennial battle, and which pole triumphs is largely tied to the conception of truth that we sustain.

But does this myth capture reality? Is the myth true? Myles sets forth his thesis:

The reality of the situation is just the *opposite* of what we have been led to believe. Put simply, tyranny is not the inevitable outcome of an absolutist view of truth, but is, rather, the direct product of *relativism*. Likewise, tolerance arises not from relativism but from the very thing that our society anathematizes—the belief in absolutes.<sup>10</sup>

It would take too long to lay out the details of Myles's argument. Suffice it to say that he holds that many of our categories for thinking about these things are inappropriate. In part, he argues by case study. He begins with Japan, a country where he lived for many years. In most Western cultures, we live in the shadow of the Enlightenment, which taught us to classify our experience into two categories: the one, full of non-absolutes, is characterized by emotion, aesthetics, the arts; the other is characterized by absolutes, objectivity, science, logical thought, and truth. These two categories are mutually exclusive.

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<sup>9</sup> *kategoria* 22 (2001): 7–27.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

The second category is the domain of both tyranny and objective truth. By contrast, Japan brings the two categories together in ways that would be judged incompatible in most of the Western world: on the one hand, haiku poetry and delicate paintings of enchanting cherry blossoms, and on the other, ruthless business corporations and political machinations. The fact that these two categories co-exist and interpenetrate each other in Japan is part of what makes Japan seem so “mysterious” to the Western observer. In reality, Miles argues, what is often called the “iron triangle”—“the triad of elected government, big business and the bureaucracy”—exerts enormous power in a frankly oppressive manner. “There is no need to picture this in terms of dictators and jack-boots. Things are done a lot more subtly in Japan, but the salient fact is that those who hold power use it to control the lives of those beneath them.”<sup>11</sup> There is little tradition of elected officials being “servants of the people”; in fact, the people exist to serve the state and culture, not to mention the company to which a person belongs. In Japanese culture, there is little notion of “right” and “wrong” in absolute terms; it is well known that there is no Japanese word for “sin.” In this sense, Japanese society is relativistic—i.e., what is “right” depends on the situation in which you find yourself, determined by the social expectations of your position in the power structure. Miles writes,

Japanese are very adept at assessing what is required in a situation and acting accordingly. This is often misunderstood by Westerners as duplicity, but it is simply the way life must be lived where all is relative. Truth itself becomes merely a social construct. If everybody believes something to be true, or if the powers that be say that it is, then for the practical purposes of daily life, it is true. As the Japanese say, it’s safe to cross against a red light if everyone does it together.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, Japan is a case study in which a kind of relativism opens up the door to a kind of social tyranny that massively discounts the significance of the individual and therefore squashes individualism. Miles argues that in this sort of culture, if there were, say, unambiguous and objective moral law to which *individuals* could appeal, there could be a critique of the unfettered deployment of social and political power. It is the *absence* of such objective standards that make the oppressiveness of the culture possible.

Though it is not part of Miles’s argument, one might observe that in the twentieth century the greatest political crushing of individualism occurred under Marxism and Fascism. Both deployed not only brute force but massive propaganda machines to keep people safely in line with the party dogma. Truth was what Joseph Goebbels (for instance) said it was.

In the light of such case studies, one becomes aware that individualism that can become personally tyrannical (everyone does what is right in their own eyes) may, in this broken world, alternatively serve as a bulwark standing athwart massive social and political tyrannies crying, “Enough!” But it is hard to see whence the moral fortitude for such a stance will come if we systemically lose the category of objective truth. Martyrs are not made of sponge.

*Fourth*, among theists, the ability to withstand the age of Self and promote a kind of Christian counter-cultural individualism embedded in a profound Christian communitarianism will depend, in no small part, on what we think of God. According to Baylor University professors Paul Froese and Christopher Baker in their book *America’s Four Gods: What We Say about God—and What That Says*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11–12.

*about Us*,<sup>13</sup> there are four dominant positions. Although their analysis was undertaken in the United States, I suspect that similar results would show up if the same analysis were pursued in the UK and many other Western nations. To arrive at the four different “Gods” they identify, Froese and Baker began by asking two questions: (a) To what extent does God interact with the world? (b) To what extent does God judge the world? “The answers to these questions,” they write, “predict the substance of our worldviews much better than the color of our skin, the size of our bank account, the political party we belong to, or whether we wear white Stetsons or faded Birkenstocks.”<sup>14</sup> Once they have analyzed their data, they set forth the four conceptions of God that dominate the American landscape:

- (1) the authoritative God, who both judges and is closely engaged with the world;
- (2) the benevolent God, who is engaged but non-judgmental;
- (3) the critical God, who is judgmental but disengaged;
- (4) the distant God, who is neither engaged nor judgmental.

Of course, the taxonomy is limited, and perhaps a trifle manipulative. Doubtless it is heuristically useful. But suppose we reject these “Gods” as sad and dangerous reductionisms. Suppose we return to the God of the Bible, the God who is fully authoritative and engaged, but also compassionate and benevolent. Suppose we return to the God who judges with perfect justice but who sends his Son to bear our sins in his own body on the tree. Suppose we take our understanding of God from revealed truth that disrupts our cultural preferences. Will we not find that the truth of who this God is enables the Christian to sift the culture and form a Christian counter-culture, a community of God’s people in which it is possible to be strong in the grace of God because we are weak? Will we not rejoice in the paradoxes that lie close to the heart of Christian discipleship? We take up our cross so as to be free; in dying, we live; in giving, we receive; when we are weak, we are strong. None of the pretended gods of our culture prepare us for this biblical disclosure of God. But when he captures us, he strengthens us both individually and in the context of our churches to stand up with courage, humility, and contrition and point away from the oppressive gods of our age.

In short, we urgently and perennially need analyses that are less indebted to clichéd visions—whether of individualism or of anything else—and more indebted to the Word of God, in all its comprehensiveness and gospel focus, the Word we have been called to study at Tyndale House and around the world.

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<sup>13</sup> New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



MINORITY REPORT

## Terrible Beauty, Beauty, and the Plain Terrible

— Carl Trueman —

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**T**he present age tends to regard polemics, theological controversies, and all-round doctrinal fist-cuffs as, at best, a necessary evil, at worst, one of the most revolting aspects of Christianity. After all, while the wider culture is still capable of vicious invective against racists and homophobes, it generally regards disputes among Christians as akin to debates over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, where the passions aroused are inversely proportional to the matters at stake and the whole palaver indicates deeper psychological insecurities of the combatants. The tastes of the wider culture have become, by and large, the tastes of the church; polemic is out of style.

Yet polemic has produced some moments of great beauty in church history, and we should not let the modern cultural antipathy to religious controversy blind us to that fact. I need to be somewhat nuanced here, lest I am misunderstood, and distinguish two kinds of beauty in polemic. The first I call the polemics where, in the words of Yeats, ‘a terrible beauty is born.’ Yeats was writing about the Easter Uprising in Dublin and about the way that the cause of Irish national independence gave, in a moment of explosive violence, a terrible, frightening grandeur to men who had, up to that point, occupied mundane common-or-garden jobs.

Church history too has its moments where ‘terrible beauty is born.’ As examples, one might mention Constantinople, 381, where over half a century of sometimes violent imperial and ecclesiastical conflict is resolved in the creedal definition of the Trinity. Then there is Worms in 1521, where Luther, his conscience bound by the word of God, makes his courageous stand against the massed forces of church and empire. Or one might think of Bonhoeffer, going quietly to death in a German prison camp, having refused to compromise his loyalty to Christ with loyalty to a vicious regime. The cases are each different; but all are magnificent in their own way and made so by the defiance of violent anti-Christian power to which they each testify.

My amateur rule-of-thumb criterion for judging such terrible beauty is simple: if the event is clearly magnificent but I would not have wanted to be involved myself, then it qualifies as ‘terrible beauty.’ That is an almost purely subjective metric, but it seems to work. Sure, I can admire the fathers gathered at Constantinople or the monk standing for the gospel at Worms or the Lutheran pastor being hanged for conscience sake, but I praise God that it was not me. Terrible theological beauty is a little like terrible military beauty: for example, the battle of Waterloo is magnificent (what English schoolboy of the 1980s did not feel his chest swell with pride in history lessons at the thought of crushing the French in such a decisive way?) but who in their right mind would have wanted to fight in the battle? Battles, like

theological controversies, are great and beautiful in retrospect, once you know that your side won and you managed to make it out alive.

There is another kind of polemical beauty, however, and this is of a kind that you might not even notice was polemical unless it was explained as such. Some of the most beautiful lines in church history have been penned precisely as beautiful, if quiet, polemic. I am thinking here specifically of the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. Before the thought of yet another dog-eared document of merely historical interest causes eyes to glaze over, hands to move to mouths in discreet stifling of a yawn, and conversations to turn to the weather, here is what the Heidelberg catechism actually says:

**Question 1.** What is your only comfort in life and death?

**Answer:** That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

This may not sound very polemical; in fact, it seems really rather pastoral; but make no mistake, in the context of the sixteenth century, it was a very polemical statement.

At the pastoral heart of the Protestant Reformation lay the doctrine of assurance, the idea that every individual believer could know—indeed, should know—that God was gracious to them. This was critical because, as the Reformers rightly saw, it lay at the heart of the Christian life, a life which was to be marked not by works done in a servile manner in the hope of thereby earning God's favour, but rather by works done out of gratitude to God for his grace, and in a spirit of confident freedom. Medieval Catholicism was built upon a different strategy, where doubt of God's individual mercy was a means by which to keep believers on the straight and narrow, so to speak. When the Heidelberg Catechism kicks off with a statement about assurance, it was also kicking Catholicism in the theological shins.

This is a significant dividing line between Protestants and Catholics from the Reformation to the present day. I am often asked in class about how Protestants should respond to Catholic friends. My response is usually two fold. First, it is appropriate (and, indeed, costs us nothing) to acknowledge the many good things that Catholicism has preserved over the centuries, not least the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. We share a common catholic heritage, and one which they often value far more than evangelicals do, for they tend to have a deeper appreciation of history and of their own comparative irrelevance as individuals in comparison with the church as a whole.

Yet, for all of this great creedal theology, those who convert from Protestantism to Catholicism do sacrifice something crucial: the joy of real, evangelical assurance. Of course, we need to understand that the assurance of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks is not the kind of assurance so common in our Christian culture today: the idea that God is a kind-hearted, sentimental chap, that fallen human beings are not really all that bad after all, and that at the end of the day everything will turn out for the best. Not at all. Reformation assurance is Pauline assurance: in ourselves, we are utterly lost and undeserving; but in his glorious grace, God himself has overcome the mountain that was sin and, against all hope and

expectation, delivered us through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, a deliverance that is made ours by grace through faith.

There are several fascinating aspects to the rhetoric in certain evangelical quarters about the Reformation being over. Most obvious is the failure of many of those who use such rhetoric to act in accordance with their stated convictions and thus return to Rome. Please do not lecture me about the Reformation being a mistake, or about all the differences now being resolved or negligible, if your church commitment seems to contradict this. If you truly believe the matter is now done and dusted, have the courage of your convictions.

The second thing that fascinates me is the general failure to address the issue of assurance as a source of difference between Protestants and Catholics. It really does not seem to matter anymore, at least to those carrying around the 'Reformation = over' banners. Strange, for it was central to the Reformation protest and is still surely central to pastoral practice today. Thus, to argue that the Reformation is over is to argue that assurance does not matter anymore. My suspicion is that that is the case not for theological reasons, not because the two traditions have resolved their differences, but because the whole notion of assurance, and the lack thereof, has become nonsense for most Christians. And that speaks of a religious world where the bases for lack of assurance (the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin) are no longer of any major consequence. If assurance is not an issue, it is likely because you have a sub-biblical view of God's holiness and a sub-Pauline view of human sin; and if this is the case, then the vanishing distance between Protestants and Catholics should not be a cause of comfort or rejoicing for either; rather, it speaks of the secularization and the worldliness of the Christian mind. If polemics can have a terrible beauty, sometimes anti-polemics and peace can be just plain terrible.

# Fiction and Truth in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature

— Daniel J. Estes —

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Since the mid-twentieth century biblical scholars have increasingly accepted that the texts of the Bible must be interpreted in terms of their literary genres.<sup>1</sup> Many fine books, ranging from Fee and Stuart’s general primer, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, to Sternberg’s specialized tome, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*,<sup>2</sup> have informed and assisted students and scholars of the Bible in reading according to generic distinctives. Numerous articles and monographs have explicated how biblical narrative, poetry, psalms, wisdom, law, prophecy, apocalyptic, and epistles should be interpreted. These analyses of specific genres are important, because as Coats states, the goal of genre studies is “to identify a class of literature that will facilitate a functional definition of any given piece that may belong to the class.”<sup>3</sup> One genre, however, that is notable by the relatively scant attention it has received from biblical scholars is fiction or imaginative literature. Aside from some references in discussions of biblical parables,<sup>4</sup> the fictional literature of the Bible, and in particular the OT, has not often been examined.

It must be acknowledged at the outset that the very notion of fiction is ambiguous. Fiction often refers to what is false, as when one observes that truth is stranger than fiction. Using this sense of the term, many critics draw a clear line between fact and fiction in the Bible. For example, Lemche argues that the Bible makes use of fiction that consciously distorts the most elementary historical facts.<sup>5</sup> From

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<sup>1</sup> Leland Ryken, “The Bible and Literature: A Brief History,” in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 57–65.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indiana Literary Biblical Series; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> George W. Coats, “Genres: Why Should They Be Important for Exegesis?” in *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature* (ed. George W. Coats; JSOTSup 35; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>4</sup> The recent thorough study of the parables by Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–42, presents an excellent introduction to the background of the parables of Jesus, and he touches on the strategies of biblical fictional literature.

<sup>5</sup> Niels Peter Lemche, “New Perspectives on the History of Israel,” in *Perspectives on the Study of the Old Testament and Early Judaism* (ed. Florentino Garcia Martinez and Ed Noort; VTSup 73; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 44.

a confessedly evangelical position, Blomberg holds to the same firm antithesis between fact and fiction when he contends that in the Bible “a historical narrative recounts that which actually happened; it is the opposite of fiction.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, assessing scholarship on the Gospels, Chilton concludes, “The distinction between fact and fiction lies at the heart of the controversy between those who regard the Gospels as historical and those who regard them as mythical.”<sup>7</sup> However, Chance’s analysis of the Gospels against their background in Hellenistic biography blurs the lines between fact and fiction when he states, “The study of ancient biography makes clear that Christians were not alone in their refusal to “draw the line” between fact and fiction in their narrative presentations of their hero. They would have been alone had they not employed fiction in their narratives about their hero, for fiction was a fact of ancient biography, be it Christian or non-Christian.”<sup>8</sup> In this respect, according to Alexander the early Christian writers were simply following the accepted narrative conventions of their day.<sup>9</sup>

That notion of fiction corresponds with one of the definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary: “That which is imaginatively invented; feigned existence, event, or state of things; invention as opposed to fact.” In this sense, fiction is what is erroneous but presented as though it were factual. This contrasts with the historical-critical sense of truth, that is, genuine, real existence. Fiction, then, in this sense does not correspond to the external world that it purports to describe because the story cannot be corroborated by comparing external data.

There is, however, another longstanding and well-attested sense of fiction, for the Oxford English Dictionary also defines the term as “the species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters.” As early as in the writings of Hesiod, the muses in *Theogony* 26–28 describe their sayings in the following terms: “Field-dwelling shepherd, evil disgraces, mere bellies, we know how to say many falsehoods that are like the truth, and we know, when we wish, how to voice what is true.” Although scholars interpret these lines differently, as Bowie analyzes this statement he argues that the muses here are not speaking of false stories that are told in order to mislead, or stories mistakenly thought by their tellers to be true, but rather “to a category of poetry that is truly ‘fictional,’ in the sense that the poet is neither lying nor relating erroneously held views, but is . . . telling a story that he had made up to be like reality without claiming that it *is* reality.”<sup>10</sup>

Hedrick summarizes the division of narrative by Sextus Empiricus into categories of history, legend, and fiction. According to Sextus Empiricus, “history is the recording of things that are true and, hence, actually happened. Legend is the narration of events that have never happened and, hence, are false. Fiction is the narrating of things that are not real but are similar to real events in their narration.”<sup>11</sup> Abrams states that most current literary critics, building on the sixteenth-century proposal by Sir Philip

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Cf. the discussion by Mark Zvi Brettler, “The New Biblical Historiography,” in *Israel’s Past in Present Research* (ed. V. Philips Long; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 47–48.

<sup>6</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 19n12.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Chilton, *Beginning New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 22.

<sup>8</sup> J. Bradley Chance, “Fiction in Ancient Biography: An Approach to a Sensitive Issue in Gospel Interpretation,” *PRS* 18 (1991): 141–42.

<sup>9</sup> Loveday Alexander, “Fact, Fiction and the Genre of Acts,” *NTS* 44 (1998): 386–87.

<sup>10</sup> E. L. Bowie, “Lies, Fiction and Slander in Early Greek Poetry,” in *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (ed. Christopher Gill and T. P. Wiseman; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 20–21.

<sup>11</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, “Realism in Western Narrative and the Gospel of Mark: A Prolegomenon,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 349.

Sidney, “hold that fictive sentences are meaningful according to the rules of ordinary, nonfictional discourse, but that, in accordance with conventions implicitly shared by the author and reader of a work of fiction, they are not put forward as assertions of fact, and therefore are not subject to the criterion of truth or falsity that applies to sentences of nonfictional discourse.”<sup>12</sup> Truth in the genre of fictional literature, then, is not what is empirically verifiable, but it is what is considered true within a particular conceptual system, whether rooted in an ideological worldview, or, as in the case of Lewis’s Narnia or Tolkien’s Middle Earth, created out of the cloth of the author’s imagination. The truth claims of fiction, then, are of a different kind from those made in realistic narrative. In the case of biblical fiction, truth is an aspect of reality that lies within the boundaries of divine omniscience and that at times must be accepted by faith apart from empirical corroboration.

Fiction, then, has two distinct senses that one must be careful not to conflate or confuse. On the one hand, for the historical scholar fiction refers to what is erroneous when measured by empirically verifiable data. On the other hand, for the literary scholar fiction is used to speak of the genre of imaginative literature that consciously communicates principles that the author considers true within a conceptual framework. As Sternberg trenchantly declares, “What opposes fiction to historiography is not the writer’s breach or avoidance but his independence of factuality.”<sup>13</sup>

In this essay, fiction is viewed in its literary sense as a subset of narrative in which the imaginative stories in the Bible have been composed in order to communicate aspects of spiritual or ethical truth. Just as factual, historical narrative is frequently employed in the Bible to teach what God wishes to reveal to humans, so the genre of fictional narrative is used for the same purpose.<sup>14</sup> By drawing on both biblical scholarship and literary studies of narrative, this essay endeavors to do five things: (1) demonstrate the existence of the genre of fictional or imaginative literature in the Bible, particularly the OT; (2) investigate the literary strategies employed in fictional narratives; (3) briefly analyze a fictional wisdom story in the light of the strategies distinctive to fiction writing; (4) discuss how the wisdom books of Ecclesiastes and Job may plausibly be read as imaginative literature; and (5) draw some conclusions and implications for ministry and further research.

### ***1. Examples of Biblical Fiction***

The Bible is full of stories that range from realistic non-fictional accounts to narratives that embody the author’s invention. Ryken notes,

The stories in the Bible exist on a spectrum. At one end is the brief fragment in which we are told only the facts about what happened. Here the historical or documentary impulse governs. At the other end are stories in which the writer images the events in sufficient detail that we can recreate the experience in our imagination. The farther a

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<sup>12</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th ed.; Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999), 95; cf. Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *Reading between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 118–19, notes well: “Some works of literature are in a realistic mode—although the reader should be alert to the mind of the writer behind the shaping. Some works of literature are in a fantasy mode—although the reader should be alert to the reality that can be disclosed in the play of the writer’s imagination. Realism and fantasy represent distinct literary approaches, both of which are congenial to Christianity.”

biblical narrative moves toward the second end, the more accurately we can call it a literary narrative.<sup>15</sup>

When the term fiction is used in the literary sense of language that emanates from the imagination rather than being a realistic description of external data, then numerous examples of literary fiction in the Bible can be adduced. In a very broad sense, every metaphor is technically a literary fiction because it declares what is not literally true. For example, in Ps 23:1 Yahweh is the psalmist's shepherd only in a non-literal sense, and in Ps 91:1 the psalmist abides in a non-literal shadow of Shaddai. Bar-Efrat states that in a metaphor "the word is used in a non-literal sense, there being similarity but no direct continuity between its literal and non-literal meanings, and the things which the word indicates in its literal and non-literal meanings belong to completely different and separate spheres."<sup>16</sup>

More directly to the point, fictional writing is also evident in a handful of fables in the OT. Fables present a moral or principle by ascribing human features to animals or plants,<sup>17</sup> and in so doing "draw some comparison between one kind of reality and another."<sup>18</sup> The fables by Jotham in Judg 9:8–15 and by Jehoash in 2 Kgs 14:8–10 (par. 2 Chr 25:17–19) are clear examples of non-literal language being used in fables to communicate the speakers' points.

Apocalyptic literature in both the OT and NT is replete with non-literal descriptions. Much of the content of Ezekiel, Daniel 7–12, Zechariah, and Revelation 4–22 is presented in a visionary mode, in which collages of fantastic pictures impressionistically evoke an emotional response in the reader. The portrayals of beasts and battles are not intended to be taken primarily as realistic descriptions to inform the mind; rather they are imaginative creations designed to touch the heart of the reader by employing a fictional strategy.

Biblical fiction is also represented by parables. According to the Gospels, Jesus frequently taught by parables, "brief fictions realistically portraying aspects of first-century Palestinian life,"<sup>19</sup> both to make spiritual truths about the kingdom of God understandable to those predisposed to believe him and to obscure the same truths from those who were not inclined to accept him (Mark 4:10–12).<sup>20</sup> It is likely that the parables included in the extant text of the NT constitute only a selection of the stories that Jesus invented and told in his earthly teaching ministry.

Although parables are less frequent in the OT than in the Gospel accounts, there are several clear examples of this kind of imaginative story.<sup>21</sup> Simon points to five similarly crafted stories that he calls

<sup>15</sup> Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 45.

<sup>16</sup> Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Bible and Literature Series 17; JSOTSup 70; Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 209.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin J. Cathcart, "The Trees, the Beasts and the Birds: Fables, Parables and Allegories in the Old Testament," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel* (ed. John Day et al; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 214.

<sup>18</sup> Ann M. Vater Solomon, "Fable," in *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature* (ed. George W. Coats; JSOTSup 35; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 118.

<sup>19</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, *Parables as Poetic Fictions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 294–96.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the surveys by John Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 7–20, and Craig A. Evans, "Parables in Early Judaism," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 54–62, as well as the comprehensive study by Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*.

juridical parables because they judge the hearer.<sup>22</sup> The most prominent of these parables is the story of the poor man's ewe, a fiction told by Nathan in 2 Sam 12:1–4 in his successful attempt to provoke David to acknowledge his sin with Bathsheba. By using realistic language that conceals the fact that the story is indeed a parable, Nathan imaginatively draws David into the conflict and without a word invites the king to give a legal judgment on the case. Nathan's tactic in telling this fictional parable works brilliantly, as David becomes so emotionally involved in the story that he indicts himself of his own guilt. Fokkelman concludes his excellent analysis of the scene with this assessment:

As a message to David, the parable is true, fictional, and fictitious. The king has positively perceived the report's fictional character, i.e. its literary and sometimes even poetic make-up, but has not been misled by this knowing that a prophet in action is a poet in action. Its fictitious aspect, on the contrary, remains completely hidden to him, and this is how the truth can penetrate him deeply and engage him. While David imagines the story to have really occurred, the truth is already working on him. From Nathan's point of view, fiction, made functional and attractive by literary devices, is the ideal vehicle for the truth and, as theologians say, for revelation.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to Aristotle's preference for historically factual parables (*Rhetoric* 2.20), the OT parables are typically imaginative fictions that in many ways parallel the parables used by Socrates in the dialogues of Plato.<sup>24</sup>

This essay focuses on one wisdom story, which in many ways shares the features and strategies of the juridical parables. Von Rad identifies two wisdom stories in Prov 24:30–34 and in Ps 37:25, 35–36, as well as another two non-biblical examples in Sir 33:16–17 and 51:13–16. He comments,

Here we definitely have, rather, a traditional stylistic form in which the teacher could . . . clothe his instruction, and which also allowed of being extended into larger units. Our modern interest in the biographies of the biblical authors should not, therefore, be misled, for here we are scarcely dealing with genuine experiences; at any rate they appear in a highly conventionalized form.<sup>25</sup>

The wisdom stories cited by von Rad, as well as the stories in Ecc 4:13–16 and 9:13–18, and the story in Prov 7:6–23, which will be examined in this study, are marked by the author's first-person account. By this means, the author lends an air of vivid realism to his narrative as though it were a scene that he has personally witnessed. Significant details in the texts, however, including direct quotations and rhythmic language, strongly suggest that the stories in fact emerge from the author's imagination rather than from his empirical observation. As such, they are fictions composed in order to teach principles of wisdom.

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<sup>22</sup> Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Bib* 48 (1967): 207–42.

<sup>23</sup> Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 20; Assen: Gorcum, 1981), 81; cf. Michael S. Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman? A Biblical Study of Women's Roles," *Restoration Quarterly* 35 (1993): 153.

<sup>24</sup> Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (1970; trans. James D. Martin; London: SCM, 1972), 38.



## 2. Strategies of Fictional Narratives

Before we examine Prov 7:26–33 as an exemplar of biblical fiction, it is beneficial to consider how such fictional narratives operate and what strategies characterize this genre. As one considers strategies of fictional narratives, two questions emerge.

### 2.1. How Does Imaginative Literature Teach Truth through Fiction?

In fiction writing, the author uses and adapts familiar literary conventions. For example, the standard fairy tale begins with “Once upon a time” and ends with “and they lived happily ever after,” and the reader is not surprised to find talking animals, wicked stepmothers, and benevolent fairies. To read fiction accurately “requires some detailed awareness of the grid of conventions upon which, and against which, the individual work operates.”<sup>26</sup> When one turns to the fictions in the Bible, however, it is not always easy to discern the literary conventions that would have been shared by the original author and readers two thousand or more years ago.

All narratives draw from a wide range of possible authorial points of view, but fiction in particular extends what the author is able to know up to the point of total omniscience. Because the author of fiction is able to know well beyond what would be directly observable, imaginative stories can reveal even the internal thoughts and motives of the characters. As Booth observes, “One of the most obviously artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character’s mind and heart. Whatever our ideas may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know.”<sup>27</sup>

As a subset of narrative, fiction is also marked by its rich characterization. The development of characters can be achieved by both explicit and implicit means. Although it uses some description, fiction typically reveals character by deeds. Bar-Efrat explains the significance of this narrative strategy: “Since one’s inner nature is embodied in external behavior a narrator can present the characters in action rather than spelling out their traits. In biblical narrative deeds do in fact serve as the foremost means of characterization, and we know biblical characters primarily through the way they act in varying situations.”<sup>28</sup>

One of the most prominent means by which imaginative literature teaches truth is by simplifying issues as it removes ambiguity. Life as it is actually experienced is complex, but in a fictional world issues can be distilled into clear polarities or meaningful patterns.<sup>29</sup> This is particularly the case when the characters are required to make a decision, and the alternatives are presented as a stark choice between

<sup>26</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47.

<sup>27</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3; cf. John W. Sider, *Interpreting the Parables: A Hermeneutical Guide to Their Meaning* (Studies in Contemporary Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 161.

<sup>28</sup> Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 103.

antithetical moral visions.<sup>30</sup> By this means, concrete situations are used in order to communicate abstract concepts, and the particulars in the story are constructed in order to teach universal principles.

## 2.2. Why Is Fiction Employed Rather Than a Factual Record?

Another way to ask this second question is “What advantages does fiction provide over non-fiction?” Aristotle addresses this issue in *On Poetics* 9:

The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse . . . ; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars.

Because fiction writers are not constrained by the actual events of history, they are able to structure perception in ways that communicate their messages with optimal force. This structuring of perceptions usually moves in the direction of simplifying the issues that in real life are rather complex, so that the reader can view them more clearly. Instead of relying on detailed argumentation to make a point, the author draws simplified pictures of life that help the reader to see in a fresh way. Because of its ability to structure perception, fiction has the advantage of being able to present truth with a high degree of clarity. By this means, it can “encapsulate . . . the fundamental values that undergird the more complex decisions one must make in real life.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, fictional portrayals lend themselves to unusual vividness that highlights the issues in view.

The purpose of the fictional presentation is to elicit the active participation of the reader by constructing a story that is familiar, even though of imaginative origin.<sup>32</sup> The simplicity and brevity of fictional stories, moreover, actually lends a measure of ambiguity to them, and that very ambiguous character of fiction requires focused meditation by the reader. Rather than merely stating a principle that can be received passively, the fiction writer compels the reader to think through the issues that have been raised in the story, thus making the reader actively involved in the process of discovering truth.<sup>33</sup> By means of fiction the author also draws the reader into a profound emotional involvement with the story. As a result of this connection with the characters and plot of the narrative, “we feel what they feel, rejoice in their gladness, grieve at their sorrow and participate in their fate and experiences.”<sup>34</sup> This intense identification with the fictional text leads naturally into the reader’s acceptance of the explicit or implicit injunction of the author.<sup>35</sup> Hence, fiction can have powerful persuasive force because rather

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Veith, *Reading between the Lines*, 120.

<sup>33</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 32–33; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 429–30; Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Bible and Literature Series 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 49.

than providing mere cognitive instruction, it presents an attractive and compelling vision that awakens the reader's moral imagination.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, at a very basic level, fictional stories are pleasurable, and that feature stimulates people to read them when they might be less eager to begin a non-fictional text. Speaking of biblical narratives in general, Ryken roots their enduring appeal in their ability to address fundamental human impulses:

These stories are both factually realistic and romantically marvelous. They bring together two impulses that the human race is trying to join—reason and imagination, fact and mystery. The stories of the Bible nourish our need for both down-to-earth reality and the more-than-earthly. They appeal both to that part of us that is firmly planted on the earth and to that part of us that soars to the heavens.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Analysis of Proverbs 7:6–23

How does the wisdom story in Prov 7:6–23 teach truth through the genre of fiction? This story demonstrates a wide range of fictional features as the teacher exhorts the son, or pupil, to a life of wisdom. The image of the strange woman parallels and parodies the language of Woman Wisdom in chapter 8, before the two women are set side by side in their contrasting appeals to the youth in chapter 9. This contrast reflects the antithetical categories that dominate traditional wisdom. It is also significant that the seductress misappropriates the language of wisdom, as she leads the youth astray with persuasive words (*leqah*) in 7:21, in contrast to the positive references to *leqah* in 1:5; 4:2; 9:9; 16:21, 23. In 7:12 she is described as lurking at every corner, the same term (*'ārab*) that is used in 1:11 to refer to the appeal to the youth by violent young men who plan to rob the innocent. Both are bad companions who use appealing talk to bring others to moral destruction. The strange woman also appropriates erotic language that is used in the Song of Songs for the nurture of intimacy within a God-honoring relationship.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to exploiting several familiar literary conventions, this fictional story also extends the authorial point of view. Within the framework of the teacher's interpretive commentary in 7:1–5 and 24–27, the author probes beyond what would have been recognizable by a distant observer. He is able to discern the woman's deceitful motives (7:10) and her predatory pattern (7:11–12) that contradict the words with which she propositions the youth in 7:15. Davis suggests that the term *nēsūrat* used to describe her heart in 7:10 is best rendered “guarded, closed, blockaded,” as also in 2:8, 11, so “behind her passionate words and gestures lies a blockaded heart, and so there is no possibility of genuine relationship.”<sup>39</sup> The author is also able to quote her words to the youth, which one must suspect would have been spoken surreptitiously rather than within earshot of others.

<sup>36</sup> Vigen Guroian, *Tending the Heart of Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>37</sup> Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 39.

<sup>38</sup> For specific parallels, see Scott C. Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy: A Comparison of Proverbs VII and 4Q184,” *VT* 53 (2003): 70–71. Examples include “myrrh” (Song 4:6; 5:5), “aloes” (4:14), “cinnamon” (4:14), “love-making” (5:18), and seeking in the street and in the squares (5:6–7). The same point is expounded well by Daniel Grossberg, “Two Kinds of Sexual Relationship in the Hebrew Bible,” *Hebrew Studies* 35 (1994): 8–9.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 60.

In characterizing the seductress, the teacher uses both explicit and implicit means to describe what she is like. In the interpretive introduction, she is called an adulteress and a wayward wife (7:5). In contrast to 5:15–20, she is functioning outside the bounds of marriage, and thus she is a *zārâ*. In her dress she appears as though she were a prostitute (7:10), even though in fact she is a married woman (7:5, 19–20). The author's description of her defiant promiscuity (7:11–12) is borne out by the fact that she is active and calculating in accosting the passive and clueless young man (7:13).<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the language of mutuality that predominates in the Song of Songs,<sup>41</sup> she does all the talking in leading him to his destruction (7:14–23). Making effective use of her social position and splendid possessions, she seduces him to join her in an immoral tryst. To complicate matters, according to Lev 7:19–21 the meat of the votive offering could not be eaten in a state of ritual uncleanness, so when the woman's telling the youth that she has fellowship offerings at home is juxtaposed with her sexual proposition, she is also proposing an action that violates the stipulations of the Mosaic law.

By detailing such an unambiguous solicitation to sin, the author clarifies the issue and its consequences. In his concluding hortatory words, the teacher indicates that what he has described is the pattern by which many people have been brought to disaster (7:26–27). This story, then, is not just a specific incident in history, but it is intended as an example story that applies well beyond the case of a particular individual.

Why does Prov 7 employ fiction rather than a factual record? By inventing a realistic but imaginative scene, the author is able to structure and focus perceptions. Embedded within a specific interpretative framework (7:1–5, 24–27), the fictional wisdom story finds additional significant linkages to the larger structure of the book of Proverbs. The strange woman is the antithesis to the wife with whom the young man should be exhilarated (5:15–20), to the worthy woman of 31:10–31,<sup>42</sup> and to Woman Wisdom herself (chs. 8–9). Moreover, by constructing the story with its specific details, the author is able to present an unusually tempting set of conditions, for the fulfilled vow provides a rare opportunity for a sumptuous meal, the inventory of her luxurious possessions presents the lure of the exotic,<sup>43</sup> and her husband's absence diminishes the possibility of detection.<sup>44</sup> Both in the persona of the seductress and in the strategy of the author, "every element is calculated for maximum impact."<sup>45</sup>

Through fiction the author is also able to use description rather than explanation to make his important point with compelling force. The passage begins with a distant shot of a young man mindlessly wending his way through the city in the direction of the house of the seductress. The focus then settles on the woman, who comes out in the dress of a prostitute as she aggressively accosts him. To this visual picture, sound is added as the woman flatters, allures, tempts, and entices the youth to make his fateful decision to follow her. At that point, the observant author steps in to interpret the calamity that the reader has imaginatively witnessed.

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<sup>40</sup> Mieke Heijerman, "Who Would Blame Her? The 'Strange Woman' of Proverbs 7," in *Reflections on Theology and Gender* (ed. Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes and Athalya Brenner; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 23.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Clifford, *Proverbs* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 87.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. the numerous verbal parallels cited in Jones, "Wisdom's Pedagogy," 74, including the only two OT uses of the Hebrew term *marbaddim* in Prov 7:16 and 31:22.

<sup>43</sup> R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 115.

<sup>44</sup> Kathleen Farmer, *Who Knows What Is Good?* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 49.

<sup>45</sup> Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 60–61.

The language that the author places in the mouth of the strange woman is calculated to elicit the reader's active participation. In aggressively initiating the seduction and alleging that she was waiting just for him (7:15), she plays on the male fantasy of being irresistibly desired by a sensuous woman.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the seductress appeals to all of the senses to create an allurements that is overwhelming even to the reader of the text. By placing these words in her mouth, the author causes the reader to feel the powerful force of her siren call.

The imaginative story in 7:6–23 demonstrates the strategic advantages that fiction provides over non-fiction. The graphic depiction of the woman's invitation to sexual delights sparks immediate interest as it draws the reader imaginatively into her erotic seduction.<sup>47</sup> By using a compelling personification of folly that preys upon the sexual vulnerability of young men, the author imaginatively leads the readers to totter at the edge of disaster, so that they will acknowledge their need to heed the warnings of wisdom.

By constructing a cautionary tale of the destruction of a youth who lacks maturity and wisdom, the author describes and then unmasks the powerful seduction not just by an immoral woman, but by folly itself. This fictional story, then, is intended to equip the youth to anticipate the various temptations that folly presents, to see through its blandishments, and to respond wisely to it to avoid potential disaster. The sage

relies on his descriptive powers and his ability to reconstruct imaginatively the woman's stratagems and seductive conversation, so that the warning is conveyed not by schematized instruction, but by introducing the young man into the ways of the world and bringing him to the woman's house, in order to show him that it is a death trap and that only a fool will satisfy his desire at such a price.<sup>48</sup>

#### ***4. Ecclesiastes and Job as Imaginative Literature***

This article interprets the wisdom story in Prov 7:6–23 as a fiction that the wisdom teacher specially composed to communicate to young men in a particularly potent way the dangers inherent in the powerful allurements of folly. Making extensive use of the language, conventions, and strategies of imaginative literature, the author endeavors to awaken the moral imagination of those who otherwise would be prone to succumb to the lure of folly rather than adhering to the way of wisdom.

Although this study has focused on one wisdom story, its conclusions may well have broader implications for other OT wisdom texts. On a larger scale, it could be that the autobiographical discourse in Ecclesiastes signals the use of an accepted fictional convention; in other words, the book is an exemplary tale writ large.<sup>49</sup> This would be compatible with Longman's identification of the genre

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<sup>46</sup> Grossberg, "Two Kinds of Sexual Relationships in the Hebrew Bible," 12, notes well: "Here the woman is the sole initiator of the action and the prime actor. The young man is largely passive and acted upon, whereas she speaks smoothly, comes toward him, is boisterous, is rebellious; she lurks, she grabs, she kisses, she acts defiantly, she finds him, she decks her couch, she sprinkles her bed, invites him to drink deeply of love and to revel in love, she sways him, she leads him astray, and she strikes many dead. In contrast to these nineteen far-reaching actions, all performed by the woman, the wisdom writer makes the young man the subject of a mere four verbs . . ."

<sup>47</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 252.

<sup>48</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 332.

<sup>49</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 2000), 135.

of Ecclesiastes as framed wisdom autobiography, although it would not necessitate his specific literary connection with fictional Akkadian autobiographical texts.<sup>50</sup>

A difficult interpretive question for the book of Job is the relationship of the narrative to factual history.<sup>51</sup> Does this book record the literal account of a calamity that overwhelmed Job at a specific time and place, along with the transcripts of the actual words spoken by Job and his friends as they endeavored to come to terms with this tragedy? Or is the book a *māšāl* that “illumines some enduring condition or recurring experience/situation by way of analogy”?<sup>52</sup> The historicity of the book of Job must not be rejected on *a priori* grounds. The biblical allusions to Job in Ezek 14:14, 20 and James 5:11 do not state that he was a fictional character, but rather they refer to him just as an historical figure would be indicated. The question of the historical factualness of the book of Job, then, has to be decided by a careful consideration of the textual data in the book.

The opening paragraph of Job uses a literary pattern that finds close parallels both in historical narrative (1 Sam 1:1) and in imaginative parable (2 Sam 12:1). What is intriguing is that the author sets the book outside of Israel in the land of Uz, and he introduces Job as a man who is not in the covenant family. The introduction proceeds to describe Job’s family and possessions in ideal terms. Job himself is portrayed as the epitome of righteousness (1:1), an assessment that is twice endorsed by Yahweh (1:8; 2:3). Although the evidence is not definitive, the details of the initial verses of the book hint that the opinions of the Babylonian Talmud tractate Baba Batra 15a and of Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed* III:22) that Job is a parable could well be indicative of the genre of the book.

Additional internal evidence comes from the poetic dialogues that constitute the major section of the book of Job. The artistic qualities of these poems appear to be explained better by conscious craftsmanship rather than by artful spontaneity, which leads Archer to conclude that “the main body of the text reads like a poetic and highly artistic composition, employing language which would not normally be used by persons speaking extemporaneously in a real life situation.”<sup>53</sup> The intricate design discernable in the dialogues suggests that the book is not a transcript of actual, unprepared conversations between Job and his friends. The book of Job, rather, may well be explained better as a divinely-inspired work of imaginative literature, in which the author explores the lofty theme of the problem of evil by setting forth an ideal case study and then by constructing a series of speeches that represent the best efforts by humans to resolve the issue. By this means, the book of Job is able to transcend the necessary limitations inherent in any actual human example in order to focus on the theological issue in its most comprehensive dimensions.

### ***5. Conclusions and Implications***

This article demonstrates that the wisdom story in Prov 7:6–23 is best viewed as a fictional narrative that exploits to great effect the conventions of imaginative literature in order to persuade the reader in an unusually vivid way. In addition, it suggests that the wisdom books of Ecclesiastes and Job may

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<sup>50</sup> Tremper Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 41–43; *ibid.*, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 17–20.

<sup>51</sup> The following three paragraphs are adapted from the discussion of the literature of the book of Job in Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 16–17.

<sup>52</sup> John H. Stek, “Job: An Introduction,” *CTJ* 32 (1997): 444.

<sup>53</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (3rd ed.; Chicago: Moody, 1994), 509.

well be read best as examples of biblical fiction crafted to teach theological truths that could not be expressed as well if the authors had been limited by the constraints of actual historical experiences.

The relationship between literature and truth is an ancient and complex question, for as Lamarque observes, “just how literature intersects with truth, what relevance truth has to literary value, whether literature is essentially to be conceived as a vehicle for truth, even what ‘truth’ might mean when applied to works of fiction: these questions go to the very heart of literary studies.”<sup>54</sup> When addressing the subject of fiction and truth in the Bible, many scholars allege that the historical narratives of the Bible are full of falsehoods. In light of this denial of the veracity of the biblical texts, it is understandable that evangelicals who hold to the truthfulness of the Bible could be prone to consider the idea of biblical fiction an oxymoron. This essay, however, demonstrates that the term “fiction” can refer not only to what is false, but also in a literary sense to the genre of imaginative literature. This mode of fictional writing has a long history from ancient times to the present day, and its distinctives and strategies have been analyzed and expounded by literary scholars. When clear biblical examples of the use of the genre of fictional literature are adduced, as for example in the parables of Jesus and in wisdom stories such as Prov 7:6–23, then the existence of imaginative literature in the Bible must be acknowledged.

Because of the ambiguity presented by the two senses of fiction and the confusion that can easily enter into the discussion, biblical scholars and expositors must define precisely what they mean when they speak of fiction and truth in the Bible. To read historical narratives as though they were falsehoods is to fictionalize the text. On the other hand, to insist that texts composed in the genre of fiction (i.e., imaginative literature) must be read as records of literal fact is to literalize them. Both of these approaches fail to read the Bible accurately because they do not treat it according to the distinctives of its literary genres. Instead, historical narratives should be read as reliable records of what actually happened in time and space, but biblical fictions must be read as the imaginative texts that they are.

How, then, should pastors, students, and scholars approach the fictional stories of the OT wisdom literature? How should they read, study, and teach to derive the most benefit from them?

First, stories are composed to be heard as complete narratives, not to be dissected as though they were logical arguments. When a biblical story is taught or preached, it is important to tell it as a story and let its literary power work on the audience. Just as Nathan’s parable brought obstinate David to his knees in repentance, so the stories of the Bible can have the same life-transforming effect today. This inherent power is diluted when the story is treated as though it were some other kind of literature.

Second, because familiarity can breed contempt, or at least inattentiveness, it can be helpful to retell a story like Job in a fresh way. Just as Shakespeare’s plays are often updated and set in more recent periods, so recasting Job in twenty-first-century terms can produce a new appreciation of its enduring message. To do this, a preacher or teacher must ask, “If the author of Job were telling his story today, how would he communicate the same points?” This strategy can be effective in building an applicational bridge from the ancient text to the contemporary context.

Third, the OT wisdom stories assume the worldview of biblical wisdom, so they must be understood within that conceptual framework. Before studying or teaching either the short fictional stories in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes or a longer narrative like Job, it is important to get a firm grasp of the themes of wisdom.<sup>55</sup> That background will provide a much more profound understanding of the wisdom story. In order to understand fictional literature, we must enter into the imaginative world that the author

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<sup>54</sup> Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View*, 92.

has constructed. To comprehend and appreciate what C. S. Lewis says in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, we first have to step through the wardrobe and assume a different kind of world. Similarly, to grasp the OT wisdom stories, we have to enter into the conceptual world of wisdom and understand it on its own terms.

Fourth, much scholarly work on biblical fiction remains to be done. Biblical narrative in general, and biblical fiction in particular, has not often enough drawn on the insights of literary scholars. It is true that biblical specialists have appropriated insights from some literary scholars with an interest in the Bible, especially Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, Leland Ryken, Adele Berlin, Northrop Frye, and Frank Kermode. A few biblical scholars such as Jan Fokkelman and Wilfred Watson have crossed over to the discipline of literary analysis and by this means have developed excellent insights on the biblical texts. Much more must be done, however, in integrating the skills and insights of biblical and literary specialists. Only when that is done can we clearly hear the wisdom stories as the imaginative literary texts they are and thus be able to feel the full force of their messages to us.

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<sup>55</sup> A brief summary of the worldview of biblical wisdom is found in Daniel J. Estes, "Wisdom and Biblical Theology," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (ed. Tremper Longman and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 853–58.



# Plots, Themes, and Responsibilities: The Search for a Center of Biblical Theology Reexamined

— Daniel J. Brendsel —

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## ***1. The Search for a “Center”: Obsession or Responsibility?***

In the prolegomena to his “approach to biblical theology,” Charles H. H. Scobie comments, “It is difficult to understand the obsession with finding one single theme or ‘center’ for OT or NT theology, and more so for an entire BT. It is widely held today that the quest for a single center has failed.”<sup>1</sup> With a body of literature as diverse and complex as Scripture, it is easy to see why Scobie would wonder at the labors of many to find a “center” of biblical theology.

But if, in Scobie’s (and others’) opinion, the “quest for a single center has failed,” does that mean necessarily that the quest is unjustified? Indeed, despite Scobie’s sentiments, could this preoccupation to find a center be well-founded, representing less of an “obsession” and more of a responsibility? An affirmative answer to the latter question is the underlying assumption and motivation for the present essay, which (1) provides a rationale for the search for a center to biblical theology; (2) refocuses what the object of the search for a center is (what should we be looking for?); and (3) discusses the process of the search itself (what factors and criteria are involved in the identification of what is central?).

## ***2. A Rationale for the Search: Delivering “the Whole Counsel of God”***

David Wenham suggests two reasons that a search for a center matters.<sup>2</sup> First, if we can discern a “coherent shape and a center in an author’s thought and writing,” then surely that center would provide us with a better grasp not only of the work as a whole but also of the various individual parts. If a center exists, it holds massive heuristic value.<sup>3</sup> Second, the search for a center is driven by a prior conviction concerning the unity of Scripture. If Scripture consists of a collection of books with “significantly

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 87.

<sup>2</sup> David Wenham, “Appendix: Unity and Diversity in the New Testament,” in *A Theology of the New Testament*, by G. E. Ladd (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 710.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Carr, “Passion for God: A Center in Biblical Theology,” *HBT* 23 (2001): 2, asserts, “There is a heuristic value in searching for *various* conceptual ‘centers’ in the Bible” (emphasis in original). He is, however, not satisfied with the language of “center,” and is tempted to speak of “nodal points” by which he means “multiple points where various traditions converge, all treating a common conceptual structure (often differently)” (3). See similarly, James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM, 1999), 343,

different centers,” then that seems to “undermine . . . the harmony of the different strands of New Testament Christianity.”<sup>4</sup> To these two suggestions, a third could be added that recasts the question within a specific context.

Acts 20 recounts the final meeting between Paul and the Ephesian elders in which Paul describes how he fulfilled the ministry of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace that he received from the Lord Jesus (v. 24). In particular, he exonerates himself from “the blood of all men” (v. 26) since he “did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (v. 27). Is this merely naïveté or presumption? How could Paul possibly have communicated *all* God’s purpose in three short years without at least being severely reductionistic? He assumes a fundamental deposit (a heart, a core, a center?) that does not violate, but actually serves the manifold other details of Scripture, ordering and illuminating them such that when Paul departs, the Ephesians can fruitfully reflect further on those details in the light of the initial deposit.<sup>5</sup>

Of crucial importance with respect to the search for a biblical theological “center” is the context in which Paul makes this bold claim. Paul makes this sweeping statement while describing and unpacking his ministry in Ephesus. The search for and proclamation of a center—what may be termed *the whole counsel or purpose of God*—is, for Paul, a function of pastoral ministry for the good of God’s people. Compare Paul’s parallel statement in Acts 20:20: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was *profitable*.” However one may want to recast the details of the search for a center, it is nevertheless no mere hobbyhorse. It is at the heart of how we pursue our pastoral ministries of teaching and preaching. The search for a center is the search to provide heuristic lenses for the people of God in their interaction with Scripture (and the world).<sup>6</sup> It is with this task in mind that we take up again the question of whether a “center,” or something like a center, for biblical theology exists, and if so, in what ways we might pursue it.

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who speaks of theologians appropriately appealing to “centers” as “the expression of structure” and as a “simple necessity for the organization of their work.”

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, James M. Hamilton Jr., “The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: The Center of Biblical Theology?” *TynBul* 57 (2006): 61, comments, “The theological presupposition that the Bible is the revelation of a coherent and harmonious God keeps us probing for the best triage of themes, and at the centre of the sorting will be the centre of biblical theology.” From a slightly different perspective but coming to similar conclusions, Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 15; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 41–43, suggests that canonization functions to “make one text out of many,” which possesses (a reader with a hermeneutic of charity may presume) a meaningful unity. Thus, Dempster argues, the literary structure of the Hebrew canon forms “a Text” out of many texts and makes the search for a “fundamental theme” of that “Text” a matter of “responsible hermeneutics.” However, Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 153, warns that we ought not flatly to equate unity with a center.

<sup>5</sup> It is curious that a survey of major NT theologies and related works reveals very few who appeal to Acts 20:27 in this connection. For a couple exceptions, see G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (ed. L. D. Hurst; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Scott J. Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 19, who seeks “to provide a basic framework for understanding the Scriptures in a way that will stimulate us to take up the Bible for ourselves.”

### **3. The Object of the Search: The Synthesis of Plot, Themes, and Responsibilities**

It might be best to speak of “something like a center” because many are dissatisfied with the term “center” itself. No small part of this dissatisfaction arises from the term’s nebulosity. Indeed, D. A. Carson pointedly asks, “Does it refer to the most common theme, determined by statistical count, or to the controlling theme or to the fundamental theological presuppositions of the NT writers, so far as they may be discerned?”<sup>7</sup>

#### **3.1. Problems with the Term “Center”**

Few answer Carson’s question. In a recent attempt to argue for a center of biblical theology, James Hamilton defines center as “the concept to which the biblical authors point as the ultimate reason” for God’s activities and as “the theme which all of the Bible’s other themes serve to exposit.”<sup>8</sup> But most are not so forthright and intentional about the term. Kaiser notes, “the very terms by which we referred to this phenomena [*sic*] [of a canonical theological center] remained elusive.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the terms used to denote some chief element of Scripture vary nearly as much as the actual proposals of that element itself, and they suggest varied nuances in the very element sought (center, heart, core, main/controlling theme, ultimate purpose, unifying principle, etc.). It may be, as Kaiser goes on to suggest, that “a similar note is sounded” in the various terms used, namely, what integrates the whole into a unity, some unifying concept or theme. But he also laments that the term “center,” though communicating a unifying function, nevertheless fails to communicate the progressive, developing nature of the “center” throughout Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

When we add to the problem of definition the dizzying array of proposed “centers” and when we point out the widespread assumption that all potential “centers” will simply steamroll diversity,<sup>11</sup> we might lose confidence in the pursuit of a “center” as the best way to convey “the whole counsel of God.” Is there a better way to sum up the message of Scripture?

#### **3.2. Plot, Themes, and Responsibilities**

An increasingly popular reaction is to turn attention to the plot or storyline of the Bible. Indeed, communicating the storyline of Scripture has multiple advantages. It is an effective way to communicate “the progressive, developing nature” of biblical material, for which Kaiser has expressed concern. It seeks to be faithful to the most common form of Scripture, namely, narrative. Sticking to the storyline of Scripture seems to stand clear of criticisms that we are imposing foreign systems onto the biblical material or that we are not granting equal voice to all of Scripture. And it provides a way to bind together diverse and complex themes and concepts in a meaningful whole.

<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, “New Testament Theology,” in *DLNT* 810.

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, “Glory of God,” 61.

<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Towards an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

<sup>11</sup> On the latter point, see esp. Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 158, who asks, “Will not any center which is to serve as an organizing principle for the entire OT world of revelation and experience always turn out to be a *tour de force*?” See also Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 163–64.

This last point is especially important to emphasize. Certain wings of Christian thought have neglected elements of biblical plot, tending to view the narrative elements of Scripture as so much husk surrounding the kernel of doctrine, concepts, and themes.<sup>12</sup> But doctrine and concepts and themes cannot be utterly dissociated from the story of Scripture without in some way damaging them, without losing some of their meaning. For example, one could say that Irving Berlin's film *White Christmas* is about the need for clear communication in relationships (and the deleterious relational effects of misinformation, cold-shoulders, silent grudges, etc.). One could also say that the film concerns the search for significance in the face of aging. Both would be true statements about the film, and both would touch on two of its most important thematic strands. Yet they are not, in the abstract, integrally related nor necessarily tied to one another. What binds them together is the *plot* or *narrative*. Barry G. Webb, in arguing that the Book of Judges is best understood as primarily a literary work rather than political propaganda or a religious tract, articulates the point perfectly: "The meaning cannot finally be abstracted from the story. The narrative itself is the only formulation of the meaning which contains all its aspects."<sup>13</sup>

In light of all these advantages, it is not surprising that many turn to plot or storyline as a better way of summing up the biblical message. Thus, in addressing pluralism and the need to remediate a widespread ignorance of Scripture, Carson offers a "plot-line" of the Bible since "the fact remains that the Bible as a whole document tells a story."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Blomberg opines,

It is not often asked if it is necessary to reduce that which is couched in story form to a single theme or proposition. Perhaps it is more appropriate to consider how the story might be retold in its simplest form. Treating the Bible as narrative suggests a model for demonstrating in greater detail the unfolding unity and diversity within Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

Carson and Blomberg are just two examples of a growing number who appeal to narrative in an effort to be faithful to the form of Scripture, while at the same time trying to avoid the manifold difficulties of elevating any single theme or cluster of themes to prominence. While renewed emphasis on narrative, plot-line, and the kinds of literary analysis that often are connected to such emphases is a welcome development in biblical studies,<sup>16</sup> nevertheless there are two reasons that we should not stop merely at recounting the plot-line of Scripture in summarizing what Scripture says to us.

First, talk of storylines does not avoid the problems confronted by proposals for central themes or ideas in Scripture. Themes, concepts, and responsibilities are inextricably woven into a plot. Thus to open the storyline of Scripture with the creation of the world by the only true God is to set forth the theme of creation (and God's unique sovereignty/kingship) from the outset. Narrative is not an option

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<sup>12</sup> Both conservative and liberal wings of Christianity have been guilty of stripping the Bible of narrative dressing and treating it as a "one-dimensional text" (Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 24–25).

<sup>13</sup> Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 75.

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 194.

<sup>15</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 66.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*.

over against ideas—the latter is intrinsic to the former.<sup>17</sup> Thus, if proposals for specific central themes in Scripture can be criticized as reductionistic, then proposals of summary plot-lines are equally open to the charge and for the same reasons. Why are particular events (and the ideas and responsibilities entailed by them) selected instead of others?

Second, plot-line alone might not sufficiently summarize the message of Scripture, nor describe its fundamental heartbeat, because not all Scripture is narrative. Neither the NT epistles nor what is the bane of nearly all proposed centers of biblical theology—the Wisdom literature—is easy to fit into a concise storyline. Furthermore, while the vast majority of Scripture comes to us in narrative form and there are strong grounds for considering Scripture as cast in a purposefully narrative framework, nevertheless these observations cannot, by themselves, fully ground a decision to rely solely on storyline as a way of delineating *in nuce* the message of the Bible. 99.998% of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is presented in the form of journal entries, with only a paragraph-long preamble and page-long “note” written by Jonathan Harker as a conclusion. Yet despite the numerical minuteness of the occurrence of these two forms, they may be the interpretive key to the whole book. Why are the journals available for us to read? Who compiled them? How can we be sure of their contents? Might we even question who the crazed monster in Stoker’s work really is? Narrative may dominate Scripture, but we may be justified in seeking to provide more than a plot-line in our effort to summarize the heart and essence of Scripture.

The insufficiency of a storyline on its own to adequately summarize the whole counsel of God is no reason to ignore the narrative aspect of Scripture. Rather, storyline can be an effective means of communicating the whole counsel of God *when the key concepts and commands arising from the storyline itself are also explicitly noted and highlighted*. An adequate proposal for a center to biblical theology, or more preferably, to use the language of Acts 20:27, a sufficient summary of the whole counsel of God, will link these elements together—plot, theme(s), responsibilities—in its formulation. These themes and demands should be the very ones suggested by the points in the plot-line we spotlight (e.g., the creator/created dynamic arising out of the event of the creation), but they must be highlighted or acknowledged *as concepts, ideas, and propositions* with particular *duties and responsibilities* implied therein.<sup>18</sup>

It is true that elements of biblical plot have often been neglected within the church. We ought not to be content merely with outlining main themes and ideas. But if we emphasize that meaning cannot be abstracted from story, then we must equally acknowledge that story necessarily conveys meaning. The synthesis of plot, themes, and responsibilities is what forms an adequate summary of the message of Scripture, and it is the goal and object of the search for a center to biblical theology.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140, suggests that “stories are a key worldview indicator,” which may, in fact, “carry, or be vehicles for, authority.”

<sup>18</sup> We ought explicitly to add “responsibilities,” bearing in mind Jon D. Levenson’s observation that while duty to God is “a theme that occupies most of the biblical materials, legal, prophetic, and sapiential alike,” yet it is conspicuously absent from lists of commonly proposed “centers” to OT (or biblical) theology (“Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology,” in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* [ed. J. Neusner et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 299).

<sup>19</sup> For convenience (unless context clearly specifies otherwise), the term “center” will be used in the rest of this essay as shorthand for a summary of the message of Scripture in terms of plot, theme, and responsibility.

### 3.3. Two Important Precedents

Before moving on to reflect upon key aspects of the search itself (i.e., the means by which and the manner in which we might perform the search), we might note that there are two important precedents for this fusion of plot, theme, and responsibility as a way of summarizing Scripture to be used as a heuristic tool by God's people. The first comes from Jesus himself, the second from the early church.

First, in a well-known passage at the end of Luke, we are told that Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to comprehend "the Scriptures," saying, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:45–47). Note two things: (1) Jesus presents a concise summary of "the Scriptures," offering what could be considered the core of what "is written." (2) This core consists of a plot (the story of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, and a proclamation beginning in Jerusalem and moving outward), a theme (repentance for the forgiveness of sins), and responsibilities (repentance, proclamation).

Second, ante-Nicene theologians (esp. Tertullian and Irenaeus) spoke of a "Rule of Faith," which they viewed as being both derived from and serving deeper reflection on Scripture.<sup>20</sup> Tertullian offers one variation of this Rule:

The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right (hand) of the Father, destined to come to judge quick and dead through the resurrection of the flesh as well (as of the spirit). (*Virg.* 1)<sup>21</sup>

The rule was viewed as "the sum content of apostolic teaching"<sup>22</sup> and functioned as a guide to fruitful and appropriate reading of Scripture. Irenaeus mentions for illustrative purposes individuals who stitch together Homeric verses to form a narrative, or *ὑπόθεσις*,<sup>23</sup> which though understandable and perhaps appealing, is nevertheless quite foreign to Homer. A familiarity with Homer's genuine *ὑπόθεσις* would enable readers to detect the labors of an opportunistic imposter. For Irenaeus, "the rule of the truth" (τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἀληθείας) functions as the correct roadmap or storyline (*ὑπόθεσις*), helping believers to discern faithful biblical interpretation from the charlatan's distorted formulations (see *Haer.* 1.9.4).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For further description of the nature and function of the Rule of Faith in ante-Nicene Christianity, see Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. K. J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 703–4; and esp. Paul M. Blowers, "The *regula fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," *ProEccl* 6 (1997): 199–228.

<sup>21</sup> This translation is from ANF, vol. 4. Tertullian offers a longer and more explicitly Trinitarian version of the Rule in *Praescr.* 13.

<sup>22</sup> Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," 703.

<sup>23</sup> The sense in which Irenaeus uses the term *ὑπόθεσις* is debated, but, citing Richard Norris and Robert Grant in support, Blowers believes it is best rendered as "storyline" or "plot" (esp. when it is used in this passage with respect to Homer).

<sup>24</sup> Earlier in the same work, Irenaeus uses the illustration of a mosaic which can be arranged to form the image of either a king or a fox or dog (*Haer.* 1.8.1). Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," 703, explains, "In the ancient world, unassembled mosaics were shipped with the plan or key (*hypothesis*) according to which they were

The Rule of Faith offers four important parallels with the present proposal. First, it seeks to offer a narrative digest of Scripture. Second, it combines plot (moving through creation, fall, redemption, and restoration),<sup>25</sup> themes (creation, sin, salvation, etc.), and responsibility (as a creedal statement). Third, it was used as a kind of framework or guide for further fruitful reflection on Scripture, a kind of heuristic lens through which the people of God may discover truth.<sup>26</sup> Fourth, as Paul Blowers has argued persuasively, ante-Nicene theologians were not interested in using the Rule merely as a useful guide for biblical instruction and interpretation or as a way to fend off error, but also in the formation of Christian identity, that is, in shaping believers' "storied" existence as themselves part of the biblical story.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the Rule of Faith was formulated and passed on within the context of pastoral care for the people of God.

There are, therefore, at least two important precedents for the kind of proposal being advanced here, which identifies the search for a center to biblical theology as the effort to distill the Bible's message through plot, themes, and responsibilities. All of this merely begs the question, however, of how to discern and determine which themes and responsibilities and which turning points in the Bible's plot-line to emphasize. Thus, it is to the process of the search itself that we now must turn.

#### ***4. The Process of the Search: Selecting Key Points and Stating Context-Driven Purposes***

Carson, though rejecting the search for a center as "chimerical," nevertheless acknowledges that "inevitably the texts themselves will force a hierarchializing of unifying themes."<sup>28</sup> But how does the text provide such "forcing"? More to the point, is it the text doing the forcing or the interpreter? Is the process whereby certain events and themes move into the interpretive and proclamatory spotlight a matter of interpretive imposition, mere arbitrariness, or something else?

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to be arranged." For Irenaeus, the Rule of Faith functions like such a key (ὑπόθεσις), with which Christians can produce the correct image of the King, rather than a fox or dog.

<sup>25</sup> Blowers, in particular, argues strongly for the narrative structure and dimensions of the Rule of Faith ("The *regula fidei*," 199–228).

<sup>26</sup> Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," 703, refers to the Rule as "a hermeneutical key for the interpretation of Scripture." Similarly, Blowers, "The *regula fidei*," 202, speaks of it functioning "as an hermeneutical frame of reference for the interpretation of Christian Scripture and Christian experience."

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Blowers, "The *regula fidei*," 214: "The handing on of articles of belief and the inoculation of the believer against heresy and apostasy inevitably figured prominently in the transmission of the Rule of Faith, but the most basic issue remained that of Christian *identity*, identification with and in a particular story that transcends all *local* particularities and aspires to universal significance."

<sup>28</sup> Carson, "New Testament Theology," 811. Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 76, is also quick to say that the need to address every part of Scripture "is not to say that every part of Scripture is of equal value."

#### 4.1. The Use of “Validation Tests” in the Selection of Key Points

In an appendix to an essay proposing “new creation” as the theological center of the NT, G. K. Beale reflects on the method involved in the search for a center to NT theology.<sup>29</sup> He offers four “validation tests” for determining the plausibility of various proposals, which provide helpful points of departure in identifying how certain elements in Scripture are brought to the fore. Proposals for a center must be (1) “more overarching” than other proposals; (2) related to the other major themes of the NT; (3) “integrally related to major Old Testament themes,” resting ultimately upon “a broad storyline” and rooted in Christ; and (4) individually examined. These four tests can be condensed into two broad criteria: comprehensiveness and integral relationship to the major themes of Scripture, especially the Bible’s plot-line and the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>30</sup> Both of these criteria may be criticized in different ways. In addressing the criticisms a way forward will emerge.

First, the concept of relatedness to other major themes is susceptible to the charge that the very identification of “major” themes is largely driven by cultural and historical factors. Perhaps our identification of “major” and “central” is, in fact, due to our seeing only what culture and historical location inclines us to see as major and central.<sup>31</sup> Just as, if not more significantly, Levenson adds, “It is difficult to resist the suggestion that the faith of the theologian is the greatest factor in his or her positing a center for the Old Testament.”<sup>32</sup> To what extent, then, can we really validate that a proposed center is at the heart of Scripture using the criterion of relatedness to other major themes?

Entering into the philosophical and hermeneutical quagmires uncovered by such lines of inquiry is far beyond the scope of this essay. But perhaps an observation, or more accurately a pondering, might lessen the force of this kind of objection. While there is surely much truth in the notion of culturally and confessionally conditioned identification (or failed identification) of biblical themes, nevertheless one might well wonder whether *some* themes are consistently identified, at least to some extent, across cultures and historical eras. For instance, are there significant and material overlaps between Augustine’s “city of God” and the kingdom of God we hear so often of in contemporary theological works? Are Aquinas’s “beatific vision” and Edwards’s supremely beautiful and worthy glory of God into which believers are engulfed two perspectives on what is largely the same thing? As Scobie has pointed out, it is striking how many of the various proposals for centers in the last century coalesce around a few major concepts, especially when the varied nature of the individuals suggesting these centers is

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<sup>29</sup> G. K. Beale, “The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology,” in *The Reader Must Understand: Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott; Leicester: IVP, 1997), 45–52. It should be noted that Beale uses the language of “center” in this article without specifying precisely what is meant by the term.

<sup>30</sup> The fourth test is really just a proposed method for the process of evaluation.

<sup>31</sup> Thus, e.g., John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–12, is intrigued that “certain interpretations [of Isaiah] became popular or influential at particular periods or in particular communities.” Cultural/contextual factors create atmospheres ripe for particular ways of handling Scripture.

<sup>32</sup> Levenson, “Jews,” 299.



considered.<sup>33</sup> There may be external evidence, therefore, that emphasizing certain themes and items in Scripture is not arbitrary or a practice purely in imposition.

Second, the idea of comprehensiveness might be rejected on two fronts: (1) there is no basis for relegating some elements of Scripture to mere sub-categories under other more comprehensive themes, and (2) even if there were a basis, it is extremely difficult to know what to subordinate under what. The first objection, that there is no basis for relegating some things underneath others, is particularly important to consider. Indeed, it is a problem faced even by so-called multi-perspectival approaches to biblical theology. For even multi-perspectivalists inevitably elevate certain themes (or stops along the plot-line) over others as somehow deserving of more attention; stated negatively, they reduce certain elements to a peripheral, subordinate role. But it is precisely the tendency toward hierarchy, to set some items in prominent and commanding positions and others in subordinate positions, which seems to be at the heart of much criticism of the search for centers. Thus, for example, Hasel is concerned that “single concepts, themes, ideas, or motifs . . . relegate essential aspects of the OT (or Biblical) faith to an inferior and unimportant position.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Blomberg complains that narrow proposals for a center “seem to exclude certain material within the canon or at least move certain books or portions of books to the periphery.”<sup>35</sup> Surely the same criticism could be leveled against any proposal that a multiplicity of ideas or “clusters of broadly common themes”<sup>36</sup> should be elevated as “major” while others are treated (implicitly) as “minor” and peripheral.<sup>37</sup>

For lack of a better term, this method of criticism could be referred to as a “marginalia critique.” Four things may be said in response to such a critique. First, Barr helpfully reminds us that selectivity is inevitable, and thus only on the criterion of exhaustiveness can the exclusion/omission of biblical elements in a proposal by itself be considered fatal.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 87. Barr, *Concept*, 340–43, is quite helpful on this count. He is struck by the fact that most proposals for biblical theological centers “may complement others or indeed may be combined with others.” He even speaks of “a sort of evolution” wherein later writers build upon and develop (not discard) previous proposals. In this case, the search for a center is more of an “ongoing discussion” than a sheer “contest,” such that “Talk about a ‘winner’ is a crude caricature.” Cf. also Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 159.

<sup>35</sup> Blomberg, “Unity and Diversity,” 66. Similarly, Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 187, in searching for a unified ethical vision in the NT, warns of making “the text speak univocally” since to do so “will at best limit our perception of the range of these witnesses and at worst produce distortion of their messages.” It seems that speaking of and emphasizing a supposed “center” (or “centers”) of Scripture carries with it the danger of muting the voices at the periphery.

<sup>36</sup> Carson, “New Testament Theology,” 810. Köstenberger, “Diversity and Unity,” 154, speaks of a “plurality of integrative NT motifs.”

<sup>37</sup> In this light, it is ironic that Scobie, after pronouncing the search for a center a failure, on the same page proposes that “when numerous suggestions for a single ‘center’ are examined, many similarities are to be observed, and the suggestions tend to fall into four major groupings” (*Ways of Our God*, 87). This is not to suggest that he is wrong about the “many similarities” between various proposals. But his subordinating of other themes as “sub-themes” under these four major groupings ultimately leads him into a criticism faced by single-theme proponents.

<sup>38</sup> Barr, *Concept*, 341–42.

Second, calling attention to the fact that certain things are at the periphery in a proposal for central events and themes is not a criticism of the proposal *per se*, but a recognition of the centering process in action. That is, the fact that some elements are at the margins while other elements are at the “center” in proposals for a center is a description not a criticism.

Therefore, third, proposals for centers should be criticized on other grounds. It may be that the very act of “peripherizing” is *de facto* unbiblical and sinful and that we should be absolutely and utterly egalitarian in our identifying, presenting, and attending to themes in Scripture. It may be that another articulation of plot, theme, and responsibility is deemed better. Or it may be that certain portions of Scripture (whether sentences, paragraphs, or whole books) actually contradict the proposal in question. But such criticisms are of a different sort than those arising from a marginalia critique.

Fourth, and most significantly, there are indications in Scripture itself that certain elements are to be prioritized. Dempster notes Jesus’ criticism in Matt 23:23 of the religious leaders of his day who neglected the “weightier matters of the law” for marginalia.<sup>39</sup> One might also point to prophetic statements that God desires obedience, loyalty, and knowledge of God *more than* sacrifice; to Micah’s summation of the Lord’s requirements in the three poles of justice, kindness, and humility; to the NT’s repeated summation of the Law in the greatest and second commandment or simply in the love commandment; and to Jesus’ insistence that the Law bears witness of him. It seems that there is no hesitation in Scripture to summarize large swaths of biblical material, and in that summary to prioritize and “hierarchialize,” such that some elements move into the spotlight while others slide to the periphery.

Thus, we need not reject the criterion of comprehensiveness. It may be that the process of identifying which elements properly fit underneath others is hard, complex, and laden with obstacles,<sup>40</sup> but this does not mean it is impossible. Multiple factors should weigh in on the decision. Repetition and representation in diverse portions of Scripture, while certainly not sufficient in and of itself, is a significant consideration.<sup>41</sup> Climactic portions of the biblical narrative would be key places to identify clusters of important events and ideas.<sup>42</sup> Integral relationship with other major themes has been shown to be a valid area for examination. And related to this is whether or not parallel suggestions have been made in the history of interpretation, which could be either different expressions of or perspectives on a substantive core, or the seed form of something one is trying to develop. All of these are helps in the task of identifying what clusters of themes, responsibilities, and elements on the plot-line are to be seen

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<sup>39</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> How, for instance, do kingdom and new creation relate? How do we determine if one should be subordinated under the other? Or is there another option available? The issue is quite knotty. This very difficulty may account for the change occurring from Beale’s 1997 essay cited earlier, to his 2002 essay “The New Testament and New Creation” (in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* [ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove: IVP, 2002]). In the former he speaks of “new creation” as the center of NT theology, but in the latter he refers to “the kingdom of the new creation” or a “new creational kingdom” as being the center.

<sup>41</sup> Kaiser, *Theology*, 33, points out that we need not restrict ourselves to searching for a single term, but have at our disposal a “constellation of terms.” Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), also notes the need to study “concepts, not just words” (6–8).

<sup>42</sup> In this respect, it may be helpful to consider the ways in which canonical structure at a macro-level may help orient us to key events and ideas. See, e.g., Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 23; see also John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 35–37, who discusses the significance and function of narrative or poetic “seams” in the Pentateuch.

as the most comprehensive and, therefore, highlighted in a sufficient summation of the Bible's message. But one further observation, related to the criterion of comprehensiveness, will aid in the task, while also providing a necessary focusing for a multi-perspectival approach.

#### **4.2. The Search within the Context of Particular Purposes and Agendas**

Beale, like many others, argues that “the center which is most comprehensive” is most likely to be the key thread in the biblical story.<sup>43</sup> However, it is interesting that he stops short of suggesting God as the best center. Surely this is the “most comprehensive” we can get. It is likely that Beale, along with the vast majority of others,<sup>44</sup> is unsatisfied with the broadest suggestion of all (“God is”) because he implicitly realizes that “at one level that is saying everything at another level it is saying almost nothing.”<sup>45</sup> Generalities have a way of evaporating substance. But an intentional setting forth of the particular purpose for which one proposes a dominant theme in Scripture helps in this regard, for it provides a frame, a handle, that purposefully (rather than arbitrarily) specifies and focuses the effort to be comprehensive.

A significant problem with multi-perspectival approaches is that they view the task of biblical theology in a one-sided manner. What is generally meant in the call to look at Scripture from multiple perspectives is viewing Scripture from the perspective of kingdom or the perspective of covenant or the perspective of Jesus—that is, from the perspective of various text-based concepts. Typically all that is emphasized is the object of observation and study, namely, the Bible. While this is valuable and necessary, it also seems to be only half of the picture. For observation and study necessarily involve observers and students, that is, us. And we examine Scripture with particular purposes in mind: making sense of suffering, caring for the environment, providing heuristic lenses for the church, addressing neglected elements of Scripture. In fact, it is inevitable that we come to Scripture with purposes and agendas. Perhaps acknowledging these purposes and agendas up front will go a long way in explaining why such diversity of themes can be identified as central in Scripture and may ultimately help in reconciling them with one another.

Furthermore, such purposes are usually, if not always, context-driven and context-sensitive. Rosner speaks of the need to “‘tell the old, old story’ in fresh and unexpected ways.”<sup>46</sup> We might add “in contextually sensitive ways,” that is, in ways that the moment and our callings demand. Thus, for a couple struggling with infertility, emphasizing the collocation of the themes of barrenness, suffering, promise, sovereignty, and prayer emerging in the patriarchal narratives, in the story of Hannah, and in the birth narratives of Jesus, may be a powerful, relevant, and necessary way of explicating the message of Scripture. Or when ministering within and to a church implicitly operating with largely Gnostic categories of thought and practice (reinforced in no small part by an increasingly digitized age in which “virtual reality” is comprehensible as part of our regular vocabulary), an appropriate summary of the

<sup>43</sup> Beale, “Eschatological Conception,” 45. See also Hays, *Moral Vision*, 189.

<sup>44</sup> Though cf. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 168, who states, “God/Yahweh is the dynamic, unifying center of the OT.” He calls this the “theological center,” which does not organize or systematize one’s reading of the OT, but merely provides its unifying principle.

<sup>45</sup> Carson, “New Testament Theology,” 810. Carson’s comment is specifically applied to the suggestion that Jesus Christ is the center of NT theology.

<sup>46</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 9.

biblical message may need to emphasize God's original act of creating a "very good" universe, the very physical nature of the Levitical cultic system, the danger posed during the monarchy not merely by the wrong ideas of the nations but also by the improper practices of the nations, the incarnation of the Word and his physical death and resurrection, the nature of sacraments and sacramental grace, the embodied nature of community in the early church, and the hope of new creation. All of this, of course, requires discernment, which assumes Spirit-dependence in our identification not only of emphasized and unifying themes in Scripture, but also of the various good purposes to which they may be applied. Furthermore, it makes the issue of describing the core message of the Bible more than a matter of utilizing different but equal metaphors. Different metaphors have different connotations, especially in differing contexts. The metaphor of Yahweh as king, though related to the metaphor of Yahweh as father, has differing emphases, and it would surely have differing images associated with it depending on the target culture.

Christopher J. H. Wright has perfectly illustrated what we are proposing here.<sup>47</sup> In arguing for a "missional" hermeneutical framework for reading Scripture, he acknowledges that "*any* framework necessarily 'distorts' the text to some degree." In fact, "The only way not to distort the biblical text is simply to reproduce it as it is."<sup>48</sup> Like maps of the world, summaries and hermeneutical frameworks necessarily do some kind of "distorting" of Scripture. But like maps, summaries of Scripture and frameworks for reading it are justified in this, inasmuch as they attempt "to simplify and clarify" the message and to open the door to further exploration of it. And just as a variety of different maps are useful for a variety of different contexts and aims (e.g., maps of London tourist attractions, maps of the London Underground, maps of London roadways), so also a variety of different summaries of Scripture may be useful in ministering to the people of God. Thus, Wright comments,

[A]ll world maps ('projections') compromise on where the unavoidable distortion occurs—the shape of the continents, or their relative area, or the lines of latitude and longitude, or distortion at the poles, or compass orientation and so on. The choice will depend on *who the map is for and what it is intended primarily to show*.<sup>49</sup>

The search for the center to biblical theology, that is, the search for a formulation of plot, themes, and responsibilities to adequately convey "the whole counsel of God," will best be performed when one acknowledges for whom the "map" is intended and for what ends it will be used.

## 5. Conclusion

To summarize, what has been argued thus far is that the search for a "center" to biblical theology is, at least, a pastoral concern. It is rooted in the desire to communicate to the church the whole counsel of God for their profit and benefit. It should seek to hold plot, theme, and responsibility inseparably together, and thus it resembles a version of multi-perspectival approaches. Both tend toward hierarchy, and both must fend off criticisms of reductionism. And while no biblical center has been proposed that is

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<sup>47</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. C. Bartholomew et al.; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 138–40.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, emphasis added.

fully satisfactory for a decisive majority, nevertheless, both the Bible and the history of its interpretation demonstrate centering tendencies. This suggests, therefore, that we are justified in continued attempts to tease out from Scripture a centering structure and a centering substance, a summarizing plot and a summarizing purpose, a particular theater in which particular themes are emphasized. All the while we must acknowledge that identifying themes and theaters to emphasize involves engaging both Scripture and the world. That is, the particular themes we choose to highlight are intimately related to the purposes and agendas that we seek to address.

To return, then, to the opening purpose and agenda in which this particular essay has been situated: What constitutes the best way of summarizing the message of Scripture, indeed “the whole counsel of God,” in the specific context of pastoral ministry? What basic, general hermeneutical lens ought we to provide for the people of God? Perhaps we might suggest the following: *The triune God is actively engaged in increasing (and incarnating) his presence among his people, a presence that entails for his people the responsibility of worship, in the fourfold story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.* This proposal constitutes both a theme and a responsibility (which are variously and diversely represented in Scripture) and a plot (which aligns with the climactic moments of, and key transitional portions in, Scripture, and is recapitulated throughout). It seems integrally related to other major events and themes in Scripture. And it has the advantage of aligning well with other proposals of the central message of Scripture, both contemporary proposals<sup>50</sup> and ones occurring in the broader history of interpretation.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of whether, in the final analysis, such a proposal will be considered convincing or distinctive, hopefully some of the questions raised and suggestions made here will be useful in advancing our ability to minister the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ to the church and the world.

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<sup>50</sup> Note, e.g., how Wenham’s proposal hits on the four major chapters of the Bible’s storyline (Wenham, “Appendix,” 712–13). Scobie’s fourfold schema of promise-proclamation-fulfillment-consummation also has noticeable parallels (Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 93–99).

<sup>51</sup> The proposed “fourfold story” shares the basic structure of the Rule of Faith and the ancient creeds. For discussion of some shared creedal core among the earliest Christian communities, see Peter Balla, *Challenges to New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Justify the Enterprise* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 199–207.

# The Dazzling Darkness of God’s Triune Love: Introducing Evangelicals to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar

— Stephen M. Garrett —

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Jürgen Moltmann observes that Christian theology and the Church face “a double crisis: the *crisis of relevance* and the *crisis of identity*.” When theology and the Church endeavor to be relevant to the surrounding pluralistic culture, they face a “crisis of their own Christian identity” because they are confronted with conflicting viewpoints. Yet the more they “assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rights and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become.”<sup>1</sup> Some respond by capitulating to the cultural ethos of the day becoming indistinguishable from the culture while others isolate themselves and withdraw into Christian ghettos failing to engage the culture.<sup>2</sup> Such responses seem to indicate a bifurcation between theology and the Christian life, between the theoretical and the practical.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, a prominent twentieth-century Swiss Catholic theologian and contemporary of Karl Barth, similarly criticized the Catholic theology of his day. He argued that “not only the faith but the heart, too, is wrapped up in a spiritless, conscientious and ultimately Pharisaical practice, a religion of dogmas and an enthusiasm for dogmas (the more that are defined, the better), a zeal for everything that can be seen, that is limited, calculable, and controlled.”<sup>3</sup> We should not understand such statements by Balthasar as anti-intellectual, a disdain for dogmatic theology, or a lack of concern for conceptual clarity in theological discourse as many of his critics maintain. Rather, his objections centered on contemporary theology’s assent to the false dichotomy between theology and the Christian life, for it is “contrary to the very conceptions of the Fathers to attempt to divide their works into those dealing with doctrine and those concerned with the Christian life (spirituality).”<sup>4</sup> How, then, are we to connect orthodoxy with orthopraxy, right thinking about God with right action?

Balthasar maintained that this presumed bifurcation between theology and the Christian life “has sapped the vital force of the Church today and the credibility of her preaching of eternal truth.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–15, 18–23.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Creator Spirit*, vol. 3 of *Explorations in Theology* (trans. Brian McNeil; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 502.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, vol. 1 of *Explorations in Theology* (trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 121.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

Professional theologians have unfortunately perpetuated this problem, according to Balthasar, since they pursue either a scientific dogmatic theology with the utmost precision or a spiritualized mystical theology characterized by platitudinous piety that lacks substance. Consequently, pastors and church leaders bear the brunt of this penury situation as they seek to address the concerns of their congregants with the truth of the gospel. Balthasar contended, though, that such matters could find resolution at the nexus of “wisdom and holiness.”<sup>6</sup>

Balthasar insisted, then, that we must reconsider the nature of theology in order to retrieve this unity between scholar and saint, between theology and the Christian life. Christian theology, according to Balthasar, “has always been, at its heights, a spiritual activity, aware not only of a rational and ethical but of an aesthetic responsibility to the relative proportions of the various parts of revelation.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, theology must have its center where revelation has its center, namely, in the living resurrected Christ mediated through Scripture and the Church. The pursuit of theology devoid of this Christological center is a bankrupt endeavor as theological discourse “draws attention to peripheral matters, or serves only human curiosity or vanity (and nothing is more vain than the human mind in its thinking).” Saints never lose sight of this fact, for “they give themselves to their work and world, while ‘praying at all times’ and ‘doing all to the glory of God’ (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Cor 10:31).”<sup>8</sup> True theology, therefore, has the person and work of Jesus Christ at its center that brings together both wisdom and holiness in the spirit of prayer.

Balthasar endeavored to follow this prescription by identifying Jesus Christ, who is the distinct speaking and doing form of God’s self-revelation, as the Lord of Glory (*Herrlichkeit*) and the form above all forms (*Übergestalt*).<sup>9</sup> His theological journey took him into the dazzling darkness of God’s triune love where “the splendor which breaks forth from this love of God . . . gives itself without remainder and is poured forth in the form of worldly powerlessness.”<sup>10</sup> This inbreaking and self-presentation of God in the world was a supreme act of his freedom that necessitated human action thereby instituting the most prodigious drama—God’s drama of redemption. Within all this, we come to see the structure of truth, God’s theologic, “which can indeed be nothing other than the discernment of being in the freedom of its self-revelation.”<sup>11</sup>

The preceding paragraph sketches the contours of Balthasar’s mature thought in the fifteen-volume English translation of his trilogy—*The Glory of the Lord* (7 vols.), *Theo-Drama* (5 vols.), and *Theo-Logic* (3 vols.). This essay can in no way articulate the complexity and nuances of his trilogy with any

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 187–94.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 195–96.

<sup>9</sup> One of the key concepts for understanding Balthasar’s Christology is his non-platonic use of the term *Gestalt* or form, which he formulates by drawing from a variety of sources like Christian von Ehrenfels and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Balthasar understands *Gestalt* as the dynamic appearance that expresses a unified whole found in the interrelation of parts in an external medium. The splendor of the internal depths of reality radiates through the external such that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, producing a unified meaning inconceivable in the parts alone. This expression of the invisible in and through the visible not only reveals but also conceals such that the invisible is not exhausted in the appearing. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, vol. 1 of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches; trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 30–31, 467. Subsequent references to *The Glory of the Lord* are abbreviated as *GL*.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, vol. 2 of *GL* (ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches; trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13.

degree of sufficiency. Although there are several gateways into Balthasar's theology, this essay seeks to explicate what I think to be one of the primary entry points, namely, what is meant by the dazzling darkness of God's triune love. Balthasar's theology is not systematic in the traditional sense where one can turn to a particular section and read his definitive take on a particular doctrine or issue (e.g., the Trinity, atonement, etc.). Rather, his theology is more symphonic in that he weaves together a variety of themes in order to demonstrate the interconnectedness of theology that results not simply in the mere contemplation of theology's object, namely, the triune God, but the actions required by those who properly perceive him in faith. The motifs covered in this essay resonate throughout his trilogy and even into many of his works beyond it, striking a prominent chord within the concerto of Balthasar's theology.

We begin, then, by providing a brief narrative context of his life that alludes to the impetus for much of his work, allowing us to frame the subsequent discussion on the dazzling darkness of God's triune love. The next section explicates Balthasar's notion of the dazzling darkness of God's triune love through what I call "divine eternal kenosis" that serves as the basis for all other kenotic movements, including Christ's decent into hell. Finally, we conclude by suggesting relevant points where evangelicals should critically yet charitably engage Balthasar's theology while offering resources in a postscript, both primary and secondary works, for further exploration.

### ***1. Formative Influences in the Life of Hans Urs von Balthasar***

Balthasar was born in Lucerne, Switzerland on August 12, 1905 into an aristocratic family of Hungarian descent. His childhood and early adolescent education occurred at a Benedictine abbey school in Engelberg, in the heart of the mountains, just outside Lucerne. While there, the influence of the Benedictine monks nourished his love of music, so much so that he published his first book at the age of twenty: *The Development of the Musical Idea: An Attempt at a Synthesis of Music* (1925).<sup>12</sup> Before finishing his secondary education in Engelberg, though, his parents moved and enrolled him in a Jesuit college in Feldkirch, Austria. Dissatisfied with his parents' decision, Balthasar finished his final examinations a year early and matriculated at the University of Zurich in *Germanistik*, an amalgam of German literature, philosophy, and linguistics, in 1923.<sup>13</sup>

Balthasar's studies, in pursuit of a doctorate, took him to important centers of learning such as Berlin and Vienna where he encountered the likes of Fr. Romano Guardini (Berlin), Rudolf Allers (Vienna), and Hans Eibl (Vienna). In October 1928, five years after enrolling, Balthasar completed his doctoral examinations and soon thereafter finished his final revisions on his dissertation entitled *The History of the Eschatological Problem in Modern German Literature*, which was published in 1930. Nearly one month later, he enrolled in the Jesuit novitiate where he studied the neo-scholastic manuals

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<sup>12</sup> Balthasar's love of music is an important theme throughout his life as his affinity for Mozart becomes a central conversation piece with his dear Protestant friend Karl Barth. Moreover, the influence of Christian von Ehrenfels upon Balthasar's understanding of Form (*Gestalt*) appeals to a dynamic, melodic notion that considers the form of given experiences as unified wholes. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, vol. 4 of *GL* (ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches; trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward, and Rowan Williams; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 30–31.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (ed. D. L. Schindler; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 7–44.



in preparation for ordination as a Jesuit priest.<sup>14</sup> During this time of preparation, he embarked upon the thirty-day *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola with some friends under the tutelage of Fr. Friedrich Kronseder where he experienced an unmistakable divine calling that changed the course of his life.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.1. The Calling of God on His Life

Balthasar's decision to enter the priesthood did not come without serious consideration since his contemporaries during his study of *Germanistik* considered it "a misfortune if someone apostatized and turned to the study of theology."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the Jesuit College at Feldkirch where he began his Jesuit studies was located in a predominately Protestant area hostile to the Jesuit cause. Yet, in an interview thirty years later, Balthasar recollected his "electing" experience that he described as "a kind of invisible theme of my life." He recalled his experience that day with a vividness not lacking in detail:

Today, thirty years later, I can still find the very tree along the lost path of a forest in the German part of the Black Forest not far from Basel under which I was struck by a sudden bolt of lightning. . . . It was neither theology nor the priesthood that forced itself at that time on my spirit; it was only this: You have nothing to choose, you are called. You will not serve, but others will make use of your service; you have no plans to make, you are only a small stone in a mosaic designed long before you. I had only to "give up all and follow," without making my own plans, without wishes or anticipations. I had only to wait there expectantly and look out for the way I would be used. And that is how it happened.<sup>17</sup>

In the midst of this experience, Balthasar began to realize the implications of this divine encounter for his life: "When I once thought: so, God has given me complete certainty and has provided for me an exactly outlined mission, it struck me that he was free to turn it all on its head—in fact in a moment and in spite of the views and habits of the tool that I was."<sup>18</sup>

The importance of this divine call on Balthasar's life cannot be overstated, for "the key to 'understanding' his person as well as his work is this obedient Yes to the call to follow Christ. . . . Whatever von Balthasar has done since then can be grasped only as an activity *within* this original Yes to the call God made to him," as Werner Löser notes.<sup>19</sup> We see some of the implications of this experience when we compare the theses of the first of his major writings, *The Apocalypse of the German Soul* based in large part on his dissertation, and the aforementioned trilogy.

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<sup>14</sup> Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide through Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1998), ix–xv.

<sup>15</sup> See Werner Löser, "The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (ed. D. L. Schindler; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 103–20, for details regarding Balthasar's experience as well as how the *Exercises* influence his theology.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Pourquoi je me suis fait prêtre," in *Pourquoi je me suis fait prêtre* (ed. Jorge Sans Vila and Rarnón Sans Vila; Tournai: Desclée, 1961), 21; quoted in Werner Löser, "Being Interpreted as Love: Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Communio* 16 (1989): 479.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 479–80.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>19</sup> Löser, "Being Interpreted as Love," 482.

His first major work based on his dissertation sought to trace German thought, beginning with the German Idealism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, examining German poets from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Rainer Maria Rilke, and culminating with the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche and other German thinkers of the twentieth century. He surmised that the German soul is anthropocentric; that is, it seeks to construct one's understanding of self and the world *solely* from the vantage point of human subjectivity. Humanity is the measure of all things.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, he based his trilogy on the premise that human beings find meaning only when they transcend themselves in order to participate in God's divine reality, namely, the drama of redemption. Key to understanding this contrast and much of Balthasar's life and work is his divine calling. To be sure, though, other important figures aid him in fleshing out his thoughts.

### 1.2. Significant Philosophical, Theological, and Spiritual Influences

Erich Przywara, a Jesuit theologian whom Balthasar encountered in Munich in the early 1930s, was one of the seminal figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century debate regarding the *analogia entis* or the analogy of being—the idea that “between Creator and creature no similarity can be noted, however great it may be, without noting a greater dissimilarity.”<sup>21</sup> Balthasar learned from Przywara how to analyze the history of philosophy using the doctrine of *analogia entis*. Consequently, Balthasar appropriated Przywara's ontological position stressing the ever-greater dissimilarity between God and humanity no matter the similarity thereby opening space for genuine divine/human interaction. This human participation in the divine life became the cornerstone for Balthasar's theo-dramatics.

Another significant contemporary, whom Balthasar lionized, was Henri de Lubac whom he met while studying near Lyons, France. Balthasar drew deeply from de Lubac's encyclopedic knowledge of the patristic fathers, going on to write several monographs on the likes of Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, Augustine, and others. His study of these Church fathers surfaced again in his trilogy as he drew upon their works to establish a historical basis for his theological aesthetics. More importantly, though, de Lubac's influence, as well as Przywara's, enabled Balthasar to alleviate an intense dissatisfaction he had with his studies while preparing to become a Jesuit priest. Balthasar remarked, “My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation.”<sup>22</sup> This assessment of his Neo-Scholastic training along with his previous intuitions regarding his *Germanistik* studies became the impetus for his criticisms of Catholic theology mentioned at the outset of this essay. Yet he kept much of these thoughts to himself, becoming a Jesuit priest on July 26, 1936.

Balthasar's first assignment as a Jesuit priest came as a collaborator for the prestigious periodical *Stimmen der Zeit*, located in Munich near Ludwigstrasse where “the boots of the SS sounded ever more

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Geschichte des eschatologischen Problems in der modernen deutschen Literatur* (Zurich: University of Zurich, 1930), 7–9; *ibid.*, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele: Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen* (3 vols.; Salzburg: Pustet, 1937–1939). See also Edward T. Oakes's chapter, “Goethe, Nietzsche, and the Encounter with German Idealism,” in *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 72–101.

<sup>21</sup> Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis: Metaphysik, Ur-Struktur und All-Rhythmus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 251–54. See also Oakes's chapter “Erich Przywara and the Analogy of Being,” in *Pattern of Redemption*, 15–44, for a fuller survey.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Einleitung,” in *Erde und Himmel, Ein Tagebuch: Zweiter Teil II: Die Zeit der grossen Diktate* by Adrienne von Speyr (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975), 195.

loudly . . . and no ear could escape the loudspeakers that were set up everywhere in the city.”<sup>23</sup> Shortly thereafter, Balthasar’s superiors offered him the opportunity to serve as a chaplain at the University of Basel or as a professor teaching theology at the Pontifical Jesuit University in Rome, the renowned Gregorian University. Given Balthasar’s relative disdain for professional theologians and the shallow neo-scholastic theology of his day, he opted for serving as a chaplain. This decision took him to Basel, where he encountered two other figures and arguably the most influential—Karl Barth and Adrienne von Speyr.<sup>24</sup>

Karl Barth, acclaimed as one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, expressed mutual admiration for Balthasar as the two engaged in critical yet charitable dialogue regarding a whole host of theological issues. Balthasar gave lectures on Barth, in Barth’s presence, and would later publish those lectures in a monograph entitled *The Theology of Karl Barth*. In this seminal work on Barth, Balthasar identified Barth’s theology as “beautiful” as it stressed the objectivity of divine revelation, namely, God’s self-revelation in Christ, and drew our attention to the aesthetic side of existence, including divine revelation.<sup>25</sup> This admiration, though, did not preclude Balthasar from vigorously opposing Barth regarding, for example, the analogy of being, the narrowness of Barth’s Christocentrism, or the nature of the Church. Thus, much of Balthasar’s later writings were in direct response to Barth’s work. To be sure, though, Balthasar saw Barth as an advocate, as one who could be “like a Trojan horse to bring about change in Catholicism,” the kind of change that breathed vibrancy and life into the arid neo-scholasticism of his day.<sup>26</sup>

Both Balthasar and Barth possessed a profound spirituality evidenced by their commitments to overcome the bifurcation between theology and the Christian life. Balthasar seemed to take a more mystical approach, acknowledging that Adrienne von Speyr, a medical doctor and mystic whom he converted to Catholicism, had more of an impact on his life than any other.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, her terrifying visions of Christ’s descent into hell, which she received while taking the Eucharist, found their way into Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday.<sup>28</sup> Her visions and mystical writings, though, were not viewed by the establishment as authentic or worthy of publication. As such, Balthasar found these

<sup>23</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Cultural and Theological Education,” in *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 11–18.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (trans. Edward T. Oakes; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 400. For a meticulous discussion regarding this important friendship, see either Stephen D. Wigley, *Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Critical Engagement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007) or John Webster, “Balthasar and Karl Barth,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241–55.

<sup>26</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1976), 362. These remarks are Barth’s words that recount Balthasar’s personal comments to him regarding the value of his theology.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981). Some believe that Balthasar’s attribution of Speyr’s influence upon him is a “chivalrous overstatement” that stems from the dismissive treatment of her mystical experiences by ecclesiastical authorities and other Jesuit priests (Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, xvii).

<sup>28</sup> For Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday, see especially his *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (trans. Aidan Nichols; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990).

dismissive attitudes appalling and determined to publish her work. In 1945, Balthasar and Speyr, with the financial backing of a friend from Einsiedeln, collaborated to form the Johannes Verlag, a publishing house to print and distribute her writings.<sup>29</sup>

Balthasar's Jesuit superiors did not approve of this endeavor, so they gave him an ultimatum to either abandon his pursuits or be disbanded from the Jesuit Society. After much prayer and consideration, Balthasar determined to leave the priesthood in February 1950, knowing the full ramifications of his decision. This decision caused him an immense amount of grief as he was further isolated from the ecclesiastical establishment and pushed to the margins.<sup>30</sup> From this point forward, though, Balthasar produced his massive trilogy, a work of enormous range and complexity that winds its way through the dazzling darkness of God's triune love. It is this motif to which we now turn.

## ***2. The Dazzling Darkness of God's Triune Love***

Balthasar, following his conviction that theology needs an objective center, identifies Jesus Christ as the Lord of Glory (*Herrlichkeit*) and the form above all forms (*Übergestalt*). These designations assume three things, according to Balthasar. First, God "is the infinitely free agent who, in his freedom, invents a world and, also in his freedom, creates that world." As Lord, God is Wholly Other than his creation thereby controlling the form and content of his communicative actions to his creation. In other words, God determines how and what he communicates of himself to his creation. Thus, "he is the triune God who in Jesus Christ becomes man."<sup>31</sup>

Second, while interpreting Rom 1:19–20, Balthasar underscores the utter dissimilarity between God and his creation (i.e., the Creator-creature distinction). In doing so, he stresses the importance of God's glory shining in and through the form of his creation so that his creatures might be able to see it. Further emphasizing this point, Balthasar remarks that the glory seen in creation "is the glory of *God* and not of the world, since it is precisely such confusion that at once leads to the terrible fall which results from confusing God's glory with the 'likeness' (*ὁμοίμα*) of the 'form' (*εἰκὼν*)."<sup>32</sup>

Third, the revelation of God in Christ is not the "prolongation" or "intensification" of his revelation in creation. Rather, it brings together the "heavenly and earthly, which is thus endowed by grace with a crown, the radiance of whose glory belong[s] to the *Kyrios* of the world." God's revelation in creation prepares the way for his self-revelation in Christ such that Christ is the "perfection of the form of the world."<sup>33</sup> This perfection, though, is seen only by faith "as the appearing of the triune God" and "is the

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<sup>29</sup> Johannes Verlag was created as part of The Community of St. John, which Balthasar and Speyr founded in 1945 as "a secular institute or society of consecrated life for lay people living the world as also for diocesan priests. The Community of St. John became more widely known three years later when Balthasar produced a theology for secular institutes, the first book published by Johannes Verlag" (Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, xvii). For an intimate glimpse at the inner workings of this community, see Maximilian Greiner's interview, "The Community of St. John: A Conversation with Cornelia Capol and Martha Gisi," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (ed. D. L. Schindler; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 87–102, with two of its founding members.

<sup>30</sup> Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar," 19–28.

<sup>31</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:429.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:430–31.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:431.

crowning recapitulation of everything in heaven and on earth.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Jesus Christ, not humanity, is the measure of all things.

Building upon these presuppositions, Balthasar answers the question, “why is there something rather than nothing,” theologically, giving a *theological basis* to the transcendentals of being (i.e., the true, the good, and the beautiful).<sup>35</sup> In doing so, he subdivides objective revelation into two related yet distinct parts, revelation in creation and in Christ.<sup>36</sup> The first, revelation in creation, manifests God’s glory in and through the created order such that our existence is to be understood as a gift. The glory of God in creation anticipates and foreshadows the second, the manifestation of God’s glory in the incarnation where the Word of God comes in the form of a human being (Phil 2:6). What appears, then, in the hypostatic union of Christ, according to Balthasar, is “the becoming visible and experienceable of the God who is himself triune” whereby the Christ-form (*Gestalt Christi*) manifests the form of God (*Gestalt Gottes*) in the glory of the triune God.<sup>37</sup> What, though, does Balthasar mean by divine glory?

### 2.1. Balthasar’s Theological Interpretation of Scripture

Balthasar remarks that the “Bible is full of statements about God’s glory, and the passages and vistas are far more numerous than most believers realize: glory is a fundamental statement that leavens all of Scripture.”<sup>38</sup> That being the case, Balthasar connects the glory of God’s revelation in creation and in Christ via the tabernacle and the temple: “In this way the form of the world itself, which as such already was the revelation of the divine δόξα, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit poured out through him becomes a temple which, like the tabernacle and Solomon’s edifice, harbors within and above itself the *kâbôd* of God.”<sup>39</sup> By typologically connecting the *כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה* with the δόξα-Χριστοῦ, Balthasar begins to illumine what he means by the dazzling darkness of God’s triune love.

This *כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה* to which Balthasar refers, is also the same glory present in the cloud and fire that leads the nation of Israel both day and night through the wilderness (Exod 13:21; 40:38). Balthasar sees a

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1:432.

<sup>35</sup> Though the concept has roots prior to the Scholastics, Thomas Aquinas brought theological weight to the notion of the transcendentals of being by elevating God over all being. Aquinas distinguished between two different types of properties, namely, categories and transcendentals. Categories are predicated of certain kinds of being while transcendentals are predicates of all being. Umberto Eco states that the transcendentals “are a bit like differing visual angles from which being can be looked at. This is why they differ from one another conceptually . . . . But each transcendental is nonetheless the whole of being and is found in everything that exists” (*The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* [trans. Hugh Bredin; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988], 21). Thus, for Aquinas, the real was a multifaceted existence consisting of unity, truth, goodness, and beauty, unlike Hume and Kant, who *projected* these on to being via the human mind. Aquinas’s development of the transcendentals was significant for Balthasar as he christologically appropriated them, thereby enabling him to distinguish between God’s glory and earthly beauty.

<sup>36</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:429–33.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1:432. Christ is not an instance of some “general class” of *Gestalt* under which Balthasar subsumes the incarnation. Rather, he employs an amalgam of concepts to explicate God’s divine revelation in Christ. John Saward makes the point: “A *Gestalt* is something concrete and objective, with a unity that is more than the sum of its parts. Applied Christologically, it signifies the incarnate form, the real flesh and blood figure of Jesus as expressing the inexhaustible glory of God’s triune love (*The Mysteries of March* [London: Collins, 1990], xix).

<sup>38</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 4:11.

<sup>39</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:439.

dialectic between the deep and threatening darkness of the cloud and the blinding and consuming light of the fire. Consequently, "if the first sort of appearance has on the people the effect of the absolutely *tremendum*, then the second sort is the *fascinosum*."<sup>40</sup> We see both of these phenomena in the life of Moses. First, the Israelites trembled with fear at the thunder and lightning emanating from the thick dark cloud on Mt. Sinai when Moses receives the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:19–21). Second, Moses is consumed with the fire of the unconsumed bush that draws him to it, piquing his interest in this marvelous sight (Exod 3). These phenomena converge, according to Balthasar, to form the *כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה*, which is the manifest presence of God "in the form of fire and wrapped in 'the' cloud" that fills the tabernacle and establishes the covenant cultic practices of Israel (Exod 40:34–38).<sup>41</sup> Therefore, within the *כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה* a dazzling within the darkness exists that allures yet humbles.

Balthasar identifies these same themes typologically in the *δόξα-Χριστοῦ*, revealed definitively when God the Father glorifies his Son on the cross. The Christ-form integrates the darkness of the cross and descent into hell with the trinitarian love of God such that "the form which gives expression to the meaning of a radically sinful existence which yet stands under the sign of the hope for redemption . . . takes the modalities of fallen existence upon itself so as to transvalue them by redemptive suffering."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the *awful* suffering of Christ on the cross not only indicates the radical nature of our sin but also indicates the *awe-full* hope of redemption.

We should by no means conclude, at this point, that Balthasar is glorifying suffering. Rather, Balthasar is drawing our attention to that fact that Jesus Christ radiates the splendor of God's glory because he is perfectly in tune with the Father's will, obeying the Father even unto death and thereby fulfilling his mission to the world (John 17). *This is the beauty of Christ's holiness*. There is, thus, a dazzling within the darkness of the *δόξα-Χριστοῦ*, something that is alluring within the tragic, when the Father through the Spirit glorifies the Son in his death and descent into hell that reveals the triune love of God for us in Christ's glorious resurrection. In turn, God draws humanity to himself in the humbleness of faith.<sup>43</sup>

We have mentioned on several occasions that God's triune nature is manifested in and through the Christ-form. Yet what does Balthasar mean by this? To be sure, Jesus Christ, who makes the invisible God visible, "appears in such a way that this polarity reveals itself to us as a personal relationship within God's very nature," manifesting a dialogical I-Thou relationship characterized by lordliness and holiness in the bond of love.<sup>44</sup> According to Balthasar, though, the kenosis evidenced by Christ (Phil 2:6) also reveals a primal *eternal* kenosis within the Godhead that "makes possible all other kenotic movements of God into the world."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology: The Old Covenant*, vol. 6 of *GL* (ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches; trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis and Brian McNeil; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 42.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:43.

<sup>42</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:460.

<sup>43</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology: The New Covenant*, vol. 7 of *GL* (ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches; trans. Brian McNeil; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 264–317.

<sup>44</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:610; 7:115–61, 439.

<sup>45</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Action*, vol. 4 of *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (trans. Graham Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 331; subsequent references to *Theo-Drama* are abbreviated as *TD*. The consequent kenotic moments that Balthasar understands as proceeding from this primal moment are creation

This intratrinitarian kenosis is the total self-giving of the Father where “the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son” (John 14:26; 16:13–15).<sup>46</sup> The Son’s response is one “of eternal thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to the Father, the Source—a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father’s original self-surrender.” The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son such that he is “common to both as the essence of love . . . maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it and, since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it.”<sup>47</sup> This infinite distance within the Godhead serves as the basis for the *possibility*, not only of other kenotic events within the economy, but also of “every other separation—be it never so dark and bitter.”<sup>48</sup> What might be the significance, then, not only of the dazzling darkness of God’s triune love but also of this “divine eternal kenosis” for Balthasar’s theology?

## 2.2. Importance to Understanding Balthasar

It may seem that the preceding paragraphs are rather esoteric. To be sure, Balthasar’s theology has its own rhythm and style that requires diligent study; “for those up to the challenge, von Balthasar’s theology points the way up a steep path.”<sup>49</sup> Yet Balthasar knows this, expecting much from his readers: “The most demanding thing of all is also the loveliest. The hardest thing turns out to be—because it is love—an ‘easy burden and a yoke that is light.’ Finally . . . in God’s eyes, love has become the manifestation of divine freedom, proven in the fusion of claim, Cross and Resurrection. Only here can Being itself be loved as love.”<sup>50</sup>

That being the case, Balthasar likens the “begetting” within God’s triune life as the “absolute self-giving,” providing explanation for what it means to say that God is love.

Its result can only be the total acceptance of, and a total responding gift to, the origin.

The “love” of giving back in return can never be less than that of the begetting. From this we conclude that the interpenetration of love elicits that identity of love, equally powerfully in all three Persons, [for] God is love and nothing else.<sup>51</sup>

God’s revelation of himself to Moses in the burning bush as the identity of being finds its fullest expression in Jesus Christ who reveals God’s triune life as love, which would otherwise not be known. God unveils in Jesus Christ “an inner vitality in which the transcendentals are identified with his identity,” for “there is no possibility of separating the life of the three Persons from God’s essence. This essence is no fourth element, [though,] something common to the three Persons. Rather, it is their eternal life itself in its procession.”<sup>52</sup> For Balthasar, then, God’s *esse* is his *essentia*, affirming God’s divine simplicity such that God *is* true, good, and beautiful.

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and incarnation, which culminates in the ultimate kenotic event—Christ’s death on the cross and descent to hell (see *TD*, 4:317–61 and *Mysterium Paschale*, 23–36).

<sup>46</sup> Balthasar, *TD*, 4:323.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:324.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:325.

<sup>49</sup> Löser, “Being Interpreted as Love,” 489.

<sup>50</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Warum ich noch ein Christ bin,” in *Zwei Plädoyers* (ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner; Munich: Kösel, 1971), 52; quoted in Löser, “Being Interpreted as Love,” 489–90.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilogue* (trans. Edward T. Oakes; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 93.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

Christ, for Balthasar, is the one who integrates and unveils the true, the good, and the beautiful so that he can communicate to us God's life of love found within the eternal processions of the Godhead. God's giving of himself, then, becomes the focal point of the divine being since his self-showing and self-saying culminate in his self-giving. On this basis, Balthasar asserts, "Being itself here unveils its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall at last on that other mystery: Why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light and truth and goodness and beauty."<sup>53</sup>

Is Balthasar's understanding of kenosis and subsequent extrapolation back into the eternal life of God consistent, though, with his own claims regarding divine simplicity? Can he maintain the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity as he so desires? And is his understanding of kenosis consistent with the biblical testimony? These are the kinds of questions that probe the depths of the dazzling darkness of God's triune love in Balthasar's theology, raising important questions for evangelicals.

### ***3. Engaging the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar***

There is much that evangelicals can affirm with Balthasar. For example, evangelicals can concur with Balthasar's Christocentrism as a proper theological starting point for attending to God's divine revelation because Christ is the exegesis of the Father, for "no one has ever seen God; it is only the Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart who *autos exegēsato*" (John 1:18).<sup>54</sup> Evangelicals can also echo Balthasar's high regard for the biblical text: "Scripture is the Word of God and not the word of the Church, but it is the Word which the Church, by her meditation in faith, carries in her womb and really brings forth, giving it birth in the world."<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Balthasar's commitment to the Creator-creature distinction, the goodness of creation, the ontological priority of the immanent Trinity, and Chalcedonian orthodoxy all harmoniously resound within the halls of evangelicalism.

#### **3.1. Critical Analysis**

Evangelicals, however, should also have some reservations. To date, there is a lively and ongoing debate regarding Balthasar's understanding of Holy Saturday—Christ's descent into hell—where questions about Christ's purpose in descending and whether Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday is heterodoxy or a new development in theology are vigorously debated.<sup>56</sup> Most troubling, in my estimation,

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<sup>53</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:158.

<sup>54</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "God Is His Own Exegete," *Communio* 4 (1986): 280.

<sup>55</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 1:539.

<sup>56</sup> Much, of course, has been made of his controversial theology of Holy Saturday and Christ's descent into hell found in his work, *Mysterium Paschale*. See Alyssa L. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Edward T. Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007): 184–99; and David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004). See also the rather lively exchange between Oakes and Pitstick in "Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange," *First Things* (December 2006): 25–32 and *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009): 195–216, where John Webster and Lauber charitably engage with Pitstick, seeking to frame the discussion dogmatically. Pitstick continues the conversation with Gavin D'Costa in the following two articles: Alyssa Pitstick, "Development of Doctrine or Denial? Balthasar's Holy Saturday and Newman's *Essay*," *International Journal of*



is Balthasar's version of kenotic theology (which is at the heart of this debate) that has divine eternal kenosis as its central tenet. This core element of his kenotic theology seems to undermine God's unity of action, misappropriate the biblical understanding of Christ's kenosis, blur the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, and purport a synergistic understanding of salvation that precludes the evangelical notion of *sola gratia*. Before elaborating on these concerns, we need to know in brief how Balthasar explicates the relationship between divine and human freedom.

### 3.2. God's Unity of Action

Balthasar's notion of infinite difference within the eternal Godhead entails an infinite mutual freedom—what he calls the *Urdrama* of the Trinity—so that the Father and the Son have the freedom to be who they are. Human freedom within the world drama presupposes and finds its basis in this *Urdrama*. In short, God is free necessarily while humans are free contingently. Balthasar surmises: “Unlike God, the world, and finite freedom within it, will not have its ground in itself, not even in an ‘idea’: its ground is exclusively in God's freedom.” That being the case, “being totally dependent on divine freedom, the world can receive its possibility and reality nowhere else but in the eternal Son, who eternally owes his divine being to the Father's generosity.”<sup>57</sup> In contrast to the solipsistic freedom found in modern Western societies today, which understands freedom as freedom *from* some constraint or authority, Balthasar's notion of human freedom is contingent upon divine freedom and is best understood as freedom *for* something or someone.<sup>58</sup> Such a notion of freedom is commendable as human freedom takes shape in the relational and personal, exhibiting its humble, servant orientation as a gift from the triune God.<sup>59</sup> Yet what shape does divine freedom take?

Balthasar's notion of divine eternal kenosis, which is the basis for the possibility of creation and human freedom, seems to undermine his trinitarian theology as he struggles to maintain God's unity of action (Deut 6:4–5). Recall Balthasar's description of the Father's freedom whereby “the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead.”<sup>60</sup> In doing so, the Father divests himself of his “entire substance,” handing it over to the Son. This creates what John Milbank calls a “suspended middle” such that “the personal character of the divine essence . . . is forgotten when von Balthasar so reduces the Trinitarian persons to free centers of being.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Balthasar struggles to articulate “what it means to think of one act of love throughout the dramatic processes he evokes,” moving toward

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*Systematic Theology* 11 (2009): 129–45 and Gavin D'Costa, “The Descent into Hell as a Solution to the Problem of the Fate of Unevangelized Non-Christians: Balthasar's Hell, the Limbo of the Fathers, and Purgatory,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009): 146–71.

<sup>57</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2 of *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God* (trans. Graham Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 261.

<sup>58</sup> Servais Pinckaers gives a helpful description of this solipsistic freedom found predominately in Western societies, labeling it as “the freedom of indifference” (*The Sources of Christian Ethics* [trans. Mary Thomas Noble; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995], 327).

<sup>59</sup> For further discussion regarding this view of freedom, see the essays in Colin Gunton, ed., *God and Freedom* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1995) and Alexander J. McKelway, “The Freedom of God and Human Liberation: The Structure of Divine Freedom,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 9 (1988): 197–210.

<sup>60</sup> Balthasar, *TD*, 4:323.

<sup>61</sup> John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 74.

“something a bit like tritheism (the mutual worship of persons as Balthasar proposes)” thereby implicitly questioning God’s divine simplicity.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, this eternal and complete divestiture initiated by the Father, received and responded to by the Son, creates an infinite difference between them held together only by the bond of the Spirit. Such a notion not only borders on the precipice of incomprehensibility but also further questions how the triune God can act as one.

### 3.3. Christ’s Kenosis and the Immanent/Economic Trinity

Turning to the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, Balthasar rightly affirms the ontological priority of the immanent Trinity in his kenotic theology. In doing so, the immanent Trinity, understood as “that eternal, absolute self-surrender whereby God is seen to be, in himself, absolute love . . . explains his free self-giving to the world as love, without suggesting that God ‘needed’ the world process and the Cross in order to become himself.”<sup>63</sup> Such an assertion presumes Balthasar’s commitment to the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity whereby “we know about the Father, Son, and Spirit as divine ‘Persons’ only through the form and disposition of Jesus Christ. Thus we can agree with the principle, often enunciated today, that it is only on the basis of the economic Trinity that we have knowledge of the immanent Trinity and dare to make statements about it.”<sup>64</sup>

Balthasar surmises, though, that “a way must be found to see the immanent Trinity as the ground of the world process (including the crucifixion) in such a way that it is neither a formal process of self-communication in God, as in Rahner, nor entangled in the world process, as in Moltmann,” if we are to retain our commitment to divine impassibility. His solution is the aforementioned notion of divine eternal kenosis whereby “the Father’s self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial ‘kenosis’ within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis.”<sup>65</sup> Yet his notion of divine eternal kenosis, drawn from Phil 2:5–8, seems to go beyond the biblical witness that speaks only of the Son’s self-emptying and not the Father’s, thereby equivocating on the meaning of kenosis and confusing the particularity of the Son with the Father. What, though, might the apostle Paul mean by the Son’s self-emptying?

The meaning of the Son’s self-emptying is a rather contested notion where some interpret Christ’s kenosis as a complete divestiture of his divinity while others see an abdication of only some of his divine attributes.<sup>66</sup> Gordon Fee contends, though, that Paul’s use of the term *μωρφή* in Phil 2:6–7 provides us

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<sup>62</sup> Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and the Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (ed. David Moss and Edward T. Oakes; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 50.

<sup>63</sup> Balthasar, *TD*, 4:323.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, vol. 3 of *TD* (trans. Graham Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 508.

<sup>65</sup> Balthasar, *TD*, 4:322–23. See also Balthasar’s *Mysterium Paschale*, where he gives a fuller account of his kenotic reasoning regarding Christ’s death on the cross and its link with the incarnation (11–48).

<sup>66</sup> For a survey of the relevant issues surrounding Kenotic Christology, see the essays in C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

with an important clue to understanding not only “the real act of the Son,” as T. F. Torrance remarks,<sup>67</sup> but also Christ’s self-emptying. The term μορφή, according to Fee, does not denote “the external features by which something is recognized, but of those characteristics and qualities that are essential to it. Hence it means *that which truly characterizes a given reality*.”<sup>68</sup> Paul’s use of the word in this context connotes metaphorically, then, the reality or essential quality of the mind of Christ (2:5) both as God and as man. Thus, Christ expresses in becoming a human being an essential quality of being God, namely, the giving of himself for the sake of others.<sup>69</sup>

The incarnate Son’s kenosis discloses the very identity of God, the fact that the triune God is not selfish; and as such, we should emulate his humble attitude. God “as love . . . is pure altruism, looking not on (or at) his own things, but at the things of others. From this point of view, the idea of *kenōsis* is revolutionary for our understanding of God.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, with Balthasar, we can concur that God is self-giving love, but it seems best to demur from attributing eternal kenotic moments to all the trinitarian Persons to delineate such love. Otherwise, the economic Trinity, as the summary of the gospel, seems to be *constitutive* rather than *communicative* of God’s eternal identity, calling into question Balthasar’s adherence to the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity.

### 3.4. Sin and Grace

Evangelicals should also demur from Balthasar’s doctrine of sin and understanding of prevenient grace. Balthasar submits to traditional Catholic dogma, noting that though our “turn toward God can have various levels, it always occurs *praeveniente gratia* [with God’s prevenient grace]” as Vatican I affirms: “For the most merciful Lord stirs up and helps with his grace those who are wandering astray, so that they may be able to come to a knowledge of the Truth.”<sup>71</sup> This notion of grace presumes that sin has brought spiritual sickness to humanity rather than death as Paul says in Eph 2:1. Humanity, according to Balthasar, has the ability to cooperate with God (i.e., synergism) or resist him, for “prevenient grace certainly is not lacking to man even in a single moment of his life.”<sup>72</sup> If God’s grace works in this way, to whom does the apostle Paul refer when he speaks of being enslaved to sin in Rom 6:16–23?

<sup>67</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert T. Walker; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 75.

<sup>68</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 204.

<sup>69</sup> See Richard Bauckham’s *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), where he argues that Jesus belongs not only to who God is by being equal but expresses such equality “in service, obedience, self-renunciation and self-humiliation for others.” Consequently, “this radical self-renunciation was his way of expressing and enacting equality with God, and *therefore* (v 9) it qualified him to exercise the unique divine sovereignty over all things” (58).

<sup>70</sup> Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 215.

<sup>71</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (trans. Edward T. Oakes; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 261–63, henceforth abbreviated as *KB*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 263. My critique follows an Augustinian and Reformed understanding of sin and grace, parsing divine and human freedom in light of God’s covenant with humanity. See Michael Horton’s *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) and *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). Balthasar’s notion of prevenient grace is akin to Arminian and Wesleyan understandings operative among evangelicals today. However, evangelical Arminians and Wesleyans may differ with Balthasar on how such grace is administered. No matter, this may well be an important point of engagement by evangelical Arminians and Wesleyans, which deserves further exploration.

Balthasar is correct in noting that the Fall does not erase or remove the image of God in human beings. Natural acts of morality are possible; yet, as a consequence of the Fall, they remain off the mark (i.e., in an Augustinian sense) because the depravity of humanity inhibits such actions from reaching their supernatural end, namely, the glory of God (Gen 6:5; Ecc 9:3; John 8:34; Rom 1:24; 2 Cor 4:4). Humanity, then, even with its natural faculties, is unable to direct its faculties and actions to their created end such that no one is able to do anything to please God—*non posse non peccare*—for sin deforms the very heart of human beings. It is precisely at this point that the deleterious effects of sin contaminate our natural faculties, causing us to twist and deny reality such that no amount of “natural” beauty, truth, or goodness can satiate us. Sin distorts and contorts our limited understanding of God, ourselves, and the world, for we see only a poor reflection and know in part what will be understood wholly only in the eschaton when we see God face-to-face (1 Cor 13:9–12).<sup>73</sup> What, then, of our sinful condition?

Balthasar contends for a prevenient grace that enables humanity to cooperate with God, leaving “room for all real events and phases that make up man’s way to God.”<sup>74</sup> If prevenient grace operates in the manner Balthasar suggests, allowing humanity a kind of autonomous freedom to say yes or no to the light of God’s divine revelation, why do some reject God and others do not? Is God’s glory not efficacious to transform the deformed heart of humanity such that humanity responds in faith (Eph 2:8–10; Heb 11)? The crux of the matter, for Balthasar, hinges on *humanity*, not God, for God has done his part and humanity has failed to do its. Such notions subvert the evangelical commitment to *sola gratia* and diminish God’s freedom.

Nevertheless, Balthasar’s theology deserves a hearing among evangelicals as his symphonic approach to theology invites readers to view old and current theological impasses in new ways. Let us conclude, then, by suggesting several implications of Balthasar’s thought for evangelical theology that might spur further engagement with Balthasar and perhaps enrich evangelical theological discourse.

#### 4. Conclusion

Balthasar has much to offer evangelicals. His theological aesthetics, which primarily appropriates aspects of Goethe’s notion of form (*Gestalt*) for theology, emphasizes the inseparable nature of form *and* content such that content is indiscernible without form and form is indiscernible without content. In other words, the “how” or manner in which God communicates himself becomes important for theology rather than simply the content or the “what” of God’s self-revelation. Balthasar advocates such a notion primarily on the basis of the Word taking on flesh, accentuating the trinitarian basis of his proposal, the freedom and wholly otherness of God, and the goodness of creation. Numerous implications ensue from this conclusion. For example, biblical genre becomes essential to discerning the meaning of a biblical text; the manner in which we do theology (i.e., the intellectual virtues) says volumes about our understanding of God; and present human existence, as devilish as it may seem at times, is not to be discarded in an ascetic lifestyle in favor of some otherworldly disembodied reality. Rather, human existence, with its tragic and idyllic moments, should be lived with joy in relationship with others, all to the glory of God.

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<sup>73</sup> See Stephen Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: An Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 1999).

<sup>74</sup> Balthasar, *KB*, 377.

Balthasar's emphasis on the sovereign freedom of God and humanity's relative freedom casts new light on the dramatic covenantal relationship between God and humanity. Typically, God's freedom is juxtaposed to humanity's freedom, usually in an adversarial relationship. Many theologians opt to frame the parameters of the discussion using the analytic philosophical categories of determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism. To an extent, these categories allow theology to parse the relationship between divine and human freedom with a measure of perspicuity. Yet these analytic categories inherently presume an Enlightenment conception of the individual and a scientific notion of causality. Balthasar, on the other hand, seeks to reframe the discussion with a dramatic metaphor such that the triadic relationships between playwright-actor-director apply to the Trinity as Father-Son-Holy Spirit, respectively. Such notions maintain the contingency of human freedom upon God that takes shape within the relational and personal, exhibiting a humble servant-orientation to human freedom as a gift from the triune God.

Balthasar's dramatic metaphor also insinuates that our understanding of the truth, in part, requires a performative element, which reveals an inherent connection between aesthetics and ethics, thereby dissolving the dichotomy between theology and the Christian life. In his biblical theology of the *gloria Dei*, Balthasar examines numerous theophanic manifestations of God's glory, concluding that God's giving of himself in his self-showing precedes his speech. This self-showing is the beauty of God that demands action, "for God's revelation is not simply an object to be looked at: it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence 'understand,' through action on *its* part."<sup>75</sup> Yet, within God's self-showing of his glory, "there appears [God's] holiness and sinful man falls to the ground, only then does the contradiction between light and darkness, holiness and sin, come into full view, and *the drama is begun*."<sup>76</sup> No one can perform his or her part in God's drama of redemption without knowing this fact first. Therefore, God gives life within this dramatic covenantal moment such that our participation in the living resurrected Christ by the Spirit transforms our understanding of God, the world, and ourselves, tethering together theology and the Christian life.

Finally, Balthasar's theology also brings other important questions into the purview of the evangelical conscience that deserve further exploration. For example, how should evangelicals construe the God-world relationship? How does God's trinitarian nature shape our understanding of his actions in the world and hence influence our conception of other doctrines (e.g., the nature of Scripture, ecclesiology, etc.)? And, what are the implications of Balthasar's view of the atonement for the doctrine of justification? These kinds of questions can only intimate at the potential fruitfulness of interacting with Balthasar's thought. Thus, it is my hope that they spur evangelicals to consider one of the most prominent Catholic theologians of the twentieth century who can help evangelicals sharpen their theological discourse and perhaps move beyond current impasses regarding the doctrine of God, the nature of Scripture, and the doctrine of justification, to name a few.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *TD* (trans. Graham Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 15.

<sup>76</sup> Balthasar, *GL*, 4:13.

<sup>77</sup> I am grateful for comments made by Jonathan King, Hans Madueme, and James R. A. Merrick on a previous draft of this essay as well as to Charles Anderson and the reviewers who asked probing questions and offered constructive suggestions, all of which sharpened my thinking and rhetoric. Nevertheless, any errors in judgment are solely my own.

### 5. Postscript

In what follows, I offer a succinctly annotated sketch of the prominent primary and secondary sources regarding Balthasar's life and works that may prove useful in exploring the previously mentioned questions. It is a meager offering of literature designed to spur the reader towards engaging Balthasar's theology and is not intended to be exhaustive. Any engagement with Balthasar, though, will have to wrestle with these works, depending upon the reader's interest. No matter I trust that the reader will identify a resounding theme, which strikes a prominent chord within the concerto of Balthasar's theology and is necessary for discerning much of his writings, namely, his notion of the dazzling darkness of God's triune love.<sup>78</sup>

Balthasar's *Epilogue* (Ignatius, 2004) to his trilogy provides readers with the most succinct work on how and why he moves from the transcendentals of being to divine revelation in his trilogy thereby detailing his symphonic methodology. Other one-volume primary sources that touch on Balthasar's major themes include *Mysterium Paschale* (Ignatius, 2005), which expounds his theology of Holy Saturday, his work on Karl Barth entitled *The Theology of Karl Barth* (Ignatius, 1992), which outlines his position on the analogy of being, *Heart of the World* (Ignatius, 1979), which details Christian theology's love affair with modernity and sketches the theological solution in the love of Christ, and his work on encouraging contemplative prayer entitled *Prayer* (Ignatius, 1986). Two relatively short works, *Love Alone Is Credible* (Ignatius, 2004) and *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship* (Ignatius, 2008) offer succinct entry points into his *magnum opus*, namely, his trilogy. The first articulates the necessity of a theological aesthetic for a proper rendering of theology's object, namely, the self-showing glory of God's triune love for the world, which provides a rudimentary sketch of *The Glory of the Lord*. Similarly, the second aids readers in discerning the essence of his *Theo-Drama* by detailing the biblical basis for God's divine involvement in the world through his electing purpose of Israel and Christ that elucidates the dramatic interplay between God's sovereign freedom and humanity's relative freedom. Finally, his book *My Work: In Retrospect* (Ignatius, 1993) is a concise retrospective sketch of his oeuvre, laced with several historical anecdotes, that provides a broad context for each of his major writings.

Significant secondary works that also help navigate Balthasar's theology include Edward Oakes's *Pattern of Redemption* (Continuum, 1994), the finest single volume work that provides an overview of Balthasar's trilogy and the prominent influences on his thought. David Schindler's edited volume entitled *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (Ignatius, 1991) provides numerous essays that explore many of the biographical details of Balthasar's life and pertinent themes of his trilogy. Aidan Nichols's five-volume *Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar* is also commendable as he guides readers not only through Balthasar's trilogy but also his earlier writings and all other major works beyond the trilogy. *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by Edward Oakes and David Moss, is also notable in that many of the essays attempt to discern Balthasar's thinking on the traditional categories of theology like revelation, Christology, and the Trinity. Finally, three works that explore specific aspects of Balthasar's theology that may be of interest are Gerard O'Hanlon's *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge, 2007), Stephen Wigley's *Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Critical Engagement* (T & T Clark, 2007), and W. T. Dickens's book detailing

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<sup>78</sup> For a more detailed overview of Balthasar's vast oeuvre explained using a cathedral typology, see my essay "Glancing into the Cathedral of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology: A Bibliographic Tour," *Christian Scholar's Review* 39 (2009): 91–105.

Balthasar's biblical interpretation entitled *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, 2003).

PASTORAL PENSÉES

# A World Servant in Christian Liberal Arts Education

— Philip Graham Ryken —

Most of our readers are theological students and pastors. Most, therefore, have pursued or are pursuing tertiary education, some of it in distinctively Christian institutions, some not. We thought it might be helpful to include the following address by Phil Ryken at his inauguration as the eighth president of Wheaton College on September 17, 2010. (A video of the address is available at <http://www.wheaton.edu/wetn/flash-Comm/100917RykenInaugAd.html>.) A few of his comments presuppose “insider” knowledge; more important are the values and integration ably articulated. Ryken, a Council Member of The Gospel Coalition, was Senior Minister of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1995 to 2010.

I used to think that Thomas Wolfe was right, but now I’m not so sure. The American novelist is famous for one of his titles: *You Can’t Go Home Again*. Here is how Wolfe’s protagonist explains it, near the end of the story:

You can’t go back home to your family, back home to your childhood, . . . back home to a young man’s dreams of glory and of fame, . . . back home to the ivory tower, . . . back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time.

Wolfe’s point, of course, is that when you do go back home, it is never the “home” that you remember. Things have changed. *You* have changed. So when you walk again on the old familiar pathways, you find that the ground has shifted.

I take Wolfe’s point. Yet as I return to Wheaton after twenty-two years away, I find so many things *unchanged*. Not everything is in the same place, of course. The Stupe has moved from the Memorial Student Center to Beamer. The wardrobe to Narnia no longer guards the entrance to the English department, but has been carted off to the Wade Center with the rest of our C. S. Lewis relics. Even Perry Mastodon has shifted his creaky old bones to the new science center—his last migration, I suppose.

And yet all of those old friends are still here. What is more, the substantial things endure: the theology and piety of this Christ-centered community—with all the passion of our students, excellent teaching of our scholarly faculty, dedication of our staff, engagement of our alumni, and generosity of our supporters. You are those faithful friends: we thank God, and we thank you for being here today. As I return to campus I even find, to my amazement, that students still call the dining hall “SAGA”—a name that hasn’t been valid since the 1980s. I am home again.

But understand this: I did not answer God’s call to Wheaton because I wanted to come back home. Rather, I am here because I believe that God has appointed this College as a vital instrument in the



worldwide work of his kingdom. This is no safe retreat, but a strategic base of operations for the global advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the discipleship of the Christian mind.

### ***1. Community Covenant***

So I speak with you today about Wheaton College as a world servant in Christian liberal arts education. For guidance, I go back to a critical moment in biblical history when God's people were at home in a good land. As we turn to the end of the Book of Joshua, we find the eponymous general gathering God's people for worship. After years of wilderness wandering, they have found a good home in a land flowing with milk and honey.

As they look around and see what God has done, they know that they are recipients of blessings they do not deserve. God says to them, "I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant" (Josh 24:13, *ESV*). Everything they have is a gift. It is all by grace, not by works.

These people are so greatly blessed that it might be tempting for them to become arrogant and complacent. So Joshua wisely confronts them with a choice. Will they serve the true and living God, or bow down to the man-made idols of false religion? Leading from the front, Joshua makes his own choice clear: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh 24:15).

The children of Israel accept Joshua's challenge and make their own choice for God. On that day, as a community of faith, they renew their sacred covenant. "And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up" (Josh 24:26), as a witness to that covenant.

As I read this story, I see so many parallels with our situation at Wheaton today. We too are in a good place—a campus flowing with milk and honey. We are the recipients of undeserved blessings: buildings that others built, endowments that others raised, academic programs that others launched.

Like the children of Israel, we are members of a covenant community—every student, every staff member, every professor, and every board member. In our Community Covenant we each vow to fulfill our kingdom calling by loving God with all our minds and by loving one another for Jesus' sake. This is our promise before God.

Today we renew that covenant. As we inaugurate a new presidency, it would be tempting for us to rest upon our academic standing, our history of doctrinal orthodoxy, or our position of influence within the evangelical church. Yet the choice comes to us again, as it comes to every generation: Will we serve the Lord or follow other gods? Will we walk in the footsteps of a Savior who gave his life and his blood for the poor, the lost, and the blind, or will we be satisfied with personal comfort, academic achievement, and material prosperity?

What I say today—not just for me, but for all of us—is what Joshua said: "As for me and this house, we will serve the Lord!" Then we ratify this choice by renewing our collegial calling to be a world servant in Christian liberal arts education.

### ***2. Faith and Learning***

Now, when I say "Christian," I mean that in the full, biblical sense of the word (see Acts 11:26). We follow Christ. We do this because we believe that he is God incarnate, the only divine Son of God, the Creator of everything there is, from the light of the first star to the man and the woman he made in his

image. Jesus Christ is the source and the sustainer: “All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17).

Christ is not only Creator, but also Redeemer—the Savior of the world. By his sufferings and death on the cross he has made full and perfect atonement for sin. What is more, by his resurrection from the dead he has brought life out of the grave. Now from his position of absolute authority at the right hand of God, Jesus offers forgiveness and eternal life to anyone and everyone who believes in him.

This is the Savior we choose to follow. To be specific, we follow him with our minds. Dr. J. Richard Chase, our sixth president and only lately tenured in glory, said it like this: “Whether you are five or ninety-five, following Christ is a thinking person’s life.”

To follow Christ with our minds is to pursue what we so often describe on this campus as the integration of faith and learning—what I somewhat prefer to call “the *reintegration* of learning with faith.” I say this in part because learning and faith are not equal entities. Faith is more fundamental. As philosopher Arthur Holmes has often reminded us on this campus, “In order to integrate, you have to have something to integrate *with*,” and for us that something is biblical Christianity.

But I also speak of *reintegration* because faith and learning were never intended to be separate. This is true biblically. It was only when Adam and Eve pursued knowledge apart from trusting God that sin came into the world and learning was sundered from faith. It is also true historically. In the best and oldest traditions of American higher education, faith and learning belong together—not merely juxtaposed, but integrated.

That is what we still do at Wheaton. We take whatever knowledge we gain through the arts and sciences and test it according to the absolute truth of God’s Word. Whatever is true to the world as God made it, and whatever is true to who we are as people made in his image, we view it all from the perspective of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, believing that all truth is relative to his person and work.

### ***3. The Liberating Arts***

As we reintegrate learning with faith, we provide a particular kind of Christian education: liberal arts. Here I use the word “liberal” in its oldest and truest sense as what brings freedom. The liberal arts are the liberating arts: they give us the freedom to become everything God has gifted us to become.

Liberal arts education grants this freedom by giving broad exposure to the arts and sciences, building critical skills for thinking, writing, listening, speaking, and analytical decision-making. Through art, music, history, literature, philosophy, mathematics, science, social science, and theology, we develop the whole person. We do this not only in our undergraduate program, but also in our graduate school by grounding professional training in the broader context of the liberal arts.

My favorite definition of Christian liberal arts education is the one I learned at my father’s knee. It comes from John Milton, who said that a “complete and generous education” fits a person “to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.” As Milton understood, a truly liberal education prepares a person for anything and everything in life. It makes us better workers and colleagues, better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers, better leaders and servants, better citizens of the kingdom of God.

I choose the word “citizen” deliberately. According to the classical model of the liberal arts—going back to Cicero and Isocrates—the goal of education was effective citizenship in a participatory democracy. Our vision includes that kind of citizenship, but it is more expansive. To be “for Christ” is

to be a citizen of “his Kingdom.” So what is distinctive about a Christian liberal arts education is that it prepares students for active service in the kingdom of God—not simply in church-based ministry, although that is part of it, but in every vocation that glorifies God.

#### ***4. Global Engagement***

Today the kingdom of God extends around the globe. It was never God’s intention for his people to be confined to only one place, but for the good news of his gospel to transform people from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation. That promise has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, whose spiritual kingdom stretches from shore to shore and whose wide dominion spreads from the rising to the setting of the sun.

What is Wheaton’s place in the kingdom work of Jesus Christ? Through excellence in Christian liberal arts education, we have a place of worldwide service in a century that will offer us unprecedented opportunities for global engagement.

This is fully in keeping with our historic mission. When Jonathan Blanchard first came to provide visionary leadership for this college, he said that he came to Wheaton because “it is near Chicago, the gate city between the Atlantic and the Pacific, between Western Europe and Eastern Asia.” His son Charles—our second president—believed, “The College can have no joy unless those whom it instructs become powers in the world, working for righteousness.”

We have been faithful to that founding vision in many ways, through the missionary forces we continue to send all over the world and through the ordinary graduates who do extraordinary work in many ordinary callings. Wherever you go, you find Wheaton alumni serving Christ and his Kingdom: they generate capital in London; they do relief work in Sudan; they provide educational leadership for Indonesia. In many cases they have been directly prepared for this work through graduate and undergraduate programs that have given them cross-cultural experience.

Yet we do not have a central office that coordinates and facilitates global and experiential learning. We have not articulated a philosophy of liberal education that incorporates global engagement as an essential part of a Wheaton education, so our students learn how to live, work, worship, and serve in a globalized society—not just preparing students *for* global engagement, but preparing them *through* global engagement. We have not developed long-term strategic alliances with colleges and universities overseas that enable us to learn and to teach collaboratively, strengthening both institutions through mutual influence. We have not fully learned how to take everything that is exceptional about Wheaton as an institution of higher education and then multiply its global impact.

I hardly need to tell you that the world’s need has never been greater: billions are hungry and hopeless; they have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Mercy and justice require global leaders—world servants—who have the understanding, the skill, and the compassion that Christian liberal arts education can best provide.

As great as the needs are, the opportunities have never been greater. The current issue of *Foreign Policy* reports that out of all the cities in the world, Chicago is number six in its global influence on culture, commerce, and creative innovation—ahead of cities like Singapore, Seoul, and Shanghai. Thus the City of Broad Shoulders remains what Jonathan Blanchard said it was: a gateway to the world.

As we enter the century of the global city, as some are calling it, imagine our students learning on a Wheaton campus in the urban, cross-cultural context of Chicago. Imagine the leaders of African

colleges revitalizing our evangelical convictions out of the strength of their historic Christian orthodoxy. Imagine the professors at the rising Christian universities of China learning how to integrate learning with faith through collaboration with faculty from Wheaton College. Imagine more students from South and Central America enriching our campus community by sharing their experience of suffering and joy before returning home with the treasures of the liberal arts in the Christian tradition. Imagine these things and you begin to imagine a mission as big and as beautiful as the kingdom of God itself.

### ***5. A Community of Grace***

I want to close by reminding us that as we renew our calling and our covenant, we should not imagine that we can ever do anything good for God apart from his grace. If we look at the history of Wheaton and ask why the College has remained essentially faithful to its original mission, the answer is not because of who we are, but because of who God is. We are a community of his grace.

We are reminded of our ongoing need for that grace by the strange and agonizing dilemma at the end of Joshua 24. We might expect the story to end with verses 16 to 18, where God's people make their commitment not to forsake the Lord, but to serve him to the very end.

But that is not how the story ends. When the people make their choice, Joshua informs them that they will fail. "You are not able to serve the LORD," he says, "for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins" (Josh 24:19). So God's people are caught in a dilemma: as a matter of conviction, they must promise to serve the Lord; yet because of their sin, they will fail to keep that covenant.

Wheaton College has always faced the same dilemma. As a matter of conviction, we promise to serve Christ and his Kingdom. We renew that covenant today. Yet we renew it knowing how often we have failed and that we are bound to fail again. As a College we have never fully lived up to our own ideals, let alone the perfect standard of a holy God. Nor have we ever completely fulfilled our calling.

Nevertheless, we believe that God has bridged the chasm between his holiness and our unrighteousness by loving us and accepting us through Jesus Christ. As the sinless Son of the Father, Jesus perfectly kept the covenant that we have broken so that through faith in him God forgives our sins and accepts us. His grace now gives us the freedom, by the power of his Spirit and in spite of our many failings, to fulfill our calling as a world servant of the world's Savior.

Frederick Buechner has written, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." What is the place where your gladness and the world's hunger meet? For me that place is back home at Wheaton College, where we find our deepest joy in serving the Christ who alone can satisfy the hungry soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: In *Themelios* 35.2 the review of Michael Northcott and R. J. Berry, eds. *Theology after Darwin* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009) incorrectly quoted Denis Alexander and thus made it appear that he believes Intelligent Design represents a scientific hypothesis, which he does not. The sentence should have read, "In his chapter, 'After Darwin: Is Intelligent Design Intelligent', Denis Alexander states that 'Another significant problem with the suggestion that Intelligent Design represents a scientific hypothesis with explanatory power comes from a false conclusion inherent in its argument' (p. 32)." We apologise for the error.

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## OLD TESTAMENT

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Mark J. Boda. *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*. Siphrut 1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009. x + 622 pp. £38.00/\$59.50.

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While most would agree that sin is a major theme in the OT, only a few have likely had the time to explore its nuances there book-by-book. The present volume does just this (only Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are not treated) while showing how each composition constitutes parts of a larger, coherent whole.

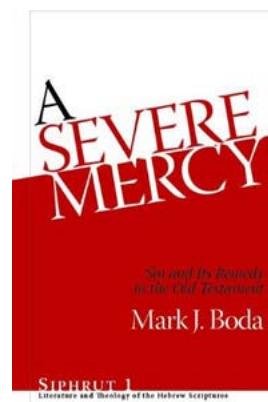
Boda's approach is "canonical-thematic," and he identifies the "hermeneutical foundations" of his work with Brevard Childs's call for a *theologically* focused interpretation of individual books in their canonical form and order (pp. 4–5). At the same time, Boda's adaption of the "canonical" method is much more congenial to a divine author than was Childs's, which located authority in the community that transmitted the text. Consequently, Boda not only eschews an interpretative approach that focuses on the historical development of the text (e.g., the various sources purportedly present in the Pentateuch), but also preserves Scripture's revelatory nature by stressing that it is "normative" (p. 5).

Boda's method gives some attention to where a biblical book is located in the most common Hebrew order of the books (in which, notably, the so-called wisdom literature is grouped with Daniel, Ruth, and other books in the third and final section that ends with Chronicles), though like most who do so he does not explain how canonical order functions hermeneutically (pp. 7–10). Perhaps this is because he does not make as much as some other theologians of this element in his interpretation.

At the level of textual interpretation, Boda traces the theme of sin across the OT not simply by following words like "transgression," "iniquity," and the like, but by attending to "lexical, linguistic, and conceptual frameworks," some of which may not employ the usual vocabulary of sin. He suggests in a preliminary definition that sin is "an offense against a divinely ordered norm" (p. 11). Within that definition, of course, there are important nuances. Brief overviews of how Boda treats different books are the best way, within the constraints of this review, to see these nuances (and the value of his work).

Beginning in Leviticus, the "priestly conception of sin differs radically from the other major canonical traditions (prophetic, wisdom, deuteronomic)" because its orientation is dominated by the presence of God among his people (p. 51; Boda devotes two sizable chapters to Leviticus). Boda divides the spectrum of proximity to God into three graded zones of holy, clean, and unclean (p. 51; cf. Lev 10:10–11; clean and unclean are not opposites but two kinds of non-holiness on his view). The priestly view of sin also recognizes polarities like ritual-moral, commission-omission, and inadvertence-defiance in terms of the action itself. The consequences of sin are likewise diverse, including "punishment, death and destruction" in some cases and "ritual, sacrifice, and reparation" in others (pp. 52–60).

Leviticus builds on the knowledge that sin's remedy will come through the line of Shem (Genesis), whose descendants form a nation in covenant with Yahweh (Exodus), by exhorting "the people of Israel to respond by consecrating themselves and so to make Israel a place free from the impurity and sin that would threaten the enduring presence of Yahweh in their midst and on earth" (p. 116). Deuteronomy



subsequently stresses that this response has to be genuine, but does not resolve the emerging tension between Israel's calling and her apparent inability to fulfill it.

Now to another genre and another era. In the eighth-century prophet Amos, Boda sees "human response and divine discipline as ways of remedying sin" (p. 310; cf. Amos 4:4–5:7). Summoned to "meet their God," Israelites must repent, and Amos himself introduces a tension between (superficial) cultic observance and authentic fidelity to God: "The people's 'seeking' of God through sacrifices and tithes . . . is inappropriate in light of their present behavior, which is described . . . as injustice against the poor" (p. 312). The "outcome of [true] repentance is nothing short of 'life' . . . in Yahweh's gracious presence (5:14) rather than 'death' . . . from Yahweh's terrible presence" (p. 312). In common parlance, the "Day of the Lord" thus brings the destruction of sinners and the purification and restoration of "Israel," though Boda's treatment of Amos 9 is quite short.

A last example, this one from the wisdom literature: Proverbs sets sin over against its opposite through the contrast of the two ways of wisdom and folly. "The rewards and punishments associated with these two ways suggest a *theology of retribution* in which righteous wisdom is blessed and wicked folly is cursed," though Boda is careful to note that this retribution is neither impersonal nor automatic (pp. 373–74). Sacrifice is almost absent from Proverbs, underlining the importance of heart-obedience for God's people (pp. 374–75), something Israelite wisdom literature calls "the fear of the Lord."

Boda concludes his extensive study by explaining the variety in the OT's perspectives on sin and its remedy in light of the complexity of the divine character (p. 522, cf. Exod 34:6–7), especially divine justice and grace. Sin's remedy often involves divine grace, a mediator, and the (especially eschatological) transformation of sinful people, which enables a deepening of the repentance that the OT consistently urges upon Israel (pp. 520–23).

Readers should be grateful to Boda not only for treating this prominent biblical theme thoroughly, but also for doing so in a way that respects the integral features of each book. While this makes the tasks of integrating and systematizing the biblical testimony regarding sin more challenging, it simultaneously equips one to do so in a way that honors the rich diversity of Scripture.

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Douglas S. Earl. *Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture*. Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplement 2. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010. xiv + 277 pp. £24.00/\$37.95.

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This revised Durham dissertation (2008, under R. W. L. Moberly) is an excellent example of the recent (re)turn to “theological interpretation.” Earl advances a complex interpretation of Joshua designed to enable one to read that book theologically despite the historical and ethical problems that he sees in it; he accepts as uncontroverted fact that Jericho’s fall occurred centuries before the late Bronze Age date the OT seems to require (p. 2) and describes the conquest as “bloody genocide and xenophobia” (p. 47).

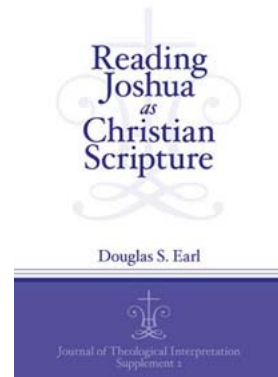
Earl’s proposal begins with the suggestion that Joshua should or could be read as myth (on terms much like those suggested by W. G. Doty), which transmits “cultural memory” (for this Earl draws on the work of Jan Assmann in particular). This view of “myth” is then merged with P. Ricoeur’s theory of symbol, in which “history” and “fiction” can both be “true” within the respective bounds of their intention. Since he finds the historical-critical and ethical problems in Joshua insurmountable, Earl chooses to apply Ricoeur’s concept of fiction to Joshua.

Accordingly, the book of Joshua usefully “re-describes” reality without being history (i.e., historiography): it is “history-like” (p. 33). “The issue at stake with regard to the biblical narratives is thus not that of historical veracity, but of whether, and how, they paint a *good, fitting or faithful* (even if imperfect) image of ‘the Kingdom of God’” (p. 31). Earl follows this conclusion by affirming Karl Barth’s removal of historical referentiality from (biblical) revelation and affirms that this type of revelation can occur even if a text that purports to give a historically referential account does not actually do so (p. 211; cf. also 49, 61). If a given text is revelatory in this sense, the reader decides (in light of his or her “contemporary context” and the text’s “tradition of reception”) how its message “would be reflected in terms of concrete expressions or enactments of actual human practice and behaviour” (pp. 61–62).

Using this method, Earl concludes that the conquest-language in Joshua is mythic, and that “whilst reinforcing many aspects of Israelite identity . . . Joshua simultaneously challenges accepted views of what it is that constitutes Israelite identity” (p. 202). He shows acute theological sensitivity in drawing out ways in which this and other elements in Joshua might function theologically.

It cannot be said that Earl set an easy task for himself or that he has developed facile solutions to the challenges posed by the book of Joshua. His engagement with a wide spectrum of literature (Christian and Jewish interpretations of Scripture, myth theory, and hermeneutics in particular) makes for stimulating and challenging reading. Though not germane to this review, the book also includes a judicious evaluation of text-critical questions in Joshua and of its tradition-historical interpretation as well as some seventy pages of illuminating theological interpretation of Joshua’s twenty-four chapters.

In the spirit of constructive critique, several aspects of Earl’s approach would benefit from further development. First, it is extremely important how the rules of one’s “language-game” are established, and Earl makes two decisions that impact his treatment in profound ways. Beginning with the question of whether a given biblical text should be taken literally or symbolically, Earl argues (very briefly) that although the book of Joshua shares significant traits with other ancient conquest accounts, several points of difference mean it is not to be classified as such, but is, rather, myth: the fall of Jericho is unique; the command to destroy Jericho as something consecrated to Yahweh (*herem*) is very rare in extra-biblical



accounts, which moreover use the first-person (Neo-Assyria) and focus on destruction of immaterial objects (Hittite); and chapters 12–24 do not fit the genre. It is certainly not impossible to critique these objections (cf. especially K. L. Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* [JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990]), but even if Earl were right, his conclusion that since Joshua (or parts of it) is not a typical ancient conquest account it is therefore myth is a *non sequitur*.

Second, it could be asked if it is possible on Earl's view to write a historiographic text that is not essentially mythic. Earl sees all texts as containing some of both, so that at least *some* of any historiographic text must be understood non-referentially. This is a far-reaching theoretical commitment and does not seem a promising hermeneutic for genres otherwise recognized as prioritizing (not exclusively) historical referentiality.

The "language-game" is also important at a canonical and epistemological level. With hundreds of references to Christian (and occasionally Jewish) interpretations of Joshua but no discussion of how the rest of the canon (especially the NT) views the ethics of biblical interpretation, Earl's decisions to make Barth's doctrine of revelation the *sine qua non* of his interpretation and to limit the text's use by the community's pragmatic judgment of both its revelatory status and "fittingness" make the interpreter nearly autonomous and push aside authorial intent (pp. 53, 233).

Had Earl given more weight to the canon's explicit and implicit hermeneutics, the picture might have looked quite different. Simple points like the acceptance by the rest of the OT of the conquest's historical character (Earl makes the "promise" of Deut 7:1–26 of no historical significance by labeling it "a later retrojection," p. 108), as well as more significant issues like the christocentric nature of the NT's use of the OT, drive interpretations of Joshua in directions sometimes different than that followed by Earl. The author's brief engagement with the salvation-history approach, and his conclusion that it "is really a 'new myth' of existential significance" (p. 210), will make some readers wonder if he has fully grasped the significance of historical referentiality for a whole-Bible theology. It is especially surprising at this point that evangelical "biblical theology" is completely absent from his discussion and bibliography.

Despite its sophistication, this theological interpretation of Joshua does not fully succeed in resolving the tension between the sense of the text as a whole (with the historical referentiality and theological voice that inhere in it) and historical or ethical criticisms that seek to fragment it. The canonical approach of Brevard Childs, developed in the 1970s for the identical purpose of maintaining the validity of historical-critical findings while establishing grounds other than the text's historical veracity for its theological claims, left many uncertain that the two had been successfully wedded, and the same question can be asked of Earl's work. While on the one hand problems raised by historical-critical treatments of Joshua prevent him from reading Joshua as something other than myth, on the other hand Earl rejects Vanhoozer's critique of Ricoeur (to the effect that historical veracity is indeed an important epistemological warrant) by saying that "appealing to history in *this* way reflects a mythical perception of reality rampant in modernity, but it is an epistemology that is simply not available" (p. 57). Earl has used history to identify problems in Joshua, but has summarily excluded it from his formulation of a solution, and he provides no justification for this decision. This methodological and epistemological

inconsistency needs to be resolved before Earl's interpretation of Joshua can be said to have carried the day.

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John H. Sailhamer. *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 632 pp. \$40.00.

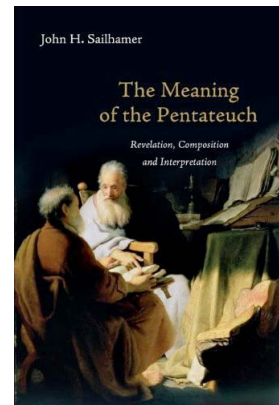
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John Sailhamer is an evangelical Old Testament Professor at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Brea, CA. He was president of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2000, and he authored over a dozen books on biblical theology and the Pentateuch. The current work, *The Meaning of The Pentateuch*, covers the gamut of biblical studies. Not only does it deal with the meaning of the Pentateuch; it also interacts with hermeneutics, biblical theology, OT theology, and covenant theology and dispensationalism.

The book is evidently written from an evangelical, conservative perspective, and it addresses the issues surrounding the revelation, composition, and interpretation of the Pentateuch. Sailhamer is convinced that the Pentateuch was composed in its present state to present theological truth. He shows how various biblical themes are arranged, organized, and presented throughout the whole of the Pentateuch. Thus, Sailhamer assumes that a single divine mind stands behind the five books of Moses. His purpose is to study the theology of the Pentateuch through exploring its authorship, its author's intent and audience, its literary composition as a whole, its theology and revelation of God, and how we may understand and apply its meaning as Christians living today. It seems that the author completely achieves his goal of writing and provides clear understanding to the reader.

The book is divided into three main parts. Part 1 focuses on approaching the biblical text as divine revelation (pp. 58–218). It seeks to understand the nature and goal of OT theology and to find the author's verbal meaning. Furthermore, it considers the question of the "historical meaning" of Scripture and tackles the question of the core idea in the final composition of the text. Part 2 aims to rediscover the composition of the Pentateuch by revealing the textual strategies within the Tanak, its process of composition and the legal material contained in the canonical corpus under examination (pp. 221–415). Part 3 discusses the issues surrounding the exegetical process of interpreting the theology of the Pentateuch (pp. 419–601). In this section Sailhamer analyzes the nature of covenant and blessing; the place of the "Biblical Jesus" of the Pentateuch; the purpose of the Mosaic Law; and the development of the doctrine of salvation in the Pentateuch.

Sailhamer proposes a new understanding of the Pentateuch. He argues for a two-stage composition of the Torah, with Moses the author of the vast part and an unnamed prophet/author at the end of the OT period who brings the Pentateuch into the realities of the time that had elapsed since Moses. Sailhamer argues that the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings was theologically intentional rather than simply reflecting a historic development. This assumption is based upon the biblical references to meditating on the Torah day and night in Josh 1:8



and Ps 1:2 as appropriate locations in the seams between the first and second and between the second and third divisions of the Tanak. Furthermore, all three sections end on a messianic note with the hope of a prophet unfulfilled in Deut 34:10, the eschatological promise of the forerunner Elijah in Mal 4:5 and the lack of a final fulfillment of Cyrus' decree in 2 Chr 36:23 (readers should remember that the Hebrew Bible ends with the Book of Chronicles).

The author explores hermeneutical issues of text and history, and investigates textual clues of authorial intent. He offers some very persuasive evidence that later biblical authors engaged in serious reflection on the Pentateuch in their prophetic books and Psalms. He focuses on the "final form" of the Pentateuch as a literary work. He also stresses the priority of a textually based canonical reading of the Pentateuch over a historically based reading. Sailhamer is not attempting to cast doubt on the historicity of the underlying events in the text. He is rather calling for more attention to how the biblical author conveys that epochal event in the history of salvation because that is what later authors are concerned about. We should not be as concerned with the history behind the text as with how the author conveys those events through his text. Though Sailhamer utilizes contemporary critical methods in interpreting the Pentateuch, he often identifies with pre-critical commentators in unfolding the theological message of the biblical text.

Arguably the most thoughtful and dynamic interpreter of the Pentateuch today, John H. Sailhamer has produced a monumental theological exposition of the Torah that will take its place alongside his classic *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. As such this book is a crucial resource for pastors, students, and scholars who desire to look closely at the Pentateuch theologically in a way that speaks to us today. By all means *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* is destined to be a classic contribution in biblical studies. I would highly recommend this work for personal study and practical implementation in teaching.

Igal German

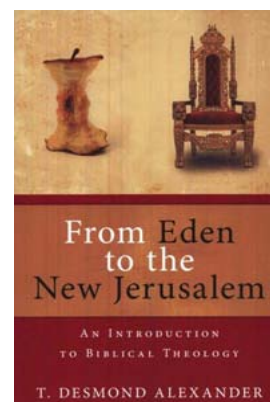
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## NEW TESTAMENT

T. Desmond Alexander. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 288 pp. £9.99/\$19.99.

T. Desmond Alexander's latest book, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, seeks to tackle some rather hefty perplexities—the purpose of earth's existence and human life—through the telling of a "unique story" (p. 9). This "unique story," of course, is the story of the Bible. It is precisely as *a story* and not stories—for no single writing in Scripture can satisfactorily be interpreted in isolation from the larger story (p. 10)—that divine revelation has been presented to us. That is, "a meta-story that claims to communicate absolute truth that cannot be discovered by any other means" (p. 9). But Alexander's aim is hardly to remain at the exegetical or theoretical level. "Good theology always has pastoral implications" (p. 11), and his volume is as interested in the application and living



of this meta-story as it is in the telling of it. The volume is more or less an extended essay on reading the Bible backwards. That is, reading the bible as Christian literature from the perspective of Rev 20–22, from *Endzeit* to *Urzeit* with proper appropriations for redemptive progression.

The first main chapter introduces the organizing principle of Alexander's pan-biblical theology, viz., the concept of divine presence. This survey of the theme of divine presence, he argues, "reveals a fascinating and coherent progression from Eden to tabernacle to Jerusalem temple to church to New Jerusalem" (p. 73). These topoi are the substance of Alexander's focus. The Eden scenes are in fact adumbrations, or the protological figuration of both tabernacle and temple. "As models of the ideal cosmos, the tabernacle and the temple are designed to remind people of God's original purpose for the world" (pp. 40–41). Throughout the volume in general and this chapter in particular, Alexander is keen to show how these mediatorial modes of divine presence are in fact "replaced by the church" (p. 60). In other words, it is in the church where God now intends to remind humanity of God's original purposes for the world (cf. p. 188), and through which he intends to reclaim his world (p. 189). Though there is mention of the incarnation as significant for this proposal (cf. pp. 17, 191), the move from former modes of figuration to the church is uncomfortably direct for at least two reasons. First, it moves too quickly over the realities of Jesus-as-temple and the host of signification at play with later reflections on union and participation. Again, Alexander hints at this, but the move is only exacerbated by, second, his uses of terminology such as "superseding" (e.g., p. 61).

The second main chapter is actually a sharp refocusing of the first problem. Where Adam and Eve failed as viceroys of the Divine, Jesus succeeded as the faithful viceroy (p. 92), and the people of God now stand in Christ as God's priests to the world. The third main chapter looks at Rev 20:2, creatively reading the appearance of the serpent in Eden as a sign of Adam's failure to guard the holy sanctuary from impurity (cf. Lev 11; Deut 14; see p. 104n4). The fourth main chapter reads the occurrences of "lamb" in Revelation in light of its OT precedents of Passover and sacrificial atonement, with Jesus redeeming creation through his death. It is as the *slaughtered* lamb that Jesus *reigns*. The fifth main chapter surveys the concept of holiness and its connections with the nations. The chapter also views holiness and the tree of life as motivating capital for both ecological and social transformation (pp. 157–70). Though one wishes for more thoughts on the enactment of this moral vision and perhaps a bit more nuance in his moves from ancient texts to contemporary contexts, the attempt is entirely noble and laudable.

The seventh and final main chapter more or less angles the tension of Babylon and the New Jerusalem. These cities "represent contrasting worlds," (p. 175) and there is therefore a need for a code of cultural conduct. Alexander handles the apocalyptic genre with admirable deftness here. Apocalyptic isn't intended to cause one to abandon Babylon but to motivate citizens to live holy lives *within* the city. "While our inheritance still lies in the future, we must claim our citizenship now" (p. 187), living faithfully and for the social betterment of the other. Because Revelation is rather concerned with economic exploitation, it makes good sense that Alexander would have something to say about contemporary economic practices. I did find his criticisms of competitive capitalism, however, a bit strange (pp. 183–85). He states that competition "is about doing better than others and there is nothing very Christian in this" (p. 184). I'm not too sure about that. Competition is hardly non-Christian. I remember a former football coach of mine, a devout Roman Catholic, would lead us in prayer before our games, asking that each team would play to the best of their abilities. At first this struck us all as strange. Why would we want our competition to play to the best of their abilities? But competition viewed from my former football coach's perspective brings out the betterment of all sides and is actually a form of seeking the



best of the other and is actually quite biblical (cf. Rom 12:10; Heb 10:24–25). In other words, a critique of global capitalism on the basis of competition entirely misses the point. There are massive reasons to critique the hegemony of global capitalism—with all its tilted tables and perverse structures keeping the bottom rung of the ladder of upward economic mobility just out of reach for so many—but competition is one of the “lesser evils” of insurance which allow for socio-economic mobility.

Though certainly not above criticism—with all its talk of metanarrative, for example, there is no mention of the deep suspicion of such language in our current cultural moment—I do hope this volume will be read widely and its contents considered by and appropriated in future studies. Those interested in biblical theology will find *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* interesting as will those committed to living the vision of new creation.

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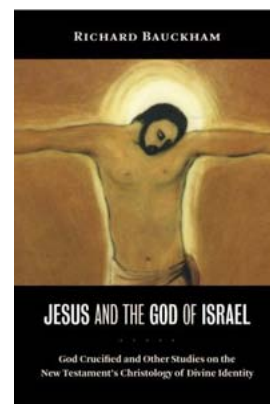
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Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the God of Israel: “God Crucified” and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008. xii + 285 pp. \$34.00.

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In this collection of essays, Richard Bauckham republishes his classic, *God Crucified* (Eerdmans, 1998), along with seven additional chapters on NT Christology, most of which revise previously published essays. Although one could read each chapter as a stand-alone piece, what holds the book together is Bauckham’s aim to demonstrate that ‘earliest Christology was already the highest Christology’ and a ‘fully divine Christology, maintaining that Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the unique and eternal identity of God’ (p. x). In this regard, Bauckham employs the term ‘divine identity’ both to distinguish it from later patristic discussions of function and ontology and to place NT Christology within the context of Second Temple Judaism and Jewish understandings of monotheism.

Chapter 1, ‘God Crucified’ (pp. 1–59), reprints Bauckham’s seminal publication that Jesus was identified ‘directly with the one God of Israel’ (p. 3). This contrasts with scholars who argue that earliest Christology either (a) was incompatible with a strict Jewish monotheism or (b) appropriated Jesus into a more elastic Jewish monotheism that had room also to include divine or semi-divine intermediary figures. Bauckham’s complex argument should perhaps be summarised below in very broad strokes. First, in Second Temple Judaism, we find a self-consciously strict and monolatrous worship of the one unique God who revealed himself to Israel (e.g., Exod 34:6) and is the sole Creator and Ruler of all things. Within this divine identity, furthermore, Bauckham identifies a specific category of ‘divine personifications’ of God himself (e.g., his Spirit, Word, and Wisdom) that are to be distinguished from non-divine angelic beings and exalted patriarchs. Second, the NT authors include Jesus deliberately and consistently as the unique and sovereign God who created all things (e.g., Matt 28:17; 1 Cor 8:4–6; Eph 1:21–22; Phil 2:9–11; Heb 1:4; Rev 5). Indeed, this ‘highest possible Christology . . . was central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them’ (p. 19). Third, in the NT texts—particularly Phil 2:9–11, Revelation, and John’s Gospel,



all of which take their cue primarily from a ‘Christian’ exegesis of Isa 40–55—God’s divine identity was uniquely revealed to the world through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Chapter 2, ‘Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism’ (pp. 60–106), tackles the difficult issue of defining ‘monotheism’ and assessing whether in fact the authors of the Scriptures presupposed a ‘monotheistic’ belief. Bauckham begins by suggesting that the term ‘monotheism’ is a misleading Enlightenment category. After engaging critically with N. MacDonald’s *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of ‘Monotheism’* (Mohr Siebeck, 2003), Bauckham concludes that even if Deuteronomy does not deny that other gods may exist, it is nevertheless clear from this text ‘that YHWH appears in a class of his own’ (p. 71). Bauckham then argues against the view of R. Gnuse that exclusive Jewish monotheism subsequently developed during the late monarchical period. Rather, Jewish monotheism in the Hebrew Bible is a consistent contrast between YHWH and all other gods. After establishing this part of his argument, Bauckham argues for a biblical theology of monotheism by pointing out those christological texts in the NT that clearly appropriate the Jewish Shema’ (Deut 6:4–6), including Rom 3:28–30, 1 Cor 8:1–6, and John 10:30. Bauckham thus concludes, ‘Exclusive devotion is now given to Jesus, but Jesus does not thereby replace or compete with God the Father, since he himself belongs to the unique divine identity’ (p. 106).

Chapter 3, ‘The “Most High” God and the Nature of Early Jewish Monotheism’ (pp. 107–26), turns to the issue of Jewish monotheism in the Second Temple period. In his investigation of the use of the phrase ‘the most high God’ in the literature of this period (unfortunately, he does not also discuss epigraphic evidence), Bauckham argues that this phrase denoted an ‘exclusive’ monotheism, that is, the belief that the Jewish God was supreme and transcendent over all other beings and not simply that he was chief of many gods. At the back of the chapter, Bauckham includes a helpful table indicating all the occurrences of the phrase God ‘Most High’ in Jewish literature from 250 B.C.—A.D. 150.

Chapter 4, ‘The Worship of Jesus in Early Christianity’ (pp. 127–51), expands Bauckham’s article ‘Jesus, Worship of’ in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Here Bauckham sketches the early evidence for the worship of Jesus, including prayers, doxologies, and hymns. Along the way, Bauckham helpfully includes some ‘pagan’ evidence as well, which demonstrates from an outsider perspective that Christianity was defined by the worship of Jesus. Bauckham concludes by arguing that ante-Nicean christological discussions contained two trends, one that reflected Jewish monotheism and the other ‘Christian Platonism’. The danger of the first trend, Bauckham argues, was a possible devolution into modalism. But the danger of the latter ‘was the loss of monotheism in the Judeo-Christian sense’ (p. 148). And it was Nicean (and Chalcedonian) doctrines that eventually provided the theological language that held together the worship of Jesus with monotheistic belief.

Chapter 5, ‘The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus’ (pp. 154–81), both expands slightly on Bauckham’s argument in chapter 1 and freshly discusses some of the relevant literature of the Second Temple period (e.g., *Parables of Enoch*, Ezekiel the Tragedian). To be sure, he claims that it is a false trail to search for parallel developments to the church’s ‘Christology of divine identity’ in pre-Christian Judaism (although Jewish monotheism was open to this development), chiefly because the NT authors were involved in a creative exegesis of key biblical texts (e.g., Pss 2, 8, 110; Dan 7). He concludes that because early Christian texts ascribe worship to Jesus (e.g., Matt 28:17; John 5:23) and depict him as sitting on the heavenly throne of God (e.g., Eph 4:10; Heb 1:3–4; Phil 2:9), he must therefore have been regarded as having the ‘characteristics of the divine identity that were regarded in Second Temple Judaism as distinguishing the uniqueness of the one God’ (p. 181).

The final three essays in this volume are contributions not previously published elsewhere. The first of these instalments, 'Paul's Christology of Divine Identity' (pp. 182–232), aims to demonstrate that Paul's Christology 'was framed within the familiar Jewish framework of creational, eschatological and cultic monotheism' (p. 185), that is, Paul's Jesus was identified with the sole creator and ruler of the world who would return to establish his universal kingdom and therefore should be worshipped as the one true God. His argument is wonderfully documented, but it can be sketched here only very briefly. First, Bauckham sets out the evidence where Paul identifies YHWH texts in Israel's Scriptures with Jesus (building upon the seminal work of D. Capes). Second, a large number of these YHWH texts have specific reference either to creational or eschatological monotheism. In this regard, Bauckham discusses passages such as Rom 10:13 (Joel 2:32), Phil 2:6–11 (Isa 45:23; 52:13; 53:12), and 1 Cor 8:5–6 (Deut 4:35, 39; 6:4). Third, Bauckham posits that the 'Jewish precedents for Paul's Christology of divine identity are minimal' (p. 232), even if similar exegesis was practised in other early Christian texts (e.g. the Gospels, Hebrews, 1 Peter).

Chapter 7, 'The Divinity of Jesus in the Letter of [*sic*] the Hebrews' (pp. 233–53), turns specifically to the Christology in Hebrews. Here Bauckham argues that the three categories of Son, Lord, and High Priest are all discussed (exegetically) in order to depict Jesus as sharing both in divine identity with God and in human solidarity with his people. His helpful treatment includes a fresh discussion of themes in Hebrews such as the significance of angels (Heb 1–2), the priesthood of Melchizedek (Heb 7), and the divine eternity of Jesus (Heb 13:8).

Bauckham's final chapter, 'God's Self-Identification with the Godforsaken: Exegesis and Theology' (pp. 254–68), is devoted to the theological significance of the cry of Ps 22:1 on the cross in Mark 15:34. Bauckham correctly argues that this cry of dereliction, when read in the context of allusions to several other psalms of lament in Mark's passion narrative, must be understood within both the context of Ps 22 and the other psalms of lament in the Hebrew Psalter. In this way Jesus' cry on the cross clearly identified with all the godforsaken 'by entering the situation of humanity at the deepest level of the human plight: the absence of God' (p. 268).

Bauckham's contribution to our understanding of NT Christology is breathtaking and persuasive at so many levels, from his exegesis to his theological conclusions. In this regard, his handling of the biblical text and of other Jewish literature from the Second Temple period is remarkable, as is his knowledge of a huge swath of scholarly inquiry on the subject of Jewish monotheism and Christology.

Of course, when bringing together a collection of essays, one is in danger of unnecessary repetition and/or slightly compromising the shape of the work as a whole. Bauckham is by no means immune to this reality, and although he attempts to tie the chapters together logically, overlap and slight disjointedness was inevitable. A discussion of Phil 2:6–11, for example, occurs in no less than three chapters (1, 5, and 6). Furthermore, isolated arguments sometimes needlessly make their way in more than one chapter (e.g., his discussion of the Shema' in chs. 1, 5, and 6), while other arguments could have been developed more fully (neither did the volume include a concluding chapter). Readers may also be slightly frustrated that although the volume has subject and Scripture indices, it does not contain a bibliography either at the end of the book or at the back of each chapter.

These minor blemishes do not detract from the significant contribution Bauckham has made to our understanding of earliest Christology. Indeed, this volume is a tremendous advance in the field and is essential reading for all those interested in NT Christology.

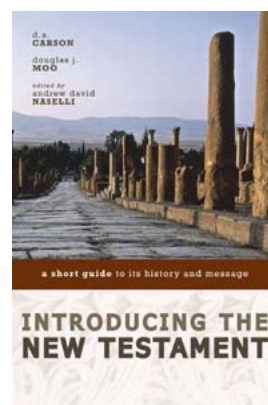
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D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message*. Edited by Andrew David Naselli. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. 176 pp. £8.23/\$12.99.

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Appropriately titled, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* contains nearly identical table of content headings with the original fuller treatment by D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Andy Naselli, who has a PhD from Bob Jones University and another from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School under D. A. Carson, has masterfully condensed the original 784-page work into 176 smaller pages. Unlike the larger work, which serves seminary students or trained pastors and theologians particularly well, the shorter edition provides a quick reference guide to the NT for a much wider audience.



While it is no easy task to abridge complex theological arguments, Naselli successfully condenses information compiled by two acclaimed NT scholars, first, by employing simple questions. Below are various questions used throughout the *Short Guide*:

1. Content: What is the book about?
2. Author: Who wrote the book?
3. Genre: What style of literature is used?
4. Date: When was the book written?
5. Place: Where was this book written?
6. Audience: To whom was this book written?
7. Purpose: Why was this book written?
8. Contributions: What does the book contribute to our understanding of the faith?

Second, Naselli effectively utilizes simple numbered lists to organize answers to the above list of questions in a very straightforward and helpful manner. The *Short Guide*, then, is in essence a very detailed sentence and paragraph outline to key introductory questions of NT books.

The *Short Guide* also includes chapters on “Thinking about the Study of the New Testament,” “The Synoptic Gospels,” “The New Testament Letters,” and “Paul: Apostle and Theologian.” These chapters usefully provide quick, accurate, and helpful explanations. Like the chapters on individual NT books, the chapter “Synoptic Gospels” also outlines information by questions and numbered list answers. In less than three pages, Naselli answers how the Synoptic Gospels came into being, including discussion on oral traditions and form criticism, written sources and source criticism, and final composition and redaction criticism. In just under three pages in the chapter “New Testament Letters,” the *Short Guide*

describes pseudonymity and pseudepigraphy, including introductory observations, issues of internal and external evidence, and contemporary theories. The chapter “Paul: Apostle and Theologian” sketches out a historical background, analysis, and response to the “New Perspective” on Paul and Judaism in merely two and one-half pages.

The *Short Guide* also has at least two helpful additions from the original work. First, the *Short Guide* provides lists of questions for review and discussion of each chapter. This makes it all the more useful for the non-graduate level classroom, such as an undergraduate NT survey course. Second, instead of combining all bibliography material together at the end of each chapter, the *Short Guide* categorizes recommended resources by level of reading difficulty (introductory, intermediate, and advanced).

Other features of the *Short Guide* include a few tables and maps, a Scripture index, and a general index. At \$12.99, this resource will prove beneficial not only for the seminary student or pastor who is preaching through a NT book, but for any student of the Bible.

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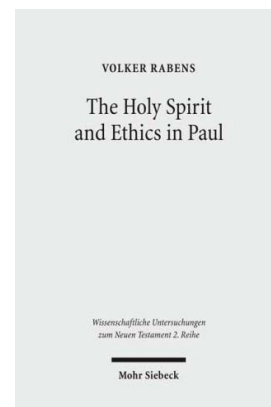
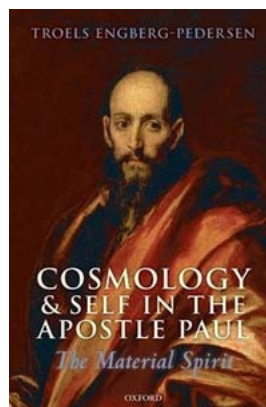
Troels Engberg-Pedersen. *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xv + 287 pp. £65.00/\$110.00.

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Volker Rabens. *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.283. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. xvi + 378 pp. \$125.00.

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The central thesis of Troels Engberg-Pedersen’s book (a sequel to his *Paul and the Stoics*) is that many of the central concepts in Paul need to be read with a double perspective. In addition to the traditional metaphorical/cognitive readings, Engberg-Pedersen argues for a ‘non-metaphorical, concrete and basically physical’ reading, which he labels ‘cosmological’ (p. 1). Among other things, this involves understating *pneuma* as a *physical* entity in Paul’s letters. Chapter 1 argues that in 1 Cor 15, Paul understands ‘*pneuma* as a through and through material, bodily phenomenon’ (p. 3). Not only is Paul drawing from the widely accepted Stoic idea of corporeality but he also remains consistent with both the Hebrew Bible and ‘apocalyptic’ understandings of God. Engberg-Pedersen does point out, however, that a Platonist reading of *pneuma* in Paul is excluded. Chapter 2 applies this materialistic understanding of *pneuma* to the other (undisputed) Pauline letters in order to continue to build up a clearer view of Paul’s worldview. Chapter 3 seeks to show the further applicability of his approach to understanding Paul’s entire worldview. He concentrates on showing how the cognitive and physical explain both Paul’s anthropology and his understanding of different super-human entities (e.g., angels, demons, Satan). Chapter 4 reflects on the



relationship of human beings to the ‘powers’ of the world (discussed in the previous chapter). Engberg-Pedersen employs Epictetus, whose analysis is not only ‘philosophically valid’ but also reflects Paul’s own handling of the issue. Paul and Stoicism both share the idea that divine agency enables human freedom. Chapter 5 begins the second half of the book and takes a different turn. Whereas the first four chapters seek to understand Paul’s worldview in its totality, the second half seeks to understand how those various features relate to themes that belong directly to the text itself. Engberg-Pedersen focuses on three themes: Paul’s account of his own conversion (including his reception of the *pneuma*); how he expects his own readers to ‘be structured both physically and mentally’ (p. 5); and how he brings about this change in his readers through his own letter-writing. Chapter 5 applies three (contested) modern philosophical concepts: ‘religious experience’, ‘self’, and ‘habitus’. Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the findings and brings them to their focus: ‘an elucidation of Paul’s bodily practice in the writing of his letters’ (p. 172).

This is a demanding book that assumes a fair bit of philosophical background. It is immensely stimulating and often provides very fresh readings of the Pauline text. So, when Phil 2:15 is read in the light of 1 Cor 15, Engberg-Pedersen argues that we are to understand that the latter text pictures those who are resurrected as no longer merely shining *like* stars but actually *becoming* stars (p. 43).

Volker Rabens’s book, however, challenges many of the central concerns of Engberg-Pedersen. (Rabens interacts with Engberg-Pedersen’s volume as well as his earlier articles.) Rabens’s study expands his PhD dissertation completed at London School of Theology. The central concern of the book is to determine Paul’s understanding of the role of the Spirit in the ethical life of the believer. In reviewing the last 140 years of scholarship in this question (extensively detailed in a fifty-page appendix), Rabens observes a spectrum. On one end, scholars stress the ‘pneumatological *indicative*’ whereby the Spirit actually drives the believer (e.g., Gunkel). The other end of the spectrum sees the Spirit making believers aware of their salvation by which they are enabled to realize the ethical *imperative* by their own power (e.g., Stadler). Within this spectrum, one major area of discussion has concerned the nature of the believer’s *transformation* accomplished by the Spirit. Recently (since Gunkel), the idea that the Spirit is a heavenly substance that transforms humans *substantially* (or ontologically) has dominated the discussion.

Part 1 examines that dominant view of transformation by the infusion of a material Spirit. Chapter 2 examines Paul’s context with respect to the idea of a physical concept of the Spirit and ethical change by infusion-transformation. Rabens surveys Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature. He concludes that while the Stoics did have a material concept of *pneuma*, this concept did not play a major role (if any) in their ethics. In discussing Jewish literature, Rabens concludes that apart from perhaps one strand in Philo (where *pneuma* is referred to as an ἀσώματος οὐσία) there is evidence neither for any interest in the materiality/immateriality of the Spirit in Judaism nor for an infusion-transformation ethic. Chapter 3 turns to consider Paul’s own letters. The bulk of this chapter treats the ‘spiritual body’ of 1 Cor 15:44 and the possible infusion of the material Spirit through the sacraments (1 Cor 12:13; 6:11; 10:3–4). On the basis of extensive exegesis of 1 Cor 15:44, Rabens argues that the idea of a physical *pneuma* is not found here. However, Rabens is more cautious regarding the possibility of Paul having an ‘infusion-transformation’ concept of ethical enabling. He argues that Paul is ambiguous regarding the actual method of reception of the Spirit—i.e., the image of being made to drink of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) may have evoked an association with Stoic pneumatology in Paul’s audience. However, not only does the philosophic language of Stoicism fundamentally differ from Paul, it remains to be proven that Stoic

pneumatology was understood by *all* the members of Paul's churches (and not just the elite). As such, Rabens argues, it seems wiser to attempt to develop a model of the work of the Spirit in Paul's ethics that is based on the actual effects that are attributed to the Spirit in Paul (and in Judaism).

Part 2 thus considers a new approach, namely ethical empowerment by the *relational* work of the Spirit. Rabens's basic argument in this section is that 'it is primarily through deeper knowledge of, and an intimate relationship with, God, Jesus Christ and with the community of faith that people are transformed and empowered by the Spirit for religious-ethical life' (p. 123). Chapter 4 provides a prolegomena, including a definition of terms (e.g., 'relationship,' 'empowerment') and a general discussion of his relational model, particularly its dynamic nature in contrast to the static 'infusion-transformation' model. In the context of discussing his relational model, Rabens addresses the question of the personhood of the Spirit. He suggests that Paul at most appears to understand the Spirit having 'personal traits' rather than explicitly as a person (p. 145). He argues that it is methodologically unwise to argue for a particular ontology of the Spirit. Rather it is more fruitful to examine the *effects* of the Spirit. In the final two chapters, Rabens examines these effects in Hellenism, Judaism, and Paul. Chapter 5 seeks to show that there is adequate material in Paul's religious and philosophical context against which his relational model of the ethically empowering work of the Spirit can be read (p. 146). Rabens does not extensively examine every aspect of ethical empowering in Graeco-Roman and early Jewish literature. Rather, he seeks to uncover traces of the idea of the Spirit empowering people for ethical living by 'facilitating deeper knowledge of God and an intimate relationship with him and with the community of faith' (p. 146). Chapter 6, the most extensive in the book, argues that the Spirit 'continually transforms and empowers believers for ethical conduct by enlivening and even intensifying [their] intimate relationships' with God, Christ, and the Christian community (p. 186). He deals first with how the Spirit transforms via deeper knowledge of God and Christ (2 Cor 3:18) and then with the idea that the Spirit's work of adopting into God's family is a transforming and empowering experience (mainly Rom 8:12–17).

Chapter 7 summarises his findings: though certain strands of Hellenism subscribe to a view of a material *pneuma*, this is not present in the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism, or Paul; nor do these sources operate with an idea of ethical empowerment or transformation through the infusion of a material Spirit. In contrast, Rabens argues that Paul operates with a relational understanding of the ethical work of the Spirit. In terms of Pauline pneumatology more generally, Rabens argues that Paul is relatively unconcerned with ontological questions concerning the Spirit (p. 249). He agrees with Engberg-Pederson that Paul's pneumatology cannot simply be reduced to *either* 'Hellenistic-materialistic' *or* 'Jewish-immaterialistic'. However, he argues that it is *also* a false dichotomy to reduce Paul's understanding of *pneuma* to either a Stoic or a Platonic one as Engberg-Pederson does. Rather, Paul may have been uninterested in the philosophical agendas of these schools and in the ontology of the Spirit. The closest he comes, argues Rabens, is in his discussion of the resurrection body in 1 Cor 15:35–54, but here the focus is on the nature of the resurrection body, *not* the Spirit. As such, this text cannot be made the starting point for understanding Paul's pneumatology (*pace* Engberg-Pederson, who argues that how we understand the σῶμα πνευματικόν has 'huge consequences for everything else we should say about Paul' [p. 14]).

Both of these works seriously treat aspects of Pauline pneumatology and ethics and the interaction between the two. In summary, Engberg-Pedersen argues that Paul is operating with a physical concept of the Spirit and an *essentially* physical ethical transformation. In contrast, Rabens argues that Paul

operates with neither a material view of the Spirit nor a materialist view of ethical transformation. Rather, he sees the Spirit working *relationally*. On balance, Rabens is more convincing since he more thoroughly compares Stoic and Pauline thought and highlights the obvious differences that Engberg-Pedersen disregards. Rabens's book is a model of thorough research, lucid argument, and careful exegesis. Engberg-Pedersen's volume is also carefully argued, intensely stimulating, and an important study, but, ultimately, on a number of key points it remains unconvincing.

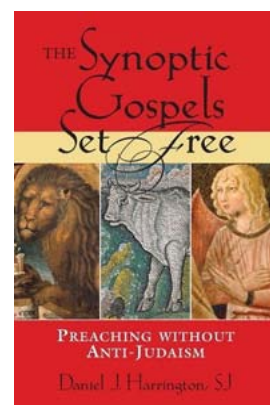
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Daniel J. Harrington. *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism*. New York: Paulist, 2009. 231 pp. \$19.95.

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In this post-Holocaust world, interpreters of the Bible have become especially sensitive to questions about the potential for anti-Semitism in the NT. Moreover, in the wake of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* several years ago, new questions were raised about the relationship of the NT to Jews and Judaism. One of the responses to these questions is the *Freeing the Word* series from Paulist Press. The first volume in this series, *The Gospel of John Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism* by George Smiga, discusses the potentially anti-Semitic passages in the Fourth Gospel. Smiga attempts to place these passages in both their historical context and in the context of the Roman Catholic Church's official teaching on these matters. While not repeating the church's teaching, the second of these volumes, Harrington's *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free*, shares the subtitle of the previous volume and is intended as a companion volume.



Harrington's central thesis is "that one effective way to free the Synoptic Gospels . . . from their anti-Jewish potential is to read them in their first-century Jewish context" (p. 1). To that end, he works through many of the difficult passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Based on the standard three-year lectionary used in the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations, Harrington discusses fifteen passages from each of the Synoptic Gospels.

Given this approach, the book essentially functions as a short commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. While we cannot summarize each chapter in this short review, most chapters follow similar formats. Harrington attempts to set each passage in its historical context, explaining problematic features and unfamiliar elements. Moreover, he has a sensitive eye for finding OT backgrounds in many of the Gospel narratives. Some of these suggestions are quite helpful and illuminating. For example, he argues that the feeding of the 5,000 in Matt 14 (and other accounts like it) finds its "biblical prototype" in Elisha's miracle in 2 Kgs 4. Given the aim of the book, however, it is more than a short commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. Along with his comments about the historical backgrounds to each pericope, Harrington is careful to consider all possible statements that could be construed as anti-Semitic and explains why they are not.



On the whole, Harrington's approach is often valid and helpful. As noted above, his comments on the OT backgrounds of the Gospel pericopes are often illuminating. As a commentary, this book could indeed be a helpful tool. However, the book is not without its faults. First, Harrington's approach to the Synoptic Gospels is fairly standard Roman Catholic critical scholarship. Therefore, his assumptions would not be controversial for many. However, apart from the facts that such standard critical theories are not quite as standard as they were twenty, or even ten, years ago, his assumption that Matthew corrects the "minor errors" in Mark (p. 8), his references to the "embarrassment" of Jesus' baptism (p. 19), and other similar assumptions are problematic for many evangelical interpreters. Moreover, such assumptions could also be problematic for Harrington's project, for if the Evangelists felt free to alter the stories in substantial ways, how are we to know that we can accurately reconstruct the Jewish backgrounds with any degree of certainty?

A second problem is the effect that Harrington's agenda sometimes has on his interpretation of the Gospels. While I admit that we all approach the text with agendas and biases, Harrington's aim of explaining potentially anti-Jewish statements may lead to unnatural interpretations. For example, in his discussion of Jesus' statement about those who do not oppose him being for him (Mark 9:40), Harrington assumes that the person in question is a Jew with no particular commitment to Jesus' teachings. He extends this possibility to Joseph of Arimathea, proposing that Mark paints him not as a follower of Jesus, but simply as a righteous Jew. This seems to be special pleading. While Harrington is right that setting the Bible in its Jewish background will remove most if not all possible anti-Semitic material from the NT, we cannot push the pendulum so far that we dissolve the line between those Jews who followed Jesus and those who did not.

Therefore, the greatest value in this volume is probably as a short commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, especially for those who are following the standard lectionary used by Harrington. For those with little or no knowledge of the OT and Jewish backgrounds of the Synoptic Gospels, it could be a good starting point for background studies, but it may not be sufficient for a thorough knowledge of the issues under consideration.

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Murray J. Harris. *Colossians and Philemon*. 2nd ed. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010. 272 pp. \$24.99.

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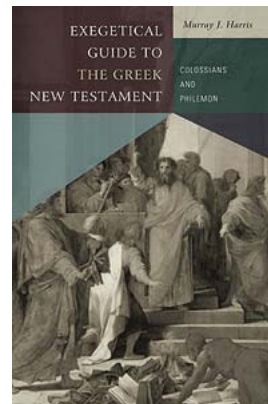
This substantially revises a work first published in 1991. For nearly a generation now students and pastors have benefited from Harris's distinctive analysis of these two Pauline prison letters. His "exegetical guide" consists primarily of a phrase-by-phrase explication of the Greek text. The author targets three groups of readers: "students preparing for examinations in New Testament studies, ministers and pastors who are hard-pressed for time yet eager to maintain the momentum in the study of Greek that they gained in their theological training . . . , and teachers seeking to help students gain confidence in reading" their Greek NT (p. xiii).

As a teacher who has often assigned the first edition in second-year exegesis classes, I can attest to the high usefulness of the old version. Yet this new edition is not a cosmetic update. In some ways it is a thoroughly new work. (1) It cites updated editions of the Greek NT. (2) It interacts with important new commentaries that had not appeared in 1991 (e.g., those by O'Brien, Barth-Blanke, Fitzmyer, Dunn, and Wilson). (3) It appeals to newer reference works, notably the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* and the four IVP dictionaries on Jesus and the Gospels, Paul, the later NT, and NT backgrounds. (4) It normally cites BDAG (2000) rather than the older BAGD. (5) It updates the bibliographies of the fifty (!) separate "For Further Study" sections.

The "For Further Study" segments are huge timesavers and encouragements to efficient research. They come at the end of treatment of the grammatical, syntactical, and translational issues in each subsection. For example, after Harris deals with Col 2:9–15 under the heading "Christ, the Remedy against Error" (pp. 87–100), there are four "For Further Study" listings: "The Deity of Christ (2:9)," "Principalities and Powers in Paul (2:10, 15)," "Christian Baptism (2:12)," and "Resurrection with Christ (2:12–13)." In each of these four listings students are given important commentary, book, or article references. The lists are not exhaustive, of course. But they direct readers' attention to major discussions, eliminating that maddening moment when a student has discerned the basic meaning of the Greek but now needs to move to the next level of analysis. Where does one even begin given the bewildering variety and volume of resources that are out there? "For Further Study" points in the right direction by giving a substantial bibliographical foundation.

Harris prefaces each section by breaking down the structure (though not with formal diagramming). Corresponding to this, he gives "Homiletical Suggestions" at the end of each section. For example, in dealing with Col 1:15, 18, Harris offers an outline called "Five Titles of Christ." A homiletician might see these as more exegetical than homiletical in nature. Still, with a little coaxing this material can easily be massaged into sermonic substance.

Harris points out that since the first edition, some eleven major English translations of the NT have been published. Among these are the CEV, NLT, HCSB, ESV, TNIV, and NET. Harris interacts with these at appropriate junctures. It is gratifying to see his recognition of Cassirer's translation as well (p. xxxii). A notable feature of the book is Harris's own translation, expanded paraphrase, and exegetical outline of both Colossians and Philemon (pp. 187–204, 245–250). As students do their own best work line by line, they can check it against the interpretive decisions of an accomplished master.



Harris's translation often answers the question of which option he favors in the detailed and sometimes atomistic discussion of individual words and phrases along the way.

The book concludes with "Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms" (pp. 251–272). This explains words or technical expressions used in the book that might stump beginning students, like protasis, stative, telic, transitive, and voice. It is no replacement for fuller treatments of such terms (like M. S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek*, 2001), but it cements the utility of Harris's volume as basically a free-standing reference work in its own right. There is usually no need to keep another stack of books at the ready to make effective use of Harris.

The didactic aim of the book and its attention to grammar and syntax mark it as something different from a commentary. But commentaries often frustrate because they may reveal more about a commentator's opinion than about the scriptural text. Harris's focus is the text in its detail, richness, and often complexity. He lays out options for understanding and puts tools in the interpreter's hands to make the best decisions possible on meaning and translation. There is constant recognition of the need for going deeper ("For Further Study") and the call to proclaim exegetical results ("Homiletical Suggestions").

In a peculiar way, Harris encourages readers to slow down and smell the roses. Those who take the time will come to regard Harris's careful, initially dense discussion with relish and eventually even fondness, like the words of a wizened and trusted counselor. That would not be fantasy but recognition of the true nature of Harris's ability and stature as a scholar who has long pored over this material and now as a humble pedagogue puts the fruit of his observation on display for the benefit of those who are learning to share his passion for getting at the fullest and most accurate possible apprehension of Paul's words in these two priceless epistles. *Tolle, lege!*

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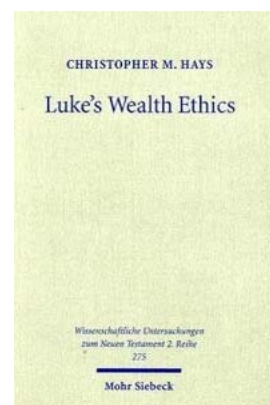
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Christopher M. Hays. *Luke's Wealth Ethics: A Study in Their Coherence and Character*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.275. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2010. xiv + 347 pp. \$147.50.

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So much work has already been devoted to Luke's presentation of money and possessions that one might question the need for yet another run at the material. But according to Hays, the scholarly consensus that Luke's treatment of this topic is inconsistent and incoherent needs revision. The fact that some passages demand complete divestiture of possessions whereas others allow giving less than all, in tandem with passages where Jesus recommends almsgiving whereas Acts appears to advocate a communal form of distribution has led many to the conclusion that Luke's treatment of the theme is contradictory. Hays's entire project seeks to undermine this conclusion by demonstrating that Luke's ethical teaching on wealth consists of a coherent principle.

Hays argues that there are four strategies for dealing with the apparent contradiction. Two of them he rejects: literary and interim solutions. Literary solutions account for the apparent contradictions by arguing that Luke has uncritically reproduced source material with which he



does not agree. That such a literary artist as Luke should have made such egregious errors on a matter of such importance strains credulity for Hays. The interim solution suggests that Jesus' demands for total divestiture pertain only to the period of Jesus' ministry. But this solution runs into problems as it fails to account for *all* of the textual evidence (e.g., Luke 14:33). Hays accepts modified versions of the bi-vocational solution (which sees the inconsistency as arising due to the difference between itinerant and stationary disciples) and the personalist solution (which views a person's use of possessions as a demonstration of their response to Christ).

According to Hays, Lukan wealth-ethics are built on the coherent principle of renunciation of all, a principle that expresses itself in a variety of contingent forms that depends upon a person's wealth and vocation. Hays first examines the practices of Jesus and his disciples. Two of Hays's key texts, upon which he puts a great deal of emphasis, are Jesus' calling of the disciples in Luke 5:11 and 5:27–29. In both passages, Luke notes that the disciples leave behind “all” or “everything.” Luke is speaking of “all,” however, hyperbolically as Peter, James, and John do not sell their fishing nets and their garments. They simply leave it all behind to follow Jesus. Likewise, though Levi is said to have “left behind all things” he is portrayed as giving a great banquet for Jesus in *his very own residence*. For Hays, this indicates that renunciation of possessions is not synonymous with complete divestiture. Further, the female followers of Jesus in Luke 8:1–3 are depicted as model disciples as they continually use their possessions to provide for Jesus and the disciples. One of the linchpins for the interim solution is Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–16, where the disciples are sent out by Jesus as missionaries with the bare minimum of basic provisions. Nevertheless, Hays argues that these poor itinerants are dependent upon the hospitality and provisions of those to whom they preach. Thus, there is again a depiction of discipleship which does not entail total divestiture.

Hays turns next to Jesus' extended teaching on wealth in the Lukan Travel Narrative (TN). This section forms both the nucleus of the work and is where Hays's exegesis shines the brightest. In Luke's TN obedience to Jesus' demand to renounce all, depending on the wealth and vocation of the disciples, is expressed through a manifold variety of behaviors. The parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrates that Jesus values the Torah's command to love neighbor (Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18) over cultic purity. In Luke 11:37–44, Jesus denounces the Pharisees precisely for neglecting love and justice (11:42) and encourages them to make themselves pure through almsgiving (11:41). Hays notes that in Luke 12:33–34 Jesus does not require absolute divestiture, though he does advocate generosity through radical almsgiving. When Jesus demands that all disciples renounce their possessions, Hays again argues that this renunciation is expressed through a fidelity to Jesus that overrides concerns over family, wealth, and one's own life.

Hays's interpretation of the difficult parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–13) is nicely argued. As the unjust servant shrewdly used money to find a place of employment after his dismissal, so must disciples use wealth strategically to find friends and eternal dwelling places. By giving alms to the poor, the disciples can expect that these “poor” friends will give them aid in the age to come. Hays's reading of Luke 16:14–31 demonstrates that seemingly out-of-place references to the Torah and the Prophets nestled within Jesus' teaching on possessions (e.g., 16:16–18, 29, 31) are included precisely because Jesus sees the Law as demanding care for the poor. Jesus' warnings against possessions climax with the negative portrait of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18–30. Hays argues that Jesus' command to sell “everything you have” (18:22) does not entail entire divestiture but is similar to what is found in 8:1–3 and means something along the lines of “gradually and persistently expending [his] wealth on the

care of the other disciples” (p. 173). This is an option open to rich itinerants which the man rejects. In Hays’s attempt to coherently explain Luke’s wealth-ethics, he combines the best of the personalist and bi-vocational approaches. Ultimately, Hays’s approach is closest to the personalist as Luke evidences a variety of appropriate behaviors regarding wealth. Hays’s twist, as we have seen, suggests that these varieties of behaviors all appropriately express Jesus’ demand to renounce all. The contingent expressions depend upon two factors: vocation and wealth.

In the second major movement of the book, Hays examines the Acts of the Apostles to determine whether there is continuity between the wealth-ethics of the Gospel and Acts. Hays argues that in Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35 Luke uses *both* philosophical *and* utopian friendship language to describe the early church’s periodic divestiture of its possessions and the sharing of possessions and not a love-communism that abolishes private ownership. There is, then, no contradiction between the Gospel’s advocacy of almsgiving and Acts’ depiction of the early church. In fact, given the vocationally non-itinerant nature of the Jerusalem community at this point, they faithfully implement Jesus’ wealth-ethic through the richer members of the church using their possessions to serve the poor. While Luke’s concern with the proper use of wealth and possessions is much more muted in Acts 7–28, Luke never fails to mention both the proper use of possessions by the story’s protagonists (Tabitha, Cornelius, and Paul) and the character flaw of greed by the antagonists (Judas, Simon Magus, and Demetrius).

Hays’s dissertation makes a fine contribution to the ongoing and apparently endless spawn of publications to this Lukan topic. While his two chapters on Jewish and Hellenistic wealth-ethics nicely illuminate his reading of Luke-Acts, he rightly foregrounds Luke’s narrative and its distinct concerns without subsuming it under the weight of the background texts. His exegesis (more so of Luke than Acts) is rigorous and at times particularly illuminating. His treatments of Luke 16:1–31 and 18:18–30 are especially helpful. While Hays impressively argues that all of the behaviors Jesus advocates express renunciation of all, his claim that the precise expression depends upon one’s wealth and/or vocation is a bit more problematic. For example, both the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus are called “rich” (Luke 18:23; 19:2), so they do not differ in terms of their wealth. According to Hays, a rich itinerant such as the fellow from Luke 18 can properly use his possessions by providing the basic needs of fellow itinerants. But that this is what Luke advocates for the rich young ruler is simply speculation. That one can profitably divide disciples into rich itinerants, poor itinerants, rich localized disciples, and poor localized disciples, as a means of determining the proper use of possessions seems to me to be the most controversial component of Hays’s thesis. Nevertheless, despite the more than occasional typographical error (e.g., pp. 3, 16, 18, 30, 73, 87, 92), Hays’s dissertation is thoroughly researched, contains a wealth of solid exegesis, valiantly attempts to give a coherent logic to Lukan ethics, and will certainly be one of the three or four works I turn to when engaging Luke’s teaching on wealth.

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Paul M. Hoskins. *That Scripture Might Be Fulfilled: Typology and the Death of Christ*. Xulon: 2009. 200 pp. £10.50/\$15.99.

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This popular level book opens with a warm personal account of the author's youthful perplexity about NT citation of OT verses. When he heard a sermon mentioning this, 'Sometimes, in a moment of curiosity, I would flip to the OT text. These efforts were usually more confusing than enlightening' (p. 17). As the book progresses, Hoskins uses his doctoral research on John's use of temple-imagery to aid those of us for whom perplexity over NT use of the OT continued beyond youth!

After an introductory chapter, there follows five chapters, each on a type which brings meaning to the death of Jesus. These include the Suffering of David, Jesus' words at the Last Supper, the Passover in John, the tabernacle in Hebrews, and the Messiah's death in Hebrews.

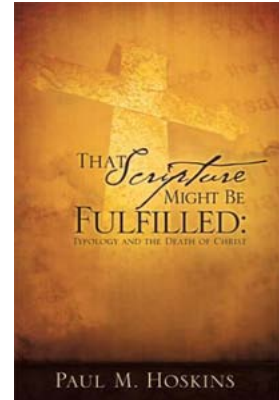
Hoskins argues that typology is a literary technique taught and used within Scripture. The term *typos* is found in the NT fifteen times, though every use is not directly relevant to an understanding of typology (p. 27). The Church Fathers are cited as interpreters who were sometimes given to fanciful excess—such as seeing the atonement in anything cross shaped (p. 32). At the same time, Hoskins reminds us that the Church Fathers 'sometimes showed a keener eye for connections to the Passover than more recent commentators' (p. 330).

The substance of the book is the exegetical work on the types of Christ's death Hoskins chose to treat. Evangelicalism has done well to take on board the redemptive-historical narrative of Scripture. Typological studies such as this remind us that the connections between the OT and NT are richer than a straightforward timeline can convey.

A pleasantly surprising (absent from the contents pages) subvention is the provision of various charts of verses and allusions. These include a chart of allusions from the Psalms (pp. 44–45), Johannine themes that relate to the Passover (p. 102), and types and antitypes in Hebrews 9 (p. 127). In addition, each chapter concludes with a brief reflection on the significance of the typological connections. Recurring themes are God's plan and power (pp. 55, 167). The author is surely correct to highlight the way typology reminds us of these. God reveals himself by planning and bringing about events in the OT that help future generations better appreciate the death of Christ.

It is all too possible for us to read and preach the Bible in a way that stresses logical connections and cognitive content. This is important, and one has no desire to resurrect the age-old false distinctions between facts and values or truth and beauty. Nevertheless, typological connections could be studied and presented in a manner which highlights the logical connections and links between testaments—or it may be utilised as an aspect of Scripture which is pregnant with the numinous beauty of evocativeness, longing, and prodigality. God has not simply told us that Christ died for our sins. God has painted his multi-faceted revelation of grace on a canvas that stretches through time. There is obscurity to ponder and clarity to blind.

Hoskins does not develop his thoughts on the significance of typology in great detail, though further reading is suggested. The burden of his book is inductive exposition. Still, there are suggestions that he would commend the above description of the value of typology for evangelicals. The description of his long-term wrestling with the issue of typology is indicative of a man who has himself been captured



by the surprisingly confusing evocativeness of the Scriptures. One does not pursue the studies he describes and draws upon unless unsatisfied with the merely rational. Finally, the book concludes with an appendix (pp. 189–90) which offers three weeks of Easter readings from the Bible, which would fuel readers’ reflections upon the typological revelation of Christ’s death. This feature suggests that Hoskins desires that we do not simply see the number of connections between OT and NT in a logical fashion. Rather, he hopes that we move beyond that to sustained meditation and reflection upon the death of Christ. Hoskins’ book helps us move from external consideration of typological connections to internal appropriation of the atonement those typologies reveal. This is surely the great value of typology—the images of Scripture are perplexing and surprising. With literary lateral thinking, the Spirit is able to sidle up to us and give a fresh glimpse of the gospel.

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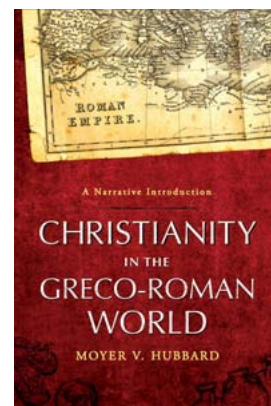
Moyer V. Hubbard. *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: A Narrative Introduction*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010. xix + 344 pp. \$24.95.

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“Background as foreground,” in bold and large type, are the first words we read in Moyer Hubbard’s introduction to the world of the NT, the area that is known in biblical studies as “backgrounds.” This first subheading in his introductory chapter captures the core conviction of Hubbard’s book and others like it, that the better one understands the historical and social context of the NT, the better one understands the NT itself.

That said, two other convictions, both pedagogical, set this book apart from other books in the genre. One is that narrative has a teaching potential unique from discourse. This conviction is manifest in seven-page pieces of historical fiction that begin each of the four major sections (Religion and Superstition; Education, Philosophy, and Oratory; City and Society; and Household and Family). These brief interconnected narratives, despite the kitsch that some readers may feel in the Amer-ancient style (“But what can you expect? His grandfather was a mason, you know—a bricklayer! . . . You can’t cover up that lineage with a toga” [p.113]), do in fact work. They provide an informative, engaging picture of the ancient Greco-Roman world and contribute to one of the clear strengths of the book, its ability to immerse readers in the NT world. Hubbard manages to give an experience of that world rather than simply information, more an emic account of that world than an etic one. A good contrast in this regard is Everett Ferguson’s *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, which has deservedly become a standard in the genre. Compared to Ferguson’s more encyclopedic style, Hubbard’s is conversational and vernacular. And while comprehensiveness might be the main virtue of Ferguson’s text, pedagogy might be the main virtue of this one. These characteristics may be largely due to the fact that the book originated as a lecture series for students at Biola University, where Hubbard teaches at Talbot School of Theology.

Another pedagogical conviction guiding Hubbard is that people learn best when the content’s practical relevance is explicit. With this in mind, he sets out to make explicit the connections between



his descriptions of the world of the NT and the NT texts themselves. The basic structure of each of the main sections, in which the first half presents cultural context and the second half the NT context, is a simple and effective fit for his purpose.

For example, in the first section, Religion and Superstition, Hubbard discusses polytheism, Diaspora Judaism, magic, divination, oracles, and skepticism. Then he applies the discussion of polytheism to 1 Cor 8, indigenous folk religion to Galatians, magic to several scenes in Acts, and divination to Paul's visionary experiences. These applications are genuinely explications, which prove to be more illuminating and interesting than parenthetical Bible references that one often encounters in introductions to the world around the text. With this method, Hubbard successfully brings "background" into the foreground; moreover, he successfully shows the value of the enterprise, explaining puzzling texts and heightening our sense of the radicalness of the Christian experience taught by the NT.

Hubbard also provides very helpful bibliographies of both primary and secondary literature at the end of each section. The primary source bibliographies are annotated and tell readers where they can find the published texts (e.g., in the Loeb Classical Library or online).

Readers should be aware that, despite its title, the book's focus is limited to Paul and Corinth. The limitation is understandable in light of the book's specific aims; nonetheless, it may leave some readers wanting. Also, although comprehensiveness is not Hubbard's main goal, two Household and Family topics, women and homosexuals, are introduced in his discussion of Greco-Roman culture but conspicuously overlooked in his NT application. This absence is noticeable not only because of the engaging treatment they receive in the first half, but because contemporary readers will likely be eager to read how Hubbard elucidates the NT texts touching these hot-button issues. At the same time, readers may commend Hubbard for his inclusion of conversion and chastity in his book, two topics that similar introductions do not frequently discuss.

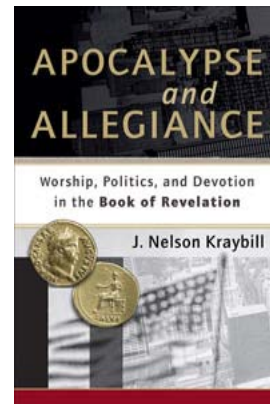
Overall, Hubbard has written a highly readable and accessible book that can be recommended for students seeking an introduction to NT "backgrounds."

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J. Nelson Kraybill. *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010. 224 pp. £14.09/\$21.99.

The last book in the biblical canon has evoked a multitude of divergent interpretations, and many Christians consider it bewildering, mysterious, and even terrifying. Kraybill, who served for twelve years as the president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, wrote a doctoral dissertation at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia that has been published as *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). In *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, his aim is to serve as a tour guide through the Book of Revelation. He explains, "In addition to studying Revelation on a scholarly level, I aspire to teach John's vision in ways that are accessible to a general audience. This book grew out of such efforts. It includes photos and graphics throughout, a minimum of footnotes or rehearsal of scholarly debates, and some contemporary application" (p. 11).



This user-friendly volume achieves that goal. It reads easily and is amply illustrated by drawings and pictures, many of which the author himself photographed. The book concludes with a timeline that features events, people, and empires that are relevant for interpreting Revelation, a helpful glossary of important terms, and a brief chart explaining the value of Roman coins from the first century. There is also an up-to-date bibliography, a map comparing the New Jerusalem with the Roman Empire, a Scripture index, and a subject index, which includes authors. Kraybill notes that reading the biblical text aloud and studying it in the context of a group are important (p. 24). Thus, he includes reflection questions at the end of each chapter that can be used by the individual reader, but also provide a stimulus for group discussion. In addition to the questions, his passion for applying the principles of Revelation to contemporary life today is evidenced in a brief section at the end of most chapters entitled "Living the Vision." These contain descriptive examples from multiple cultures and geographical places of people who embody the ideas of Revelation; many of these stories come from interviews conducted by the author.

Kraybill does not proceed sequentially through the chapters of Revelation, but introduces them to his readers in the order that he feels best accommodates a reader encountering the book for the first time. Each chapter begins with an assigned section of reading from Revelation that Kraybill encourages his readers to study in their own Bibles, although he includes the text of numerous biblical passages within *Apocalypse and Allegiance*. After introducing the prophet John from Rev 1, Kraybill moves over to Rev 13 to discuss the beasts that symbolize the Roman Empire and the local religious authorities who encouraged imperial worship. Then he examines the characters from Rev 12 who play major roles in the drama of Revelation, before zooming in on chapters 4 and 5 to discuss the worship scenes from God's throne room and the slaughtered Lamb. Revelation 7:1–11:19 is the topic of the seventh chapter, and the next two chapters look at Rev 15–19 and the fall of Babylon that John sees. Chapter 10 discusses the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2–3 since "after exploring how John deals with large themes of empire and allegiance," explains Kraybill, "we now have a broad context for understanding local issues facing the seven churches" (p. 156). Here he also includes a section on the final judgment and the millennium in Rev 20. Lastly, chapter 11 considers John's vision of the two witnesses in Rev 11 and the New Jerusalem in Rev 21–22. A final chapter concludes the book and examines how the hope found in the worship of Revelation can apply to Christians today. Throughout this entire volume, the focus is "on

the theme of worship—worship of the emperor, worship of the Lamb, and worship in our world today” (p. 22).

Kraybill has provided a helpful aid to the study of Revelation that students and pastors will find profitable; biblical scholars will appreciate his interaction with recent scholarly resources. He is particularly knowledgeable in the area of numismatics and demonstrates with numerous images how the coins used in Roman currency served as propaganda for the imperial interests. He also provides an accessible introduction to the theory of signs and shows how icons, indexes, and symbols functioned in the worship of the first century and in our worship today (see esp. pp. 34–37). The many discussions of cultural, religious, and historical backgrounds give his readers a good grasp of the social situation that Revelation addresses (cf. pp. 157–61).

In a way that is fittingly reminiscent of Revelation itself, Kraybill’s writing is designed to provoke thoughtful personal and corporate self-examination and to unsettle some of the assumptions and comfortable conclusions of twenty-first century North Americans. For instance, he asserts, “The challenge for Christians who live at the heart of empire today is to recognize the good in society around us without being so enamored of it that we fail to see when our own country acts like a beast” (p. 144).

However, it is precisely in this aspect of prophetic critique that some readers will find the biggest areas of disagreement. This is especially true for those who do not share the background and presuppositions of Kraybill’s Anabaptist tradition. “Jesus’ way of nonviolence” (p. 121) is commended throughout the volume, although the integration of this motif with Rev 19:11–21 seems a bit strained, despite Kraybill’s stress on the symbolic nature of this passage (pp. 152–53). Additionally, some may question if exemplary models for Christian conduct are displayed when the book approvingly discusses the Texas pastor who was arrested for civil disobedience by praying in one of the White House’s restricted areas (p. 40) or the Christians who “broke into military draft board offices and destroyed files at Catonsville, Maryland” during the Vietnam War (pp. 188–89). In the end, whether or not one agrees completely with Kraybill’s applications of the principles from Revelation, all can benefit from his familiarity with its symbolic world and his stimulating and provocative attempt to apply John’s visions to our world today.

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Joseph L. Mangina. *Revelation*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010. 288 pp. £19.22/\$29.99.

In the series preface, R. R. Reno, general editor of the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, explains, “The central premise in this commentary series is that doctrine provides structure and cogency to scriptural interpretation” (p. 14). In his contribution to this series, Mangina, who is an associate professor of systematic theology at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Canada, describes his task as “theological exposition, listening for the word [of God] in John’s visions, hearing the book in the context of the entire canon, and letting ourselves be guided by the trinitarian faith of the church” (p. 30).

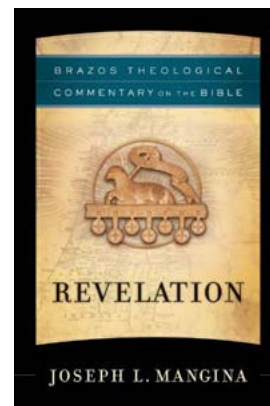
Although he writes as an Anglican theologian, Mangina demonstrates familiarity with various traditions of the church in his interpretation of the Apocalypse. While he mentions several NT scholars whose analyses of Revelation have aided him (Eugene Boring, G. B. Caird, Paul Minear, Henry Swete, Richard Bauckham, and David Barr), Mangina says, “As a theologian, the particular lens I bring to reading Revelation is the desire to clarify what the Christian community confesses concerning God and to uncover the practical implications involved in living the Christian life—in short, doctrine and ethics” (p. 22).

The format followed in this commentary matches the aims of the author. After an introductory chapter that discusses genre, interpretive approaches, structure, dating, authorship, and social situation, Mangina divides the commentary into chapters that correspond to each chapter of Revelation (although chs. 2–3 and 8–9 are treated together). Within each chapter, various verses are grouped together and discussed in more or less detail, based on the theological implications of the text that the author chooses to expound. For example, in the chapter covering Rev 21, verses 1–4 receive a little over two pages of discussion, verses 5–8 are not given a section, verses 9–11 are handled in one page, and verses 12–14, 15–21, and 22–23 each get about half a page of commentary, with verses 24–27 occupying a full page.

The book concludes with a subject index, which includes authors, a Scripture index, and a bibliography. The bibliography seems surprisingly small, with only thirteen entries on a single page, but Mangina interacts with additional scholars throughout the book in numerous footnotes. Although no maps or illustrations are included, he gives special attention to the ways that artists like Albrecht Dürer and William Blake have conceptualized the Apocalypse, as well as the impact this part of the Bible has had in the worship liturgies of the church and the music of composers such as Charles Wesley and Bob Dylan.

Mangina’s emphasis upon the Book of Revelation as the Word of God that addresses the reader (or hearer) with scriptural authority refreshingly contrasts with many other commentaries that assume the opposite. However, some will no doubt wonder if he under-emphasizes the role of hermeneutics when he asserts, “if this work is indeed holy scripture . . . then we need not worry how to bridge the gap between the first century and the twenty-first; the Spirit is perfectly capable of overcoming any gap that may exist” (p. 29). Nevertheless, Mangina is not discounting hermeneutical savvy as much as he is stressing that we must approach the text listening to hear the revelation of the Triune God. And this message should directly impact our lives in a transformative fashion.

Another possible concern in this type of theological commentary is whether a particular theological construal unduly controls the way the text is read. However, Mangina sensitively reads the text as it



stands and conducts his dogmatic exposition with exegetical restraint. For instance, after noting the theological implications that some have drawn from the grammatical irregularity of Rev 1:4, he asserts, “The idea is interesting, the exegetical thread from which it is hung slender indeed” (p. 44n14; cf. his nuanced use of Jonah as an intratextual interpretive aid for understanding Rev 18 [pp. 212–13]).

Still, there are places in the commentary where Mangina’s theological approach constrains his discussions in ways that will leave some readers wishing for more. It is somewhat surprising that Rev 1:19, considered a *crux interpretum* by many scholars, is not even mentioned, except in one sentence related to chapter 10. This omission is perhaps anticipated by Mangina’s introductory statement that “the question of time is secondary to the question of God” (p. 29). Likewise, there is no discussion on the possibility that the “the seven spirits who are before his throne” in Rev 1:4 are anything other than the Holy Spirit (pp. 42–43). In light of the numerous scholars who argue for a different interpretation here (e.g., that they are angelic beings), it would have been helpful to at least have a footnote acknowledging the exegetical debate and briefly outlining why Mangina is convinced that the Holy Spirit is in view here.

In the end, although the pastor or theological student will certainly also want to consult other commentaries that spend more time discussing various exegetical options and historical and literary contexts, Mangina has provided an excellent theological reading of the Apocalypse that overall is sensitive to exegetical concerns and informed by a familiarity with the symbolic world of the book. Scattered throughout his exposition are comments that usefully guide one’s interpretation (e.g., “The visions of Revelation often seem to resemble the Russian matryoshka doll, with each figure opening up to disclose yet another, and another, and so on” [p. 203] or his explanation of the distinction made by Kovacs and Rowland between “decoding” and “actualizing” interpretations [p. 29]). He is particularly helpful in discussing the doctrine of the church throughout Revelation (cf. the chapter on Rev 2–3 and pp. 162–63, 169–70, 190, 209).

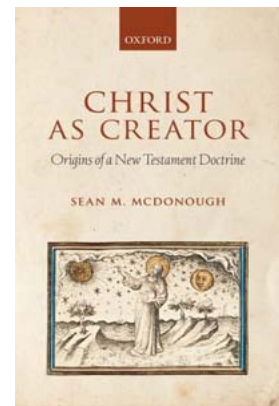
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Sean M. McDonough. *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xi + 294 pp. \$120.00.

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Many of the earliest Christian texts claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the creator of the universe and thereby include Jesus within the divine identity. That is undisputedly accurate. The origins, however, of this prevalent early Christian belief are more controversial and enigmatic. In this study Sean McDonough, professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, attempts “to reconstruct the theological framework within which such an extraordinary assertion could be made” (p. 2). McDonough is emphatic that the most valuable pieces of evidence for reconstructing this framework are not antecedent religio-philosophical concepts (e.g., Wisdom or Logos) but are, rather, the early Church’s memories of Jesus. It is Jesus who defines these prior theological concepts and not the other way around. Simply to amass “background texts” as parallels fails to understand that these texts (as well as the NT claim that



Christ is creator) arise out of particular intellectual systems. Therefore these writings “must first be read against the background of the religious community in which they emerged” (p. 13).

McDonough examines whether the church’s memories of Jesus lend any evidence for his role as an agent of creation. McDonough notes that many of the healings in the Synoptics present Jesus as the Creator God’s agent who restores creation to its intended order (e.g., Mark 1:40–45; Luke 13:10–17). Likewise, the exorcisms demonstrate that Jesus can control supernatural chaos and the most threatening elements of the created order (e.g., Luke 8:26–39; Mark 9:14–29). John’s Gospel also remembers Jesus as God’s agent of creation (John 1:3). Jesus controls the natural order as he turns water into wine (John 2:1–11); he is the “light of the world” (John 8:12; cf. Gen. 1:3); and he gives life to the dead (John 5:28–29; 11:1–44). The church’s memories of Jesus, therefore, provide serious hints for associating him as an agent of creation. But an even more important impetus for associating Christ as creator is the commonly found nexus in antiquity between redemption and creation or, to state it differently, between cosmic order and social order. McDonough examines in some detail the biblical and cultural assumption that connects creation with redemption. And the NT texts provide abundant evidence that belief in Jesus’ agency in creation resulted from their belief that Jesus is God’s definitive agent in redemption (see John 1:3, 10, 12; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16, 20; Heb 1:2–3).

Yet the primary impetus for claiming Jesus as the agent of creation is his messianic status: “Creation marks the beginning of his messianic dominion; he rules the world he made” (p. 65). As God’s anointed King (e.g., Pss 2 and 110), as the one entrusted with the task of acting on God’s behalf, the Father grants Jesus the task of creating the universe. McDonough notes that all of the texts that present Jesus as creator “focus on the theme of messianic lordship” (p. 68). Thus, to affirm that the Messiah created the world logically extends his universal lordship over the created order. The OT used the categories of Word, Spirit, Wisdom, and glory to communicate God’s creation of, and presence with, the world. The early Christians affirmed that Jesus as Messiah had these attributes that made the creation of the world possible. Messiah Jesus had God’s Word (Ps 33; John 1:1–2), God’s Spirit (Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18–19), and God’s Wisdom (Prov 8; Col 2:3)—precisely God’s own creative qualities. Thus, the confession that Jesus was creator arose out of this scriptural messianic matrix and the early Christians’ experience of Jesus as the Messiah.

Chapters 5–6 examine how the claim that Christ was creator related to the Hellenistic context in which it emerged. McDonough does not think that Greek philosophy influenced the Johannine “Logos” or “the Image” of Col 1. The NT authors have no interest, for example, in exploring the process of creation. McDonough argues that the Greek views on creation, a few exceptions aside, tended to focus more on an impersonal force as the agent of creation. And the problem of God’s transcendence and his connection to the created world was not a problem unique to the Greeks. There is for McDonough then no clear reason that the NT authors should engage Greek thought on its own terms. McDonough also disputes the idea that Philo contributed directly to the belief in Jesus as creator. The philosophical thought-world of Philo and the messianic thought-world of the NT writings are worlds apart from each other. The former rejects any conception of God as directly involved with the world, whereas the latter affirm a God so involved with the world that he sent his Son to it.

The final major section of the book (encompassing chs. 7–10) is devoted to exegeting the primary NT passages that relate to Christ’s role in creating the world. In 1 Cor 8–10, Paul argues that the Messiah and not demons is the mediator between the divine and human worlds. McDonough demonstrates that in antiquity idols, or the demons who stand behind them, were seen as offering a connection with

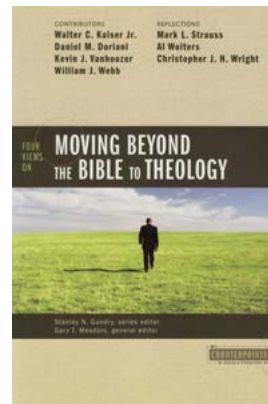
the divine world. Paul's claim that God created all things through Christ in 1 Cor 8:6 is the basis for humanity's exclusive worship of the Messiah. First Corinthians 8:6 "is Paul's way of saying that the Messiah has always been God's means of mediating his presence to the world" (p. 168). McDonough argues that Col 1:15–20 provides the clearest evidence for the belief that Jesus is the agent of both creation and re-creation. This text demonstrates that the doctrine of Christ as creator developed out of his role in redemption. The prepositional theology of the hymn (phrases such as "in him," "through him," and "for him") is reminiscent of Hellenistic philosophical speculation, but it is unlikely that the hymn was influenced in any meaningful way by it. McDonough's exegesis of Heb 1:1–14 strongly supports his argument that the doctrine of Christ as creator developed out of a messianic matrix of scriptural interpretation. He suggests that Heb 1:2 and 2:5–10 affirm that Christ is even the creator of the world to come. With respect to John 1:1, McDonough notes that there is no necessary reason to look for a prior hypostatic principle that has influenced John's Logos. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' very words prove that he shares the divine identity. The best means of capturing the union of the Son and the Father is "in the concept of God's creative speaking, a comprehensive term for God's self-expression to the world" (p. 214). As the narrative unfolds, the Son continually reveals the Father through his words.

McDonough's *Christ as Creator* is a valuable resource for all students of the NT since the study interacts with a breadth of NT writings. McDonough joins the ranks of the likes of Richard Bauckham, Larry Hurtado, and others in his insistence on Jesus' Messiahship as the fundamental category for understanding NT Christology. His primary thesis, that the affirmation of Jesus as creator emerged in a context of messianic reflection, is convincing and represents an alternative to those who would argue that it derived out of Jewish wisdom speculation. McDonough's methodological privileging of the NT texts as well as the early church's actual experience of Jesus over antecedent religious texts is a healthy corrective to much NT scholarship. Only two minor critiques emerged in my reading. First, McDonough's argument could have been enhanced had he been more forthright in the structure of the chapters (see, however, the comments on pp. 14–15). Essentially, the book unfolds in four parts: chapters 1–4 set forth the hermeneutical dynamics that led to the belief that Christ was creator; chapters 5–6 are devoted to the doctrine of creation in the Hellenistic context; chapters 7–10 examine the NT writings that refer to Christ as creator; and chapter 11 concludes the book with some theological reflections. It is a small quibble, but the clarity and flow of McDonough's argument would have been improved had he further explained the logic of the ordering of the chapters. Second, McDonough's work strongly critiques those who would account for the development of the doctrine through Jewish wisdom speculation, but he too quickly passes over certain significant texts with little or no comment. For example, more interaction with such texts as Luke 7:35/Matt 11:19, Luke 11:49, and Matt 11:27 would have been welcome (see pp. 38–40). These critiques are minor, however, and I heartily recommend this book both for NT and theology students alike.

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Gary T. Meadors, ed. *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 369 pp. \$19.99.

In line with other volumes in the Counterpoints series, each of the primary proponents in this volume—Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Daniel M. Doriani, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and William J. Webb—sets forth his view on how Christians ought to move beyond the Bible to theology and responds to the other contributors. This volume also adds a series of “Reflections” written by three further scholars—Mark L. Strauss, Al Wolters, and Christopher J. H. Wright—who have not participated in the primary four-way discussion. The title of the volume is not accidental: the writers have been asked how Christians ought to move *beyond* the Bible to theology. Transparently all of us go beyond the Bible in *some* sense whenever we apply biblical data or reasoning to cultures far removed from those found in the Bible, or relate biblical truth to, say, bioengineering. As the editor comments in his introduction, “When you shake someone’s hand at church rather than greeting him or her with a holy kiss (1 Thess. 5:26), you have gone ‘beyond the Bible’” (p. 9). It is easy to conjure up other examples. What, then, warrants the move beyond the Bible to theology? How should we go about it?



Kaiser offers “a principlizing model.” Because so much of the Bible is given in specific cultural elements and locations, priority must be given to finding the principles found in Scripture. The principle of “principlizing” is found within the Scripture itself, Kaiser avers. Thus in the case of incest found in 1 Cor 5, the prohibition of incest carries on from OT moral law (that is the principle), but the sanction demanded by the law of Moses, viz. stoning, has been replaced by excommunication, which may be temporary if it leads to genuine repentance. “Principles, then, must be given priority over accompanying cultural elements, especially when directed to the times and settings in which that text was written—times now different and separate from the contemporary manner of expressing that same principle” (p. 21). Kaiser then attempts to apply his “model” to such diverse topics as euthanasia, the roles of women in the church, and slavery.

While the respondents express gratitude for many of the thrusts of Kaiser’s work, they do not hesitate to raise a variety of questions. They suggest that Kaiser tends to elevate the principles he finds in Scripture above what the Scripture actually says. Moreover, is it so very easy to extract a-cultural principles, not least when we recall that we, the interpreters, are ourselves enculturated? Moreover, although Kaiser strongly affirms the progress of redemption in Scripture (the earlier texts not being imperfect but immature), at the same time he hunts for *timeless* principles: how does one reconcile this pair of stances? One critic (Vanhoozer) notes that all of Kaiser’s case studies focus on moral or ethical issues; there is no case study on how one develops beyond Scripture in doctrinal areas (e.g., the Trinity, atonement theology). Another critic (Webb) interacts primarily with Kaiser’s handling of slavery.

Doriani offers “a redemptive-historical model.” His first emphasis is the importance of diligent exegesis of text after text, bringing all resources to the task. This includes narrative texts and other passages that are less commonly mined. Above all we must maintain the unity of Scripture in its development toward the centrality of Christ. Certainly we must learn caution and submission when the Bible challenges our own cherished cultural icons and commitments: God has the right to correct and reform us, so we must be on our guard against domesticating Scripture. The next step is to “take our

culture's questions and objections to Scripture, looking for biblical and theological resources that make it easier for people to understand and accept it. Thus we go beyond the page by hearing the questions people raise and by engaging in theological reflection, perhaps not so tightly tied to Scripture, so as to advance biblical ideas in a new setting" (p. 99). Doriani devotes space to undermining dangerous forms of casuistry while cautiously supporting the meditative and explorative casuistry of the Puritans. Ethical matters ought to begin with the appropriate imitation of patterns of living found within the biblical narratives, and especially in the imitation of Christ. Like all the contributors to this volume, Doriani includes examples of the practical outworking of his views—rather briefly on the atonement, gambling, and church architecture, at greater length on women in ministry, scarcely at all on slavery.

The respondents are more scattered in their critiques of Doriani than they are for Kaiser. Kaiser mostly approves what Doriani writes, but criticizes him on his handling of specific texts, especially with respect to women's ministry. Vanhoozer applauds Doriani's essay, but thinks that he is partly "tone-deaf" to insight from the broad history of interpretation (though he finds Doriani less tone-deaf than Kaiser and Webb). Vanhoozer encourages Doriani "to explore the potential of a distinctly redemptive-historical casuistry rather than viewing casuistry as an appeal to principles abstracted from the history of redemption" (p. 130). Webb thinks that Doriani's approach reflects a merely "static understanding of Scripture" (p. 133) that actually diminishes Scripture's authority because it does not allow interpreters to create the trajectories that Webb himself judges to be crucially important.

Vanhoozer's chapter supports "a drama-of-redemption model"—a "theodrama" (his coinage, of course, as readers of his earlier books will know). When he emphasizes the Bible's "story," he is not thinking so much of a literary genre "as a series of events that, when taken together as a unified drama, serve as a lens or interpretative framework through which Christians think, make sense of their experience, and decide what to do and how to do it" (p. 155). He holds that his approach goes beyond the "history of redemption" approach, in that the latter does not really tell interpreters how to move beyond the Bible. By contrast,

the drama-of-redemption approach affirms God's actions in history, preserves the emphasis on story, and incorporates a canonically attuned, wisdom-oriented "chastened" principlizing, while better integrating the interpreters into action. The superiority of theodrama as a model for thinking about biblical authority and interpretation thus consists in its awareness that understanding is a matter not only of cognition but of action; moreover, it insists that there are biblical texts whose meanings are only fully "realized" as something is *done* with them or on their basis. (p. 159)

Vanhoozer sticks with his theodramatic terminology: script, performance, achieving the dramatic vision, and so on. This means he frequently has to explain how his "model" relates to suggestions put forth by others (e.g., see his comparison of his approach with that of Richard Hays, p. 171). Relying on Paul Ricoeur, Vanhoozer argues that understanding comes not by processing information, but by "inhabiting" the world the text projects. At one point he proposes three imperatives for developing "canon sense" that then serve as "guidelines for determining theodramatic fittingness" (p. 179), and three more for "catholic sensibility," i.e., fittingness to the situation. When he works out his model in examples, he treats Mary theologically, beginning with the "Mother of God" language as it was coined and understood in the fifth century and then developed into something quite different, and issues in transsexuality (especially sex-change operations).



Kaiser challenges Vanhoozer's reliance on Paul Ricoeur, in part by attempting a Ricoeurian reading of Vanhoozer's own text. As for the two applications (viz., Mary and transsexuality), Kaiser does not think that Vanhoozer is drawing his conclusions out of theodrama in any distinctive way, but is in fact engaging in the principlizing that Kaiser himself espouses. Doriani declares his admiring agreement with almost everything Vanhoozer has written, but voices two reservations: *first*, although the Scripture is constantly in the background for Vanhoozer, Vanhoozer rarely works out of Scripture or provides substantive scriptural warrant for things like "theodramatic fittingness," and his position would be greatly strengthened if he closed this gap; and *second*, Vanhoozer's work would be stronger and more convincing if he abandoned the jargon—a fault that Doriani traces to little experience in the work of preaching and teaching in the church. Webb applauds Vanhoozer's work primarily because he thinks he can accommodate his own approach within it. If he has a criticism of Vanhoozer's practical outworkings, it is this: Vanhoozer should be open to the possibility of genetic deviation behind transsexuality.

Webb offers "a redemptive-movement model." He contrasts his approach with "a more *static* or *stationary* appropriation of Scripture" (p. 217). He argues that Scripture itself warrants a grasp of the movement of redemption, a "redemptive spirit appropriation" that encourages interpreters to move beyond the application of Scripture in the ancient world. This requires a kind of trajectory from Scripture beyond the time it was written, such that illumination allows us to make applications not envisaged in the static text of Scripture that are nevertheless in line with the direction Scripture points. Webb devotes most of his space to concrete challenges such as the slavery texts and texts that deal with corporal punishment and the extent to which they do (or, in fact, do not) align very well with modern "spanking." Webb ends his chapter by seeking to debunk various misconceptions about his "model," including the charge that the redemptive-movement model is new.

Kaiser offers a robust critique, primarily in a variety of specific charges that Webb's "model" is too little tethered to the text and that Webb's own treatment of slavery and other matters distorts biblical texts in various ways. Kaiser acknowledges that this approach is not new, but insists that it has always been a mere sub-component or augmentation of grammatical-historical hermeneutics, not the controlling model that Webb advocates. Similarly, Doriani asserts that the question for Webb's proposed paradigm is not "Is it [ever] true?" but "Is it the best tool for interpretation?" (p. 256). In particular, he argues that Webb's approach so focuses on ethical issues that he "neglects the redemptive-historical character of the Bible and the capacity of Scripture to lead us to Christ" (p. 260). The details of his interaction with Webb often focus on aspects of the corporal punishment debate. Perhaps Vanhoozer's strongest criticism of Webb is that judging by Webb's own writings he is motivated to address certain "disturbing" texts of the Bible and thus wants to create a sort of "bibliodicy." Yet rarely does he actually handle those texts as discourse, to probe deeply as to what they actually mean in the Bible and find out how they "work." And in typical Vanhoozer word-play, he asks, "How . . . does the trajectory approach guard against the temptation to mistake the *Heilige* (Holy) Spirit for a Hegelian (Enlightenment) imposter?" (p. 267).

The concluding three chapters reflect on the work of the principal authors, and they emphasize quite different things. Strauss devotes much of his space to summary and then concludes with some reflections on how disciplined thought on the nature of contextualization might play into the discussion. Wolters begins with the shrewd observation that the four authors understand what moving beyond the Bible to theology *means* in at least four overlapping but distinguishable ways:

- (1) bringing the authority of Scripture to bear on issues that Scripture itself does not directly address (e.g., in contemporary bioethics);
- (2) dealing with ethically troubling

biblical injunctions or assumptions (e.g., gender hierarchy or harsh punishments); (3) forging theological categories that, though not themselves explicitly taught in Scripture, systematize and develop explicit biblical teaching (e.g., in understanding Mary as *theotokos*); (4) focusing on the reception history and exegesis of a biblical theme (e.g., gender hierarchy). (p. 300)

Wolters then interacts with the four authors in various ways, rejecting Webb’s model (he accepts the validity of the questions Webb poses but thinks he has the answers wrong) and tweaking the other contributors in various ways—all in the self-acknowledged framework of his own Dooyeweerdian heritage. Wright argues that none of the four models is to be accepted as the “right” one, but that they are mutually complementary and actually need one another.

Like other books in the Counterpoints series, this one admirably serves its purpose in helping readers come to grips with some of the divergences of opinion on these matters. Frankly, I also find this format for discussion rather frustratingly predictable. I would happily recommend it to those students who by reading it are likely to develop their own critical thinking, and would equally happily *not* recommend it to those students who like to think that by talking endlessly of the hermeneutical options they can remain above the fray as the most wonderfully inclusive of them all. One transparent weakness in this book leaps out from the earliest pages and never goes away. In the pursuit of how one moves *beyond* the Bible to theology, there is no serious discussion as to what *theology* is. What does it mean to move from the Bible *to* theology? Or is there some sense in which *all* theology moves *beyond* the Bible? If so, isn’t the framework of discussion in this book far too narrow—i.e., if all theology moves beyond the Bible in some sense, then do we not need to set that stage before tackling the topics addressed here? To put this another way, under these assumptions aren’t we really asking how we ought to do theology?

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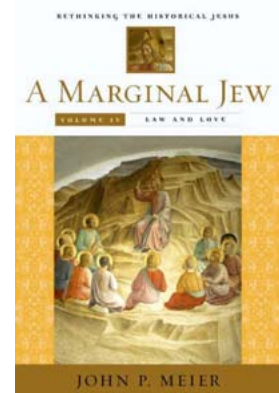
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John P. Meier. *Law and Love*. Vol. 4 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009. 735 pp. £30.00/\$55.00.

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Four “honest historians” walk into the Harvard Divinity School Library, are put on a Spartan diet, and not allowed to emerge until they have hammered out “a consensus document on who Jesus of Nazareth was and what he intended in his own time and place” (*Marginal Jew*, 1: 1). Far from the makings of pub humor, this “unpapal conclave” is the scenario that John Meier envisioned back in 1991 to describe the scope and intention of his ambitious project, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. This “unpapal conclave” has now emerged for the fourth time—though now a Muslim has joined the rank and file (p. 12)—this time to present their “consensus document” on the historical Jesus, the “fluid and complex meaning of the Law” and of Halakic debates in the first century (p. 17).

Nearly one hundred years ago, Albert Schweitzer contended that Reimarus had grasped and explained Jesus’ attitude toward the law and the process by which the disciples came to take up a freer



attitude so fully that “modern historical science does not need to add a word” (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press], 24). Meier, naturally, demurs: “although I may not be right in my positions, every other book or article on the historical Jesus and the Law has been to a great degree wrong” (p. 2). For Meier, “the historical Jesus turns out to be the halakic Jesus.” And if past commentators “had stopped for a moment to think about the matter from a truly historical perspective” they would have realized it couldn’t have been any other way (p. 297).

Where did scholarship go off the rails? Meier suggests that it is precisely in its missing the larger enigma of how “Jesus can at one and the same time affirm the Law as the given, as the normative expression of God’s will for Israel, and yet in a few individual cases or legal areas (e.g., divorce and oaths) teach and enjoin what is contrary to the Law, simply on his own authority” (p. 3). The main chapters of the book deal with the Jesus and the Law, divorce, oaths, Sabbath, purity laws, and the love commands of Jesus. Each chapter follows a basic pattern: the reading of the original commandment in the OT, then developments of this theme in intertestamental literature, and a sifting of the Gospel material as well as comparisons with wider NT texts and rabbinic sources.

The first main chapter is “Jesus and the Law—But what is the Law?” Palestinian Judaism consisted of “competing interpretations of the Torah” and animated the formation and fragmentation of “various 1<sup>st</sup>-century sects and movements” (p. 31). The mantra of the volume is therefore that “the historical Jesus is the Halakic Jesus.” That is, “the Jesus concerned with and arguing about the Mosaic Law and the questions of practice arising from it” (p. 8) The second main chapter, “Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce,” focuses the shocking statement in the final words of Mark 10:11: *ep’ autēn*. “The idea that a husband, by having sex with a woman not his wife, commits adultery *against his wife* is not a concept found in the Jewish Scriptures, where adultery is an offense against the marriage rights of some other husband” (p. 111). Here Jesus overturned the law. The third main chapter is on the prohibition of oaths, and like the findings on divorce, the historical Jesus’ prohibition of oaths exemplifies his “revocation of individual institutions and/or commandments of the Mosaic Law” (p. 205). The fourth main chapter on Sabbath judges many of the Sabbath stories to be unhistorical, whose “present form reflects Christian polemics” (p. 294). But recoverable traces of the historical Jesus emerge in his embracing of the Sabbath commandments. The “most difficult question concerning Jesus and the Law” is the subject of the fifth main chapter: Jesus and purity laws (p. 342). Meier judges “the authentic Jesus tradition [as] completely silent on the topic of ritual purity” (p. 414). But even this silence, or what Meier calls “Jesus’ studied indifference to ritual impurity,” needs to be seen “within the larger framework of his claim to be the charismatic prophet of the end time” (p. 415). In other words, his failure to produce a systematic presentation of the Law says more about his understanding of his authority: such is so because he says it. The final main chapter looks at the love commandments, deeming the double love command as originating with the historical Jesus—which, Meier argues, displays a “remarkable degree of competence in the Torah” (p. 575). But the “historical Jesus never directly connects his individual halakic pronouncements to some basic or organizing principle of love” (p. 655).

The difficulty with the legal material in the Gospels is that the “early Christian movement naturally selected and passed on those teachings of Jesus that it found particularly useful in spreading its message and winning converts” (p. 652). As the Jesus movement progressed in its post-Acts 15 mission, the inner-Jewish debates of Jesus “may have struck audiences as irrelevant or even unintelligible” (p. 652).

Many readers will walk away frustrated by the various *non liquet* judgments of *A Marginal Jew*, and, I imagine, some may wonder what utility arises from a book on Jesus and the Law that doesn’t

have much to say about relevant ethical topics (cf. p. 75). But the chapter on divorce alone is worth the price of the book for the busy pastor who seeks to speak intelligibly (and non-anachronistically!) about the topic. Moreover, this volume helpfully problematizes received readings of Jesus and the Law. In any case, *Law and Love* is all we've come to expect from Meier: erudite, meticulous, careful, iconoclastic, and a must-read for those interested in the historical figure who inspired the movement known as Christianity.

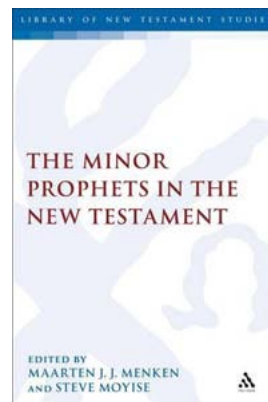
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Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise, eds. *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament*. Library of New Testament Studies 377. London: T&T Clark, 2009. xii + 179 pp. £65.00/\$130.00.

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Maarten Menken is Professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Tilburg (The Netherlands), and Steve Moyise is Professor of New Testament at the University of Chichester (UK). The two have teamed up again to edit this fourth volume in the series 'The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel,' which has thus far examined the use three OT books in the NT: Psalms (2004), Isaiah (2005), and Deuteronomy (2007). This is the first to examine an OT corpus. The intended readership is "scholars, teachers in the field of New Testament studies, postgraduate students and advanced undergraduates" (back cover).



As in previous volumes, the editors have assembled a team of scholars to contribute chapters in their areas of specialization. Following an introduction and a chapter that examines the use of the Minor Prophets (MP) in the second temple literature (Leonhardt-Balzer), eight authors each devote a chapter either to a book or a corpus of the NT: the Gospel of Mark (Breytenbach); Matthew (Ham); Luke–Acts (Van de Sandt); John (Menken); Paul (Moyise); Hebrews (Gheorghita); James, 1–2 Peter, and Jude (Jobes); and Revelation (Jauhiainen). The contributors investigate the NT quotations of and/or allusions to the MP within their respective assignments. Because there are no quotations or certain allusions to the MP in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, the Pastorals, Philemon, or 1–3 John, these are not examined in the study.

In the introduction, the editors state that in specialist study of the OT in the NT, "there is no consensus on how terms like quotation, allusion and echo should be used, or indeed what methods or approaches should be applied" (p. 4). Therefore, they decided "to allow each contributor to use whatever methods and approaches that they find most illuminating for the particular text being discussed" (p. 4). This rich diversity is the strength of the work: eight specialists employ eight distinct approaches, offering studies upon eight different books or corpora of the NT. The study thus serves as a fantastic primer to the variegated state of the discipline and to a range of approaches currently employed therein. Furthermore, it highlights how different approaches to the use of the OT in a NT text can shed their particular light upon that use. For example, Menken's careful attention to text-form differences between the quoted and quoting text in the use of Zech 9:9 in John 12:15 reveals what the author via his redaction

wished to emphasize in the new context (pp. 80–85). Van de Sandt explores the original context of Luke’s quotations and demonstrates that “ignoring the contexts from which these quotations originate is to miss important intertextual echoes” (p. 57). Moyise highlights the dissonance between the original context of the MP quotation and the new context in the Pauline literature and thus raises the larger perennial questions concerning faithfulness to original context and the degree to which the apostle’s Christian presuppositions governed his reading of the OT. Gheorghita shows how attention to wider considerations such as *Sitz im Leben* and the broader literary context of the quoting text may bear fruit. Ham walks each quotation of the MP in Matthew through several steps: broad NT context, original OT context, its use in early and later Jewish literature, its use in early Christian literature, investigation of synoptic parallels, analysis of text form, and finally function in new context. (A similar approach is followed throughout G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007].)

The diversity of approaches employed within the work is therefore not a shortcoming. True, the reader must retool upon completion of one chapter in order to read the next, for the approach of each contributor is distinct. The editors nevertheless did command a common structure for the chapters so that they generally follow an ‘Introduction—Quotations—Allusions—Conclusion’ format that provides some overall continuity. The shortcoming, rather, is the failure to discuss method and terminology on the part of several of the individual contributors in their ‘Introduction’ sections that begin their studies. The lack of consensus concerning terms and method, however, makes compliance to fundamental principles of scholarship urgent: each scholar simply must be explicit as to what it is he or she is doing methodologically within their own investigations and must define key terms in the process. Perhaps sensitive to the allusive nature of the material assigned to them—there are no MP quotations in James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, or Revelation—Jobes and Jauhiainen do offer some discussion (see also Menken, p. 80). The overall patchiness of discussion of method and terminology, however, is therefore the true weakness of the study. In this regard, the book reflects the exciting yet disheveled state of the discipline generally.

Future volumes may be more constructive if they robustly synthesize the important discoveries of the otherwise isolated chapters, such as the prevalence of Zech 9–14 upon NT thought. (Some general trends are mentioned briefly on pp. 4–5.) And a bibliography that compiled into one place all the cited works relevant to the OT in the NT would facilitate further study.

Keeping in view the criticism above, which is not insignificant, there is otherwise hardly a paragraph of chaff in the entire study. The contributors have carefully used their allotted space and packed their contributions with exegetical, intertextual, and theological insights. I detected only a single typographical error (of the Hebrew, p. 87). Technical in nature, some students and pastors will find the work arduous, and the price puts it out of reach of most of the same. The work reveals that the Minor Prophets, far from neglected, significantly inform NT thought and theology.

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Steve Moyise. *Paul and Scripture: Studying the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010. viii + 151 pp. £12.99/\$21.99.

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Steve Moyise is Professor of New Testament at the University of Chichester, UK. He has authored several books in the field of ‘the Old Testament in the New,’ including *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (1995), *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction* (2001), and *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (2008). He is also co-editing a series with Maarten Menken that explores how particular books of the OT are used in the New, four books to date: Psalms (2004), Isaiah (2005), Deuteronomy (2007), and the Minor Prophets (2009), all in the JSNTS/LNTS series.

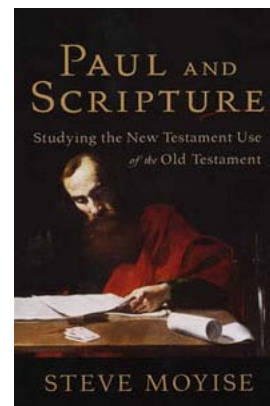
Although the author at least mentions that the “theme” of his book is “to study *how* Paul interpreted Scripture” (p. 1, emphasis in original), a fuller introduction is desirable to give the reader some needed orientation. The back cover offers endorsements by four NT professors, and at least from these it can be gathered that the book is probably an “overview” (Horrell) or “introduction” (Enns) to “Paul’s use of Scripture” (Horrell) or “Paul’s quotations from the Scriptures” (Ciampa) or—and this is probably the most accurate, as I see it now—“how each of the main features of Paul’s teaching grows out of and interacts with the Hebrew Scriptures” (Dunn). According to the endorsements, the intended audience is students. Without anything of a true introduction, however, it was not until halfway through the book that I began to have a feel for the book’s aim. I had mistakenly assumed that the book was intended to replace E. E. Ellis’s *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, a classic in the field but now somewhat dated (1957).

The book consists of an ‘introduction’ and eight chapters. The introduction is largely an historical orientation to the apostle Paul. The first three chapters then discuss Adam (“creation stories”), Abraham, and Moses in turn and how these significant figures of the biblical history shaped Paul’s thought. The next four chapters explore Paul’s use of Scripture from each of the tripartite divisions of the Hebrew Bible: the law (ch. 4), the prophets (chs. 5–6), and the writings (ch. 7). Because Paul’s use of the prophets is extensive, the topic is subdivided into two parts: ‘Israel and the Gentiles’ (ch. 5) and ‘the life of the Christian community’ (ch. 6). The concluding chapter introduces the reader to modern approaches to Paul’s use of Scripture (ch. 8).

Scattered throughout at appropriate places in the manuscript are shaded boxes that discuss in more detail significant yet possibly unfamiliar topics that the text proper briefly mentions. Such topics include ‘Introductory formulae (IF);’ ‘New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS);’ ‘Allegory and typology;’ ‘Testimony hypothesis;’ ‘Origen’s Hexapla,’ and ‘Criteria for assessing the presence of an allusion.’

In my estimation, the book is written for students as an introduction to how the main themes of Paul’s teaching stem from a reconfigured understanding of Scripture in light of the Christ-event and how the apostle interprets Scripture to support that teaching. It is less an introduction to Paul’s use of Scripture proper. The work discusses the same topic as that of Ellis broadly speaking, but the two go about their studies in different ways. For example, while Ellis spends significant time discussing text-form and first-century Jewish exegetical methods, Moyise largely passes over such discussions. Ellis’s book is more for an informed, third-year student, while Moyise assumes no prior formal study of Paul.

Moyise focuses upon Paul’s explicit quotations, but some of the more obvious allusions are also discussed (e.g., Ps 143:2 LXX at Rom 3:20 [pp. 100–101]). The book does not discuss every quotation,



but only those that feature significantly in the major emphases of Paul's teaching. Highlights include chapter 4 on the law with its lucid introduction to the New Perspective, and chapter 8 with its summary of recent approaches—intertextual, narrative, and rhetorical—to the study of Paul and Scripture and their major practitioners.

While Moyise would probably not be comfortable to don the tag 'evangelical,' he is fair to represent issues that concern them. For example, with regard to the issue of the authorship of Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, Moyise reports the conservative positions without a hint of belittlement (pp. 1–2). Some critical scholars never bother to mention that alternatives exist and if they do, only to pour scorn upon them. Moyise is also sensitive to what is often a conservative concern about Paul and assertions of his quoting out of context. Moyise feels no need to defend Paul, but frequently I found him offering thoughtful interpretive options that try to provide a reasonable explanation for how the apostle used Scripture, rather than blathering blanket-allegations that the apostle twisted them to further his own ends. Not that all will be satisfied with all of his conclusions. Moyise is content to raise questions and offer possible solutions without sweeping unseemly evidence under the rug. It is in this way that the book highlights why Paul's use of Scripture is such a tantalizing yet challenging field that refuses simple or simplistic answers. For a possible future edition, I would suggest that a more thorough discussion of Paul's first century presuppositions would be valuable—too often the debates concerning 'original context' are driven more by twenty-first-century presuppositions than by the light of the apostle's own.

I recommend the book as an up-to-date supplement to Ellis and as an inviting, informed, accessible introduction to Scripture and scripturally-shaped themes in Paul. Moyise leaves the reader wanting to read further and study more, which is, of course, precisely his point.

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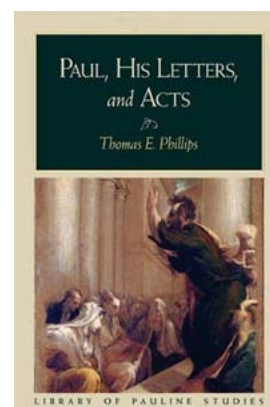
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Thomas E. Phillips. *Paul, His Letters, and Acts*. Library of Pauline Studies. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009. 256 pp. \$24.95.

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No one doubts the importance of the apostle Paul to Christianity. The question many scholars raise, however, is which Paul is the most authentic: the Paul of the epistles or the Paul of Acts? This "Search for the Historical Paul" looks at both the letters of the apostle and the accounts of his ministry recorded by Luke and puzzles over which reflects the most accurate representation of the great apostle. Are these two Pauls the same? Are they very different? If different, can these Pauls be reconciled?

It is to these and other similar questions that Thomas Phillips devotes his energy and analysis in this volume. A significant contribution to the Library of Pauline Studies, Phillips, Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, sets out to investigate how the Paul of the letters and the Paul of Acts relate to each other. Phillips describes the central project of this volume as having two aspects: first, "to help interpreters to understand—and perhaps establish for themselves—the lines of demarcation between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the letters.



Second . . . [to] help interpreters to compare the ‘Paul’ on each side of these lines of demarcation” (p. 2). As Phillips approaches his task, he wants to bridge Acts and the letters, taking into account twin towers that suspend his bridge: “the recognition of *Paul’s split personality* within contemporary biblical scholarship and the importance of *the apostolic conference in Jerusalem*” (p. 2, emphasis his).

Phillips divides the book into six chapters. The first chapter, “The Plurality of Plausible Pauls,” surveys the work of Bruce Chilton and compares it to that of John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed. These authors present us with two divergent views of Paul based on the principle that Chilton is willing to accord more weight to the accounts reported in Acts. Crossan and Reed, on the other hand, “severely restrict their use of Acts as a source for reconstructing Paul’s life, and the resulting Paul does, by design, look significantly different from the Paul of Acts” (p. 27).

In the second chapter, Phillips examines the roots of Paul’s split personality in biblical scholarship and finds them in the work of Ferdinand Christian Baur in the nineteenth century and then that of John Knox and Philipp Vielhauer in the twentieth. Phillips concludes this chapter with his own methodological proposal based upon four principles: “1) independent inquiry into Acts and the letters; 2) intentional separation of Paul’s life and thought; 3) conscious focus upon lesser data sets; 4) and disciplined comparison moving from the lesser data sets to the great data sets” (p. 47).

Following this method, the remaining chapters of the work begin with an introduction, a survey of the Pauline data set (taken from the seven uncontested epistles), a survey of the Acts data set, and a comparison of the two data sets. With this method in place, Phillips spends the remainder of this work carrying out his plan with regard to four areas of Paul’s life. First, chapter 3 surveys the chronological challenges involved in coordinating the data from Paul’s epistles and Acts. One of the key questions revolves around Paul’s trips to Jerusalem. Galatians records two visits while Acts records five. Which Galatians visits correspond to which Acts visits?

Chapter 4 looks at Paul’s relationship to the Greco-Roman world. Here Phillips examines the topics of Paul’s family, his educational background, his identity as a Jew, his vocation, and finally his political status, or how did Paul see himself in relation to the Roman Empire?

Chapter 5 seeks to define Paul’s place in the church, in particular his relationship to those who participated in the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15. Here Phillips examines the references in Paul and Acts to five key individuals: the three leaders of the Jerusalem church (Peter, James, and John) and two of Paul’s co-missionaries (Barnabas and Titus).

The final chapter looks at other individuals who were a part of the Pauline churches. Here Phillips groups them in two broad categories of Paul’s associates and converts and then focuses on one individual, Apollos.

The data from these four chapters is extensive and, as a result, the important details and various possible constructions are too numerous to survey in a brief review. In the conclusion, however, Phillips, who has not committed himself clearly in the earlier chapters, finally tells the reader the decisions he has reached. First, he regards the relationship of Gal 2 to Acts 15 to be the primary issue in relating the Paul of the epistles and the Paul of Acts (pp. 191–92). Second, he contends “that the primary effect of critical scholarship’s strong tendency to separate the Paul of Acts from the Paul of the letters has been to create an ‘historical Paul’ (the Paul of the letters) who needed to be rehabilitated by Acts if he was to be accepted in the post Pauline churches” (p. 194). In the end, Phillips believes “that the Paul of Acts is indeed a rehabilitated version of the Paul of the letters, a Paul who was recast in terms more attractive to the church of the late first or early second century” (p. 197).



*Paul, His Letters, and Acts* demonstrates extensive research. Phillips has interacted with a broad range of Pauline scholars (as his footnotes attest), and this is helpful. He raises key issues and questions that every serious interpreter of Paul must consider. His conclusion, however, is unsatisfactory. It portrays Luke as being more interested in an apology for Paul than a record of history. It is not impossible for Luke to be interested in both, but it appears that Phillips believes Luke has shifted the facts to suit his purpose. This conclusion is unsatisfactory, not only because it is incompatible with Scripture's inerrancy, but it is also not consistent with Luke's stated purpose. Luke wrote his two-volume work so that Theophilus "may have certainty concerning the things [he had] been taught" (Luke 1:4). Luke could hardly provide certainty and assurance if he manipulated his facts to suit a literary purpose.

Phillips's work suffers from other weaknesses as well. If one wishes to advance a thesis that a wide range of scholars will read, then limiting the Pauline data set to the seven undisputed letters of Paul is probably the safe way to go. This approach, however, leaves the reader without a comprehensive view of the Paul of the NT. The Pauline data set is much larger than Phillips is willing to consider in this work. Another evident weakness is his argument from silence that Silas had a "disdain for Paul's law-free inclusion of the Gentiles" (p. 185). Phillips also finds it difficult to reconcile Paul's circumcision of Timothy in Acts with his statements to the Galatians that if they allowed themselves to be circumcised, Christ would be of no profit to them (Gal 5:2) (p. 186). These two accounts are difficult to reconcile only if one fails to take into account the context and purpose of each statement.

NT students will find this volume helpful to lay out basic issues of the life of Paul and the difficulties that arise in coordinating the data from the apostle's letters and Luke's accounts in Acts. No one denies that difficulties exist, but Phillips's conclusion proves unsatisfactory and incompatible with a high view of Scripture and implausible in light of Luke's stated purpose.

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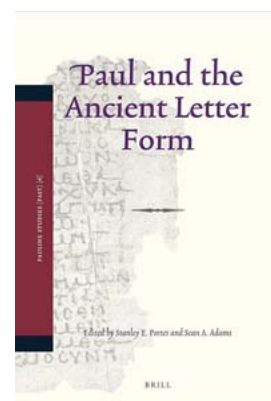
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Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, eds. *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form*. Pauline Studies 6. Leiden: Brill, 2010. xiii + 369 pp. £126.00/\$179.00.

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The first volume of the Pauline Studies series was published in 2005. Each volume is edited by well-known NT scholar Stanley Porter and is composed of scholarly essays devoted to key issues within the study of Paul the apostle. Previous books in this series are devoted to the Pauline canon, Paul's opponents, theology, world, and background. This sixth volume compares ancient letter writing with Paul's epistles.

Each volume within the Pauline Studies series begins with an opening article by Stanley Porter that orients the reader to the topic in question. The subsequent articles provide ground-breaking research in the area of Pauline studies under consideration. *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* contains twelve articles and successfully continues the aim of producing ground-breaking, scholarly essays in a field of Pauline research. The book is specifically devoted to results from ancient letter-writing study as an interpretive key to understanding Paul's letters. It evaluates the nature of



ancient letters as well as their individual components. These results are then compared to Paul's letters to grasp how Paul used and adapted these traditions for his own purposes.

The introductory seven-page essay by Porter and Adams, entitled "Pauline Epistolography: An Introduction," provides a brief history of this area of research. The examination of epistolary forms was first considered following discoveries of ancient papyri in the Egyptian desert. Adolf Deissmann brought these to the attention of the scholarly world in the early twentieth century. The study of epistolography was revived in the 1970s by a number of scholars such as Robert W. Funk, Nils A. Dahl, and Hans Dieter Betz. During this time, scholars reconsidered NT epistles in relation to the ancient world, detecting various parts of a Pauline letter such as a thanksgiving and body section and the forms used within them. In recent times there is renewed attention being given to comparing ancient Greek documentary papyri with NT documents.

Following this brief history, the opening article highlights key focal points within the volume. *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* investigates Paul's letters in relation to the greater epistolary tradition in the Greco-Roman world, particularly Greek letters but also Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, and other letter traditions. These comparisons strengthen Paul's position within the Greco-Roman world as well as highlight educational and cultural influences upon him. The opening essay also highlights how this volume's approach follows traditional epistolary study. Rather than assuming that Paul had access to and used rhetorical methods to shape his letters as George A. Kennedy, Hans Dieter Betz, and Robert Jewett suppose, most of the essays in *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* follow the mainstream of epistolary study.

Essays within the volume also treat Paul's letters in terms of traditional topics of letter study, namely, examining opening, thanksgiving, body, parenthesis, and closing sections. Whereas some scholars like John L. White and M. Luther Stirewalt are advocating only three parts (opening, body, and closing) and others like Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, Jeffery A. D. Weima, and Peter T. O'Brien support four (opening, thanksgiving, body, and closing), this volume provides space for evaluating five sections of Paul's letters: opening, thanksgiving, body, parenthesis, and closing. Individual articles address these five sections of Pauline letter study.

The first essay within *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* provides a new venture into epistolary analysis. Stanley Porter's article entitled "A Functional Letter Perspective: Towards a Grammar of Epistolary Form" examines the stalemate between Pauline epistolary form and other means of speaking of epistolary organization. Drawing upon approaches from the Prague Linguistics Circle, he introduces a new form of epistolary criticism that he calls a "Functional Sentence Perspective." Using this approach, he attempts to move beyond the sentence as the governing level of exegetical study to broader expanses of the text. This perspective he applies to Romans, Galatians, and Philemon. It is a thought-provoking study that displays many possible avenues for further research.

The remaining articles within *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* consider the five epistolary sections of Paul's letters. Sean Adams and Philip Tite address the letter openings. Sean Adams in "Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship" finds that Paul used shared experiences between his audience and himself to connect with his hearers. He also shows how Paul used titles to further his influence. Tite's "How to Begin and Why? Diverse Functions of the Pauline Prescript within a Greco-Roman Context" argues that Paul's letter openings are not to be bypassed on the way to the true message of the letter. Instead, Paul's openings were used to direct his communication within the letter from the very beginning.

Articles by David W. Pao, Peter Arzt-Grabner, and Raymond Collins pursue further understanding of the thanksgiving section within Paul's letters. In "Gospel within the Constraints of an Epistolary Form: Pauline Introductory Thanksgivings and Paul's Theology of Thanksgiving," Pao looks beyond the thanksgiving section of the letter to see how thanksgiving is repeatedly emphasized beyond a section of Paul's letters but extends throughout each correspondence. Peter Arzt-Grabner's "Paul's Letter Thanksgiving" compares Paul's thanksgivings with those of ancient Greek letters. He finds that Paul does not simply use words of thanksgiving, but tailors his thanksgivings to each situation. In "A Significant Decade: The Trajectory of the Hellenistic Epistolary Thanksgiving," Raymond E. Collins evaluates thanksgiving in relation to private and royal Hellenistic letters and also the letters to the Maccabees. He considers how these ancient letters correspond with Paul's thanksgiving section in 1 Thessalonians and also Pauline pseudepigraphers and Rev 2–3.

Two articles specifically focus on the body section of Paul's writing. Troy W. Martin in "Investigating the Pauline Letter Body: Issues, Methods, and Approaches" studies the history of examining the Pauline letter body. He draws attention to the key works that move conversations on the Pauline letter body section forward, particularly the works by Francis Xavier Exler, Heikki Koskenniemi, John L. White, Abraham J. Malherbe, and Hans Dieter Betz. In "A Moral Dilemma? The Epistolary Body of 2 Timothy," Cynthia Long Westfall also looks at the letter body, but particularly focuses on the epistolary body of 2 Timothy. Her paper shows how ancient epistolary theory can be integrated with modern linguistics. She considers moral appeals in 2 Timothy within the context of honor and shame motivations, and then calls for a fresh evaluation of this letter on its own merits rather than in relation to 1 Timothy and Titus.

Young Chul Whang and Andrew W. Pitts contribute articles on Paul's parenetic sections. Whang's "Paul's Letter Paraenesis" examines the theological motivations within Pauline parenesis. He believes that parenetic material should be a guiding principle to Paul's theology and teaching rather than an afterthought. He also raises the question as to whether there is a legitimate parenetic section when ethical material is found throughout the body of the letter. In "Philosophical and Epistolary Contexts for Pauline Paraenesis," Pitts differentiates between Paul's letters and Greek philosophical letters, which both contain parenetic material. He then criticizes Abraham Malherbe's connections between Paul's letters and ethical letters of Greek philosophy.

Jeffrey A. D. Weima's "Sincerely, Paul: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings" concludes the volume and draws attention to the often forgotten closing section of Paul's letters. Weima finds that Paul's closings display a high degree of form and structural consistency, and he concludes that Paul shapes his closing sections to relate to the main themes of the letter.

An evangelical should be aware of a few things as he or she uses this volume. First, these articles are not unified with regard to Pauline authorship. Some contributors hold to seven letters while others thirteen. At times some of the contributors could develop their line of thinking much further if thirteen letters were in view. Second, the field of epistolography seems to represent a lack of consensus. A reader of some articles may be reading only one particular vantage point within this field.

Those who are interested in ground-breaking research in Paul, early Christianity, and ancient historians will want a copy of this volume. All those interested in Pauline studies and the relationship of

the NT to the larger literary world, specifically epistolography, and Paul's relationships with his churches will be particularly interested in these essays.

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W. R. Telford. *Writing on the Gospel of Mark*. Guides to Advanced Biblical Research. Blandford Forum: Deo, 2009. 596 pp. £29.95/\$39.95.

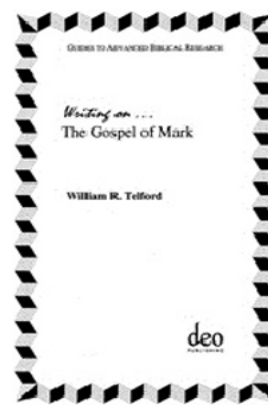
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The sheer quantity of resources available to students of biblical and theological studies is staggering. The tool chest of the modern-day scholar is filled with computer programs that will parse and itemize classical texts at the stroke of a key, available searches for key words in digitized volumes, encyclopedic articles on nearly every subject imaginable, and a host of commentaries on ancient texts and specified monographs on individual pericopae and themes. This spike in scholarly aid, however, has not been without its adverse effects. There is what George Steiner called a “mandarin madness of secondary discourse” that infects thought and sensibility. We now talk about talk, “and Polonius is master.”

A slightly awkward need, therefore, has arisen for a literature on secondary literature. We have seen several of these sorts of studies crop up on various issues ranging from commentary surveys to summaries of historical Jesus scholarship. Deo Publishing has launched its *Guide to Advanced Biblical Research* series to meet this need by producing monographs on each book of the NT that (1) chart the current state of scholarship on the particular book/letter and its critical issues; (2) offer sample exegeses and readings/approaches to the various writings; (3) provide an annotated bibliography of the writing; and (4) suggest what future areas of research remain open. The series currently consists of one volume: the Gospel of Mark. And its author is the Markan expert William R. Telford.

*Writing on the Gospel of Mark* is intended to supply readers of Mark “whether established academic or postgraduate student, with the relevant tools for researching and writing on Mark” (p. xvii). Though not expressly intended for pastors and teachers, the volume is organized well enough that if, say, a sermon series on Mark's Gospel was in the works, *Writing on the Gospel of Mark* would prove a useful guide to the best secondary literature on the Gospel. Its title is something of a *double entendre*, I imagine, in that it is a volume both on the literature (writing) of Mark's Gospel and intended for those who wish to study (write on) Mark's Gospel.

The volume is organized by the four-fold criteria mentioned above. Part 1, “State of Scholarship,” is categorized by general aids and tools, dissertations and monographs, topics and themes, passages, and methods and approaches. Part 2, “Sample Exegeses and Readings,” consists of historical and social-scientific approaches, literary approaches, theological approaches, and ideological and ethical approaches. Part 3, “Classified/Annotated Bibliography,” is structured around general aids and tools, dissertations and monographs, methods and approaches, topics and themes, and passages. And Part



4, “Future of Research,” covers history and social context, literature, theology, ideology and ethics, passages, and methods and approaches.

More than a mere reproduction of abstracts, this volume represents a guided tour through the mangled labyrinth of Markan studies by one of the field’s foremost authorities. Telford displays an admirable deftness at order and summary with an economy of words. Though from time to time there is the repetition of singular articles in the various bibliographical listings and though one wishes for more specificity in Part 4, the series and its maiden monograph is a welcome addition to the theological library.

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James C. VanderKam. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. xvi + 260 pp. £13.99/\$21.00.

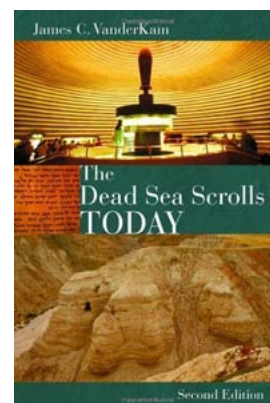
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James C. VanderKam is the John A. O’Brien Professor of Hebrew Scriptures at the University of Notre Dame and a member of the international team responsible for editing and translating the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts. This book is the second edition to his original work of the same name published in 1994. Since then all of the Scrolls have been published, so it is now possible to gain a more complete perspective of the various issues and debates.

The second edition follows the same basic format as the original, and VanderKam is still writing for a more popular audience. The major changes in the new edition include updating all the material where necessary in light of post-1994 discoveries, including the bibliographies at the end of the chapters. These are well-selected and helpful resources for further investigation. There is additional information at several places, which can be seen in the newer edition’s extra length (260 vs. 208 pages). While the older edition had a few photographs placed together in middle of the book, the new edition has many more photographs placed conveniently throughout the text.

Chapter 1 treats the discoveries of the Scrolls. For this new edition VanderKam had access to a pre-publication copy of Weston Fields’s two-volume history of the Scroll discoveries, which promises to be the definitive work on that subject. VanderKam carefully traces the discoveries from each of the eleven caves. Interestingly, we learn that the first mention of Qumran being a “monastic” community did not come from Father Rolland de Vaux, the first excavator of the site, but from scholars at the American Schools of Oriental Research, who also suggested an Essene connection in a 1948 press release. VanderKam carefully explains the ruins themselves, beginning with de Vaux’s excavations and theories. Other theories of the ruins are explored, but the author concludes that de Vaux was generally correct, though some of his conclusions should be modified in line with the Jodi Magness’s 2002 monograph, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

Chapter 2 surveys the over 900 manuscripts that have been found in the eleven caves at Qumran, both biblical texts and others. The helpful charts (pp. 48–49) have been updated to reflect the newer and more accurate totals of manuscripts from the various caves and the number of copies of each book



of the Bible that has been found. Beyond the biblical texts VanderKam discusses the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts, the various commentaries on the biblical texts, and, of course, the sectarian documents such as the Rule of the Community.

Chapter 3 tackles the question of identifying the Qumran community. VanderKam first clearly explains the case for the Essene hypothesis, also noting its weaknesses. He then explores other theories such as that of Lawrence Schiffman, who argues the people of Qumran were Sadducees. Some, like Norman Golb, have maintained that the Qumran Scrolls were brought to the caves from libraries in Jerusalem and have no real connection to the community living there. Both of these views are effectively refuted, and the traditional Essene theory is strongly maintained. The Essenes who lived at Qumran were only a small part of a larger movement in Israel. Chapter 4 is a detailed discussion of their history, beliefs, and practices based on the contents of the Scrolls and the archaeology of the site.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between the Scrolls and the text of the OT itself. Obviously, the Scrolls have had a huge impact on OT textual criticism. In the first edition the author explained how the Scrolls fit into the textual development of the OT using Frank Cross's theory of local texts and Emanuel Tov's view of textual plurality and variety. At that time the author seemed to favor Tov's reconstruction. In the new edition a third view has been added: Eugene Ulrich's idea of successive literary editions of individual books. Now VanderKam suggests that all these theories have strengths and does not tip his hand as to his preference.

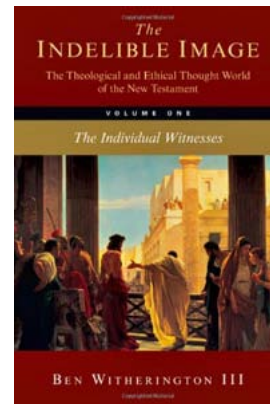
Chapter 6 addresses the issue of the Scrolls and the NT. VanderKam lays out the similarities between the NT texts and the Scrolls in areas of language, characters, organizational practices, and eschatology. VanderKam takes a careful and conservative approach to any possible parallels between the two. He rightly refutes improbable suggestions that parts of the NT have been found at Qumran (e.g., José O'Callaghan).

The first edition was widely praised and rightly so. This new edition is the best general introduction to the Scrolls. It is extremely well written and highly recommended.

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Ben Witherington III. *The Individual Witnesses*. Vol. 1 of *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 856 pp. \$50.00.

*The Indelible Image* is a two-volume work on the theology and ethics of the NT by a senior NT scholar at Asbury Theological Seminary. Ben Witherington III has the rare distinction of having published commentaries on every book of the NT. This massive two-volume work, then, is the fruit of these extensive exegetical labors. It joins the ranks of recent evangelical NT theologies by Marshall (2004), Thielman (2005), and Schreiner (2008). *The Indelible Image*, however, by no means duplicates those efforts. Witherington rightly recognizes both that “ethics and theology [are] intertwined throughout the New Testament” and that NT scholarship has tended to reflect upon one without giving equal attention to the other (pp. 14, 60–61). Witherington’s work attempts to redress this imbalance.



The first volume of *The Indelible Image* is devoted primarily to what Witherington terms an “expositional,” “exegetical,” and “descriptive” approach to the NT (pp. 16, 815). The second volume is more synthetic or thematic in character. This review will address the first volume, and a subsequent review will address the second. Volume 1 briefly overviews what Witherington understands “the grand story” of the NT to be: “God wants his moral and spiritual character (and behavior) replicated in his people” (p. 19). Specifically, believers are being conformed after “the image of God’s Son” (p. 816). Then follows a brief chapter in which Witherington takes up matters of prolegomena—questions of canon; divine revelation; hermeneutics; the relationship among biblical, systematic, and NT theology; and the quest of the historical Jesus (pp. 25–61).

The remainder of the volume consists of the distinct expositional treatments of the writings of the NT authors: Jesus himself (pp. 63–170); Paul (pp. 171–275); James, Jude, and 1 Peter (pp. 277–387); Hebrews (pp. 389–464); the Gospel and Letters of John (pp. 465–602); the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (pp. 603–723); and 2 Peter and Revelation (pp. 727–815). Appended to each treatment is a brief bibliography. The first volume concludes with a brief, thematic overview of what Witherington sees as the leading theological and ethical lines of the NT.

This volume has a number of commendable features. First, in light of Bultmann’s well-known relegation of the “message of Jesus” to the “presupposition of NT theology,” Witherington’s decision to begin his descriptive account of the NT’s theology and ethics with a lengthy exposition of Jesus’ teaching is a welcome one. Even so, one might have wished for more explicit methodological justification for devoting separate treatments to the theology and ethics of Jesus and to the theology and ethics of the Four Gospels. Second, Witherington gives attention to the portions of the NT that are often neglected in critical NT reflection—Acts, Hebrews, James, Jude, the Johannine Epistles, and the Petrine epistles, for example. His constructive engagements of these NT writings surely make for a NT theology that is truly a theology of the *New Testament*. Third, Witherington acknowledges the ways in which NT eschatology profoundly shapes, if not determines, NT theology and ethics. Fundamental for Paul, for instance, are five inter-related narratives, each of which is eschatological in character (pp. 182–203). Jesus and Paul are said to have “shared an eschatological worldview” (p. 203). Witherington describes Paul’s ethic as “Christological and eschatological” and bears that out by exposing Paul’s ethical statements (p. 243;

see pp. 242–74). The same may also be said of Witherington’s understanding of the theology and ethics of Hebrews (p. 461), Jude (pp. 295–96), and Mark (pp. 639–40), to take but three further examples.

I wonder, however, whether conformity to the image of Christ is the most apt way to summarize the theology and ethics of the NT. Neither Witherington’s expositional chapters nor his summaries at the beginning and the end of this volume seem to me particularly to substantiate that claim. This observation is in no way to minimize the conceptual importance of the *Imago Dei* to the NT, and particularly to Paul. Nor is it to question the core assumption of Witherington’s project, namely, that the theology and ethics of the NT may be summarized in shorthand fashion. It is, however, to suggest that other categories are needed to accomplish this goal.

Witherington, furthermore, reserves severe criticisms for “imputed righteousness,” and concludes that this doctrine is not a Pauline teaching (pp. 223–27). In this work, Witherington more than once operates with distortions of Reformation teaching about justification as though sanctification were rendered optional or even unnecessary by the doctrine of an imputed righteousness (pp. 15, 227). This particular distortion is neither true to the Reformation nor, most importantly, to the Scripture. This point is important because in this respect Witherington’s work parts ways with the NT’s teaching about justification. But maintaining the doctrine of justification in its biblical integrity is critical to a right conception of both the theology and the ethics of the NT. This set of concerns, in other words, is not without consequence for Witherington’s project.

Taken as a whole, the first volume of *The Indelible Image* is sure to establish itself as a leading contemporary theology of the NT. Even when dissenting from some of Witherington’s conclusions, students, pastors, and scholars interested in reflecting constructively on the leading lines of NT theology and ethics will find much to appreciate in this work.

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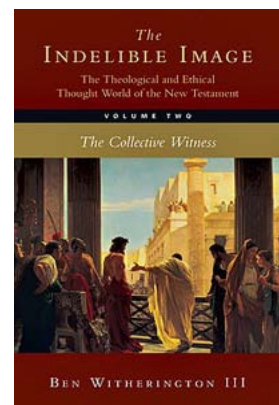
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Ben Witherington III. *The Collective Witness*. Vol. 2 of *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2010. 838 pp. \$50.00.

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This work is the second and final installment in Ben Witherington III’s two-volume NT theology and ethics. The first volume, which I have reviewed in this issue, provides expositional surveys of the writings of each NT author. The second volume attempts to synthesize the results of the first volume in such a way as to demonstrate that the NT evidences theological and ethical coherence and consistency.

After a brief synopsis of the contents of the first volume (pp. 9–12), Witherington addresses questions of prolegomena (pp. 13–32). He argues that what distinguishes the theology and ethics of the NT writers from that of other, contemporary Jewish writers is Christology: the “living Christ . . . has reconfigured their symbolic universe, their narrative thought world, and the very way they articulate theology and ethics” (p. 30).





In a brief statement of method (pp. 33–57), Witherington argues that he will not pursue the “inductive” approach to NT theology that “critically analyz[es] the individual witnesses and find[s] congruences and similarities” (p. 34). Neither will he follow the “deductive” approach to NT theology that “starts with one’s dogmatic or systematic theological categories and slots exegetical data into them piecemeal, in a proof-texting sort of way” (p. 34). Rather, Witherington begins with the “symbolic universe” of the NT writers, out of which “was formed their narrative thought world” (pp. 37–38).

The NT’s symbolic universe and narrative thought world are the subject of the next two chapters, respectively (pp. 59–99, 101–201). By “symbolic universe,” Witherington means “the fixed furniture in our mind from which we furnish our narrative thought world” (p. 59), furniture that is fundamentally conceptual (examples include God, sin, salvation, and Israel). By “narrative thought world,” Witherington means “narratological thinking about life and more specifically about religious life” (p. 102). The thought world shared by each of the NT writers was “monotheistic, messianic [and] eschatological” (p. 201).

Witherington next addresses NT theology along four topical lines: Christology (pp. 203–308), God the Father (pp. 309–45), the Holy Spirit (pp. 347–83), and salvation (pp. 385–420). He then turns to the ethical teaching of the NT. For Witherington, NT ethics is to be understood in terms of Christians’ “respon[se] to . . . Christ and his story as it has impacted them” (p. 424). More than that, ethics “is the necessary outworking of what God has worked in the community and its individual members,” and that according to the pattern set forth in the NT Scripture (pp. 423–24). After Witherington undertakes separate treatments of the ethical teachings of Jesus (pp. 443–93), the Jewish NT writers (pp. 495–600), Paul (pp. 601–95), and of Mark, Luke, and what is said to be the anonymous author of 2 Peter (pp. 697–748), he concludes the volume with a discussion of the relationships between OT theology and NT theology, and between NT theology and the subsequent theological reflection of the church (pp. 749–816).

Witherington has persuasively and exhaustively demonstrated that the twin convictions of Christology and eschatology both ground and lend coherence and consistency to the theology and ethics of the NT writers. For this reason alone, *The Indelible Image* is a welcome and I hope enduring contribution to the literature.

We may raise three points by way of interaction. First, this second volume does not bear out Witherington’s claim that “the image of God” best summarizes the theology and ethics of the NT. The “image of God” is an important strand of Pauline teaching, to be sure, but I am doubtful that it is up to the task that Witherington has assigned it.

Second, Witherington puts too much distance between NT theology and OT theology. Witherington questions whether we may speak of a “unified Old Testament thought world” and affirms that the OT “lacked a singular sort of experience like the Christ-event . . . that generated the faith of all the Israelites” (p. 751). Salvation, for the OT, is “almost exclusively, a this-worldly proposition” (p. 756). Witherington, furthermore, is unwilling to say that the OT has an exclusively normative influence on the NT writers (pp. 750–51). There is, for Witherington, a progressive but decidedly non-organic relationship between OT and NT revelation. The problem with putting matters this way is that the NT understands itself organically to bring the OT to its intended fulfillment.

Third, Witherington puts too much distance between NT theology and subsequent theological reflection. He is skeptical about importing what are said to be foreign dogmatic categories and questions into the project of NT theology. The categories of Christian theology, however, are drawn from the terminology of the NT and thus endeavor to systematize the NT using the NT’s own topical

categories. Witherington's own categories (God, Christology, salvation) are those that theologians have employed for centuries. Witherington's conclusions about NT teaching, furthermore, often align with those of the Wesleyan theological tradition of which he is part. Whatever one makes of those particular conclusions, one thing is evident: on this question, Witherington's practice is not altogether aligned with his principles. This fact serves to confirm that the bond between NT theology and systematic theology is an inalienable one.

In conclusion, both volumes of *Indelible Image* make many valuable contributions to NT theology. Readers undaunted by both the girth and often labyrinthine structure of this work will find ample material to stimulate their own reflections upon the theological and ethical lines of NT teaching.

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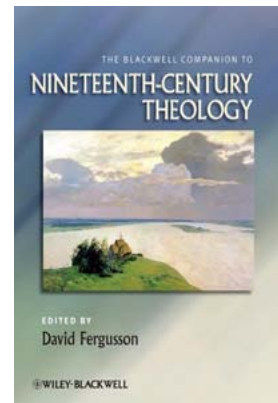
## HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

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David A. Fergusson, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. xiii + 534 pp. £110.00/\$199.95.

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Further expanding the range of "companion" volumes, Blackwell provides a detailed glimpse across the spectrum of nineteenth-century thought. Colin Gunton originally conceived and directed this project, and David Fergusson has continued it. Like other volumes in this vast series, the goal is to introduce upper-level undergraduate students, graduate students, and scholars to complex topics while advancing discussion of those topics. Therefore, they attempt to provide material suitable for research for both beginners and more advanced readers, and they look at the culminating insights and debates in the field. This volume traces individuals, debates, and streams of thought through the nineteenth-century, an era unraveling the problems bequeathed from the Enlightenment of the preceding century. The nineteenth century's reaction to the Enlightenment provided the raw material for twentieth-century philosophical and theological proposals, the fruit of which provide the ideological moorings of contemporary thought.



The volume breaks down into two main sections. The first part, made up of six chapters, looks at key thinkers and their influence. The second, made up of eighteen chapters, focuses on trends and movements.

The first section introduces the thought of several figures who turned the tides of thought in their age and whose legacy is still felt today (for good or bad): Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Coleridge, Kierkegaard, and Newman. Each essay briefly overviews the thinker, outlining the key contours and influence of his thought, attempting to place him and his theology within the broad movement of discourse in the nineteenth-century and highlighting his continuing role. For instance, Nicholas Adams argues that interpretive communities vying for influence have often tainted Kant's legacy. Turning to contemporary movements against this trend, Adams suggests that there is a retrieval of Kant's texts from

what he deems “Kantian arguments”—schools of thought which have, in his mind, led to an important bifurcation between Kant and the Kantians.

The second section provides the overarching context for these key figures by focusing on trends and movements. Topics range from evangelicalism to liberal theology in Germany, from romanticism and pantheism to transcendentalism and the social gospel. Just as in the first section, these chapters provide an historic overview that grounds the topic in the ideological context in which it arose and thrived (or failed). Furthermore, they address key individuals and evaluate the impact of trends and movements. Of particular interest are the chapters on “Evangelicalism” by David W. Bebbington, “Kenotic Christology” by David R. Law, “America: Confessional Theologies” by James D. Bratt, and “America: Transcendentalism to Social Gospel” by Robert W. Jenson. David Bebbington, known for his fourfold construction of evangelical identity, continues to build on his development of evangelicalism. In this particular essay, Bebbington addresses key distinctives of evangelical theology, the influence of the enlightenment, and the integration of theology and science.

Furthermore, Bebbington focuses his attention on Romanticism and the evangelical response, seeking to highlight the influence of the former, either in appropriation or rejection, in areas of doctrine, mission and sectarian movements.

For pastors, theologians, or students unfamiliar with the key figures and movements of the nineteenth-century, this volume proves to be a valuable resource to canvass ideologies which modern theology and philosophy have set to unravel. For those new to the study of nineteenth-century theology, each chapter has a detailed bibliography of key secondary sources, and contributors consistently address the primary texts (and issues with the texts) in their exposition. The second section helpfully glimpses movements and trends which are often hard to locate in the evolution of ideas. This does not take away from the importance of the first section and the quality of essays addressing individuals and subsequent reception.

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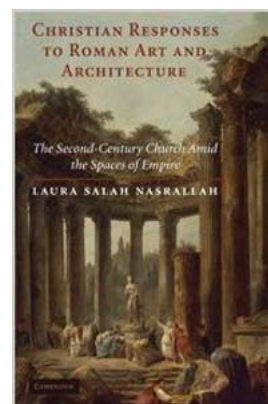
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Laura Salah Nasrallah. *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid the Spaces of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xvi + 334 pp. \$95.00.

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Too frequently early Christian literature is interpreted without reference to the contemporary material culture—the art, the architecture, and the space—which evoked a multitude of responses from these early Christians. The religious discourse of these Christians emerged not only in relation to literary texts but also in response to real, lived spaces. The spaces to which they responded were, of course, spaces of the Roman Empire and, therefore, were dominated by imperial rhetoric. These spaces of empire made visual claims in no uncertain terms regarding contested religious, cultural, ethnic, and philosophical matters. More particularly, the material culture evoked arguments over what constituted justice, piety, power, and culture. In this book, Nasrallah takes five second-century Christian texts (the Acts of the Apostles, Justin’s *Apologies*, Tatian’s *To*



*the Greeks*, Athenagoras's *Embassy*, and Clement's *Exhortation*), demonstrates how their arguments respond to these spaces of Roman Empire, and explains their strategies for articulating Christianity's peculiar identity within the Empire.

One of Nasrallah's key themes is that these five early Christian authors, all of which texts that are in some way "apologetic," participate in the religious and cultural wars of the second-century Empire (the period known as the Second Sophistic) even as they strongly criticize the Empire and its articulation of Greco-Roman *paideia*. In other words, these "apologetic" texts engage in larger religious and cultural conversations over such themes as what constitutes true piety, justice, and power. Texts addressed to emperors, such as Justin's *Apologies*, fit the broader generic framework of ambassadorial requests (e.g. Philo's *Embassy to Gaius*, Dio's *Kingship Orations*). These early Christian petitions to the emperor function to include them within the cultural conversations of the Second Sophistic regarding what constitutes Roman piety, justice, and power. In each of her treatments of these early Christians texts, Nasrallah puts their arguments and textual strategies in conversation with archaeological remains from the Roman Empire. And in this instance she situates these apologetic texts (or ambassadorial petitions) in conversation with the ancient remains found in Olympia. In particular, Herodes' Fountain of Regilla in Olympia makes its own set of claims: the family of Herodes is intimate with the imperial family, the imperial family is near-divine, and both families participate in Greek *paideia*. The claims that the structure makes are not unlike those of the early Christian apologists who claim that they represent Greek *paideia* and that they deserve from imperial power the benefits given to cultured elites.

Nasrallah argues that one of the goals of the Acts of the Apostles, which she assumes is a second-century document, is to find a space for the Christian movement within the Empire that combines the best of imperial ideology as well as Greek *paideia*. She asks the question of Acts: in light of imperial power and claims to rule the inhabited world, how did this Christian author imagine the space of the world? Nasrallah notes Paul's extensive travels to significant Greek cities and the declamations he gives regarding how all ethnicities and peoples are subject to the one true God. Acts mimics here one of the strategies of the emperor Hadrian, who founded the Panhellenion (centered in Athens), which simultaneously bound these Greek cities together into something of a civic league as well as cemented their place within the Roman Empire. Nasrallah sees Acts's depiction of Paul's travels as mimicking Hadrian's Panhellenion. Like Hadrian, so Paul travels the Mediterranean visiting significant Greek cities and producing its own "kind of Christian civic league" (p. 89) and thereby engages in producing Christianity's own foundational myths. Paul gives speeches on matters of ethnicity and what constitutes true religion (e.g. Acts 14:8–19). Acts's vision of the world is imperialistic in its own way as Paul claims that all ethnicities are God's offspring and that his reign extends over the entire inhabited world (Acts 17:16–34). By imitating Hadrian's well-known Panhellenion, Acts "creates a story of the origins of a Christian city league that might be comprehensible and attractive to Rome, and in its logic offers seeds for a Christian empire that resembles the Roman Empire" (p. 90).

One theme that runs through the entire book is early Christian responses to images and representations. Athenagoras's *Embassy*, for example, claims that images and their veneration lead to crises of representation where correspondence between image (or name) and the essence of a thing breaks down. Christians are judged and condemned on the basis of their "name" while the essence of their identity is misunderstood, and the Roman Emperors who claim to be pious and philosophical fail to accurately represent and embody these names. Misrepresentations within the visual culture of the Empire contribute to this breakdown. Thus, the Emperor Commodus' claim to be the so-called god

Heracles who was immolated and whose death was mimicked by criminals is, Athenagoras argues, manifestly absurd. Heracles is nothing but a human who has been transformed into a deceptive *daimon*.

Tatian's *To the Greeks* also criticizes representations of the gods, although he is more concerned with the ways in which images and statues communicate deceptive messages regarding power, sex, and ethics. These images distract from and corrupt piety. The very origin of images are mired in deception as they arose out of the emotions of desire, love, and longing for reunification with dead loved ones, estranged lovers, and absent kings. These statues, Tatian argues, are corrupting influences as they depict scenes of rape, valorize prostitutes, and memorialize the monstrous. The images do not lead the viewer to philosophical knowledge of God, nor do they produce self-control. They are the height of impious superstition. Finally, Nasrallah puts Clement of Alexandria in conversation with portraits and images of Aphrodite. Clement argues that depictions of the goddess produce lust and unfulfilled desire. Further, in conversation with Gen 1–2, Clement argues that humans themselves are images of God and that though most have failed to resemble God, Christ (the Logos) can restore humans into proper resemblance of God as they learn self-control and true piety—values that statues and images corrupt.

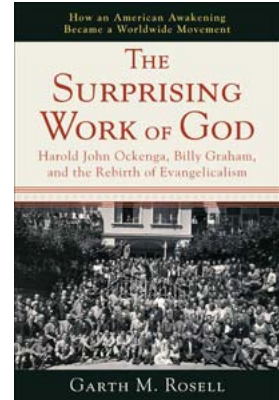
Nasrallah has produced an interesting and learned book. In every instance the material culture that she puts in conversation with these early Christian texts is illuminating and leads to a more robust understanding of their arguments and strategies. The book contains numerous illustrations and portraits of the statues and temples. She rightly emphasizes that the early Christian authors engaged in the cultural wars of the second century and used for their own ends many of the same argumentative and textual strategies in their attempt to articulate the early Christian movement's place in the Empire. I did, however, wonder if at times she overestimates some of the similarities between the early Christians' textual strategies and those of their pagan counterparts. In this regard her study would have benefited from engagement with C. Kavin Rowe's *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), which emphasizes how Acts entirely destabilizes and delegitimizes Greco-Roman culture. And I was surprised that she placed Acts as a second-century text without any argumentation for this contested decision. But this is a valuable book and will no doubt be of great help for students and scholars engaging in the study of second-century Christianity.

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Garth M. Rosell. *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. 268 pp. \$19.99.

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Evangelicalism is commonplace enough in contemporary America that historian Barry Hankins argues the movement has become mainstream. Insofar as Hankins's contention is true, it reflects a paradigm shift that took place among conservative Protestants in the 1940s and 1950s. Prior to World War II, terms like "evangelical" and "fundamentalist" were virtual synonyms, reflecting tendencies within one broad movement rather than different (but related) movements. Furthermore, conservative Protestants were anything but mainstream prior to mid-century. In the wake of the Scopes Trial and the denominational wars of the 1920s, evangelicals/fundamentalists were more concerned with building their parachurch subculture rather than engaging the broader culture. But beginning in the early 1940s, a cadre of younger conservatives distanced themselves from the more separatist fundamentalism and launched a "neo-evangelical" movement that gradually brought about the cultural prominence that many evangelicals now enjoy.



It is the story of this "rebirth of evangelicalism" that Garth Rosell tells in *The Surprising Work of God*, his narrative history of the early neo-evangelical movement. Rosell is uniquely qualified to tell this story. He has taught church history for many years at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an institution founded by some of the leading neo-evangelicals in New England. Perhaps even more important, he is the son of evangelist Merv Rosell, who was a significant participant in many of the events recounted in the book.

*The Surprising Work of God* is divided into nine short chapters. The book begins by briefly recounting the origins and nature of American evangelicalism. Like most historians, Rosell argues that movement-evangelicalism is largely a product of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century awakenings and contends that most evangelicals share some core distinctives about the Bible, salvation, and evangelism. He then focuses the bulk of his narrative on two key figures in the movement's mid-twentieth-century "rebirth": Boston pastor Harold John Ockenga and evangelist Billy Graham. Both men are shown to be gifted entrepreneurial leaders who rejected separatist fundamentalism in favor of a more irenic and engaged evangelicalism. Both men enjoyed measurable success in their personal ministries and were concerned to see a new evangelical consensus play a role in ushering in another spiritual awakening that would convert millions of Americans to Christianity. As products of the parachurch movement of the 1930s and 1940s, both men were instrumental in the founding of neo-evangelical parachurch ministries like the National Association of Evangelicals, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Fuller Theological Seminary, *Christianity Today*, and Gordon-Conwell.

Rosell uncovers very little in the way of new information about the early years of neo-evangelicalism, though there are some helpful contributions to the field. These include the focus on Ockenga and Graham's friendship, the insights of lesser-known leaders (particularly Merv Rosell), and the central role that world evangelization played in neo-evangelical priorities. At times the author shows a bit too much sympathy for his subjects, perhaps because of his own ties to neo-evangelicalism via his father and his personal relationship with Ockenga and other movement-leaders. But authorial bias does not significantly detract from the book itself.

*The Surprising Work of God* is a well-written, sympathetic introduction to mid-twentieth-century conservative Protestantism. In many ways Rosell's work is a model for how to write "insider" history that is well-researched and useful to many in the wider academy. The book would be particularly useful in evangelical college and seminary courses in American religious history. Those interested in a more scholarly historical introduction to the early years of neo-evangelicalism should consult Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 1997) or Jon Stone's *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1997).

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Frances M. Young with Andrew Teal. *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*. 2nd ed. London: SCM; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010. x + 406 pp. £25.00/\$39.99.

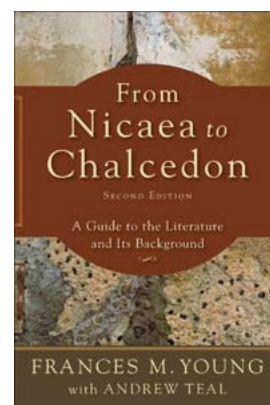
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Nearly all who call themselves Christian, whether Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant, look to the fourth and fifth centuries as a high-water mark for the articulation of certain essential Christian doctrines. The ecumenical councils held during this period (Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431, and Chalcedon in 451) produced defining statements on Trinitarian and Christological issues. Yet viewing the events of these years only in terms of the results of these councils ignores the historical context in which they originated as well as the theological and exegetical argumentation that lay behind creedal formulae. For those wishing to investigate further these crucial years of the Christian Church, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* is the best place to start.

Since its original publication in 1983, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* has served as a solid overview of the fourth and fifth centuries. However, as with all such books, its conclusions were in need of updating after over a quarter-century of research furthered scholarly consensus on a number of fronts. Though second editions of some books are little more than lightly retouched versions of the first, the updated edition of *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* assimilates and synthesizes works since 1983 throughout the book and adds a new chapter, producing a work that is as fine an introduction as the original edition proved to be.

As Young and Teal state in the preface, the century and a quarter between Nicaea and Chalcedon is "one of the most significant in the formation of the doctrine of the Church" (p. vii). Though few would disagree with this assessment, many remain unaware of background and literature of this period, so the book sets out to be "a companion to standard textbooks, providing background material, an introduction to the characters involved in the disputes, to the literary sources and the critical questions which they pose" (p. vii). The book accomplishes this goal, and it does so in remarkably clear prose and with detailed attention to the primary sources.

The chapters are arranged chronologically for the most part and are organized largely around the significant persons involved in the debates of the time. Particularly helpful are the bibliographic resources the book provides. Each section ends with a short selected bibliography for the beginning student,



and the book concludes with a more lengthy bibliography that, although certainly not comprehensive, provides the standard primary and secondary sources for the figures at hand. The primary literature surveyed includes works in Greek, Latin, and Syriac, and the secondary literature covers monographs and articles in English, French, and German.

Many of the figures included in the book will come as no surprise to most readers. Athanasius figures prominently, as well as the Cappadocians, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Cyril of Alexandria, among others. The authors briefly note the sources available for reconstructing the views of each person considered and then attempt to present their dominant theological emphases, noting along the way points on which scholars are largely agreed and those which are subject to ongoing dispute. By approaching the topic in this manner, the book places a greater emphasis on the developing theology and on the church leaders of the period, rather than giving a historical narrative of all the events as they occurred. Still, where appropriate the authors provide brief overviews of the most significant occurrences. (Other books adequately detail the councils and controversies.)

Besides those fathers who are generally regarded as the leading theologians from Nicaea to Chalcedon, Young and Teal also include several others who might otherwise be overlooked, such as Didymus the Blind, Cyril of Jerusalem, Nemesius of Emesa, and Synesius of Cyrene. In fact, the new edition adds some who were left out of the original, reflecting their growing importance in recent scholarship. These include Marcellus of Ancyra, Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Macarius, and Ephrem the Syrian. Though not all of these figures were directly involved in the development of doctrine in the four ecumenical councils, their lives and works provide fascinating glimpses into the life of the church, revealing emphases that might be lost by a sole focus on Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon.

For those wanting an introduction to the theological developments during this period or for those desiring an overview of the state of scholarship since 1983, there is no better place to start than *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*. The second edition of this work will likely be used with profit for many years to come.

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**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS**


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Gary A. Anderson. *Sin: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. vi + 235 pp. £25.00/\$30.00.

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In this book Gary Anderson, professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, seeks to trace the development of the idea of sin through the Bible and into Jewish and Christian tradition, along with its significance for understanding the atoning work of Jesus. Anderson deftly combines biblical studies, the history of the reception of key biblical texts, and the history of theology, arguing that the notion of sin changed from that of a ‘burden’ that needs to be removed in the early OT, to that of a ‘debt’ that needs to be paid for in the late (Persian period) OT and into the intertestamental and early Christian period (including the NT).



His argument falls into three main sections. Part 1, ‘Introducing the Problem,’ consists of three chapters in which he articulates his claim that the notion (and dominant metaphors) of sin develop from ‘a burden to be borne’ to ‘a debt to be repaid.’ The Day of Atonement and ‘scapegoat’ ritual, along with the language of ‘bearing’ sin (*nas’a*) play an important role in the former notion, while the Lord’s Prayer (and its Aramaic background) play a crucial role in the latter.

In the five chapters of Part 2, ‘Making Payment on One’s Debt,’ he seeks to outline how understandings of this debt, and the means to repay it, evolved in the Bible and into rabbinic and Christian theology, largely under the influence of economic ideas that dominated in the Aramaic-speaking world. His argument ranges across a reading of the rhetoric of ‘Deutero-Isaiah,’ the theology of land in ‘H’ (a putative editorial layer in Leviticus), the notion of sin as debt in Tobit and Maccabees through to the operation of loans in the rabbinic literature and the cancellation of debt imagery in Col 2:14.

The four chapters of Part 3, ‘Balancing Debts with Virtue,’ trace the development of the notion of alms-giving as a means of accumulating heavenly ‘credit’ that can be used to pay down the debt of sin, and they seek to connect that to the atoning work of Jesus, understood as the accumulation of an inexhaustible store of credit that can be applied to the sinner’s debt. He deals with a broad spread of material (including Daniel and Leviticus, Tobit and Ben Sira, fourth-century Syriac theology, the Talmud, and the classic work of Anselm on the atonement) that he believes establishes the legitimacy of ‘merit’ (and associated practices such as almsgiving and the issuing of indulgences as atoning for sin) to vitiate Reformation critique.

As is already evident, this is a wide-ranging and thought-provoking book. Anderson has a ready grasp of a disparate body of knowledge that he uses to construct an interesting case for a particular view of sin and atonement in the Bible and Christian theology. There is much in this book to stimulate thought and ongoing discussion—indeed, it won the 2010 *Christianity Today* book award for biblical studies. There are, however, flaws in his argument and its underlying methodology that undermine many of his central claims (which will be a comfort to many [evangelical] Protestants). Let me note two.

First, while acknowledging that a number of metaphors are used throughout Scripture for sin, Anderson focuses on ‘burden’ and then ‘debt’ as those that dominate. While he makes some interesting points, he neither accounts for the breadth of biblical metaphors nor establishes that these are the *dominant* ideas (even if you accept his dating of various texts and traditions, itself a matter of dispute).

While he notes, for instance, the notion of sin as ‘stain,’ he doesn’t discuss the language and imagery of alienation in the Psalter, or obduracy in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, or covenantal infidelity in Deuteronomy and Joshua–Kings, or the disruption of an orderly world in the Flood narrative and Leviticus. Similar absences may be found in his treatment of sin in the NT. While this may be a necessary corollary of the *focus* of his argument, it undermines his claims, given the importance of the shift in central metaphors he finds in Scripture.

Second, Anderson combines historical study with biblical exegesis, a combination that is both a great strength and the greatest weakness of the book. Inasmuch as he traces how key texts have been conceptualized and received in Jewish and Christian tradition, and how this impacted (strands of) theological reflection, Anderson has nicely illustrated the evolution of Jewish and Christian theology of both sin and the atonement. He seems to operate, however, with a hermeneutic that fuses the meaning of a text with the history of its reception in key interpretive communities. As a result, he frequently opts for an interpretation of key texts on the basis of his understanding of the developing tradition and its governing metaphors rather than a careful analysis of the text in its linguistic and canonical context (see, for instance, his discussion of Dan 4:27 [v. 24 in Aramaic], pp.135–51). This, in my view, seriously weakens his case in relation to both sin and atonement in biblical and Christian theology and the challenges it brings to Protestant theology.

Thus, while there is much to learn from Anderson’s treatment of sin and atonement, there is also much to criticise. It opens up an interesting conversation on these matters, but it is certainly not the last word.

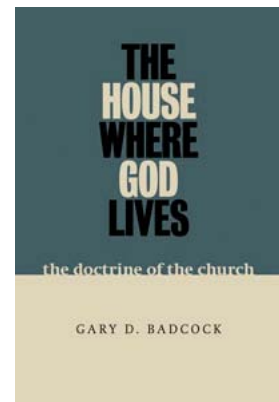
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Gary D. Badcock. *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 378 pp. £23.99/\$36.00.

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As cultural-linguistic approaches to theology and ecclesiology continue to proliferate, Gary Badcock’s book, *The House Where God Lives*, defends the scandalous idea that our doctrine of the Church *must* begin with our doctrine of God. “In order for us to develop an adequate ecclesiology,” he writes, “we must begin not with the human creature, but with God” (p. 25). Badcock’s self-identification with “blueprint ecclesiology,” however, does not mean that he cares only about theory. Indeed, his opening pages, which interact with Nicholas Healy’s “practical-prophetic” approach to ecclesiology, are not insignificant. While Badcock *does* reject context as a legitimate starting place for theology, or the Church as itself authoritative, his concern is not entirely different. Badcock shares with contemporary ecclesiology a commitment to the concrete Church and, related, to ecclesiology’s proximity to theology and context. Thus, with Healy, he asserts that the goal of ecclesiology/theology is “helping the Church live more faithfully” (pp. 12, 153, 336).



Unlike Healy (and all whom he represents), however, Badcock denies both that theology as “ethnography” can ever truly promote faithfulness (having no basis for repentance or reform) and that the Church’s primary problem is contextuality. Instead, viewing the Church “sacramentally,” he argues that the sign can lose the signified (there is a difference, we all recognize, between an “alive” and “dead” Church), when the Church turns in on itself or accommodates to cultural values, and thus loses its fundamental grounding in the gospel. Following this, Badcock’s alternative “vision of ecclesiology” is conceptualized not as contextual sensitivity, but as “renewal”; what is missing in a smoldering Church is connection to its roots. What is needed is *ressourcement*, a return to the roots, to the gospel of the triune God. “The roots of the church reach deep into the mystery of God, and it is in nurturing the life of the church as it springs up in the world from these roots that the fundamental task of ecclesiology consists” (p. xii). Moreover, what Badcock offers is not merely a general theology of ecclesial renewal; rather, he believes that we live in a time desperately needing our own “renewal movement,” with the Western Church captive to political and social liberalism, where “human spirituality and self-understanding alone have importance, and in which doctrine and church alike are made to do obeisance to the demands of subjectivity” (p. 152; his critique of liberalism is woven throughout the book).

It is therefore not surprising that Badcock, having set forth this proper ordering of “Theology and Ecclesiology” (ch. 1), begins his constructive ecclesial work in a Trinitarian fashion, relating the Church to theology proper (ch. 2), Christology (ch. 3), and Pneumatology (ch. 4). While God is related to a discussion of election, Christ to “the Body of Christ,” and the Spirit to the Temple and divine presence, Badcock’s conclusions relate less to those particular subjects than to his broader purpose of conceptualizing a doctrine of the Church oriented toward *ressourcement* and renewal. His discussion of election emphasizes the “divine outreach of God,” whereby the existence of the Church is not its own, but a result of God’s love “turning toward the creature” in forming a people (pp. 60–65). The “Body of Christ” chapter, while conversant with the debates surrounding this ecclesologically charged exegetical collocation, finally emphasizes the eschatological nature of the ecclesial community, which, on the one hand, denies sacralizing any institution, and on the other, demands that the *ecclesia* (rather than the spirituality of the individual) be located within the gospel. And finally, Badcock’s comment on the presence of God, while originally addressing questions of divine presence in Jewish eschatology, finally centers on the uniqueness of the Spirit’s ministry in the economy of salvation.

Like chapters 2–4, the three “modalities” of the Church developed in chapters 5–7 (community, word, and sacrament) are not self-contained, but develop Badcock’s larger argument. Communion and Word “coexist in a dynamic relationship” (p. 210), with communion centrifugally opening up space for diverse manifestations of the Church and the Word centripetally maintaining the Church’s unity in the “common confession.” This Pneumatological dynamism allows for divergent theological positions and liturgical expressions within a doctrinal core (cf. pp. 210–11, 269, 304–5). Badcock’s definition of “sacrament” (note the singular) continues this thesis, defined as the doctrinal core grounded in the *μυστήριον*, the one mystery of God, or the “primal sacrament” (centripetal), but open to many manifestations (centrifugal), even making room for his friend Jim Dale, who was a sacrament of faithfulness and holiness (pp. 278–82).

Against our contemporary ecclesial backdrop, where, to paraphrase Qohelet, “of the writing of ecclesiologies, there is no end,” Badcock’s concern for the “renewal” of the Church is a fresh perspective, affirming what is good in the ecclesial turn (concern for the faithfulness of the Church) while avoiding its errors (forgetting what is theological about theology). Moreover, the superiority of this model (compared

to our contemporary alternatives) is demonstrated by his sharp critique of liberalism, showing more contextual sensitivity than most prophets of context. It is not only, then, a book *about* Renewal; it is equally a call to renewal, to *ressourcement*. While several minor quibbles may be raised (like his neglect of evangelical sources, all the more problematic since he includes us rather indistinguishably within his critique of liberalism), his largely evangelical vision of ecclesiology should be applauded. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the contemporary discussion of context and ecclesiology; his views of sacrament, renewal, “pneumatal dynamism,” and centripetal and centrifugal ecclesial movements are all fresh perspectives in a stale conversation. To what degree Badcock’s proposal will benefit ecclesial faithfulness (as opposed to simply adding theological and theoretical complexity) is yet to be seen. In the meantime, while most pastors and ministry-minded readers will probably read with intrigue his critique of liberalism/inclusivism/individualism, I doubt that such is substantive enough to encourage your reading, and his model of ecclesiology offers little immediate direction for the daily life of the Church. As Badcock says from the outset, this book is a “blueprint.” For the carpenters, then, interested more in wood, hammer, and nails, I would not encourage this book; but we ought to praise God for architects (or apprentices of the Architect) who strive to build on a sure foundation. And Badcock is certainly striving for no less than a Church established on Christ the cornerstone and edified by the Spirit.

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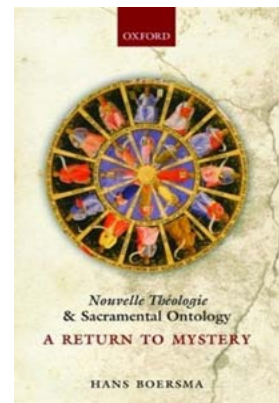
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Hans Boersma. *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xvi + 325 pp. £68.00/\$120.00.

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The author’s subject is a group of twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologians who challenged the hegemony of neo-Thomism and sought to rejuvenate theology by returning to Scripture and the Fathers—de Lubac, Bouillard, von Balthasar, Chenu, Daniélou, and Congar. It explains mainly how they sought to connect nature and the supernatural by adumbrating a comprehensive sacramental ontology centred on mystery. They did not constitute a defined school nor agree on everything among themselves, but they struck out in the same direction and against the same currents: “The sacramental ontology of *nouvelle théologie* did . . . make for a relatively cohesive, shared sensibility’ (p. 83).

Before discussing their work, Hans Boersma surveys the precursors to this ontology in the shape of Möhler, Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot. Then we move on to the Jesuits, de Lubac and Bouillard, and the Dominicans, Balthasar, and Chenu, contrasting what is nonetheless their theologically related attempts to draw the natural and supernatural closer together. But it is with the hermeneutical retrieval of the Fathers and their spiritual interpretation of Scripture effected by de Lubac and Daniélou that ‘we find ourselves . . . at the heart of the sacramental ontology which motivated many of the endeavours of this French renewal movement’ (p. 149). The hermeneutic involved here can itself be called ‘sacramental’, probing and disclosing the deep dimensions of reality contained in the events



narrated in Scripture. Boersma is not content to give us a purely descriptive account. In his introductory chapter on 'the rupture between theology and life' he had indicated that he was positively interested in the ecumenical potential of the movement under discussion. So where the spiritual interpretation of Scripture is concerned, 'we also find ourselves at the place where genuine theological *rapprochement* between Catholicism and Protestantism should originate' (p. 149). This point is taken up again in the 'Conclusion' on 'The Future of *Ressourcement*' (the return to Scripture and the Fathers), which follows two substantial chapters on Daniélou, Congar, and de Lubac on doctrine and tradition, church, and sacrament. Thus the volume ends with this statement: 'The re-appropriation of a sacramental ontology may provide a mindset that will open up avenues for a common return to mystery' (p. 294).

The author is to be warmly congratulated on a book that is both thoroughly researched and pleasingly written, an exercise in good, solid, purposeful scholarship, which sustains the reader's interest. If critics be found who will dissent from the way that Boersma picks out the unifying strand of sacramental ontology in his authors, it is hard to imagine that any will be found who will credibly deny the suggestiveness and plausibility of much in the main lines of exposition. It is a measure of the confidence that Boersma inspires in the reader that one would want to hear the author on subjects which are outside the scope of his concerns, such as how we should plot the relation of transcendental Thomists (especially Rahner, himself influenced by Maréchal, for example) to the *nouvelle* theologians' constructive criticism of neo-Thomists.

Let me flag up two questions. The first concerns the relation of the *nouvelle théologie* to Augustinianism. Augustine features occasionally in this book, as does Neoplatonism, whose contrast to Aristotelianism is occasionally germane to the exposition. Boersma remarks on Chenu's attitude towards Augustine, but it is worth supplementing these remarks by recalling Chenu's comment in a study which remains useful, *Towards Understanding St. Thomas*: 'All reforms in the course of the Church's history, it has been said, were stirred up and supported through the influence of Augustine'. Arguably, it is a point Chenu makes a tad non-committally, but he is certainly not hostile towards that claim. Given (a) the influence of Augustine on Protestantism and (b) Boersma's interest in ecumenical possibilities, not to mention (c) the strong affinity that the present Pope has with Augustine, it would have been interesting to know in more detail how Augustine fared in the theology of the thinkers under scrutiny. (If this is to request another volume from the author, I make no apology.)

The second question is even more directly focussed on ecumenical possibilities. Because Boersma's immediate task is overwhelmingly an expository one, his theological advocacy of the *nouvelle* theologians on this point or that, including on the core issues of sacramental ontology and spiritual interpretation of Scripture, is usually indirect and implicit rather than blatant and explicit. Of course, where we think theological *rapprochement* between Catholics and Protestants should originate depends on how we interpret their disagreement. But supposing, for the sake of argument, we find the moves proposed in this volume theologically promising or agreeable. Still, just how far will consensus get us? Ecclesial realities are often at a vast, vast distance from what is disclosed in theological insight. My question is designed neither to criticize the author nor to doubt the importance of getting straight on the theological issues which he discusses, whether or not we are in complete accord with the *nouvelle* theologians or their present historian. It is just a matter of musing yet again on the fact that producing good theology is a small, though vital, part of the battle. How that theology can contribute in practice to the task of bringing life to the Church remains the nagging question. But it is not the author's business to address

this question in specific detail; meanwhile, we are most certainly edified by the path of reflection ably described and furthered in this volume.

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Richard Briggs. *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue*. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010. 270 pp. £14.99/\$26.99.

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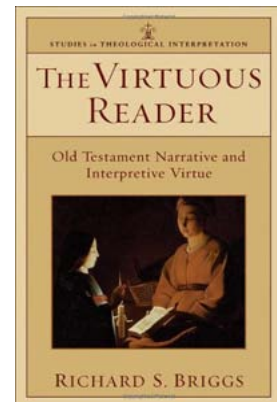
This is a book about “the moral character or virtues most appropriate to the many and varied tasks of reading the Old Testament” (p. 17). The main idea is that we find in the OT itself a series of portraits of “the kind of character most eagerly to be sought after” (p. 17). The first chapter sets the stage by clarifying what interpretive virtue is and what an implied reader is, and why Briggs is focusing on the OT alone, rather than asking questions of the whole Christian Bible. The concluding chapter takes us from the implied reader to the real reader. The intervening chapters are focused upon particular virtues: humility (ch. 2); wisdom (ch. 3); trust (ch. 4); love (ch. 5); and receptivity (ch. 6).

Briggs begins in chapter 2 by noting that humility does not have an undisputed place, historically, among the virtues, and indeed that it is a contested concept. Numbers 12 is then recruited in pursuit of a biblical understanding of what humility is and is not. The ultimate outcome of his discussion is the suggestion that humility in this context refers, not to meekness, but to dependence upon the presence of God (Moses is quite capable of “appropriate, vigorous, yet still respectful engagement with God,” p. 62). Likewise, ongoing interpretation of Scripture requires such dependence upon God. A “spiritual life is one key to faithful handling of Scripture” (p. 67).

Unlike humility, wisdom (ch. 3) has an uncontested place, historically, among the virtues; but again, Briggs asks, what does the Bible mean by it? He seeks an answer to this question by way of 1 Kgs 3, attempting to show that “the kind of wisdom displayed by Solomon . . . speaks directly to the nature of the interpretive virtue of wisdom sought after by the reader of the Old Testament” (p. 97). The reader, like Solomon facing the two women, is faced with competing claims in texts, and requires patience to hear the testimony rightly. Wisdom is required to know the difference between questions that lead us forward and questions that do not.

The preceding chapter having raised the question of the proper roles of trust and suspicion in interpretation, chapter 4 pursues this question in relation to 2 Kgs 18. “Trust” in the face of an “onslaught of suspicion” (p. 123) is a major theme in this passage. The question that Briggs sets himself is “does wisdom consist in always assenting to the communicative purpose of biblical texts?” (p. 103). The implied reader of 2 Kgs 18, he suggests, “is one who trusts God in the face of considerable evidence (and even logic) to the contrary” (p. 130). Yet suspicion also has its place, and is indeed the inevitable companion of trust. Wisdom lies in knowing what that place is.

Chapter 5 deals with the virtue of love, or “interpretive charity,” taking as its base texts Ruth 1 and 2 Kgs 5. The first passage illustrates “love as a form of long-term commitment to the agenda of another” (p. 145), implying an interpreter who promises to go where the text goes “in the sense of following it



on its own terms” (p. 153). The second passage illustrates love that in the short term deviates from the longer-term path, “blessing some interpretation of the text that may seem to sit at odds with many other ways of rightly handling the words of Scripture” (p. 162). Interpretive charity may call hearers to account before the text; but it may also grant some leeway in the reading of the text, in pursuit of the larger agenda of building up in the reader’s love of God and neighbor.

In chapter 6 the virtue of receptivity towards the holy God who summons is explored through the lens of Isa 6. Here it becomes clear that modes of interpretation informed by the other interpretive virtues are not of themselves sufficient, unless “receptivity operates in, with, and under” them (p. 192). Theological interpretation certainly cannot bypass questions about how the words and illocutions of the text function; and yet when those questions have been asked and well answered, there remains still the question of the willingness of the interpreter “to have one’s perspectives transcended and taken up into mysterious divine purposes” (pp. 191–92).

I do not always enjoy the books I am sent for review. Sometimes the effort of reading them attentively seems poorly rewarded when in the end (as every sane reader should) I pose the “so what?” question; and then regret begins to set in that I did not spend the day fishing instead. I must say, however, that I greatly enjoyed this book. It is well-written; contains lots of interesting historical, theological, and exegetical discussion; and represents exactly the kind of integrative project of which one would like to see more (beset as we still are in these days both by theologians who cannot/will not read their Bibles well, and by biblical scholars whose attention to detail is admirable but whose attention to anything else is limited—or who have given up on detail altogether and have vanished in a cloud of postmodern subjectivity and generalization). One could quibble, of course, about this or that detail: the too easygoing affirmation of Brueggemann’s categories of testimony and counter-testimony (p. 130), which draws a veil over significant difficulties in Brueggemann’s approach; the unconvincing use of the Elisha story in 2 Kgs 5 in speaking of interpretive charity, when admittedly “2 Kings 5 does not use the vocabulary of love” (p. 159); the failure to agree with me in my reading of 1 Kgs 3 (pp. 78–79!). I am, however, disinclined to quibble. In these strange times in which we live, in which “most of the scholars who might want to make [a theological claim about the communicative force of the canonical text] do not work with the text overmuch, and many who work with the text would prefer not to make such a claim” (p. 131), this book represents a refreshing attempt at theological interpretation of the Bible that insists at the outset that the Bible (and not, e.g., Aristotle) should define our terms. It is to be welcomed.

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Graham A. Cole. *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 295 pp. £14.99/\$26.00.

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Graham A. Cole, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, offers students and scholars an overview of the doctrine of the atonement, including the ongoing debates surrounding this doctrine. Using the narrative of Scripture as his guide, Cole paints a rich theological picture of atonement as God's project for restoring *shalom* to a sin-spoiled creation.

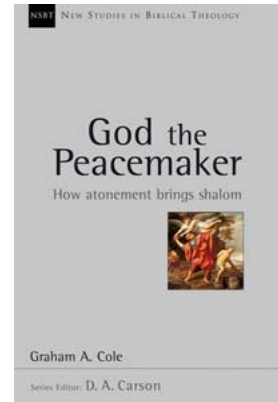
Cole begins by letting his readers know the overall theological framework from which he is working. He affirms the primacy of Scripture for drawing theological conclusions: "If a putative doctrinal proposal is textless—that is to say, it lacks biblical support—then it may be held as a speculative possibility but not as a candidate for a non-negotiable conviction expressing the Faith" (p. 27). He also lays out the scope of his project in this introductory chapter, offering a list of questions this study will address, as well as suggestions for reading the book in part or as a whole.

With introductory matters behind him, Cole commences his discussion of atonement. His opening explanation of the holiness of God sets the stage for a proper understanding of why atonement is necessary. Atonement is not just about human sin. It is about human sin and how that affects the relationship of humans with a holy God. Cole makes this clear, keeping love and justice in careful balance. The great need, as he puts it, is "to be in right relation to the God who created us and has a wise design for human flourishing" (p. 67). He goes on to deal with issues such as the wrath of God, the place of violence in the atonement, expiation versus propitiation, as well as the contemporary questions surrounding justification and the new perspectives on Paul. His treatment is thorough, even touching on the controversial Reformed doctrine of particular atonement at one point (p. 151).

Cole's thoroughness can at times, however, become pedantic. The explanatory footnotes are extensive and sometimes distracting. At other times, one gets the impression that he simply did not know how to properly limit his subject, an impression also left by the appendix. This level of detail could be difficult for all but the most serious students to wade through. On the positive side, the topics he raises and the references he gives related to those topics offer numerous research opportunities for interested scholars.

Cole is generally fair in dealing with viewpoints that differ from his own. He points out what he considers to be the strengths and weaknesses of the various atonement models on the basis of the biblical text. The one exception to this is how he deals with penal substitution. Clearly he is an advocate for the centrality of this model. He is at times, however, dismissive of arguments that question the model, even arguments that agree with the notion that substitution is biblically crucial but question the validity of the "penal" aspect of the model (pp. 138–41; 238–39). Given his assertion that the language of "penal substitution" is historically rather recent (p. 234), one cannot help but question whether some of the texts he cites as obvious support for penal substitution are not quite as obvious as he purports.

The weakest section of Cole's work is in chapter 8 where he deals with how an understanding of Christ's atoning work should affect Christian practice. Cole correctly asserts that "belonging to Christ means living for him—or at least it ought to" (p. 192). While he goes on to describe various ways that a Christ-like life might manifest itself, one is left with the impression that this is fully the work of the





believer. The cooperation of the Holy Spirit with the believer in sanctification is never mentioned. In fact, he does not mention the work of the Spirit at all until the very end of the chapter, giving the reader the sense that the Spirit's work in the believer's post-regeneration life is something of an afterthought. This oversight has the potential to feed the mistaken notion that justification and sanctification are separate; that salvation equals justification only and sanctification is somehow optional, dependent on the believer's determination. Perhaps, however, Cole addresses this issue in one of his other publications that deal specifically with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

One additional disappointment was the almost complete absence of a connection between the atonement and the renewal of all things. Although Cole recognizes the broad sense of *shalom* as creational flourishing (p. 22), and even promises to explain the "peace dividend" as having cosmic consequences (p. 30), he never substantively delivers on that promise. A short two paragraphs is given to "the groaning of creation" (pp. 82–83) and only a few pages to "peace for the cosmos" (pp. 181–84). The bulk of his work focuses on the effects of atonement on the relationship between God and human persons.

These weaknesses are minor, however. In contrast to many modern theological works that rely heavily on sources outside the biblical text, Cole's work on atonement is refreshing in its reliance on Scripture. He begins his arguments by looking to the Bible, asking questions that arise from the text. At every subsequent bend in the road of his theological development, he turns to Scripture for support. While one may quibble with his interpretation of various texts or his use of a particular text at certain points, the fact that he is concerned that his theology be biblically grounded should be heartening for evangelicals and others whose primary concern is whether a position is biblically defensible. Overall, Cole's book is a helpful introduction to the multifaceted topic of atonement theology.

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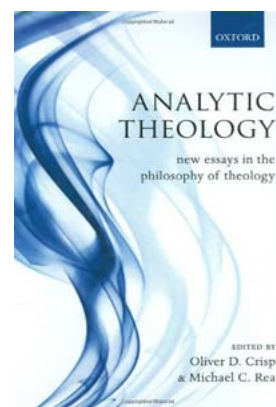
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Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds. *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. viii + 316 pp. £53.00/\$99.00.

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This collection of essays is meant formally to state the claims that have been percolating in analytic (i.e., Anglo-American) philosophy of religion for the last few decades. Given the prominence of its authors (e.g., Rea, Wolterstorff, Stump, Westphal), this proffering is not lacking in credibility. In brief, this volume proposes that analytic theology (AT) is the precision and clarity of analytic philosophy more rigorously applied to theology. The exact nature and extent of that application varies from author to author, but the basic thrust persists. "[C]larity and precision" with "attention to possible objections" creates the centerpiece of the AT proposal (p. 44). Rea's astute introduction exemplifies this clarity while demonstrating Rea's insight regarding the apprehension of AT's most capable skeptics.

AT is then conceived as an investigation of the topics of systematic/dogmatic theology employing the "virtues of the analytic tradition" (p. 55). Or as Oliver Crisp puts it (ch. 1), "analytic" here "involves



the use of certain tools like logic to make sense of theological issues, where metaphysical concerns are central” (p. 37). The primary critique, previously lodged by philosophers like Westphal, is that AT is more “onto-theology” (i.e., focused on a metaphysical understanding of God, the Trinity, etc.) than theology properly understood. The editors appreciate the charge of being both *ahistorical* and narrowly *onto-theological* when working in the analytic mode. However, this critique is acknowledged more than it is accommodated by most contributors and will resurface several times. Additionally, AT claims to follow arguments to their logical conclusions, no matter where they lead, which might create an uncomfortable variability for theologians. This uncertainty regarding the orthodoxy of AT’s theological products is shored up in part by Abraham’s proposal (ch. 2) that calls for an epistemology of theology: “a new sub-discipline in the borderlands between philosophy and theology” (p. 67). This would be a “systematic, self-critical, historically informed” discipline that could counter the reservations held by the authors at the end of the volume.

Those skeptics of AT are given the last word in the final three chapters, and they are cautionary about the criteria for applying AT. First, Eleonore Stump’s essay (ch. 12) considers the ways in which AT might overstep narrational constructs embedded in more traditional theology, hindering the very knowledge meant to be imbued in us by means of story. Second, Westphal (ch. 13) also focuses on the problem of propositions and the value of phenomenological approaches in hermeneutics. In the final chapter (ch. 13), Coakley posits that analytic philosophers have typically misread mystical experiences and that this hermeneutical problem suggests AT’s limits. Of interest, all three critiques aim at the Scriptures, hermeneutics, and their relationship to theology.

Because the proposal for AT and the reconsiderations about AT are at the front and back of this volume respectively, I will briefly summarize the content of the remaining chapters in between. Rauser (ch. 3) seeks to analytically conceptualize the problem of ferreting out *bull* (re *bullshit*) and find “checks and balances” to avoid its creep into theological discussion. Lamont (ch. 4) takes on the current analytic debate about testimony as a source of knowledge requiring support (reductionist) or not (non-reductionist). Chignell’s essay (ch. 5) is based on an admittedly controversial premise that belief (*Glauben*), not knowledge (*Wissen*), was Kant’s goal and serves as a more suitable model for AT. Andrew Dole (ch. 6) tries to reread Schleiermacher in a way that intends to disarm his seeming turn away from metaphysical theology. Wolterstorff (ch. 7) confronts the “onto-theology” objection against AT. He contextualizes recent theistic metaphysical concerns inherent to the mode of AT, rather than merely supposing that Kant is loitering into every discussion. McCall (ch. 8) takes on the daunting task of applying AT to Barth’s doctrine of Scripture by moderating it with Vanhoozer’s now popular speech-act project. Crisp (ch. 9) wrestles with the prolegomenal question: By what kind of source do we justify our belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture? Sudduth (ch. 10) tackles the major Reformed objections to natural theology and the possible neglect of religious experience as formative for dogmatic theology. And Murray (ch. 11) has a creative take on the traditional formulations of the science/religion relationship, picturing them as lovers in various states of affection. The critique of “doormat lovers” is especially worth the read.

*Analytic Theology* represents the next step where theistic philosophy of religion formalizes its relationship with Christian theology. Of value to pastors and theologians alike, the call for precision and clarity is profoundly significant to the field.

However, there are some aspects of AT represented here that merit further development and explanation. First, few authors seemed to genuinely consider the notion that the Scriptures, and not just

Medieval Scholasticism or Reformed systematians, might impose the criteria that guide the process of answering questions that the Scriptures themselves inspire. Rauser's statement that theological *bull* ought to be held in check by "the rigorous demands of closely reasoned analysis" (p. 83) begs questions about Scripture's role in that process of "checks and balances," not to mention the church. This concern is more pointed when considering Oliver Crisp's claim that an "analytic theologian might end up holding doctrine that is unorthodox, or even heretical" (p. 46). Of course, AT must "privilege some ways of conceiving of God over others" (p. 25) as all theologies must do. And Rea tips his hat to the problem of privileging as being "highly contentious" (p. 25). But there is no substantive discussion about the role of Scripture, hermeneutical strictures, or even more, the criteria by which that "privileging" takes place.

As well, the character of AT's "precision and clarity" is presumed throughout, but never adequately defended. Rea anticipates this objection, but the other contributors seem to neglect the possibility that analytic clarity might actually be a veneer of clarity (possibly because of Rea's discerning introduction). Nevertheless, the general opinion that analytic "clarity" might actually be a methodological weakness is evidenced by the critique that resurfaces in the final chapters.

As for the volume in total, it is difficult at some points to determine how the individual essays contribute to the overall thesis. They presume various conceptions of AT as well as definitions of "theology." These variations make the reader do the critical work of clarifying what is being offered and what is at stake when one embraces AT. This, together with the absence of anticipating the objections about AT's relationship to Scripture and hermeneutics, seems to make the AT proposal *slightly less analytic* by its own lights.

Despite the above concerns, which might merely be indicative of the growing pains in a new subfield, this volume deserves to be critically considered as an initial step toward formalizing analytic influence on Christian theology.

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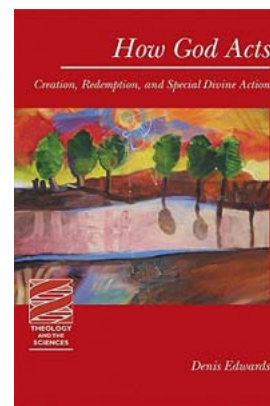
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Denis Edwards. *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. 207 pp. £18.99/\$27.00.

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Denis Edwards is Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology in the School of Theology of Flinders University in the Netherlands. Edwards has been associated with the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, California, and workers in this area including Robert John Russell, Ted Peters, William R. Stoeger, and Nancy Murphy. This volume will particularly interest teachers, pastors, and seminarians who have special interest in the interface between Christian theology and the natural sciences.

A major focus of the book, as indicated in the title, is how God acts in the natural world and how the biblical narrative of creation and redemption can be understood against the background of a modern scientific cosmology in which the universe has been developing in a long evolutionary process lasting some fourteen billion years. Edwards proposes a "non-interventionist" model of divine action, in which God



“does not intervene in the sense of acting to break into creation from outside” (p. 47) and does not violate or undermine the laws of nature. God is “radically interior to every aspect of the universe from the very beginning by the very act of creation” (p. 46), acting in and through secondary causes, and hence does not need to act through miracles, as these have been traditionally understood in the Christian faith. This “non-interventionist” view of divine action, while having some appeal, has serious limitations as well.

One of the major theses of this volume, influenced by the thought of Karl Rahner, is that creation, incarnation, redemption, and new creation form a “seamless garment” in the one unified plan of God for the universe: from the beginning God chose to create a world in which “the Word would be made flesh and the Spirit poured out . . . . Creation, incarnation, and final fulfillment are united in one act of divine self-giving” (p. 40). The incarnation is no afterthought, and the entire sweep of cosmic history can be seen as the footsteps of the Holy Spirit and part of a redemptive plan of God that includes not only humans but animals and other living creatures and the material universe itself (p. 125). Edwards paints a very attractive theological canvas in which the divine purpose is shaping the forces of the cosmos over vast stretches of time and space for a magnificent redemptive end. God works through natural processes of a deterministic nature, but is also guiding chance events as well (p. 55).

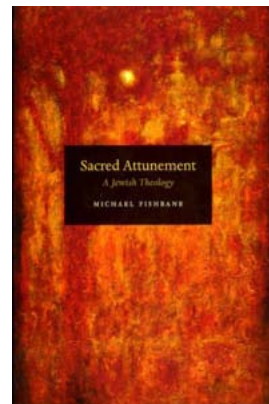
The proposed “non-interventionist” model of divine action is problematic as well as statements that the cross of Christ was “not directly willed by God” (p. 27) and that Jesus’ death was “not necessary” (p. 139). If on the “non-interventionist” model miracles as such are not allowed, then it seems difficult to understand how the universe and humankind can be radically transformed at the very end of history as we know it (cf. p. 154). If Edwards allows for radical discontinuity with the laws of physics at the beginning (creation *ex nihilo*) and hopes for radical transformation at the end (to avoid “heat-death” of the universe scenarios), then why not allow for the possibility of radical discontinuity with the laws of nature (miracles) in the *middle* of history?

Edwards could still retain the considerable merits of his theological proposal and yet allow, as has the historic Christian tradition, for the possibility for such special divine interventions. These criticisms notwithstanding, Edwards’s volume is to be commended as a significant contribution to the current discussion of divine action and the interface between Christian theology and the natural sciences.

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Michael Fishbane. *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 238 pp. £14.50/\$22.50.

Our age is a peculiar one, especially as it relates to the prospect of constructive theology within the social imagery of the Western academy. Numerous studies have appeared in recent years peddling the theological discipline to the coffers of governmental agencies with great apologetical verve. Is there value and is there sufficient interest in the theological discipline to merit faculties, facilities, and funds for such a project under the auspices of the university? Even if the answers to these questions are in the affirmative (even if only in the sense of opting for historical or sociological approaches), that leaves the riddle of *how* to do theology in a disenchanted universe—or, at least, in the disenchanted Western hemisphere. Though slightly more complicated than easy formulations of a Kantian *terminus a quo*, this side of Kant's turn to the subject has found the subject trapped "under the ceiling of interpreted phenomena" (p. 12), creating a complicated and contradictory matrix of the endless deferment of meaning (p. ix) and, in A. N. Whitehead's vivid phrase, "misplaced concreteness."



*Sacred Attunement* is not so much an apologetical tract in favor of the place of theology within the academy or secular society as it is a poetic and prophetic demonstration of constructive theology from *within* the academy and *for* the world. It is "an attempt to 'do' theology in a dark and disorienting time—a time sunk in the mire of modernity" (p. ix). Despite the Babel fences marking the borderlands between the natural and the supernatural, the everyday remains shot through with "traces of transcendence" (p. x), and, with Goethe, even still we "shudder before the mortal mysteries." *Sacred Attunement* is therefore a theology "grounded in the *forms of experience* found in the natural world," a theology that seeks to embrace "these perceptions of transcendence and tries to sustain (and even revive) them in the normal course of life" (p. x). Theology is therefore a "sacred enterprise," the "ever-new attempt to speak of the reality of God and direct the self toward this truth" (p. 1). The attempt is "ever-new" because no "honest theology can ignore what we know and experience as moderns, or relegate this to some separate cognitive sphere" (p. 13). Because theology is aired in "the world of persons," it "is a human truth projected into the mysteries of God's truth" (p. 32). Hence, there is a continual need for "age-specific personifications of God" (p. 3). Much of the theological torpor today fails precisely at this point. Theology is either beguiled by the gestures of the generations or caught within the habitudes and thickets of "accepted meanings" (p. 82). The theologian must be aware of the current cultural complications of theological formulation (pp. 9–11), while both speaking from *within* and *to* this moment.

Theology as *attunement* has a dual nature: "it involves both perception and performance. Accordingly, theology is not merely a type of thinking but also a type of living" (p. xiii). It involves perception in that it seeks after the order, the wisdom, the truth of things. It names this "most primal Depth (beyond the Beyond of all conception), so infinitely disposing" what "we haltingly bring to mind by the word *God*" (p. 34). It is also performative in that it seeks to pattern itself after the Real and for the world, to *image*—perform—the divine to the world. The theological task, therefore, "does not change nature as such, but rather transforms its reception, through spiritual consciousness" (p. 123) and attentiveness to the double dimension of primary realities, rupture and revision. It is at this crossing-point where theology finds its *first prefiguration* (p. 22). These caesural events challenge habitude and all matters of "routine and idolatry" (p. 105), pressing upon us the question of whether the divine is "a

living reality in our lives, or merely some abstraction of thought; and in what respect is religious life a matter of true engagement, or simply an expression of inherited behaviors?” (p. 2).

It is at this point where Fishbane’s general comments on the theological task turn to a special instance of Jewish theology. The giving of the Law at Sinai “stands at the mythic core of religious memory” and marks the beginnings of Jewish theology. There is “no authentic Jewish theology outside this covenant core” (p. 49), where the “divine ‘I shall be’ requires a living human attentiveness for its realization as an event of earthly significance” (p. 54). Jewish theology is therefore hermeneutical, performative, and transformative (pp. 43–45), seeking “to interpret sacred scripture in ways that sharpen our religious awareness for the sake of a God-centered life, and to allow our reinterpreted lives to disclose ever-wider and deeper spiritual realities of God’s *torah kelulah*” (p. 64). Through the varying interpretive processes of *PaRDeS*, there is an attempt “to foster diverse modes of attention to textual details, which in turn cultivate correlative forms of attention to the world and to divine reality” (p. xi.). Within the threefold nature(s) of *torah she-bikhtav*, *torah she-be’al peh*, and *torah kelulah*, the “old words of scripture are spaces for ever-new moments of spiritual consciousness and self-transformation” (p. xiv). Covenant theology is thus a “heroic theology” (p. 175), constantly reshaping itself to “meet new circumstances” (p. 150), a “heroic transvaluation of values within the frameworks of scripture and tradition. It is an ever-present human attunement to God’s ‘Shall-Be,’ and with it the obligation to respond” (p. 198).

It is difficult to classify exactly what genre *Sacred Attunement* inhabits. It is more than a mere Jewish theology or philosophic theology or spiritual theology. But this much is sure: it is a book marked by a profoundly God-centered and wide humanitarian vision. Though short in pages, its depth makes it a challenging read. The prose will at points haunt you, its boldness shock you, and its moral vision compel you. The book deserves a careful and critical read and Fishbane our deepest thanks.

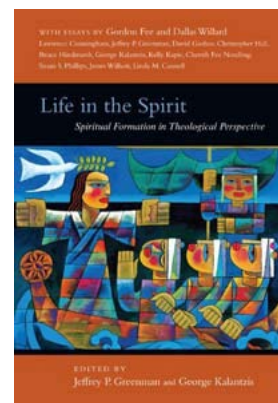
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Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, eds. *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2010. 256 pp. £14.57/\$25.00.

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Based on the 2009 Wheaton Theology Conference, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* thoughtfully engages and critiques contemporary understandings of spiritual formation. Secondly, it addresses misunderstandings as to the relationship between Scripture and tradition and suggests how spiritual disciplines might be properly practiced within the local church. This collection of essays calls for theological reflection upon both our reading(s) of Scripture and traditional practices throughout church history seeking after the recovery of a balanced discipleship that is rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit *and* the believer’s appropriation of that power in his or her own faith journey. Organized in three sections, the book invites the reader to consider not only why churches, pastors, and seminaries need to take spiritual formation more seriously, but why spiritual formation must become a central priority for the believer *and* the church.



In part one, “Theological Contours,” Jeffrey P. Greenman (“Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective”) offers a more “theologically oriented’ definition of spiritual formation” (p. 11) that challenges more problem-solving or programmatic approaches to discipleship and personal spirituality. Gordon Fee (“On Getting the Spirit Back into Spirituality”) addresses the need to link a proper theological interpretation of Scripture to our understanding of the Spirit’s transformation of believers. His contribution is perhaps unique among the contributors as he examines several Pauline passages in order to demonstrate that the majority of English translations often misconstrue Paul’s use of *pneumatikos*, interpreting it adjectivally rather than as the subject. One example is found in Gal 6:1, where the NIV denotes those who are “spiritual” are to restore gently a brother or sister who is caught in sin, contra what Fee notes as the more syntactically and theologically accurate translation of those “who live by the Spirit.” He carefully notes that such a poor translation is possible, in part, due to the artificial separation of Gal 6 “from all the Spirit talk that has immediately preceded it, which includes the so-called fruit of the Spirit” (p. 39). Therefore, Fee sees the Spirit as “both the ‘locus’ and ‘enabler’ of our lives as believers” (p. 44), allowing us to understand that spiritual formation is both located in and empowered by the Spirit of God. Dallas Willard’s “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation” concludes this section with challenging construals of salvation that are based on either behavior modification or a professing of right doctrine. Instead, he offers an understanding of salvation where sanctification as the fruit of justification is witnessed via transformed lives and churches. This, of course, directly challenges those who see no connection between “being saved” and spiritual formation. But Willard rightly wants us to see that connection, wherein we understand “the process as formation of the human spirit as well as formation by the divine Spirit, for it is indeed both” (p. 46).

Opening the second part, “Historical Approaches,” George Kalantzis (“From the Porch to the Cross”) invites evangelicals to paths of discipleship that have already been tried and trod by early generations of believers, understanding that spiritual formation has been a part of the faith from the beginning. Lawrence S. Cunningham (“The Way and the Ways”), a Roman Catholic, notes that his tradition’s “spirituality is . . . a trinitarian enterprise” (p. 85), allowing for many different expressions of spirituality within orthodoxy from which to choose. While some Evangelicals may be concerned with Cunningham’s citing Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, he does so in order to appropriately underscore the concept of “the Way” within the motif of the spiritual journey and that, while having not “arrived,” this journey does have a particular eschatological ending. Kelly M. Kapic (“Evangelical Holiness”) examines John Owen’s writings on distinguishing between Christian spirituality, as dependent upon God’s grace, and a life of moral virtue, in which one relies upon their own external behavior. D. Bruce Hindmarsh (“Seeking True Religion”) proffers the examples of John Wesley and George Overton as models for encouraging spiritual transformation through resourcing collections of ecumenical devotional materials for lay people.

Lastly, “Spiritual Practices” examines contemporary applications of spiritual disciplines coupled with greater theological reflection upon some of the more central practices. Christopher A. Hall (“Reading Christ into the Heart”) reflects on practicing *lectio divina* as a re-learning of the gospel for a better understanding of *and* fidelity to God’s call. It is an invitation to allow Scripture to address “both [our] intellect and [our] affections,” where “Christ’s words are percolating within [us]” (p. 142), forming Christ within us. Hall’s main point is that evangelicals need a reading of Scripture that complements but is separate from one that focuses solely on grammar and syntax, equally allowing the Word of God to engage our sanctified imaginations as well as our reason. For all of the strength of his presentation, however, Hall fails to note the ease of *lectio divina*’s being misconstrued into a subjective, individualistic

hermeneutic without proper preparation or teaching. While this is no reason to reject this or any other spiritual practice, this blind spot speaks to the overall need for wisdom in how one introduces spiritual formation to those less familiar with these practices. Susan S. Phillips (“Spiritual Direction as a Navigational Aid in Sanctification”) writes from her experiences and interactions as a spiritual director, noting how this position has proven helpful to others in their personal faith journey and transformation. James Wilhoit (“Centering Prayer”) considers this somewhat controversial form of prayer as a means of our consenting daily to God’s presence and purpose in our lives. Cherith Fee Nordling (“Renewed in Knowledge in the Image of Our Creator”) offers a perspective on the weekly practice of congregational worship as spiritual formation, particularly corporate singing, through which Christians enter into and experience the transforming presence of God. Finally, David Gushee (“Spiritual Formation and the Sanctity of Life”) writes of ethics as spiritual practice whereby we commit to kingdom values in the way in which we conceive of and treat all people. Linda Cannell’s epilogue (“Theology, Spiritual Formation, and Theological Education”) addresses the need for theological education to adequately prepare pastors for ministry in a twenty-first century parish context, contending that seminaries must think about spiritual formation as part of the relationship between knowledge and learning.

Many years after Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* (1978) first broached spiritual formation within the context of contemporary evangelicalism, *Life in the Spirit* thoughtfully self-examines the current state of discipleship within evangelicalism. It consciously challenges popular construals of spiritual formation that tend to be self-serving rather than conforming us to the image of Christ. The scholars assembled offer mature theological reflections and practical directions for further consideration and practice for both the church and believer. By including the Roman Catholic tradition, evangelicals are offered insights into spiritual formation as practiced over many centuries, encouraging the thoughtful borrowing from within *and* without one’s own tradition, as well as throughout church history. At the same time, however, other voices might further enrich this discussion. Eastern Orthodoxy, for example, may bring further historical insights and thoughtful practices into this discussion. From evangelicalism’s edges, some Emerging congregations offer examples of body life and discipleship formed around concepts of spiritual formation, applying them within their own contemporary contexts. Perhaps such perspectives would create greater unity even as they deepen this conversation.

One clear value is this book’s accessibility to lay people and scholars alike. Each essay adds to the strength of the overall argument of the whole book. Altogether, these essays should move readers to prayerful self-examination and thoughtful theological engagement while emphasizing the power and value of biblically grounded spiritual disciplines and their role in the daily loving of the Lord and one another. As such, *Life in the Spirit* calls for ongoing dialogue while offering a positive vision for properly incorporating spiritual formation into the everyday life of the church, therefore furthering its purity and mission as the body of Christ in the world.

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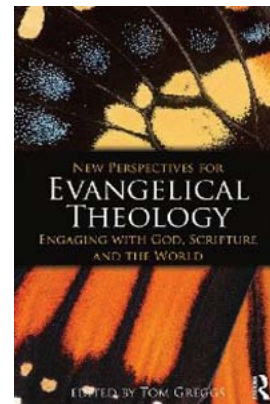


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Tom Greggs, ed. *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World*. New York: Routledge, 2010. 223 pp. £19.99/\$35.95.

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Tom Greggs, who currently serves as professor of theology at the University of Chester in the UK, has provided his first edited anthology for Christian readership, entitled *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology*. The book is made up of younger American and British scholars who address a number of salient topics that are important to evangelicals in the present intellectual climate of the twenty-first century. Some contributors wrestle with assorted doctrines inherent within evangelical thought while others challenge some of the methodological approaches that are often used to define evangelical identity. In either case though, Greggs asserts that the writers wish to engage these issues and still maintain continuity with the historical trajectory of the evangelical tradition. So this book is not a strict exercise in systematic theology per se. Nor is it simply a polemic against past evangelical norms. Rather it is more a collection of discussions about how streams of thought regarding certain theological subjects can be possibly redefined or at least nuanced in more accessible paradigms. However, the question that remains at the end of the book is whether this goal is altogether successful.



Initially, readers will find that most of the issues are longstanding. Chapters deal with the doctrines of Scripture, election, the atonement, sanctification, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Likewise, essays address how Christians should approach the public square, and two chapters in particular deal with how evangelicals can possibly maintain useful interaction with Muslims and national Israel. But as with any book having multiple essays, some chapters are more engaging than others. Some of the more helpful segments include an essay by George Bailey on the theological tensions that exist in a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification; a contemporary treatment of Calvin's understanding of communion by Ben Fulford; a critical reflection by Jason Fout regarding how the practice of Christian gift-giving should be defined in light of God's generosity through the gospel; and an analysis by Simeon Zahl about the tensions that exist among evangelicals regarding the criteria for determining the present working of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

Alongside these chapters, however, others offer various proposals that are a bit more controversial and problematic. For example, Richard S. Briggs appeals to evangelicals to reconfigure the doctrine of Scripture primarily in terms of the transformative power of the Bible as opposed to a strict ontology of inspiration. The obvious unanswered question is whether biblical authority should be defined in exclusively functional terms. Another engaging but potentially polarizing thesis is proposed by Paul T. Nimmo, who challenges Calvin's claim that God's purpose in decreeing to save the elect can be located only in his inscrutable mysterious will. Nimmo argues that Karl Barth's christocentric understanding of divine action possibly alleviates this tension by locating the intent of election in the destiny freely chosen by Christ to identify with all of humanity via the incarnation. Clearly, the problem that is still ongoing when appealing to Barth in this fashion is that it leaves the question of universalism open to debate. And Nimmo equivocates on whether this is a legitimate concern. Additionally, Paul Dafydd Jones arouses concern pertaining to the atonement; he follows a growing trend among some theologians who want to retain the idea of substitution while questioning and possibly jettisoning the violent overtones of divine wrath and the necessary congruence with the imputation of righteousness. Finally, another common thread of concern arises as one reads the chapters on eschatology by Tom Greggs and theories for

possible interaction with other religions by Andi Smith, Sarah Snyder, and Glenn Chestnutt, respectively. One quickly sees that the authors' sensitivity to pluralistic diversity ultimately results in a soft leaning toward inclusivism.

All of these items being considered, this volume is helpful because it delineates some of the crossroads that evangelicals are now facing. On the one hand, readers will see that there are areas of theological development that need to transpire so as to improve the way(s) evangelicals identify the doctrinal symmetry of Scripture. Yet on the other hand, readers will also see that while many biblical scholars and theologians genuinely want to foster dialogue about various doctrines, their discussions sometimes lead to embracing ideas that are more sensitive to the pluralistic West than to the scandal of gospel particularity. Again this can be seen in reading such chapters as the ones about election, eschatology, Islam, or Israel. And while it is true that most of these authors are not on the radar of mainline American evangelical circles, their arguments do reflect common themes that one can find in much of the literature dealing with similar topics.

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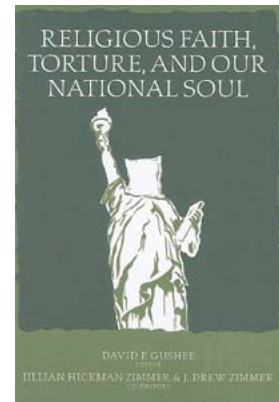
David P. Gushee, ed. *Religious Faith, Torture, and Our National Soul*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010. xi + 303 pp. £24.95/\$28.00.

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In the landmark 1964 U.S. Supreme Court obscenity decision *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, Justice Potter Stewart famously commented that despite the difficulty in defining pornography, "I know it when I see it . . ." The problem, as Stewart's quip suggests, is one of threshold. At what point does a cultural artifact cross the line between being in poor taste to being obscene? Discussions about torture seem vexed by similar vagueness. Few can say with much precision exactly *what* torture *is*, but many are willing to discuss the issue based on a tacit assumption that we all know it when we see it.

The present volume, a collection of essays presented at a 2008 conference on torture at Mercer University, is no exception. In this anthology, David Gushee, Distinguished Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer, brings together a large contingent of religious leaders, activists, scholars, and lawyers from diverse religious backgrounds to "find words" in "their own voices" to express a shared "visceral conviction" that "*No human being should be treated as we [the United States of America] have treated people in our post-9/11 national fear, grief, and anger*" (p. xi). The apparently cathartic function of expressing this shared conviction that "pulses through this collection of essays" perhaps fuels the breathtaking scope of reflections in the book's two major divisions: "Torture and U.S. Foreign Policy: Looking Back" (Part 1) and "Recovering Our Moral Bearings: Where Do We Go From Here?" (Part 2).

Part 1 contains five major essays, each supplemented by at least one concurring response, closing with a series of four, brief testimonials by lawyers with first-hand knowledge of conditions at Guantanamo. This section begins with two essays that helpfully trace recent historical developments in the U.S. military's use of increasingly aggressive interrogation techniques. It also includes reflections



on the human impact of torture from a field professional who works with victims and from a torture survivor. In addition to these retrospectives, the first part includes Gushee's own analysis on what the "torture debate reveal(s) about American evangelical Christianity" (p. 79) with responses from Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Muslim perspectives.

Part 2 begins with three brief meditations or "sermons" on torture in relation to key theological themes or scriptural texts. Following these are essays (and supportive replies) that deal with the theological grounds of human rights, the challenges of reconciliation between evangelical and Muslim perspectives in the post 9/11 era, and the need for a "truth commission" in a climate of rhetorical obfuscation. After three essays by PhD candidates in religious and theological studies on Koran desecration, the "suffering torturer/hero motif in American culture," and a theological critique of CIA black sites through the lens of Wolfhart Pannenberg's work, the book concludes with an essay recommending a political strategy for cultural and policy change on the issue of torture.

Because this collection features work from thirty different contributors on such a wide range of issues related to torture, the volume as a whole tends to read like proceedings from the conference from which the project originated. For that reason, the book's content might have been more effectively distributed as a series of podcasts. What internal conceptual unity the work as a whole does possess is supported by the axioms that undergird the contributors' shared conviction. First, "torture is wrong. It is undeniably, morally, irrefutably wrong" (p. 11). Second, "we [Americans] have tortured people" (p. 115). Thus, the contributions reflect a plurality of perspectives in harmonious chorus on two major themes: the wrong(s) of torture, especially as committed by the U.S. government, and how citizens, especially Christians, ought to respond.

Despite the unanimity of purpose, the diversity among the contributors, both in terms of vocational and religious backgrounds, leaves the book thin in the way of sustained theological reflection on torture. What theological reflection it does contain gets expressed primarily in the three transitional sermons (Cheryl Bridges Johns, Fleming Rutledge, and Tyler Wigg-Stevenson), the essay on the religious foundations of human rights (Glen Stassen), and the theological ruminations on CIA black sites (Natalie Wigg-Stevenson).

Some of the theological insights offered in this subset may seem a bit strained. Some, for example, might puzzle over Cheryl Bridges Johns's ("Sacred Bodies: Inspired Flesh") suggestion that our capacity to countenance torture without moral disapproval might be rooted in a failed ecological conscience: "Can it be too far of a jump in moral reasoning from ignoring the groans of creation to ignoring the groans of human flesh? Just how far apart are mountaintop removal and waterboarding?" (p. 124). Others may find Fleming Rutledge's consideration of God's love for the sojourner (Deut 10:17-19), asking us to "imagine" detainees through the lens of this theological motif, a bit expansive: "Once a man (or woman) becomes powerless, then he is a sojourner. A sojourner is by definition at the mercy of someone else, some other group. It is this person who God loves; it is this person who is commended to us for particular care" (p. 132).

On the other hand, the bold argumentative work of Tyler Wigg-Stevenson ("Tortured Truth") and the creative application of Pannenberg by Natalie Wigg-Stevenson ("Prisons Outside the Kingdom: A Theological Reflection on CIA Black Sites") are noteworthy. The former tackles objections from an imagined interlocutor—the only essay in the volume that does this in a rigorously argumentative way. The latter articulates a compelling incompatibility between support for CIA black sites and a proper understanding of the Kingdom of God.

Ultimately, this book's value for readers will be a function of how they position themselves in the conversation about torture. Skeptics about the two unquestioned assumptions above will not likely be persuaded since the book does not aim at a skeptical audience. Co-belligerents in the crusade against torture will find the unity of conviction refreshing. But those seeking a distinctively Christian, theologically robust perspective on torture may be disappointed.

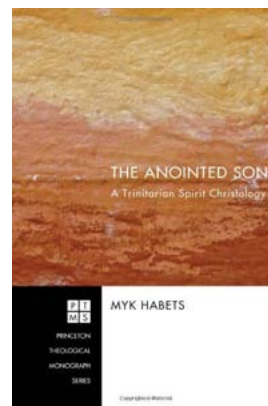
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Myk Habets. *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*. Princeton Theological Monograph. Eugene: Pickwick, 2010. 340 pp. \$37.00.

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The prolific evangelical theologian from New Zealand continues to exercise his fluent pen with the next instalment to his own expanding research interests. Currently lecturing at Carey Baptist College in Auckland, New Zealand, here Myk Habets makes his initial contribution to another growing body of ecumenical work that has come to be known as "Spirit Christology" (p. 3). In so doing and in his task of serving the church, he offers a fresh approach to an enhanced Christology that, as he understands it, gives adequate place to pneumatology. Since Spirit and Christ are mutually constitutive, Habets sets out to define Spirit Christology within a Trinitarian perspective, and thus argues for its position as a needed complement to the reigning Logos Christology that has dominated throughout the Christian tradition (p. 7).



The book's argument is spread throughout eight chapters. After the first introductory chapter, Habets sketches various methodological approaches to Christology in chapter 2. While not wanting to make starting points a matter of orthodoxy, here Habets accepts a functional Christology as his starting point which then leads to ontology (p. 17). In this move he posits a purely functional understanding as inadequate, as is also the traditional approach of a pure ontology *alone* (e.g., Nicaea or Chalcedon). He is after ontological language in the present context that is able to communicate what Nicaea did in its day (p. 21). And so for his proposal of an inspirational-incarnational Christology, he finds soteriology preceding Christology (p. 28), allowing this move *from below* with the historic Jesus *to above* with the affirmation of Christ's deity, pre-existence, and Lordship as the cosmic Christ (p. 50).

Chapter 3 considers the patristic period where the earliest Christologies were constructed. Here he shows how by the time of Irenaeus a Logos Christology was the dominant position of the church, in turn eclipsing Spirit Christology as Jesus' deity was emphasized over his humanity (p. 66). After tracing the patristic developments, in wanting to *complement* not *replace* the A.D. 451 decision, Habets offers a somewhat unoriginal critical assessment of Chalcedon (pp. 83–85), which is then followed by an account of weaknesses resulting from Logos Christology, especially in yielding an exclusively "from above" Christology (pp. 86–87). Habets is groping for a better approach that acknowledges the organic, normative pneumatological-Christological link, being both biblical and capable of speaking to today's culture (p. 88).

In offering his Spirit Christology, Habets traverses the terrain of biblical scholarship and its recent christological accounts in chapter 4. Employing a pneumatological hermeneutic, appealing to the Spirit as the minister of the Word and the one who leads the community into correct interpretation of the Bible (a well-known approach in the Baptist tradition), Habets sets forth this framework as one capable of presenting all the NT teaching on Jesus' identity in a balanced manner (pp. 102, 108). And then in chapter 5, Habets employs this hermeneutic, looking primarily at the Gospel accounts of Christ's life, and seeking to show that "the Spirit is seen as *the* interpretation of Jesus's identity" (p. 122).

Chapter 6 attempts a definition of Spirit Christology proper that might be incorporated into contemporary theology. Before exploring Catholic (i.e., Kasper, Coffey, Del Colle) and Protestant (i.e., John Owen, Irving, and "Third Article" proponents like Moltmann, Smail, and Badcock) attempts either to replace or complement Logos Christology, Habets establishes helpful criteria for what a reinvigorated Spirit Christology ought to account for (pp. 190–93). This in turn precedes his own succinct presentation of a Trinitarian Spirit Christology (pp. 220–27).

In chapter 7 Habets continues his account of a Third Article Theology, where pneumatology assumes primacy in theological method. He then sketches tracks of how this theology of transformation can be worked into prolegomena, anthropology, ecclesiology, and soteriology, which further considers the significant matters of union with Christ, *theosis* and Dabney's *pneumatologia crucis*, proposing a kenosis not just of the Son but of the Spirit as well. Finally, in chapter 8 Habets suggests ways that his Spirit Christology may contribute to further discussions in the following areas: Christology, theological anthropology, Christian discipleship, and ecumenism.

Throughout this bold work, Habets displays key characteristics of a self-consciously evangelical approach to theology. Specifically, the work shows constant awareness of biblical issues and matters of concern to the biblical text, thereby seeking to honor God. Additionally, it is aware of issues within the Eastern and Western traditions of the church and seeking to be sensitive to related issues that can serve the church. In light of the final three chapters especially, it seems that this work is effectively a sketch of something that Habets would like to further develop in due course. And yet the solid contribution that *The Anointed Son* makes should not be overlooked. In its breadth and scope of issues handled, it will be a useful text for Christology.

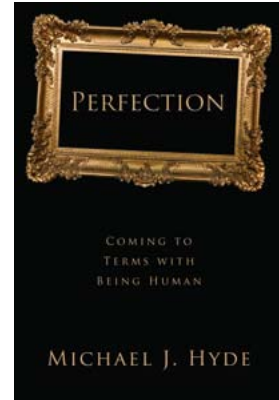
While this work is courageous, Habets is certainly capable of more here, and it is hoped that in the future he will work out more of the essential issues he touches on, perhaps especially issues surrounding methodology, by order of priority. If, as noted, there is no accepted ontology to speak of today (p. 21), what about the notion of a theo-ontology that might be built on a pneumatological-christological epistemology of theology? And another methodological area that beckons further development, since it is a deep concern throughout this work (e.g., pp. 88, 188, 231–32), is a more thorough account of precisely how theology ought to engage culture in order to speak the gospel effectively within particular cultures. As Habets continues his craft as a doctor in service of the church, this reviewer looks forward with much anticipation to forthcoming works that will provide assistance in both understanding and articulating the deep matters concerning the Triune God and his ways as revealed in the gospel of grace.

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Michael J. Hyde. *Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010. 322 pp. £19.99/\$29.95.

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At one point in this ambitious book, Michael Hyde quotes Frederick Schelling: “Has creation a final purpose at all, and if so why is it not attained immediately, why does perfection not exist from the very beginning?” (p. 24). Hyde is less interested in finding the answer to this question than in the fact that we have all asked it. Perfection, a concept Hyde leaves purposely large and vague, makes a call on all of us, and fills us with a longing for Otherness that we name “God.” We share a “metaphysical desire for perfection, *achieving a state of completeness in our lives whereby, at least for the moment, we feel secure, comfortable, and at home with ourselves, others, and our immediate surroundings*” (p. xii). *Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human* is not a history of the idea of perfection, but a phenomenology describing how we have “come to terms” with the goal of perfection and the reality of our imperfection.



*Perfection* is the third in a trilogy of books by Hyde, University Distinguished Professor of Communication Ethics in the Department of Communication at Wake Forest University. The first two are entitled *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and Levinas and Rhetoric* and *The Euthanasia Debate and the Life-Giving Gift of Acknowledgment*. The books represent the three central threads woven throughout *Perfection*. First, humanity experiences a “call of conscience,” which entails an obligation to be open to the Other. Second, humanity must *acknowledge* the Other, which has to do with recognizing the Other’s claims upon us. Third, humanity faces an unattainable desire for perfection, which in turn affects the other two. Hyde then adds to the tapestry by providing various analyses of art, music, movies, fiction, philosophy, and science, all loosely related to this desire for the perfect. Readers of this journal will recognize immediately that this book is not about “perfectionism” or the holiness movement, except as they express a deep human longing.

Hyde begins by making the case for why rhetoric matters. Rhetoric matters because although humanity shares the quest for perfection, how we “come to terms with and understand” what perfection is can be quite different (p. xiv). These differences cause the conflict. For example, people have most often correlated the idea of perfection with God, but that naming creates a problem. “The question is whether God is the ‘first cause’ of our metaphysical tendencies or some ultimate effect of these tendencies . . . . This question sets the sides of the long-standing debate between religion and science over the ‘true’ origins and workings of the cosmos” (p. 22). Hyde argues that although this conflict cannot be resolved, it can be held in tension. To show how this might be done, Hyde returns to his own, vaguely Levinasian understanding of the purpose of human existence as learning to be in a state of openness to the Other. This enables him to aver that, “in the end, both sides might be correct” (p. 22).

To make his case that the desire for perfection is everywhere, and everywhere associated with this need for openness to the Other, Hyde draws from a wide variety of sources. For example, in a chapter entitled “The Otherness All around Us,” Hyde turns to the OT and the Gettysburg address to show how the idea of perfection drives humanity forward. In “Reason,” Hyde discusses Enlightenment philosophers’ interest in the absolute perfection of the human race, explaining how “progress” becomes for these thinkers a “god term.” In “Beauty,” Hyde gives a variety of examples of the way that the arts

demonstrate how beauty is connected to perfection. He then draws on scientific discourses to show that the desire for beauty has always been a part of our quest for knowledge.

These first six chapters demonstrate how the range of Hyde's project often trips him up. His chapter on beauty feels especially scattershot: along with Plato and Kant, he discusses Leon Kass, Bertrand Russell, Steven Weinberg, Charles Darwin, Euclid, Richard Dawkins, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Leonardo DaVinci, just to name a few. There is simply no way to hold all these disparate views together on as vague of an idea as "beauty," and it makes for very difficult reading. Although the reader eventually adapts to his wide-ranging approach, the object of Hyde's endeavor seems to get swallowed up with the variety of examples. In any case, it is difficult to redeem the effort required to swallow this sentence:

Justice has an ontological ring to its nature, which is heard in a rhetoric of perfection: justice develops with the primordial relationship between the self and otherness, with the epideictic call of conscience that is announced by this relationship, with the acknowledgement that keeps us open to the interruptive function of this call and to the disclosure of truth that happens in the midst of this openness, with the salvation that transpires as we act heroically to respect and cultivate the truth in question and the beauty of which this truth speaks. (p. 177)

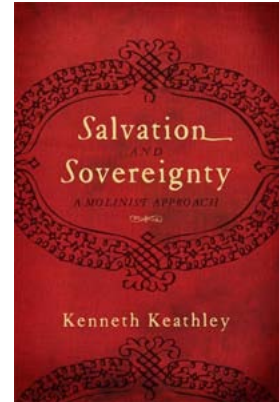
Though too much of this book is likewise unnecessarily convoluted, Hyde salvages the effort by two particularly good chapters: "The Good Life, the Good Death" and "The Biotechnology Debate" (chs. 8–9). Chapter 8 treats the Terry Schiavo case. He analyzes the rhetorical approaches of both sides, revealing how they appealed to the "same rhetoric of perfection to make their case," and how both "became rotten" with perfection. We can "become rotten with perfection" by being close-minded with our self-righteous certainty, and we can "become rotten with imperfection" by succumbing to despair about it. Chapter 9 analyzes the rhetoric of Leon Kass and other bioconservatives, comparing it to that of Dawkins, Pinker, and other detractors of Bush's Presidential Council on Bioethics. Among other things, Hyde concludes that both sides would benefit from more humility. The chapter serves as a good reminder that when coming to terms with the basic human desire for perfection, our words really do matter.

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Kenneth Keathley. *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010. 210 pp. £15.75/\$24.99.

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Keathley makes a valiant and attractive attempt in this book to reconcile Calvinism and Arminianism, defending a strong, Calvinistic view of divine sovereignty and election while advocating a libertarian view of human freedom and an Arminian view of faith. The supposed key to the reconciliation is Molinism, the view that God has what is called “middle knowledge.” This refers to God’s apparent knowledge of what creatures with libertarian freedom would do in counterfactual circumstances. According to Keathley, “The Molinist model is the only game in town for anyone who wishes to affirm a high view of God’s sovereignty while holding to a genuine definition of human choice, freedom, and responsibility” (p. 6).



With this in mind, Keathley offers his alternative to the famous Calvinist TULIP acronym, ROSES: Radical depravity, Overcoming grace, Sovereign election, Eternal life, and Singular Redemption. The rest of the book comprises mostly a discussion and defense of these points in contrast to those other views. Again, Keathley’s book offers a worthwhile attempt to accomplish this goal. In the end, however, I’m afraid it fails to deliver.

Because of space limitations and because my own expertise is in philosophy, I will focus my remarks mainly on philosophical and conceptual matters. First, in chapter 1, Keathley makes his biblical case for Molinism. As part of that discussion, Keathley rightly defines contingency as “the notion that something could have been otherwise . . . something that happens to be true but obviously could have been false” (p. 28). Of course, the term “could” here is notoriously ambiguous. And Keathley appears to exploit this ambiguity to argue for creaturely libertarian freedom in Scripture. For example, Keathley writes, “When Samuel informed Saul that God had rejected him as king, he told him that it could have been otherwise” (p. 29). But neither this nor any of Keathley’s other examples goes to show that Scripture supports libertarian freedom. All that follows from the Samuel/Saul story is that *if Saul had acted differently*, he would have remained king. But it does not at all follow that Saul could have acted differently! For Keathley to insist otherwise is to beg the question against a compatibilist notion of human freedom.

Keathley insists, “God’s statements about destroying Israel and starting over with Moses were contingently true and describe real possibilities” (p. 33). Yes, but what kind of possibilities? I would argue that they are simply *logical* possibilities, which is to say that there is a possible world in which God destroys Israel and starts over with Moses. But this possibility says nothing about whether Moses had libertarian freedom to act otherwise or even that God could have done otherwise *given his plans and intentions*. Keathley appears to think that true contingency and conditionality rule out necessity and determination, but this is not the case. In the statement “If an asteroid hits the earth, all land animals will die,” the consequent is genuinely contingent on the antecedent. Nevertheless, *given the antecedent*, the consequent is physically necessary.

Second, Keathley rightly points out that the Bible frequently utilizes counterfactual conditionals in describing and predicting human behavior. But he too quickly concludes from this that the agents involved have libertarian freedom. This simply does not follow. A compatibilist can easily grant the truth of these conditionals but insist that this is best explained by these conditionals *not* being counterfactuals



*of freedom*. Rather, God can know and utilize these counterfactuals in ordering his providence precisely because the agents have only compatibilist freedom.

Third, it seems that Keathley is unaware of the problems that Molinism has when understood (as it usually is) as an account of meticulous providence. Quoting William Lane Craig, Keathley states that via his middle knowledge, “God can plan the world down to the last detail and yet do so without annihilating creaturely freedom” (p. 39). But this is true only if God’s plan for the world develops logically *after* his cognizance of what counterfactuals are true. I have argued elsewhere (see “Molinism, Meticulous Providence, and Luck,” *Philosophia Christi* 11:1 [2009]: 156–69) that if God has a plan for how he wants the world to go that is logically antecedent to his cognizance of the truth-values of counterfactuals, then he would be astronomically lucky if there turned out to be a feasible world that matched his plan (because what worlds are feasible is determined by creaturely choices, not God). I call this version of Molinism *Scheme A Molinism*. For Molinism to be credible, the Molinist has to adopt *Scheme B Molinism* and believe that God first takes note of what counterfactuals are true, and thus which worlds are feasible, and then comes up with a plan for how he would like things to go in the actual world, given his severely delimited options. But I argue (*ibid.*) that this hardly deserves to be called a *meticulous* view of providence. On Scheme B Molinism, the extent of God’s providential control in history may be likened to a man choosing which movie to play on his DVD player where all the playable movies are written, directed, and acted by others.

Fourth, in chapter 2, Keathley objects to the Calvinist version of the idea that God has “two wills.” Among other things, he believes that this view is logically incoherent. But I believe that his objection amounts to a straw man. Why may we not say (roughly following the logic of John Piper, whom Keathley criticizes) that God has a *prima facie* (all things being equal) desire to save all, but an *ultima facie* (all things considered) desire to accomplish some other good ends that overrides his *prima facie* desire to save all and thus necessitates saving only some? There is nothing at all incoherent about this distinction. But Keathley would object that this is inconsistent with God having genuine love for the unsaved. Not so. Suppose that a physician, out of love and compassion, desires to go to a foreign land to combat a deadly disease. But he gets word that the same disease has infected many people in his homeland. All things being equal, he desires to work to save both groups of people. But all things are not equal. All things considered, he concludes that the best course is to remain home and save the people of his homeland. This is a perfectly coherent story in which a person has two desires but one overrides the other. And notice also that in making the choice to stay home, it doesn’t follow that the doctor doesn’t love the folks in the foreign land. Likewise, God can love the non-elect and genuinely desire to save them, but choose not to in order to achieve a putative greater good (e.g., magnifying his own glory).

Moreover, it is not clear that Keathley’s own preferred solution to the problem escapes serious objection. He argues that God does indeed have two wills but that they are his antecedent and consequent wills. The former is God’s genuine will to save all sinners; the latter his will to damn all those who refuse his offer of salvation. Put another way, God desires to save all but only on the condition of their faith and repentance. In response to the objection that this view portrays God as powerless and waiting in regard to the salvation of sinners, Keathley says simply that God is waiting but not powerless. It is not clear what the intended force of this response is supposed to be. Clearly, on Keathley’s view, God lacks to the power to effectively bring a sinner to faith and repentance without violating his freedom. But in that case it is logically possible that God’s offer of salvation would be universally rejected. It’s hard to see how God could be more powerless in the salvation of sinners than that!

Fifth, in chapter 3, Keathley argues that human libertarian freedom follows from God's freedom. Against my (and John Feinberg's) contention that even God lacks libertarian freedom, Keathley argues, following Thomas Flint, that this means that God "had to create this particular world. Then this is the only possible world" (p. 71). I deny the entailment. I grant that God, *given his plans and purposes for the world*, could not have created any other world than this one. But it does not follow that there is no possible world in which God's plans and purposes are different. Yet even if I'm wrong about this, I fail to see the problem. Orthodox Christianity is committed to the freedom of God especially as exercised in creating the world. However, I see no non-question-begging reason why orthodox Christianity has to be committed to understanding God's freedom in libertarian terms. On a compatibilist view of freedom, God is free in creating if the world he creates results from his own desires and intentions. Whether he could have created a different world is irrelevant.

Sixth, in response to the charge that libertarianism makes our choices simply a matter of chance or luck, Keathley, following Bob Kane, argues that being undetermined doesn't mean being uncaused. Perhaps. But it does mean that agents still choose (say) doing x over doing not-x for absolutely no reason! When answering the question why Smith chose to play ball rather than stay home, ultimately the libertarian (in order to avoid determinism) has to say that that is just what Smith chose to do. If pressed as to *why* he so chose, the answer has to be: *for no reason at all!* I contend that such freedom, if we have it, undermines rather than supports our moral responsibility.

Seventh, in the chapter on Overcoming Grace, Keathley argues that salvation can be monergistic (and thus all of grace) even though saving faith precedes regeneration and is not an irresistible gift. To understand this position, he presents what he calls the "Ambulatory Model" of grace:

Imagine waking up to find you are being transported by an ambulance to the emergency room. It is clearly evident that your condition requires serious medical help. If you do nothing, you will be delivered to the hospital. However, if for whatever reason you demand to be let out, the driver will comply. . . . You receive no credit for being taken to the hospital, but you incur the blame for refusing the services of the ambulance. (p. 104)

This model allegedly shows how salvation can be purely monergistic and completely gracious. According to Keathley, a person does not *do* anything to acquire saving faith; all a person has to do is *refrain* from acting. But even though you don't cause saving faith, you do control whether or not you get to saving faith in that you have the power to resist the offer.

I'm afraid this model just won't do. For one thing, though Keathley insists that this model avoids attaching human merit to saving faith, he does not answer this question: Why does person S not resist the offer of grace, but person S\* does? Though it occurs at a different level, the age-old problem that faces Arminianism plagues the Ambulatory Model too—it cannot explain (without appeal to some kind of merit) why one person exercises saving faith and another does not. Keathley's point that his model requires a person only to refrain from acting has no teeth. It is obvious that refraining in a case like this requires an *active choice!* "Refraining" here means something like "acquiescing," and acquiescing is *doing!* My gaining saving faith, on the Ambulatory Model, clearly requires my cooperation, and cooperation on the part of the sinner is the antithesis of monergism.

Eighth, chapter 5 addresses the topic of election. There are several things worth commenting on here, but I will limit myself to two. First, Keathley presents the Molinist view of election as an unconditional election though reprobation is conditional. He explains,

According to Molinism, our free choice determines how we would respond in any given setting, but God decides the setting in which we actually find ourselves. . . . In other words, the Molinist paradigm explains how it is possible for there to be a decree of election without a corresponding decree of reprobation. . . . The Molinist model presents an asymmetric relationship between God and the two classes of people, the elect and the reprobate. (p. 154)

Regardless of its merits for handling the problem of reprobation, the salient question to ask here is how this model provides for an *unconditional* election. Why is person S elect? Because God (via middle knowledge) saw that he would choose to have faith in the possible world that God made actual. It may be true that on Molinism whether or not I find myself in a world in which I am elect is up to God, but that does not lend itself to my election being unconditional in any relevant sense. Yes, according to Molinism, God chooses which world we live in, but even as William Lane Craig admits, “it is up to us whether we are predestined in the world in which we find ourselves” (p. 154). My election is conditioned on *my* choice. Moreover, whether or not I am electable at all depends on what *I* would do in the various settings God could place me in. Indeed, whether there are *any* feasible worlds in which I am electable is entirely up to me! It is not plausible to call this model a version of unconditional election.

Lastly, Keathley misconstrues the grounding objection to middle knowledge. He says, “Implicit in the grounding objection is the denial that God has the ability to create creatures with libertarian freedom” (pp. 162–63). This must come as a bit of a surprise to open theists who are among those who think the grounding objection is a serious problem for Molinism. Why not turn this around and say that Molinism implicitly restrains God’s sovereignty by saying he can’t create creatures with compatibilist freedom? No, the grounding objection has nothing to do with whether or not God can create libertarianly free creatures. It’s about whether or not counterfactuals have truth-value, and thus about whether or not God can know them. There are reasons to think that counterfactuals lack truth-value, which means that middle knowledge is incoherent (see my “The Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge Revisited,” *Religious Studies* 39:1 [2003]: 93–102).

*Salvation and Sovereignty* provides a thought-provoking and challenging discussion of soteriology. It is definitely a worthwhile read. But for the reasons stated (and many more that I’ve had to pass over), it does not provide the promised reconciliation between Calvinism and Arminianism.

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David H. Kelsey. *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*. 2 vols. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009. xiii + 1092 pp. £53.99/\$79.95.

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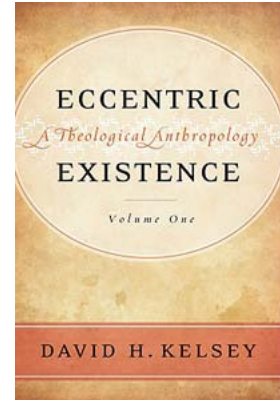
*Eccentric Existence* is a book many years—even decades—in the making. It provides theologians with the fruit of David Kelsey’s long reflections on theological anthropology. The book derives its memorable title from Kelsey’s basic conviction that human beings are centered outside of themselves, and specifically in the distinctive ways in which God relates to them. This is a long, rich, and thorough work to which a relatively brief review cannot possibly do justice. I must be content to highlight some of the chief features and central claims of Kelsey’s project and to offer only a few evaluative reflections.

But first a word about its length. *Eccentric Existence* is not a book for the reader in a hurry. Kelsey develops his proposal with a sense of leisure, and the book progresses by repeatedly circling around its subjects and often retracing ground before building a new point. This approach beneficially draws patient readers into Kelsey’s orbit and reinforces important claims that he has made and defended earlier. But it does require patience. One unusual feature of *Eccentric Existence* is that many chapters are divided into A and B sections. The B sections consist of more detailed and technical arguments in support of conclusions Kelsey draws in the A sections. He intends that people can read only the A sections should they not wish to wrestle with the more technical material. Something will be lost this way, but given the length and challenge of the A sections in their own right, many readers may wish to pursue this route.

The book is organized into three parts, preceded by several substantive introductory chapters and followed by three “Codas” that integrate the various claims made throughout the work. The three parts correspond to three claims about human beings that Kelsey believes are non-negotiable for the Christian faith. They concern how God relates to human beings: to create them, to draw them to eschatological consummation, and to reconcile them when alienated from God. These, he says, are “three inseparable, but irreducibly different ways” in which God relates to us. In each part he reflects upon what is implied about human beings by the claim that God relates to them in these three ways. According to Kelsey, God’s relating to create does not presuppose that God relates to draw to eschatological consummation or to reconcile, while God’s relating to draw to eschatological consummation presupposes God’s relating to create but not his relating to reconcile, and God’s relating to reconcile presupposes both of the other ways of relating. The basic human responses appropriate to God’s three ways of relating are, respectively, faith, hope, and love.

Kelsey also gives structure to *Eccentric Existence* by continually exploring three perennial questions of anthropology: *what* is a human being, *who* am I/*who* are we, and *how* ought we “to be existentially ‘set’ into, and oriented toward, our ultimate and proximate contexts?”

One especially noteworthy feature of Kelsey’s development of a *Christian* anthropology is that he does not deal with the idea of the image of God until his three Codas, nearly 900 pages into the book. This is a calculated move, not an oversight. As he warns readers early in the work, and defends at considerable length in one of the codas, he does not see the classic text, Gen 1:26, as providing much help for Christian anthropology. He does, however, see the NT’s identification of Jesus as the image of God as highly significant for tying together the three parts of *Eccentric Existence* into a coherent “triple helix.” Jesus, as described in the canonical Gospels, is the paradigmatic human being who shows how



God relates to human beings in the three ways and how human beings are to respond to such a God in their ultimate and proximate contexts. According to Kelsey, it is not so much that we image God but that we image the image of God.

Evaluating a book requires attention to its stated purposes. Kelsey has aimed to offer proposals for how Christians might view important theological questions rather than to offer dogmatic pronouncements about what Christians must assert about them. Judged by this intention, Kelsey has roundly succeeded, giving the theological world a wealth of material upon which to reflect. His work lacks dependence upon or commitment to a particular theological tradition, and this will prohibit it from becoming a standard text for training ministers and theologians in confessionally serious churches. This freedom from confessional constraints, however, probably has enhanced Kelsey's ability to think outside of traditional boxes and to make this a very stimulating piece of academic theology.

Most stimulating, in my judgment, is his building an anthropology upon a threefold relation of God toward the human race. Over against temptations—seemingly perennial in Western theology—of centering anthropology in a static conception of the image of God, Kelsey opens lines of thought for conceiving anthropology more dynamically, according to the various plots that Scripture unfolds. I must wonder, however, at a fundamental level, whether Kelsey has identified the proper three categories. His first category does not distinguish the who, what, and how of God relating to human beings in an originally sinless creation from his relating to them after the fall into sin. Scripture makes this crucial distinction and does so with reference to the image of God at climactic points (compare Gen 1:26 and 9:6 in their contexts). This suggests the need to identify two very different ways of God's relating to human beings where Kelsey has identified only one. With respect to Kelsey's second category, again I appreciate his extensive attention to God's drawing human beings to eschatological consummation, a central biblical theme yet seldom made central in Christian anthropology. What is ultimately unpersuasive about Kelsey's development of this category, however, is his decision to treat it as a theme distinct (albeit inseparable) from God's work of creation and reconciliation. Scripture presents God's eschatological drawing of humanity as a *constitutive* aspect of both his creative work (evidenced in Gen 1 itself as well as in commentaries on it such as Heb 2:5–9) and his reconciling work. God creates and reconciles precisely to draw human beings into eschatological life. This purpose, however, does not characterize his relation with fallen human beings. Thus I suggest that a better threefold categorization would be God relating (a) to create so as to draw human beings into eschatological consummation, (b) to preserve human beings after they have fallen, until the final judgment, and (c) to reconcile human beings so as bring human beings into eschatological consummation.

My suggested alternative presumes an important conviction that Kelsey does not embrace: the historicity of the fall through the sin of the first man Adam. Kelsey asks early in the book whether such a conviction is logically necessary given Christian beliefs about salvation. I believe that it is—though I would add that this “logical” necessity concerns the logic of the biblical narrative itself rather than an abstract logic. Kelsey does well to conclude his anthropology by pointing readers to the NT Jesus, but in the NT he is only *the* image of God insofar as he is the *second* Adam.

Finally, and related to this, Kelsey's use of Scripture is serious and deliberate, and on many occasions extensive, careful, and insightful. But at points where Scripture allegedly conflicts with modern science or historical criticism, the claims of Scripture are too often on the losing end. Readers committed to biblical infallibility must be attentive to this. Nevertheless, because of its frequent technical brilliance and

theological insight, *Eccentric Existence* must now play a part in any serious theological-anthropological discussion.

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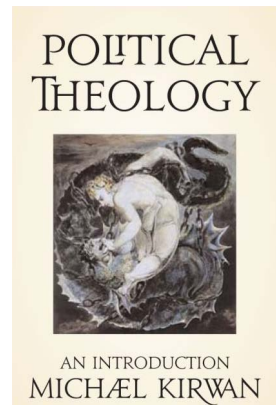
Michael Kirwan. *Political Theology: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. xiv + 221 pp. £14.95/\$22.00.

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Michael Kirwan opens his introduction to political theology by referencing three previous attempts to define the relationship between the theological and the political. He refers first to William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott's threefold framework (i.e., theology and politics as separate, theology as critical of politics, and theology and politics as similar producers of organizing "metaphysical images"). Kirwan then refers to Oliver O'Donovan's call for reflection on the authority of God as necessary to establish the intrinsically political nature of evangelical theology. Finally, Kirwan discusses De Vries's proposal of various possibilities available to define theology's relationship to the political (i.e., juxtaposition, separation, subordination of one to the other, or interdependence).

Kirwan then turns to the broad question of the role of government from a historical perspective. Using Jürgen Moltmann's "covenant/leviathan" distinction, Kirwan analyzes the role of the state in Greek tragedy. In *Antigone* and *The Eumenides* we see the state as caught between the dictates of piety and public order, maintaining the state's commitment to its "friends" even if it must turn on its own citizens. The works of Carl Schmitt and Thomas Hobbes illustrate for Kirwan the modern continuation of the belief that the state must serve as *katēchon*, or restraining force in the world. For both, the state necessarily serves as "leviathan" to preserve itself. In this schema, the law preserves and defends the intrinsic connection of order and territoriality which Schmitt in particular saw as integral to maintaining crucial "friend-enemy" distinctions.

Kirwan turns in chapter three to the criticisms of Hannah Arendt who argued that Christianity, with its commitment to doing good in secret, for example, is too committed to the "other-worldly" to be any good in *this* world, which is the scope of the political. Here, Arendt's critique is that Christianity fails to appreciate human "natality," "the human capacity to begin new things, to initiate" (p. 38). Without this, argues Arendt, Christians are unable to truly act in and for the world; more significantly, they are unable to truly *love* the world, which for Arendt requires "authentic self-disclosure." Given its "ignorance of the left hand," it isn't clear Christianity can thus engage in the political. Kirwan critiques this argument in light of Christianity's early experience with the Roman Empire, which reveals not an ambivalence to the political but an unwillingness to let it tell the larger story of humanity, to give it purpose or meaning. Kirwan notes also that despite Arendt's insistence on the political's secular grounding there are persistent religious themes in her work. Kirwan then turns to the history of Christian engagement with the political beginning with the "high traditions" (O'Donovan). He summarizes the so called "triumphalist" period of Constantine. Having contrasted the broadly "pessimistic" view of Augustine



with Aquinas's broadly "optimistic" relation of theological to political, Kirwan traces the history of theology's interaction with politics through the period of the Reformers to the Enlightenment.

Kirwan spends three chapters addressing the theological (and political) crises in the wake of the *Shoah*. Here he engages Jewish reflection on the crisis precipitated by the success of National Socialism. He discusses the work of Johann Metz and Moltmann, and he devotes an entire chapter to Jürgen Habermas's critical engagement with the theological. Finally, Kirwan closes with a reflection on "the gift" of political theology. He reflects first on the resources of the OT and NT for guiding the engagement of the two, the political and the theological. Kirwan then contrasts the violent eschatology of popular dispensationalism (captured in the *Left Behind* series) with Moltmann's and Metz's conception of eschatology as the source of a critical hope. In the final chapter, Kirwan summarizes six "models" of the "political church," ranging from the church as "in continuity" with Israel and Christ (O'Donovan) to "the Church as alternative (Eucharistic) community" proposed by Cavanaugh. Kirwan largely avoids detailed positive proposals. But he does close with the suggestion that the critical reflection of the church on the political must include reflection on the largely neglected suffering of the "Second World" amidst the Cold War. He notes that the church must continue articulating "transcendent values" to the world. Furthermore the church must further address its continued complicity with the powers that be (its "temptation to restorationism" in the post-Cold War era, pp. 196–97). Finally, the church's political activity must include suffering witness to the truth. All of this is nourished ultimately by faith in God, our doctrine of whom we must continue to keep before us, constantly drawing us forward and critiquing our politico-theological action.

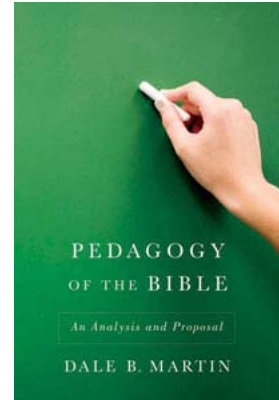
Kirwan's work, while somewhat uneven, is a rich, subtle, and nuanced introduction to a persistently unwieldy topic. While his analysis is unclear in places and in others seems to simply trail off, his willingness to frame the topic in a deeply critical and theoretical way as well as to engage a variety of perhaps lesser known voices (at least among students), is welcome. Terse treatments of Cavanaugh, Schmitt, Hegel, and Žižek, for instance, may bewilder the uninitiated, but are necessary given the continued relevance of these thinkers in modern political theological studies. With an introduction so brief, it is easy to nitpick about what could have been. The ancillary role that majority-world theopolitical engagement plays in Kirwan's study is deliberate but disappointing. Given its introductory nature, this may give readers the impression that what has been really influential is western European reflection, its crises truly formative. That said, Kirwan's work deserves a place on introductory course syllabi and the library shelves of serious pastor-theologians.

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Dale B. Martin. *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal*. Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2008. 130 pp. £16.99/\$24.95.

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Edward Farley once wrote that any discussion of theological education invariably contributes to the libraries of utopian literature (cf. p. 96). When administrators and professors of theological schools set curricula and its scope and sequence, there are more factors to consider than creating the best theological education possible. It is certainly a large part of the mix, but keeping the lights on and the books in the black are as well. For example, many educational theorists in general, and those airing their divinity desiderata in particular, speak of the mass advantages of on-site communal learning—Martin suggests a return to the monastery model in this regard—but distance education models and single-meeting sessions per week tailored for busy ministers have become cash cows for many theological schools. Moreover, owing in some measure to the shifting currents of cultural awareness, interest and sympathy to religion, and an educated clergy, theological schools have had to tinker and retool their approach. As a result, in the last several years, many seminaries and theological schools have changed their curricula—adding a spiritual formation sequence here, altering the language requirements there. Intriguingly, there has also been a rise in many churches launching their own form of seminaries or Bible colleges.



Though it would be claiming too much to say that theological education is in a state of crisis, it is simple reporting to suggest it is in a state of self-examination. Dale B. Martin, Woolsey Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University, offers his armchair assessment of the current mood in *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal*. Martin is himself not connected with a theological school—he’s more or less an historian within a religion department. But he’s “committed to the life and future of Christian churches” (p. ix) and therefore has a vested interest in the education and production of theological students. The book represents his thinking after traveling to ten different theological schools (see list on p. xi), conducting nearly one hundred interviews of educators and students, and wide reading in the relevant research.

Martin’s subtitle—*An Analysis and Proposal*—structures the book. His analysis, and more or less critique, basically consists of the dominance of the historical-critical method to the neglect of other approaches in biblical studies and the general lack of interpretation theory within theological education. By historical criticism, Martin means the view that “takes the primary meaning of the text to be what its meaning would have been in its original ancient context” (p. 3). Martin, however, is not advocating the “jettisoning” of the historical-critical approach to Scripture, but simply that “we dethrone it as the only or foundational method taught, and that we supplement it with other methods, approaches, and theories” (p. 3). The great failure of contemporary theological education, in Martin’s view, “is the absence in almost all schools of the explicit education of students in interpretation theory” (p. 17), as well as critical attention “concerning the nature of Scripture and how it should be interpreted in the life of the church and in the lives of individual Christians” (p. 22).

Many from conservative, evangelical backgrounds will bristle at much of his second chapter, “Readers and Texts.” For Martin, “texts don’t mean; people mean with texts” (p. 31). In other words, the “meaning of a text is a result of the interpretive process itself, which is not possible apart from the activities of human interpreters” (p. 30). He therefore considers that the oft-preached distinction between exegesis



and eisegesis “does more harm than good in teaching students about biblical interpretation” (p. 29). I personally find the reference to Fish’s famous chalkboard exercise unconvincing in proving or disproving this or that theory of authorial intention (see the discussion on p. 31). After all, there was something like an intent in the author’s (Fish’s) scribblings: viz., to see how the students would respond. In this case, the creation of meaning by the readers *was the intention of the author*. Even Martin eventually concedes a bit at this point:

We may imagine an author with intentions as one way of guiding our interpretations. We may talk about “what the text says.” We may refer to “the world revealed or created by this text.” None of these expressions need be avoided. What must be avoided is allowing those metaphors of agency to fool us into forgetting our own agency in the construction of meaning in the reading activity. (p. 38; see, too, p. 120n10)

Fair enough. The third chapter looks at “Premodern Biblical Interpretation” through brief summaries of Origin, Augustine, Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas. Martin hopes to demonstrate examples of different and fertile approaches to Scripture that don’t stop at historical criticism. The fourth chapter is on the “Theological Interpretation of Scripture” and suggests that the first step in this vein is “to make explicit what one thinks Scripture is” (p. 74). Martin then creatively reworks the task of interpretation as akin to musical or theatrical improvisation (pp. 86–87).

The fifth chapter, “Curricular Dreams,” moves into an actual suggested core curriculum (pp. 106–8) that is guided by seven assumptions and goals (pp. 101–4) and aims to place Scripture at the center of the curriculum (cf. p. 98).

1. Teach historical criticism, but as one among other ways of reading.
2. Retain the expertise of different disciplinary scholarship and scholars, but integrate the different disciplines and use them in conjunction with one another.
3. Teach theology of Scripture before teaching different methods of interpreting Scripture.
4. Teach theology first by teaching theological thinking and interpretation. Teach systematic theology later, as a more advanced subject.
5. Early in the educational process, introduce theories of interpretation, literary theory, and philosophies of interpretation and textuality.
6. Include and integrate artistic, literary, and musical interpretations of Scripture.
7. Introduce practical disciplines all along the way, perhaps concentrating on them toward the end.

Throughout the volume Martin humbly admits that he doesn’t pretend to have solved the theological education riddle. And, as mentioned above, there are certainly elements of disagreement and controversy some readers will find throughout. But *Pedagogy of the Bible* is a clarion call to think theologically about theological education and for that reason deserves a wide reading across theological spectrums. Moreover, his proposal gives many administrators and educators much to consider in their course constructions.

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Lee Martin McDonald. *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. xli +546 pp. £16.99/\$29.95.

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Popular culture is intrigued with other versions of the Christian faith. On the popular level, publication of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has raised questions regarding books that have been excluded from the canon. Semi-popular books that can also be found in retail bookstores include those by Robert Funk, Elaine Pagels, and Bart Ehrman, and these also have raised doubts to the limits of the canon of Scripture. On the scholarly level, writers such as J. A. Sanders and A. C. Sundberg have questioned the limits of canon.

With the interest in canon questions growing, Lee Martin McDonald presents a comprehensive history of the OT and NT canon in *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority*. It is the third edition of his earlier work, which is entitled *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (1988, 1995). This updated version is due to new information being present, access to a number of new sources, and McDonald's desire to alter a few conclusions from his earlier works. This has come due to a number of studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls, McDonald's increased study of Rabbinic tradition, the greater knowledge of apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature, and better understanding the Septuagint. As a result, his earlier editions have been completely rewritten for this current version (p. xv).

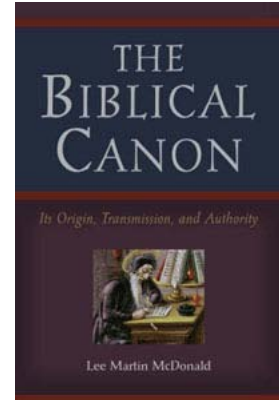
*The Biblical Canon* has three sections. Part 1 defines terms such as Scripture and canon. Parts 2–3 analyze in detail how the Hebrew Bible/OT Canon and the NT Canon were formed.

Part 1, "Scripture and Canon," focuses on definitions. McDonald defines Scripture as a written document with God's influence within it. It communicates the will and truth of God and functions as an enduring source of regulations for God's people individually and corporately. In contrast, canon is a fixed and normative collection of books. While there is considerable overlap between the two, McDonald sees these as different. Scripture functions with divine authority in a religious community, which is believed to have origins in God. Canon, however, refers to a fixed standard that defines the faith.

He further distinguishes between two types of canons. Following the influence of G. T. Sheppard and A. C. Sundberg, he calls these canon 1 and canon 2. Canon 1 is "an authoritative voice in written or oral form that was read and received as having the authority of God in it." Canon 2 is a "perpetual fixation or standardization" of a closed collection (p. 55). These descriptions are helpful and allow McDonald to distinguish between a canonical process and an actual fixed canon.

With these definitions in place, McDonald then moves to the main purpose of the volume. While there were many books that could be considered Scripture, there was not a written description of how books became a canon within early Christian history until after the first century A.D. The goal of *The Biblical Canon* is to present a history of the early canonical process (p. 69).

The remaining and lengthiest sections of *The Biblical Canon* concern the formation of the Hebrew Bible/OT canon and the NT canon. McDonald devotes 164 pages to the formation of the Hebrew Bible/OT canon and 188 pages to the formation of the NT canon. He proceeds to look at ancient texts generally in a sequential manner. Primary texts are cited throughout, which is helpful. Students will be grateful for the identification and examination of each ancient text. At times, the book is overcome with too many details for general reading, but the details are helpful for further study and reference.



Students will also be thankful for McDonald's classification of these ancient texts. For example, in the discussion about the NT, his chapter divisions help isolate issues of importance such as Scripture-like references to NT writings, origins of canonical ideas within the church fathers, the influence of heretics, the effect of translation, and collections of Christian citations. These categories help guide thinking on issues of canon limitations.

Many of McDonald's sections are helpful. Unfortunately, he arrives at conclusions with which most evangelicals will largely not be happy. He finds that the OT canon was not fixed until at least the second century A.D. Most Evangelicals would have concluded that this canon was fixed by the end of the first century A.D. if not well before then. The NT in his opinion was not formed until the fourth through the sixth century A.D. Most Evangelicals would have concluded that the NT canon was certainly concluded by the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. and largely in form by the middle of the third century A.D.

Several of McDonald's presuppositions lead to these conclusions. For the OT he takes a late dating of Daniel as well as a late formation of the tripartite OT. He also assumes unnecessary doubts for the numbering of the twenty-two book in Josephus or Jubilees and the twenty-four-book canon as expressed in *4 Ezra* and the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Bava Batra*. For his conclusions for the NT canon, he dates the Muratorian fragment late, namely, in the fourth century rather than in the second century like most scholars. He also assumes that Clement of Alexandria was more open to other Gospels outside of the canon than is necessary (p. 303). McDonald is overly suspicious of the notes that Eusebius provides on the canon of the NT (p. 310). He also assumes that Origen did not have a concept of a NT canon (p. 306). Finally, he is willing to give credence to the Gospel of Thomas as probably being the oldest document claiming to be a Gospel (p. 262).

Also troubling are some of the conclusions that are found at the end of this volume. For example, McDonald is willing to leave open the question as to whether fixed scriptural canons are even Christian. Further, he promotes that biblical canons were not arrived at by consensus in the churches; rather, "attempts were made to arrive at consensus by council decisions of the church hierarchy," and "precise boundaries of the Christian faith were never fully agreed upon either" (p. 424).

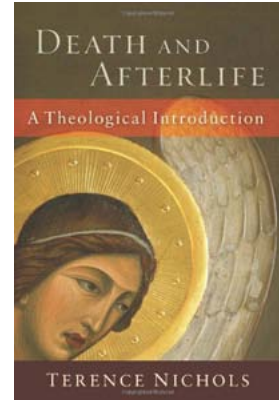
Despite these differences, evangelicals will find the breadth of the volume helpful for canon studies. It is a helpful reference volume. It successfully frames the main issues of the debate. It also provides primary texts all in one helpful volume so that students can look at the relevant passages without needing a library of books. Evangelicals will want to have access also to Roger Beckwith's *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (1985) and B. M. Metzger's *The Canon of the New Testament* (1987) for further study of canon formation and limits.

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Terence Nichols. *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010. 220 pp. £12.99/\$22.99.

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The question “What happens to me when I die?” is of perennial interest. As several recent books—both scholarly and popular—attest, there are increasingly more opinions and options with considerably less convincing support. Many popular opinions are little more than wishful thinking enshrined as belief. In such an environment, it is paramount that the distinctly Christian perspective on death and the afterlife be clearly articulated. Terence Nichols attempts to do just that. As Nichols notes in the introduction, however, that distinctly Christian perspective is challenged by philosophical materialism and naturalism, the sheer difficulty of belief in resurrection in the modern world, and various philosophical and theological objections to the traditional Christian depictions of heaven and hell. Nichols approaches these challenges with three themes of his own: the credibility of Christian belief, the necessity of personal preparation for death, and hope.



Nichols begins his investigation with three chapters that orient discussion. First, he surveys the presentation of the underworld, soul, and resurrection in the OT and intertestamental literature. His summary reveals the significant development that occurred in the theology of afterlife during the ancient period. He also compares the growing Hebraic understanding with that of Israel’s neighbors. Next he similarly overviews death and the afterlife in the NT. He discusses heaven and the kingdom of God as well as eternal life and resurrection. While he does not offer extended treatments of many of the important passages, he does succinctly summarize what can be gleaned from key passages like 1 Cor 15. In a final orienting chapter, he surveys various views of the afterlife throughout church history, touching on Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Descartes. What is perhaps most interesting about this brief survey is that it reveals to the contemporary reader that some of the most dearly cherished ideas about the afterlife, and heaven in particular, are not all that old.

In discussing Descartes, Nichols begins to turn toward the modern challenges of belief in the afterlife. With the intention of addressing these concerns in later chapters, he summarizes the challenges to traditional Christian beliefs that have come from physics and cosmology, historical-critical methodologies, evolutionary biology, and psychology and neuroscience. Though certainly not an exhaustive list, the survey does present the reader with the basic objections one is likely to face from the skeptic.

Nichols then considers the issues raised by psychology and neuroscience in two chapters: one on near-death experiences and one on the soul. Some of the near-death experiences that Nichols relates are truly fascinating. He suggests that these experiences raise serious issues about the nature of human consciousness and the possibility of the afterlife that “mind-is-no-more-than-the-brain” anthropologies struggle to answer. While he is careful not to base too much of an argument on what at times amounts to little more than anecdotal evidence, he suggests that Christian theology must reckon with these experiences and may find as much helpful as harmful. The relative amount of space given to the evidence of near-death experiences is a bit out of balance with the book’s introductory character.

From near-death experiences, Nichols moves to discuss the soul. He briefly introduces five positions on the existence and nature of the soul: metaphysical materialism (body only), emergent monism (body

plus), holistic dualism (body plus soul), reincarnation, and his own position: “soul as subject-in-relation.” Obviously these are deep issues that he can only introduce, but he does try to present each position, some of its proponents, and strengths and weaknesses.

Nichols turns next to the resurrection. He introduces and addresses several of the main objections to Jesus’s resurrection and resurrection in general. He states what can be said about the nature of resurrected bodies on the basis of Scripture. Though one might wish that he had addressed more fully both the centrality of resurrection to the Christian faith or distinguished it more clearly from reincarnation, he rightly emphasizes that the concept of resurrection includes more than just resurrected humanity but a resurrected creation as well.

Before reaching the topics of heaven and hell, Nichols dips his toe into the bubbling cauldron of current discussions about justification. He surveys various NT corpora on the issue of how one comes to be worthy of entrance into heaven. Though not heavy-handed, Nichols’s Catholicism is in evidence in his efforts to reconcile the roles of faith and works in justification. In the same chapter he discusses judgment and advocates the view that God does not send people to hell but that people put themselves there. He concludes the chapter by asserting that since at the end of their lives few humans have either totally rejected God or been perfected in the love of God, there must be some post-mortem solidification of that rejection or purification.

This obviously leads to a treatment of heaven, purgatory, and hell in the penultimate chapter. In an effort to articulate a theo-centric view of heaven rather than the more popular anthropocentric versions, Nichols expounds on the divine attributes of love, goodness, beauty, truth and understanding, and freedom as they pertain to the eternal state. To discuss purgatory Nichols likens the doctrine to that of the Trinity, noting that neither are explicitly stated in Scripture. Nichols’s argument rests on the historical practice of prayer for the dead and on the incompleteness of human sanctification in this life. Since radical personal change does not happen in the blink of an eye in human experience, he does not accept the idea of an instantaneous completion of sanctification upon death. Interestingly, Nichols does not interact at all with Jesus’s pronouncement to the thief on the cross nor with Paul’s teaching in 2 Cor 5:1–10. While affirming the reality of hell, Nichols demurs from its physicality, preferring to view the suffering as a “pain of loss.” He interacts briefly with the matter of hell’s eternity and the “solutions” offered by universalism and annihilationism. Nichols closes the book with a more pastoral chapter on the concept of dying well.

While each individual reader will find points of conflict with Nichols’s conclusions, there is much to commend in this introductory text. Its breadth may be its strength and its weakness. Its outline and the issues it covers could serve well as the outline of an undergraduate or church class, but its treatment of several key matters demand much deeper investigation, investigation Nichols may have been able to offer had he pared down some areas of personal interest such as near-death experiences, justification, and views of the soul.

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Randal Rauser. *Theology in Search of Foundations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 272 pp. £60.00/\$100.00.

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In his book *The Character of Theology*, John R. Franke quotes Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'On all fronts foundationalism is in bad shape. It seems to me that there is nothing to do but give it up for mortally ill and learn to live in its absence' (p. 27). Wolterstorff himself has recently remarked that at the present time to be called a foundationalist is rather like being accused of being a child abuser ('Herman Bavinck—Proto Reformed Epistemologist', *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 [2010]: 134). So what is going on?

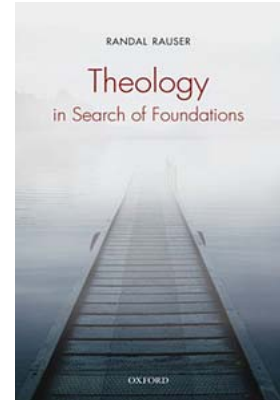
What is going on is the indulgence of a certain slackness in thought about what foundationalism is and is not. There is a wave of theologians confident that, as they say, foundationalism is dying or dead, part of the rotting corpse of the 'Enlightenment project'. They pass on this verdict like those hardly able to contain their joy at the demise of an embarrassing elderly relative. Such are not only Franke, but (among the evangelical wing) Murphy, McGrath, and Grenz. But few of these theologians, if any, seem prepared to explore the types and kinds of foundationalism before doing so.

To be such an explorer requires a certain effort in philosophical analysis, taking the trouble to distinguish various kinds of foundationalism, schemes with corrigible foundations from those with incorrigible, propositional foundationalism from source foundationalism, rationalist from empiricist, foundations as used by the sceptic and by the non-sceptic, weak and strong foundationalism, and so on. And to do this is messy. It involves making careful distinctions, paying attention to what various philosophers actually mean and claim, and seeing how the intellectual discipline of theology fares in the light of this claim and that. But before you decide to suffer the inconvenience of travelling barefoot, why not see what the shoe shop has?

So the title of Randal Rauser's book has a somewhat ironic ring to it. Searching for foundations? Who in the theological guild is doing that? Who is on the lookout for the Dodo? But the author is saying not that there is a search, but that there ought to be, and his book is a brave effort to plot a path. Chapters 1–4 have to do with the oft-told tale of the Enlightenment, the crisis of justification, and the end of classical foundationalism, that is, the end of foundationalism with self-certifying incorrigible foundations. But weren't the sceptics Bayle and Hume also members of the Enlightenment squad? And wasn't Kant rather different from Locke, and Locke and Kant different from Descartes? And what of Thomas Reid? Rauser takes the reader through this material in a series of brief, informative, pleasantly written discussions, relaying a good deal of material from both primary and secondary sources.

If classical foundationalism is dead, then what? Pressing fast-forward, Rauser proceeds to discuss the condition of both philosophy and theology after its demise (ch. 5), focusing on coherentism, pragmatism, and anti-realism in both disciplines (ch. 6). Then, in order to put the claims of non-foundationalism to the test, he offers the reader two rather detailed chapters on Bruce Marshall's non-foundationalist Trinitarian theology. He finds Marshall's brand of fideism, entitling the thinker to bet all on the mystery of the Trinity, decidedly unappealing.

Rauser is surely correct in asserting that some kind of basis looks essential for epistemology, including theological epistemology, if theologies are not simply to be a series of games. He himself favours the 'Reformed' epistemology of Wolterstorff and Plantinga, and in the last chapters he works



through this. Whether Plantinga's later externalism, which focuses attention not on the entitlement to basic beliefs not shared by every other rational person but on the workings of belief-forming mechanisms, an approach which Rauser also favours, is a species of foundationalism, seems debatable. But Rauser assumes that it is (p. 227).

In my view Christians interested in philosophy become enmeshed in some version or other of analytic epistemology too soon. In Chisholm's terms, they are too eager to join the Methodists. Rauser illustrates this by his phrase, 'If it is true, then it can be known to be true' (p. 245). But surely the historic Christian approach has been 'I know it is true; can it be shown to be true?' Paul was a decided particularist ('I know in whom . . .'; 'knowing this . . .') and Jesus too. Does faith in Christ require foundations? Does Christian theology? Does Christian theology require general epistemic foundations? I suspect that these are not the same question, but who bothers to distinguish between them?

The idea of foundationalism within a worldview which Rauser touts (pp. 245–46) looks decidedly coherentist—unless the worldview is warranted foundationally, of course. 'If it is true, it can be known to be true.' Hmm. Towards the end of the book there are some decidedly waspish remarks on the views of Kevin Vanhoozer, but I believe it is inaccurate to regard him as an epistemological pragmatist (p. 261).

The book's project is a good one. Those who wish to reflect awhile before they finally wave goodbye to foundationalism could pause here. However, there is some overall unevenness, and dwelling on the views of Marshall means some loss of momentum. But I think the better plan is to start with what Christians know. Epistemology as faith seeking understanding. All other ground is sinking sand.

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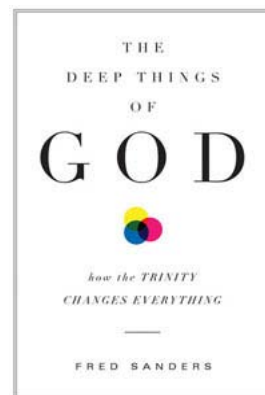
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Fred Sanders. *The Deep Things of God: How The Trinity Changes Everything*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010. 256 pp. \$17.99.

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Amidst the current evangelical Trinitarian resurgence, Fred Sanders has provided a wonderful feast. Very few works have been so bold as this, arguing that evangelicals "have been in reality the most thoroughly Trinitarian Christians in the history of the church" (p. 9). Accordingly, he provides evidence for this in numerous evangelical forebears (and contemporaries), showing that the doctrine of the Trinity is inherent to the gospel (pp. 9–10, 13, 18–21, 83, 98, 165, 191, 239) and its necessary presupposition since those who believe it are already immersed in the Trinitarian reality, having everything necessary to be robustly Trinitarian (pp. 19, 21–23).

Currently Associate Professor of Theology at Biola University's Torrey Honors Institute and a well-known blogger ([www.scriptoriumdaily.com](http://www.scriptoriumdaily.com)), Sanders has provided a rich treasure-trove for those seeking to understand more of God's ways and how he has invited us to participate in his Trinitarian life (pp. 21, 98, 120, 191, 227, 234). Employing sources from Puritans Isaac Watts and Bunyan to Holiness evangelist Amanda Smith and Nicky Cruz, chapter 1 develops methodologically how evangelicalism displays enough promise of tacit Trinitarianism to



be seen as having “within its own particular genius” everything necessary to be even more robustly Trinitarian (p. 58).

Chapter 2 highlights God’s triune self-sufficiency as the gospel’s ground of grace (p. 66) and that God’s being is behind his action in the salvation economy (p. 70). God’s inner life, Sanders says, is the only thing “even better than the good news,” since it is the infinite depth to which the doctrine of the Trinity points (pp. 83–84). Herein Sanders unpacks traditional Western ideas of intra-Trinitarian relations (generation, procession, mission), yielding somewhat a Trinitarian ontology, ably distinguishing God’s work in the gospel from God “within the happy land of the Trinity.”

After establishing from Eph 1 the necessary disorientation for proper praise and the unfortunate reductionism evangelicals have tended to, chapter 3 expounds God’s working in the salvation economy. In the gospel God’s grace is extended in a manner that opens up his heart in the most intimate way—in the very giving of God’s own life made lavishly available to fallen humanity (p. 122). Chapter 4 continues the gospel theme, seeking to show the gospel’s explicitly Trinitarian shape, including how Trinitarian members work together for our salvation, and how God has given his own life in the economy of salvation to bring about “adoption into the Trinity” (p. 162).

With an illustration from the life and Trinitarian theology of Francis Schaeffer (pp. 175–84), chapter 5 unpacks how Trinitarian theology is properly Christ-centered meanwhile granting the experience of present life with the three Trinitarian persons and the doctrine of assurance inherent to this Trinitarian framework. Chapters 6–7 offer rich, practical approaches to a Trinitarian doctrine of Scripture and prayer, cohering entirely with emphases evangelicals have always stressed—although here Sanders explicitly shows just how tacitly Trinitarian these practices are.

This book is wonderfully written, filled with rich imagery, vivid illustrations (verbal and pictorial), and a persuasive argument. It is biblically and theologically responsible, historically conscious, pastorally sensitive, and doxologically oriented. Reading like a C. S. Lewis work, or some other theological piece from a prior century, with all the dignity and wonder that earlier evangelical theologians inspired, Sanders provides an inviting, witty, and edifying treat, displaying the way theology really should be done.

While this work intends not to be as academically rigorous as Sanders is capable of, and would likely do in a different publication, there remains tension-points that beckon further clarification. Sanders has no problem noting peculiar views of the Trinity (p. 90) and conceding that some things simply cannot be known about God’s eternal life (p. 83), and yet I wonder if perhaps he too hastily dismisses some models.

On the matter of the Trinity being eternally named Father, Son, and Spirit, Sanders neither defines these terms nor allows them to be analogous. The terms are, of course, explicitly used in the economy, but with reference to the immanent Trinity, it seems like contra his avoidance of apophatic theology (p. 82; although Sanders makes concessions on pp. 86–91), here is a prime example of exactly where it should be done. Otherwise, precisely what is meant by “Father” and “Son” from eternity? Or what kind of social Trinity or Feuerbachian assertion is being posited? And if an “infinite distinction” exists between God in himself and God for us in salvation, how does this work in the revealed identity of the Three-in-One? And why is the “anonymous Three” the only alternative (p. 90) instead of something like eternally imaged or imageless relations (Torrance) or subsisting relations with perhaps one member imaged? Accordingly, it seems like the economic and immanent Trinities become blurred sometimes for Sanders (e.g., pp. 122, 132, 162–63). Are creatures really brought into God’s life as it is in itself,



or are we brought into this relationship in the economy where the salvation drama is actualized and wherein creaturely relations with the Trinity exist and always will exist? Sanders opts for the traditional relations of origin for Trinitarian members (pp. 92–93), which, besides penetrating the boundaries of the economy’s access, doesn’t seem to reckon with what this does to relational reciprocity.

Points of disagreement aside, this reviewer greatly looks forward to how Sanders will further develop his Trinitarian methodology in future academic publications, especially as related to how evangelicals, with their definite interests and concerns, might be able to integrate additional features of a doctrine of God into the traditional one for a more robust evangelical doctrine of God. Fred Sanders is arguably one of the next generation’s leading English-speaking evangelical theologians. He clearly understands the evangelical ethos (pp. 98, 167, 193) and is a well-equipped guide to lead us into the wonderful paths that this book has provided.

It is not an overstatement to suggest that this book should probably be read by every undergraduate student in any evangelical academic institution in North America and should also be on the reading list for every seminary-level class in theology proper. It really is that good. It will refresh the souls of busy pastors who have wrestled many times over with how to find a practical role in their ministries for particular Christian doctrines because the book explains both what evangelicalism is and how it has been deeply Trinitarian at its core. Finally, this book will serve as an encouraging and equipping resource in the hands of lay people eager to know precisely *how the Trinity changes everything*. It could not be recommended highly enough.

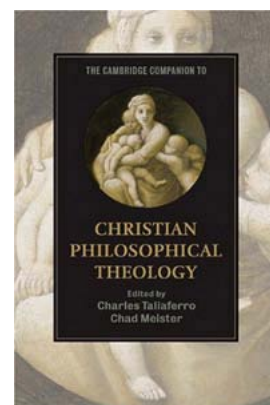
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Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*. Cambridge Companions to Religion Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xiv + 264 pp. £17.99/\$27.99.

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While the label “philosophical theology” is of relatively recent coinage, the practice of philosophical reflection on religious doctrines is almost as old as religion itself. The introduction to this collection of essays thus describes philosophical theology as “a branch of the overall field of philosophy of religion.” Philosophical theology can be conducted from the standpoint of any religious tradition—Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on—but it is indisputably the Christian tradition that dominates the discipline today and accounts for its continued growth and vitality. The present volume, which offers sixteen chapters authored by some of the most distinguished scholars in the field, is therefore a worthy and welcome addition to the *Cambridge Companions* series.



The collection is divided neatly into two parts: six chapters under the heading “God” and ten under the heading “God in Relation to Creation.” Since it is practically impossible to do justice to a topic like “Trinity” or “Incarnation” in twelve to fifteen pages, even in brief survey, the essays for the most part serve to introduce a selection of the most interesting (or vexing) philosophical issues raised by a particular

area of Christian doctrine. Some chapters offer a fairly objective overview of their topics, while others more obviously reflect the biases of their authors. All of the chapters were specially commissioned for the book, and although many consist of summaries or condensations of material published elsewhere by the authors, some do offer novel contributions to their assigned topic.

Ronald Feenstra's "Trinity" summarizes the development of the doctrine from the NT to its creedal formulations and the major contributions to its interpretation through the medieval period to the present day. Somewhat surprisingly it contains little in the way of philosophical theology, consisting mainly of historical survey; a more useful approach might have been to take one of the early Trinitarian creeds and discuss the various attempts to elucidate its metaphysical claims. In contrast, Brian Leftow's "Necessity" offers an exemplary piece of philosophical theology: a fine-grained analysis of the claim that God exists necessarily. Even so, his treatment uses logical notations that are prone to bewilder readers unschooled in such formalisms. (The difficulty is compounded—at least in my review copy—by the fact that some of the symbols are incorrectly printed.)

Brian Davies's chapter on divine simplicity focuses entirely on Aquinas's treatment, a feature that some readers will consider a strength and others a weakness. Aquinas's discussion is undoubtedly the *locus classicus*, and Davies does a fine job of rebutting some of the common objections to the Thomistic doctrine. William Wainwright's "Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence" devotes most of its discussion to the last of the three "omnis." Wainwright makes an original contribution by exploring interpretations of divine omnipresence inspired by Jonathan Edwards's occasionalism and by the Eastern Orthodox notion of "divine energies."

John Hare's treatment of divine goodness, while informative, is also heavy on historical survey and light on philosophical theology, thus inviting the suspicion that the contributors weren't all on the same page regarding the format and goal of the volume. William Hasker's treatment of "Eternity and Providence" is a model of clarity but seems deliberately constructed so as to cultivate sympathy for open theism; his framing of the issues is more reflective of the present-day inclinations of Christian philosophers than of mainstream Christian tradition, at least in the West. ("Augustinianism remains the view of a small but determined minority. The most active discussions, on the other hand, are going on between Molinists and open theists.")

Opening the second part of the book, Katherin Rogers's "Incarnation" includes a creative defense of the coherence of the Chalcedonian view of the Incarnation based on the (unlikely) analogy of a teenager playing a character in a video game. Rogers admits that her analogy, like any analogy, has its limitations—specifically, it doesn't really do justice to the unity of Christ's person—but it's a novel contribution nonetheless. The following chapter by Stephen Davis helpfully summarizes the recent defenses of the historicity of the resurrection by N. T. Wright and Richard Swinburne; it also reviews various attempts to explicate the metaphysics of the doctrine of general resurrection.

Gordon Graham's "Atonement" and Paul Moser's "Sin and Salvation" make for a somewhat odd couple. Graham proposes a synthesis of objective (penal) and subjective (exemplary) models of Christ's atonement in an attempt to address the perceived weaknesses of each, leading to a solution in which the price of sin is paid by *both* the Redeemer *and* the redeemed (albeit in different respects). Moser, in contrast, outright rejects the penal substitution view as fundamentally unjust because it involves the punishment of an innocent. Yet on Moser's alternative view, despite his insistence that Christ's sacrifice satisfied divine justice, it appears that *no one* ultimately pays the price for sin (in a penal sense). Part of the problem here, I would submit, is that both authors overlook the Pauline notion of imputation

(Rom 4:1–12; 5:12–21; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), a theological concept that surely begs for philosophical exploration.

Chad Meister’s chapter on the problem of evil includes fine summaries of Christian responses to the logical (deductive) and evidential (probabilistic) anti-theistic arguments from evil, Augustine’s free-will theodicy, John Hick’s soul-making theodicy, and Marilyn Adams’s work on “horrendous evils.” Evangelical readers may feel that Meister concedes too much to modern evolutionary theory and is overly sympathetic toward Adams’s universalism.

Next in line, William Abraham’s “Church” provocatively reflects on the nature, authority, and identity of the church, but begs too many questions with regard to Protestant-Catholic differences insofar as it tries to bypass altogether questions about the nature and authority of Scripture. Charles Taliaferro’s chapter on “Religious Rites” laments the lack of attention given to the subject by Christian philosophers. By way of remedy Taliaferro offers a preliminary definition and analysis of Christian religious rites, followed by a general account of “sacramental realism” with respect to the Eucharist. His treatment thus marks a genuine advance in philosophical discussions on this important but neglected topic.

In “Revelation and Miracles,” Thomas D. Sullivan and Sandra Menssen address questions concerning the basis for believing revelatory claims and the role of miracles in confirming such claims, interacting along the way with Richard Swinburne’s evidentialist case for Christian revelation and David Hume’s influential argument against miracle claims. Harriet Harris’s chapter “Prayer” surveys a range of philosophical analyses of the practice of prayer—even panentheist and atheist ones—and illustrates, among other things, how loosely the qualifier “Christian” in the book’s title can be interpreted.

Keeping last things for last, the closing chapter by Jerry L. Walls addresses some of the philosophical objections raised against the traditional Christian doctrines of heaven and hell. Walls takes libertarian free will for granted and devotes a large part of his treatment to countering the recent arguments for universalism put forward by Marilyn Adams and Thomas Talbott—a partial confirmation, perhaps, of Hasker’s remark about the dwindling influence of Augustinianism among Christian philosophers.

As one would expect from Cambridge University Press and such a distinguished line-up of contributors, the chapters are all of a high standard. Given the relative brevity with which each topic is treated, however, and the inevitable (and sometimes prejudicial) selectivity of the material, the *Companion* will better serve as a “taster” for the field of Christian philosophical theology than as a handbook or reference work. It could certainly provide the basis for an introductory course at a college or seminary. Despite its many virtues, the volume suffers from two rather glaring omissions. It’s remarkable that in a book whose content is partitioned by the doctrine of creation, there is no chapter devoted to the doctrine of creation itself. Also conspicuous by its absence is a chapter on the doctrine of Scripture (a topic barely touched on in “Revelation and Miracles”) given the foundational role that the Bible has played in Christian theology. Whether these omissions tell us anything significant about the current preoccupations on Christian philosophical theologians, one can only speculate. What is clearer, however, is that there is a crying need for more evangelical scholars to sow their seed in this flourishing field.

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Anthony C. Thiselton. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 423 pp. £19.99/\$30.00.

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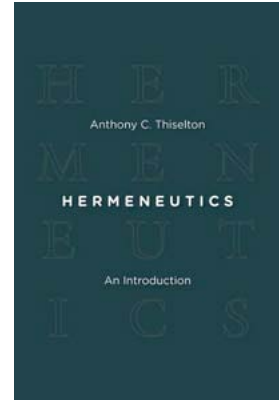
The latest offering from Anthony Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, was “commissioned as a textbook on hermeneutics for the student and general reader” (p. xiii). Who better to commission a textbook on an introduction to the sprawling subject than Anthony Thiselton? The work represents nearly forty years of reflection and teaching on the subject, and though there is little repetition from his earlier works (p. xiii), the contents have been worked through in several major volumes on the subject in years past.

Chapter 1, “The Aims and Scope of Hermeneutics,” usefully introduces and defines the hermeneutical task. Thiselton suggests that hermeneutics “explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own. Biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts” (p. 1). Chapter 2, “Hermeneutics in the Contexts of Philosophy, Biblical Studies, Literary Theory, and the Social Self,” admirably angles the general/special hermeneutics divide, and chapter 3 uses the parables of Jesus to exemplify various hermeneutical methods at work. Chapter 4 works through the cultural differences and seepage of Judaism and Hellenism as well as the hermeneutical peculiarities of each. Chapter 5 works through the reception and development of the NT in the second century, and chapter 6 is a whirlwind tour of the third-through-thirteenth centuries. Chapter 7 tallies the highlights of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and rise of biblical criticism. Chapters 8–12 look at more individual contributions from hermeneutical thinkers such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey (the former representing the first turning point), Bultmann, Barth and various other twentieth-century approaches, Gadamer (the second turning point), and Paul Ricoeur. Though sprinkled throughout the volume, one would think that Wittgenstein would merit his own chapter or at least section.

Chapter 13 begins a series of chapters that focus on the reader and reading communities. The chapter focuses on Liberation theologies and postcolonial hermeneutics and impressively introduces and surveys these burgeoning disciplines. Chapter 14 examines feminist approaches, and chapter 15 looks at the origins, diversity, and appropriations of reader-response and reception theory. The penultimate chapter, “Postmodernism and Hermeneutics,” works through three possible responses with respect to the compatibility of Christian faith and postmodernity, while summarizing the work of four complicated thinkers: Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and Rorty. The volume concludes with a brief spate of reflections.

The book is a pleasure to read and is filled with clever turns of phrase and shrewd judgments. For example, on hermeneutics, “Hermeneutics, including biblical hermeneutics, cannot be true to its task unless it is genuinely multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary” (p. 34); on parables, “We run into difficulty when one single approach is thought to be the key to all the parables of Jesus” (p. 59); on Judaism, “Judaism has never been one uniform thing” (p. 60); on the subversive nature of Jesus’ ministry, “Jesus warned against false prophets, long before Nietzsche and Foucault” (p. 342); and on the complexities of postmodernism(s), “We cannot generalize about postmodernism” (p. 347).

The perceived “order” and singularity of the telling of the hermeneutical tale, as the author well knows, is artificial but pedagogically helpful. And though the book can at times have the appearance of



incessant name-dropping, it is actually quite far from being a resource for wags at cocktail parties—may their tribe decrease! It is instead a rapid overview of the hermeneutical forest, a trip down a single-lane of hermeneutical pre-understanding while offering a kind of roundabout with a thousand different exits. The “Further Reading” sections at the end of each section and the bibliography at the end of the volume are massive aids to the beginner seeking what to read next.

Any criticisms of the book are simply a desire for the volume to be larger and more in-depth. For example, one is surprised at the absence of some feminist thinkers in chapter 14, notably Kwok Pui-Lan. There is no mention of the rising literature on gay theory, and though acknowledged at the end of the book, there is virtually nothing said on canonical criticism and the distinctives of Roman Catholic approaches (though, again, see pp. 353, 355). At times there can be strange off-putting jabs, especially toward German scholarship (e.g., pp. 224, 352), and, of course, what is a book on hermeneutics without a shot across the bow of contemporary hermeneutics’ whipping boy, Charles Hodge (p. 312)?

In any case, it is hard to think of any other volume to use in the church, classroom, or personal study on this subject of hermeneutics. I plan on assigning it and recommending it for many years to come.

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Peter Weigel. *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of His Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008. 265 pp. £32.00/\$55.95.

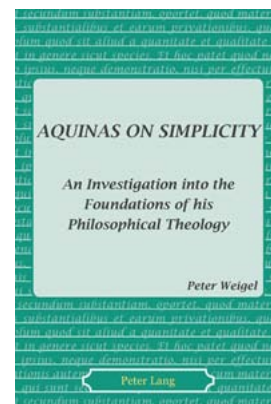
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The doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) is arguably one of the most perplexing of all the classical doctrines of God. In sum, the doctrine teaches that God is not composed of parts and is identical with his existence and essence. If he were composed of parts, he would be dependent upon those parts for his very being, and thus the parts would be ontologically prior to God himself.

In *Aquinas on Simplicity*, Peter Weigel aims to elucidate Thomas Aquinas’s highly sophisticated version of the DDS. Many modern defenders of the doctrine (including many evangelicals) view it as “indispensable to any credible notion of God’s absolute perfection and transcendence” (p. 15). On the other hand, many of its detractors regard it as “a pious accretion of the medieval tradition and a prominent barrier to any intuitively sensible concept of God” (p. 15). Weigel’s purpose in writing is more expositional than apologetical. He explicates Aquinas’s DDS in relation to his “larger theoretical framework” (p. 19) over the course of six penetrating chapters.

Chapter 1 explains the prominence given the DDS in Thomas’s theology proper. Weigel shows how the doctrine developed in importance through the progression of Thomas’s writings, from his earlier *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* to his later *Summa theologiae*. What he discovers is that the DDS is consistently used to characterize numerous other perfections that Thomas ascribes to God, including his perfection, goodness, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, and oneness. Simplicity is central to Thomas’s whole understanding of how it is that God has attributes.

But what precisely is understood by terms like “simple” and “part”? Weigel rightly observes, “The meaning that simplicity has greatly depends on what composition involves within a given ontological



system” (p. 45). Chapter 2 incisively analyzes the various forms of ontological composition that Thomas accepts: matter and form (pp. 49–52); substance and accidents (pp. 53–56); essence and existence (pp. 57–90); and potency and act (pp. 90–102). Thomas expands the sense of act and potency in such a way that every other model of composition turns out to be a species of act-potency composition. Thus, by denying that God is composed of parts, Thomas is, in effect, denying that he possesses passive potency. Put differently, absence of potency means God cannot change, be acted upon, suffer, or be annihilated. All in all, this chapter does an excellent job in clarifying just what the DDS means when it denies “parts” in God.

Chapter 3 considers the difficult counterpart to denying passive potency in God: the affirmation that God is pure act. “Pure act,” Weigel informs us, “implies that God is an infinite positive reality” (p. 103). After discussing Thomas’s arguments for understanding God as pure act (pp. 104–30) the author explains how Aquinas reasons from God as pure act to God as an infinite plenitude of being (pp. 130–35). God’s act of existence (*esse*) is not contracted by reception into some limiting potency such as an essence (*essentia*). If it were, Thomas contends, he would not be truly infinite or unlimited. In keeping with the notion that God is pure act, chapter four scrutinizes Thomas’s further claim that God is subsistent existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*). Many modern critics of the DDS find this claim baffling inasmuch as existence seems too thin and non-substantial to be identified with a person, especially God. Weigel counters these critics (most notably Christopher Hughes) by observing that Thomas does not predicate “existence” univocally of God and creatures, but only analogically (pp. 146–56). In this way Weigel helpfully demonstrates that Thomas can be rightly interpreted or internally critiqued only on the basis of his commitment to the analogy of being (Cf. pp. 213–22). The DDS was never intended to be intelligible within a univocist ontology.

In chapter 5 the author looks at two further claims of DDS: God lacks matter and accidents. Affirming the absence of matter in God is relatively uncontroversial among orthodox Christians while the denial of accidents in him is much more contentious. Against accidents in God, Thomas argues “that every accident adds something to the substance that the essence does not have” (p. 171). But, lacking potency, nothing can be added to God. Furthermore, “If a genuine first cause is self-explanatory and utterly complete . . . then an accident of it is ontologically superfluous” (p. 172). Any accident must already be in the first cause in “a more noble and sufficient way” (p. 173). This chapter could have been enhanced with a discussion of how God can freely know or will contingent things without that free knowledge or will being accidental in him. Some readers will surely be disappointed by this omission.

In the final chapter Weigel considers the effect of the DDS upon divine predication and religious language. The emphasis is “on seeing how Aquinas’s general views on divine naming are both shaped by simplicity and at the same time respond to some of the major challenges to predicating of a simple and transcendent God” (p. 177). This chapter charts an epistemological course that accords with the ontological vision presented throughout the volume.

Weigel’s expository spadework will surely benefit both adherents and critics of the DDS, making the doctrine’s difficult claims much more accessible to modern readers. I know of no other book in print that treats the classical claims of divine simplicity so thoroughly and objectively.

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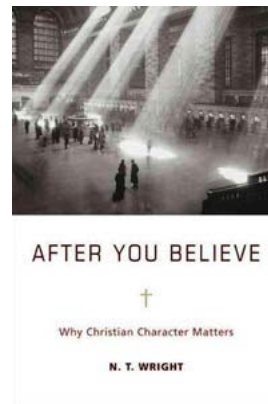
N. T. Wright. *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*. New York: HarperOne, 2010. 307 pp. £16.99/\$24.99.

What are we here for? What constitutes a “good life”? What does God want from us? N. T. Wright applies his considerable biblical acumen to these questions as he seeks “a fresh reading of the moral thrust of the New Testament” (p. 67). The book doesn’t set out to deal with ethical or moral questions or to offer a fine-tuned study of character traits. Rather, Wright looks at the big picture, the overall theological framework, for living the Christian life.

Wright’s biblical framework is decidedly teleological/eschatological: “The basic point is this: the Christian life in the present, with its responsibilities and particular callings, is to be understood and shaped in relation to the final goal for which we have been made and redeemed. The better we understand this goal, the better we shall understand the path toward it” (p. ix). This emphasis on God’s final redemptive purpose makes this book in some sense a sequel to Wright’s earlier work *Surprised by Hope* (2007), which sets forth the NT eschatological vision of resurrected believers populating the new heaven and new earth (versus the common conception of disembodied souls occupying an ethereal heaven). We are not only saved from sin; we are saved for a new purpose—to fulfill God’s design when he first created human beings in his image to have dominion over his creation. Knowing what we are made for is essential to our understanding of how we ought to live.

Wright’s teleological focus links him to the classical ethical tradition, exemplified in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which took as its starting point a functional understanding of humanity. Moral arguments within the classical tradition involve the notion of an essential purpose or function for human beings and an understanding of the virtues as the habits of character that enable one to function properly and to achieve this purpose. The NT writers, Wright contends, took over this classical framework, but they reworked it radically in the light of what God has revealed in Christ. The similarities and significant differences between the classical and Christian conceptions of human purpose and the virtues appropriate for that purpose provide a running theme through the book.

Wright presents his framework in contrast to two foils. The first is the “rule-based” or categorical conception of morality. Rules, in his view, are “at least part of the truth” (p. 44), but a “rules-based mentality” always fails, not only because, in our depravity, we fail to keep the rules (resulting in despair), but also because rules are by nature restrictive and cannot change our hearts (resulting in pride). In a helpful discussion, Wright contends that rules serve as signposts and warning signs, or even crash-barriers, on the highway. They are important to keep us on track if something goes wrong but unnecessary for those who have learned to drive properly (p. 199). Paul as a pastor uses rules in his epistles to help his readers avoid a crash, and they may also help us in uncharted territory; but Paul’s greater concern is with the development of the virtues, and especially love, which inherently lead us down the right road. Christian virtue is both the gift of God and the result of the believer making conscious decisions to cultivate this way of life (p. 197). The fruit of the Spirit and the virtues are two ways of saying the same thing (p. 206), though the last of Paul’s Spirit-inspired fruit, self-control (Gal 5:23), reminds us that to get this fruit you need to be a gardener (p. 196), exerting persevering effort and practice over time to yield a harvest. Even this, however, is a Spirit-empowered effort enabled by God’s grace (p. 60).



Wright's second foil is the view that morality is essentially self-expression, being authentic to oneself. This approach has become increasingly popular in our anti-authoritarian and emotive age. Wright finds truth here, but again human depravity distorts. The "self" to which we are to be true is not our fallen self, but our redeemed and transformed self, our new self in Christ.

Here biblical eschatology comes fully into play. Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has brought about a new way of being human that fulfills God's purpose of being royal priests in his creation—righteously ruling over God's world and reflecting back to him the praise of his glory. Our future destiny is now realized in Christ, and the call of Christian virtue is to "put off" what belongs to our old earthly nature and to "put on" what is now ours in Christ and thus enter into this divine purpose. "What counts is the formation, in the present time, of a character that properly *anticipates* the promised future state" (p. 141).

Kierkegaard once wrote that life must be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. Jesus Christ, Wright contends, allows us the luxury of doing just that. He has shown us our end, our *telos*, and we can now live forwards in the light of it.

This is not a book for new Christians (don't be misled by the American title), nor is it a "how to" book on Christian living (though his final chapter on "practices" is very helpful, especially his strong words on the primacy of Scripture in spiritual formation). The book's content is frequently insightful (see, e.g., his reflections on "conscience" [pp. 159ff.]); its prose is sometimes uplifting (love "is a language to be learned, a musical instrument to be practiced, a mountain to be climbed via some steep and tricky cliff paths but with the most amazing view from the top" [p. 183]); but its style is often rambling and the train of thought is sometimes difficult to follow. Wright's illustrations, however, keep the reader's interest and help to make the abstract ideas concrete. Apart from a few minor quibbles, I recommend the book as a stimulating look at the nature of the Christian life—what ought to happen between initial faith and final glory.

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**ETHICS AND PASTORALIA**


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M. Daniel Carroll R. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. 174 pp. \$16.99.

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James K. Hoffmeier. *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009. 174 pp. \$14.99.

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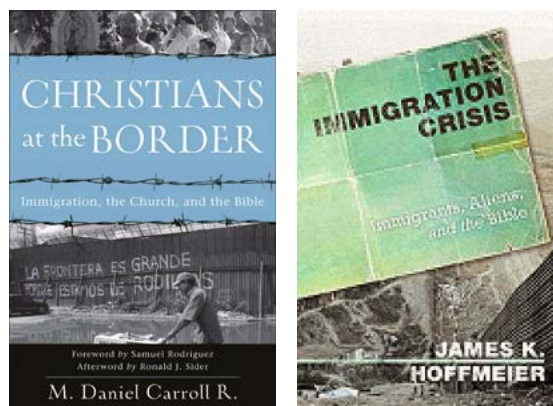
These two books have many things in common besides the issue. Both authors are OT scholars; both are evangelicals and teach in evangelical institutions; both have bicultural experience and draw inspiration from it to argue their respective theses; both have a similar goal, namely, to survey biblical material with the intention to inform Christian thinking and practice in order to engage the immigration debate in the United States; both have great regard for the Bible as the Word of God; and both books have the same number of pages!

However, their differences are more than a “slightly different approach” as Hoffmeier says (p. 17). For Carroll, the immigration crisis is neither an academic issue nor a matter of law. As the author explains in the first chapter, Hispanic immigration to the United States is perceived by many as a threat to the American identity and economy. He later adds the religious dimension to this phenomenon. Carroll’s research is supported by three important dimensions: economy, cultural identity, and religion (the latter two being those which receive more attention).

Not in vain, the word “Church” appears in Carroll’s subtitle. He believes that the opinions, evaluations, attitudes, and proposals of the American people, including among Christians, concerning Hispanic immigration, are not informed by a Christian religious commitment, but rather by ideological commitments and personal background and experience. For that reason, says the author, “this book attempts to offer what appears to be lacking: a biblical and theological framework from which Christians, *as Christians*, might participate in the ongoing debate” (p. 136).

With this goal in mind, Carroll dedicates two chapters to mining OT materials and one chapter to the NT. From the OT he emphasizes the themes of the image of God, migration in the OT, and the concept of hospitality and the law. The conclusion is clear: migrations are a recurring phenomenon in history, and God’s people must appreciate and respond to it with grace. The OT, as the Word of God, must “orient believers of the majority culture and the immigrant community as to the proper attitudes and perspectives with which both sides should engage the national debate” (p. 89). From the NT the author explores the experiences and teaching of Jesus, the phrase “aliens and strangers” in 1 Peter, hospitality again, and Rom 13. The conclusion is the same: “Perhaps these things [cultural identity] had to be held a bit more loosely, so that we can have the freedom to engage those from other backgrounds and culture” (p. 125).

Carroll does not argue for a distinction between legal and illegal immigration but rather prefers the expression “undocumented immigrant.” Much of his defense is directed toward the rights of undocumented immigrants, and Carroll applies biblical principles to today. For example:



- “These people are part of the plan of God for the unfolding of world history” (p. 87).
- The image of God and what it means to be human “must be the place where all Christians begin any discussion about immigration” (p. 89).
- “The imperative of caring for the sojourner is also binding today” (p. 109).
- Because “the arrival and presence of sojourners were *not a threat to Israel’s national identity*,” neither should they threaten American identity, for “immigration is inseparable from the history of the [American] nation and is fundamental to its identity” (p. 110).

As a result, Carroll powerfully defends Hispanic immigrants.

Likewise, Hoffmeier attempts “to take a comprehensive look at the Bible to see how it directly and indirectly tackles the issues surrounding aliens or immigrants” (p. 17). As the result of his research, he expects “that readers will have a handle for opening the Bible and using it in a responsible way when considering the policies toward and treatment of aliens and illegal immigrants in America” (p. 24). Then, after a brief first chapter that introduces the problem and hermeneutic principles, Hoffmeier dedicates seven chapters to similar biblical materials that Carroll explores. But what was not decisive for Carroll is the key point for Hoffmeier, that is, the distinction between a legal and illegal alien: “The Bible clearly distinguishes between the status of a legal alien (*ger*) and a foreigner (*nekhar* and *zar*), and one consequence of this is that there really is a difference between the legal standing of a present-day documented alien and an illegal immigrant” (p. 156). Actually, it could be said that Hoffmeier’s research is an extended word study about alien status in the Bible. In other words, Hoffmeier’s main concern is with the law that regulates the migration and residency of foreigners. As a result, then, his applications support actual American immigration laws and recommend their implementation.

Both books must be commended for addressing a very important issue in our globalized world and for exploring biblical materials usually unknown for most Christians. Both books are examples of impressive scholarly research. Notwithstanding, they arrive at different conclusions. Why is this? One might suggest a different methodology as a possible reason for the distinct theses. Carroll’s starting point is the *imago Dei*, while Hoffmeier’s starting point is the law. There is no doubt that this is an important difference and must be taken into account. It comes as no surprise that Hoffmeier sees the difference in that “Carroll has clouded the issue by not distinguishing legal from illegal immigrants vis-à-vis the responsibility of government” (p. 150). I am afraid that the debate will continue on this venue.

However, I want to finish this review by calling attention to what Paul Ricoeur has called the social and cultural imagination (i.e., imaginary). As part of the condition to be human, all of us share a cultural and social imaginary. The social and cultural imaginary is constituted by two fundamental imaginative practices: ideology and utopia. For Ricoeur, social or cultural imagination operates both as a confirmation (ideology) and contestation (utopia) of the status quo. I want to suggest that in Hoffmeier’s book the ideological component has won the way. There is no real challenge in his book either for the church, the government, or illegal immigrants. What he says is what the majority culture is saying: the law is fine; it is wrong to enter illegally to any country; illegal immigrants do not have any rights; everybody must follow the law of the land. A better defense of the status quo is unlikely.

On the other hand, in Carroll’s book the utopian component has won the way. This book really challenges both government and the church. Things are not right. Believers and Hispanics must *begin* “thinking, talking, and acting *as Christians* in regard to immigration” (p. 138). In a time where dreams

of change are fading away, it is refreshing to find someone who believes in the power of the gospel of reconciliation: “Let the journey to reconciliation begin. May the church lead the way” (p. 140).

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Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson. *Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009. 240 pp. \$15.99.

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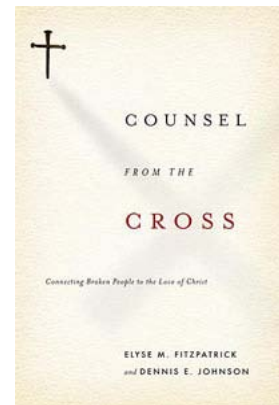
As someone who was “reared” within the biblical counseling (specifically Nouthetic) movement, I have longed for a book like this. I see it as a gift from God that I came to Christ, was discipled, and mentored by those who were committed not only to the authority of Scripture, but its sufficiency. However, for nearly ten years, I have had a nagging uncomfortable sense of insufficiency—not with Scripture, but with the approach many within the broader biblical counseling movement have taken to their methodology.

Fitzpatrick and Johnson put flesh on my “uncomfortable sense” and offer critical counsel to those involved in counseling. They state in the introduction,

Restating the Gospel truth is vital for brothers and sisters who identify themselves as “biblical” counselors and who are already convinced of the sufficiency of Scripture that answers life’s problems. To these dear friends we are issuing a gentle call to remember Jesus and the declarations of the gospel. Biblical counselors have fought a long and difficult battle to call the church back to her confidence in the Word of God in order to effect change in the lives of God’s people. This is a great good. But in our desire to bring Scripture to our friends and counselees, have we overemphasized the imperatives or obligations of Scripture but neglected the declarations or indicatives? This is a question every biblical counselor should ask him- or herself. Only you know if, in your desire to help others grow in godliness, you have left Jesus behind. (pp. 20–21)

This book is not a critique of the biblical counseling movement or any particular flavour therein. Rather, the authors endeavour to lay out a gospel-centred, cross-focused approach to counseling. The authors desire to simply apply the “old, old story,” but in doing so they offer a breath of fresh air to counselors and counselees alike.

*Counsel from the Cross* is organised into an introduction, nine chapters, and four appendices. In the introduction and first four chapters, the authors develop their thesis that the gospel is rooted in the indicatives of the NT. They accomplish this by reminding the reader of the centrality of Christ to all of Scripture and showing how he ought to be central to all the church does—preaching, baptism, the Lord’s supper, and fellowship. In chapter three, the authors demonstrate from Scripture how “God’s immeasurable love” has remedied man’s greatest need—forgiveness and freedom from sin—in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Chapter four introduces the reader to the “happy moralist,” “sad moralist,” and “gospel-centered Christian.” These characters are developed to demonstrate how people



often try to live their lives in order to be accepted by God, rather than living a life of thankfulness to God for the fact that he has already accepted them in Christ.

[The happy moralist] I know God loves me; why wouldn't he? These folks recognize there is a God who has rules of some sort, but they assume they are doing a pretty good job of keeping them. (pp. 73–74)

[The sad moralist] I can't believe God loves me like that; why would he? He believes that he *ought* to be able to do better, so he is harsh with himself, and he thrashes himself with condemnation, hoping that by so doing he will be able to obey and finally rest. (p. 79)

[The gospel-centred Christian] I'm amazed and enthralled every day as I consider his love for me! (p. 82)

The rest of the book develops what a gospel-centred Christian looks like and how one counsels others to grow into gospel-centred Christians.

Chapter 5 details the authors' understanding of "gospel-centered counseling":

Very briefly, gospel-centered counseling, as we are defining it, is the process of one Christian coming alongside another with words of truth to encourage, admonish, comfort, and help—words drawn from Scripture, grounded in the gracious saving work of Jesus Christ, and presented in the context of relationship. The goal of this counseling is that the brother or sister in need of counsel would grow in his or her understanding of the gospel and how it applies to every area of life and then respond in grateful obedience in every circumstance, all to the building up of the church and for the glory of God. (p. 92)

In this chapter they address "the Law and the Gospel" before diving into a key biblical counseling passage, Eph 4:22–24, where they outline the gospel-declarations and gospel-obligations (p. 97). The authors briefly and competently work through this important theological theme while exegeting Eph 4:22–24.

In chapters 6–8, Fitzpatrick and Johnson apply the gospel to the three primary spheres of biblical counseling—sanctification, emotions, and relationships. In these three chapters the authors demonstrate that a thoroughly cross-centred, gospel-saturated approach to biblical counseling offers the greatest foundation for change in peoples' lives: the sufficiency of Scripture and Christ.

The final chapter, "The Gospel Story and the Glory Story," compares two ways to live and counsel. The "glory story" is the belief that all we really need is to try harder and do the right things in order to find freedom, peace, rest, and fulfilment. The "gospel story" is the belief that we are accepted by God because of the finished work of Christ. Freedom, peace, rest, and fulfilment are all found in him. Our hope is not in this life but in eternity, which is assured in Christ based upon his victorious resurrection. We can change because of the work the Spirit is doing in our lives. We are motivated to change because we see the immeasurable love of our Heavenly Father displayed in the substitutionary death of his Son.

*Counsel from the Cross* also contains four helpful appendices: (1) "Why Biblical Counseling?" is an excellent, brief defence for biblical counseling as opposed to an integrationist approach to counseling. (2) "Scripture Passages by Topic for Use in Counseling" is a unique and extremely helpful tool to include in a book such as this. Although other books contain Scripture passages categorized by topic to aid in counseling, this list uniquely identifies the gospel-declaration along with the gospel-obligation in each

passage. It avoids proof texting and listing verses in such a way that they are used as “here is a list of things you need to do to fix your problem.” Rather the reader/counselor sees right in the list the gospel-motivation for change. (3) “The Best News Ever” presents the gospel along with Elyse Fitzpatrick’s personal testimony of her faith in Christ. (4) “Psalm 78” is the text of that psalm from the ESV.

Each chapter in *Counsel from the Cross* contains specific, practical examples where the topic of the chapter is applied in counseling. In addition, each chapter concludes with a series of questions to aid the reader in thinking carefully about how to “pursue counsel from the cross” in their own lives and the lives of those they counsel.

This book will serve any pastor or church leader involved in counseling immensely. It will be one of the books that will be taken from the shelf repeatedly as one seeks to faithfully *Counsel from the Cross*. It would also benefit Christians who want to grow in their love for Christ.

One weakness with the book that could be easily remedied is its cover. This may seem a bit pedantic, but the book’s cover is a surprisingly poor quality. It is easily bent or torn. As this is a book that will likely not be read once and placed on a shelf never to be referred to again, but rather one that will be pulled off the shelf regularly as a reference tool and passed along to others, a more durable cover would be a simple, but significant improvement to the overall quality of the book.

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Nancy Guthrie. *Be Still, My Soul: Embracing God’s Purpose and Provision in Suffering*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010. 176 pp. £8.36/\$12.99.

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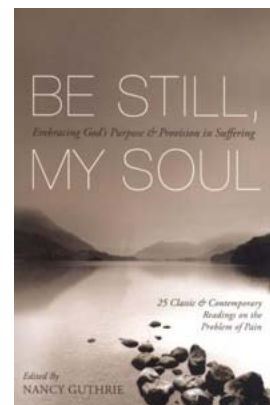
Suffering is often as difficult to understand as it is to endure. The burden of sorrow and the weight of suffering are interwoven elements of our reality. Thus, grappling with the gravity of pain in a sin-riddled world is not optional.

Recognizing the urgency of this reality, in this volume Nancy Guthrie collects twenty-five readings on the problem of pain. Writing out of her own experiences, Guthrie confesses that suffering “pushes us deeper into the mystery of God. It makes us more desperate for him, to hear from him and sense his presence” (p. 10). Her preface is indicative of the type of thoughtful reflection found in the selections throughout the volume.

She highlights one of the strengths of the collection by holding out a supernatural hope without diminishing the horror of human pain: “I am not holding on to hope in terms of a positive perspective about the future or an innate sense of optimism, but rather holding on to the living person of Jesus Christ” (p. 11). This type of resolve involves “grabbing hold of the promises of God, his purposes, and his provision, and refusing to let go” (p. 11).

Accordingly, her goal is that these compiled readings “shape your thinking, steel your resolve, and still your soul” (p. 11). There are three distinct features of the volume that serve this end.

First, the structure of the book provides a helpful framework by which a believer might understand his or her adversity. The chapters are divided into three main parts: God’s perspective on suffering, God’s purpose in suffering, and God’s provision in suffering. The chapters under each of these headings



function as variations on these themes. This rubric can enable a suffering believer to trust in God while not fully understanding every aspect of seemingly meaningless hardship. Meditating on these three themes could serve as a lifeline for someone before, during, and after those types of situations that seem to shake even the strongest theological foundations.

Second, each chapter begins with a biblical text that relates to suffering. Some contributors reflect directly on that passage, and others use the verse as a complement to a broader theme. These passages provide readers with some of the most appropriate places in the Bible for understanding suffering. This feature will particularly help readers using the book in a daily-devotional format.

Third, the content of the chapters themselves is consistent and encouraging. To highlight a sampling of the essays, Tim Keller shows how suffering can be “the servant of our joy.” Joni Eareckson Tada views her hardship as “God’s plan A.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects on what it means to “bear” suffering. Missionary Helen Roseveare talks about “when cost becomes privilege.” D. A. Carson encourages believers to think about how to “die well.” John Piper speaks of the power that comes in weakness, and Jonathan Edwards ends the volume with a word on the “refuge and rest” found only in Christ. While there is diversity among these contributors (e.g., classic/contemporary, pastors/scholars, men/women), Guthrie does a fine job of keying the selections and excerpts to the themes of the three sections. Most of the chapters also function well as stand-alone units.

An additional benefit of this volume is that readers will be exposed to a strong view of God’s providence. Recognizing God’s absolute authority over all things functions as an inner nerve that binds the various themes and perspectives of the contributors. Indeed, the reflections here are generated by the conviction that God is both good and sovereign. This conviction is necessary for one to speak of God’s purpose as well as God’s provision in suffering.

One feature I would like to have seen is more exact citations. The acknowledgements for the readings are located at the end of each chapter followed by a brief biographical note. These are helpful, especially for some of the less well-known figures. However, no page numbers are provided, so readers will have to do some digging if they want to pursue the thinking of the chapter in the original work. Also, it is unclear how much abridgement and modernization has occurred for some of the selections during the editorial process.

In these short readings, Guthrie has given believers an occasion for self-reflection. Here you will find no easy answers or superficial articulations of the questions. The contributors acknowledge the evil of suffering and maintain a proper tone of solemnity. These chapters are best read slowly and alongside introspective reflection, not because of the difficulty of their content but the gravity of their subject. I am grateful for this little book because it kept reminding me of a big God—a God who beckons in the midst of pain, “Be still, my child, and cling to your Redeemer.”

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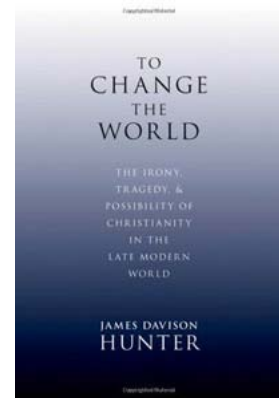
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James Davison Hunter. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 358 pages. \$27.95.

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What kind of theology of culture and power, or social science and social theory of culture, best merits the dignity of human flourishing and accurately reflects how late modern culture really does change? This lead question animates James Davison Hunter's provocative, timely, and illuminating essays in *To Change the World*.

Hunter is the Labrosse-Levinson Distinguished Professor of Religion, Culture, and Social Theory at the University of Virginia and Executive Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. With endorsements as wide-ranging as philosopher Charles Taylor to sociologist Robert Bellah to pastor Tim Keller, *To Change the World* masterfully integrates Hunter's command of social-science thinking about culture with his insightful theological reflection about the meaning of the church in culture.



Hunter's main contention is that "the dominant ways of thinking [especially by American Christians] about culture and cultural change are flawed, for they are based on both specious social science and problematic theology," resulting in cultural-change strategies that neither work nor *can* work for Christians to "change the world" in a way they desire (p. 5).

Hunter composes three well-proportioned and interrelated essays: "Christianity and World-Changing" (pp. 3–96); "Rethinking Power" (pp. 99–193); and "Toward a New City Commons: Reflections on a Theology of Faithful Presence" (pp. 197–286).

Essay One is a well-developed argument against what Hunter calls the "common view" of cultural change, which is deeply entrenched in Christian evangelism, mission, and revivalistic and political endeavors *as strategies for bringing about transformation of the culture*.

1. It naively assumes that "the essence of culture is found in the hearts and minds of individuals" (p. 6) and thus concludes that culture is the sum total of people's values and beliefs (worldview) (p. 16). But this view fails to attend to the complex dynamics and conditions of culture, especially in the late modern age.
2. It holds that "cultural change can be willed into being" (p. 16). But this fails to account for the role of institutions and networks that mediate agency in a culture.
3. It insists that "change is democratic—it occurs from the bottom up among ordinary citizens, ordinary people" (p. 16). But this populist account fails to recognize the role of elites and their institutional agency, and it overstates the agency of individual, historical actors to bring about world-change.

A popular alternative to the common view is the perspective advanced by Andy Crouch in his book *Culture Making*, which essentially argues that quintessential culture-change is the result of the goods or artifacts that we produce. In a qualified sense, Crouch espouses a kind of "cultural materialism" oriented by "market populism" (pp. 27–31). That view counters the so-called idealism (some have said, including Hunter, "Hegelianism") of the over-branded, "thinking worldviewishly" emphasis of 1) above; for ideas alone don't have consequence. But, among other things, Crouch's view fails also to think institutionally about the production and value of material goods. Therefore, as a thoughtful alternative of the "common

view,” including Crouch’s “culture making,” Hunter develops eleven social-theory propositions—a primer, really—about how culture really changes (see Essay One, ch. 4). This is one of the chapter-long gems that readers should study multiple times, mine for insights, and earnestly appropriate.

Essay Two assesses how the Christian Right, Christian Left, and Neo-Anabaptists approach political power and politics to bring about world-change. First, Hunter argues that in late modernity there is “a tendency toward the politicization of nearly everything” (p. 102) and a “conflation of the public with the political” so that “all of public life tends to be reduced to the political” (p. 105; cf. 184–87). Not surprisingly, “the final arbiter within most of social life is the coercive power of the state” (p. 106), which is indirectly related to “the loss of a common culture” (p. 107) and results in a “competition among factions” to will to power over the interests and well-being of others. Consequently, the dominant psychology and pathos of American political life is one of Nietzschean “*ressentiment*” as a motive for political action (p. 107). This has intentional and unintentional consequences for different “paradigms of engagement” (Essay Three, ch. 2).

Hunter argues that the Christian Right and Left routinely succumb to a Nietzschean *ressentiment* (filled with a discourse of domination) in their cultural power strategies with the political. In contrast, Neo-Anabaptists mistakenly think that “powerlessness” is virtuous, but that “presupposes a truncated theory of power” (pp. 181–82), which fails to see the church as having real institutional power that can be used for the good of others. All of this is both the “irony” and “tragedy” of Christianity in the late modern world (pp. 172–75). Thus, when discussing our Nietzschean moment, Hunter counsels, “it would be salutary for the church and its leadership to remain silent [politically] for a season until it learns how to engage politics and even talk politics in ways that are non-Nietzschean” (p. 186; cf. 281). Such counsel can be discouraging to receive given the cultural strategies that habituate the Christian Right and Left, especially when reading this in an American election-year cycle enamored by “culture war” contests.

Essay Three argues that a *possible* and preferable way forward with Christian cultural engagement is a “post-political witness” (pp. 184–87) where Christians recover a sense of the church’s call to be a “faithful presence within” (FP) wherever they live in the ordinariness of their lives, individually and as a Christian community, within various networks and institutions in the world.

What is the basic objective of FP? The church, as culture and community, is to be in the world tangibly enacting the shalom of God—“fostering meaning, purpose, truth, beauty, belonging, and fairness” (p. 263)—seeking it on behalf of others with whom the church has effectual contact, and as such, seeking to bring knowledge and critique of any “principalities and powers” that “animate, institutionalize, and legitim[ize]” any dehumanizing tendencies that attempt to break the shalom of goodwill toward other’s well-being (pp. 281–82). But FP is not the same as evangelism; nor does it exclude it. We might want to say that FP is the very plausibility structure, tone, and texture that ought to environ our witness.

Hunter’s sense of FP is theologically underwritten mainly by

1. an intentional robust theology of vocation and work that integrates with being a disciple of Jesus (pp. 95–96, 226–27, 252, 254, 334n220);
2. a humane ecclesiology within a dialectic of “affirmation and antithesis” (pp. 231–37, 247, 281–84) toward the world that pursues the flourishing of all people, their spaces and their institutions and not just the interest of those in the church (pp. 225–30; cf. 261–69).



3. a theology of the eschatological kingdom of God that is yet to come, which is where true power is derived and where ultimate re-creation of culture will occur (pp. 95–96; 233–35; cf. 269);
4. a doxologically oriented public theology that roots FP in God’s faithful presence in his world (p. 236 cf. 286; 238–44) and a theology of common grace (pp. 232–33);
5. a privileging of social power over political power to influence others and their institutions, especially as this is seen in the model of Jesus (pp. 187–93);
6. a philosophical anthropology that argues that “power is inherent to our nature as human beings” (pp. 177–80);
7. a theology of the humane (and not merely religious) way that faith, hope, and love “speak to basic human needs shared throughout the human community” (pp. 262–65).

The challenges for Christian witness and presence are multiple: chiefly, the “problem of pluralism” (of all types) and the “problem of dissolution,” where the conditions of late modernity deconstruct the most basic assumptions about reality (pp. 200–212). Hunter argues that his concept of FP has a better likelihood of realistically addressing these challenges *and* preserving the integrity of Christian identity compared to the political theologies and cultural engagement paradigms of the Christian Right, Left, and Neo-Anabaptists.

Can Hunter’s concept of FP help to lead toward cultural change? Perhaps, theoretically, if this question should be taken seriously (pp. 285–86). But it is not change that can be directly willed, controlled, or managed into existence or ransomed by political power, or come about by treating FP as some instrumental good. Nonetheless, there does not seem to be, necessarily, a dichotomy between FP and “world-change.”

Is Hunter’s concept of FP opposed to engagement in the political *if one is called by God to be in that sphere of influence*? Is FP at odds with responsible Christian voting? No, for these would contradict the “whole-life” and “all spheres of life” influence that FP people are supposed to have (one can hear echoes and cheers of Kuyper here, however unacknowledged). Yet history seems to show that Christians who have achieved American political power and influence are often not who they should be (as Christians). Why? Mainly, because they are not adequately encultured in their local church within a “vision of formation” as Jesus’ disciples for the sake of the world. But Hunter doesn’t seem to make any distinction between different levels of political office and their powers. For example, would an FP-intending Christian in politics be more likely to realize FP in the context of municipal governance than say at the level of a senator, cabinet member, or President? Here further reflection is needed.

Furthermore, Hunter’s concern about the real dangers of political power seem to under-represent a non-politicized, non-ideologically partisan, or a non-Nietzschean sense of political power and will, indeed, even for the endeavor of doing political theology (p. 186). Here Hunter’s discussion would have benefitted from interaction with thinkers like Oliver O’Donovan (e.g., *Resurrection and Moral Order, The Desire of the Nations*) whom the book surprisingly does not mention.

Nevertheless, these issues should not detract from the value and seriousness of Hunter’s engaging discussion and proposal. Pastors, leaders of parachurch organizations, scholars, and students of theology are all direct stakeholders of Hunter’s book (pp. 199–200; cf. Essay Three, ch. 5). It behooves such readers to think deeply and act responsibly about the cultural and humane significance of “Pastors as Teachers of the Nations”—a central orientation of FP—which Hunter’s co-conspirator, Dallas Willard, has argued

in such places as *Knowing Christ Today*. Hunter has courageous diligence toward developing a realistic and testable social theory of cultural change that takes seriously discipleship to Jesus in late modernity.

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Michael Lawrence. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010. 233 pp. \$16.99.

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Michael Lawrence's *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* offers an accessible primer on how to read the one story of Scripture for both personal and corporate Christian living. Lawrence designs the work for those "passionate about ministry in the local church" (p. 13). It is a welcome addition to a growing field of entry-level biblical-theology texts made to be put to use immediately by both laymen and formally trained church leaders.

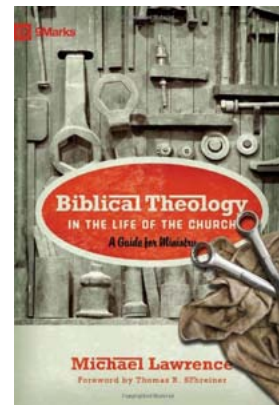
*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* is divided into three sections. Part 1 addresses "The Tools That Are Needed" for the task of doing ministry in the church. Lawrence equips the reader with "Exegetical Tools" (ch. 1), "Biblical Theology Tools" (chs. 2–3), "Biblical and Systematic Theology" (ch. 4), and "Systematic Theology Tools" (ch. 5). He challenges the reader to use the grammatical-historical method of interpretation and to consider items such as covenant, epochs, canon, prophecy, typology, and continuity in one's reading of Scripture.

Part 2 concerns "The Stories to Be Told" in order to piece together the grand story of Redemptive History: creation, fall, love, sacrifice, and promise (chs. 6–10). Lawrence teaches the church how to trace the major themes of the movement from creation to the new creation.

Part 3, "Putting It Together for the Church," explores the use of the tools and stories in local parish life. Lawrence provides several examples of preaching passages based on the theory and method in this work. Pastors and laymen alike will appreciate the author's "application grid" for appropriating messages from individual passages of Scripture to the broader story of the Bible, the non-Christian worldview, social issues at large, and the "Shepherd's Taxonomy" of personal concerns in the lives of his audiences.

One of the most rewarding sections of this work is Lawrence's attempt to relate biblical theology (BT) to systematic theology (ST). Then he demonstrates that the two disciplines—the two tools for reading every part of Scripture—are related by common trajectories and mutual need for each other. To this end, Lawrence says,

Biblical Theology is how we read the Bible. Systematic Theology is how the story of the Bible is shown to be normative for our lives. To say you want one and not the other simply shows that you understand neither. Everyone has both a systematic theology and a biblical theology, whether they realize it or not. What we want, though, is for both to be faithful to the Scriptures—the biblical story and the biblical worldview. We won't understand that worldview if we don't understand the story out of which it arises. But if all we have is story, how will that story ever engage the contemporary concerns of our lives? (p. 92)



In terms of literary pedagogy, what is good about Lawrence’s manner of presentation is that he demonstrates his theory and method throughout his work. For example, at the beginning of Part 3, Lawrence offers a “quick review” of what he has taught about the story—the metanarrative—of Scripture with Christ as the key character. Then he reviews the methods he used to tell the story:

Having told the story and noted the structure and patterns in the story, I also tried to apply the story to our lives. Using systematic theology, I asked the questions, (1) What does this story teach us about God, ourselves, and about the church? And (2) How does it apply to life right now. . . . Each time I’ve told the story there have been two steps: (1) biblical theology—getting the whole story right, and (2) systematic theology—applying the story to our lives. In fact, each time there has been another step that I did ahead of time but didn’t talk about. I simply announced that I was going to trace through the Bible, and asked you to trust me that I got the theme right. (p. 180)

In mild criticism, many assumptions take place in Lawrence’s move from biblical theology to application that are unseen to the reader but most likely second-hand or intuitive for him. Therefore, readers would be wise to observe the author’s caution: “The vision I am talking about arises out of the patient, repeated, observant reading of the whole Bible” (p. 216).

*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* is an enjoyable series of lessons on Christ-centered spiritual formation. Lawrence has not given us a text simply about theology; instead he has given us a text about “life” in the church. That is, the uniting of BT and ST reveals to congregants how God intends to use the story of Scripture to give life to and shape the life of the baptized community.

Lawrence’s work is refreshingly attractive in the age of forty-day-readings approaches to spiritual (and congregational) formation. It is an exciting alternative to the pop-culture approach of engaging society with minimum emphasis on the exclusivity and binding nature of the gospel message. It is a work appropriate for adult Sunday School, leadership training, and beginning-level college and seminary interpretation classes. As a pastor, it encourages me to think of what might happen if many believers in churches are motivated to begin faithful, daily reading of the Scriptures because Lawrence has aided them in seeing Christ in the Scriptures and in shaping their lives after him.

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C. John Miller. *The Heart of a Servant Leader: Letters from Jack Miller*. Edited by Barbara Miller Juliani. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004. 319 pp. £7.95/\$12.99.

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*The Heart of a Servant Leader* is a book that should be on the shelf of every single pastor, mission worker, and theological educator. It superbly combines heartfelt and heart-warming pastoral theology with a deep passion for leadership, mentoring, and church planting.

The book is a posthumous collection of pastoral letters from Miller to pastors, mission workers, and others who approached him for advice and counsel in his various roles (founding pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, lecturer in practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Director of World Harvest Mission).

The letters are organised around four themes: the glory of God as the motivation for serving; faith, humility, and prayer as the basics of servant-leadership; persevering in suffering; and encouragement. Each is written to a real person struggling with discipleship and ministry issues. There is nothing theoretical or abstract here. As with all of Miller's writing and teaching, each one is shot through with the glory of God, wise teaching about grace, conviction of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and faith. He is honest about his own struggles and never writes from a position of superiority. The whole book comes across as an appeal for spiritual leaders to be servants.

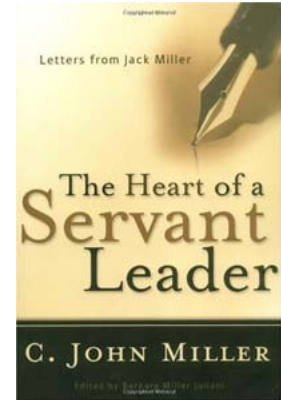
This is one of the few contemporary books to which I regularly return to have my heart pierced with the love of God in Christ. It is excellent for helping Christian leaders face our own sin patterns with sorrow leading to repentance. Miller contends that knowing God, being savvy about the enemy we face, and knowing ourselves with honesty is the heart of a healthy spiritual walk:

My own heart likes this order better: 1. Know your friend [the grace of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit]; 2. Know your enemy [sin, the flesh, and the devil]; 3. Know your personal limitations [your own particular fleshly characteristics and habits]. And I would keep the controlling theme of point 1 even when talking about points 2 and 3.

At the same time I do not think that an emphasis on grace leads to a soft ministry on sin and the severe demands of the Law. Actually it seems to me that such grace teaching makes it possible for sinners like us to hear the hardest things said about our sin patterns, and that can lead into a healthy sorrow which then leads back to sanity, i.e., repentance. (p. 60)

Anyone familiar with Miller's other work, such as the Sonship Course, will find the same strong, refreshing, emphasis on grace teaching us to say no to ungodliness.

Being a collection of letters, each section is short, eminently readable and highly personal. Pastors will find here a model of how to write pastoral letters that are direct, kind, and full of practically worked-out truth.



This book will help you lean on God and teach you to help others do the same. It is one of few easy-reading modern books that will warm your heart and inform your pastoral practice equally whether you have been in ministry for one year or twenty. Highly recommended.

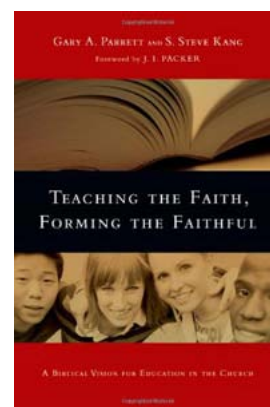
Marcus Honeysett  
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Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang. *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 461 pp. \$30.00.

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*Teaching the Faith* discusses the teaching ministry of the church from the perspective of professors at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary that are deeply involved in ministry and acutely aware of trends in local churches. It examines education and Christian formation in local churches and makes biblically grounded proposals for improvement and healthy growth. The content is divided into four parts to cover key aspects of the subject, namely, purpose (chs. 1–2), proclamation (chs. 3–5), people (chs. 6–9), and practices (chs. 10–14). Each chapter begins with a quotation, and ends with ‘hymns of contemplation and worship,’ ‘questions for planning and practice,’ and a list of ‘resources for further study.’ Subject and Scripture indexes are supplied at the end. The writing style, diagrams, and substance are very accessible and realistic for church-adoption. The main discussion is preceded by a foreword by J. I. Packer.



In part one, Parrett and Kang emphasize the need and lay out the purpose of teaching and formation in the church; the main rationale and *telos* must be to glorify God—to participate in God’s ministry of reconciliation in the already-not yet eschatological framework. They use Ephesians as the matrix to establish and clarify this objective. As the ‘*poiēma* of God,’ Paul urges the church to manifest its good deeds (flowing out of God’s gift of salvation) in bearing and obeying the gospel. The teaching ministry is primarily responsible for equipping and empowering the saints in this regard—to teach *out of* and *unto* obedience, conformity to Christ, salvation, to nurture faith, hope and love, and to edify the body of Christ (p. 49).

The second part addresses the content of proclamation and emphasizes that it should be rooted in Scripture, consistent with tradition and dynamic to meet changing needs. Building on the traditional core of the Apostles Creed, the Decalogue, and the Lord’s Prayer, the reader is challenged to impart the essentials of faith, which is the truth, the life and the way. The gospel is ‘the essential content for our ministries of teaching, nurturing and forming believers’ (p. 99). A church curriculum must therefore reflect the CORE (Comprehensive, Orthodox, Renewing Essentials). These essentials may be augmented with lessons on the history of the church, its distinctiveness, and other areas that may require treatment or attention.

Part three examines the composition and attributes of those who teach. It explores both OT and NT precedence to argue that educators and formative agents ought to include parents, laity, clergy, and all members of the church community. Pastors are encouraged to spearhead this mission and deliberately

include parents and other constituents. Parrett and Kang proceed to highlight essential attitudes and attributes for teachers to ensure effective delivery, good interaction, and productive results. 'If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to continue transforming our whole being, we want to seriously consider how best to design teaching-learning experiences where learners participate, utilizing all the ways of learning with which they are endowed by God' (p. 251).

The fourth part examines the goal and effective strategies for education and Christian formation in great detail. According to Parrett and Kang, 'to teach is to come alongside another, in the power of the Spirit and in the company of the faithful, to seek an encounter together with the truth: taking aim to perceive it more clearly, consider it more critically, embrace it more passionately, obey it more faithfully, and embody it with greater integrity' (p. 277). This may be achieved, for example, by abandoning age segmented methods of teaching to embrace biblical models that engage children and promote holiness, righteousness, and obedience. Moreover, they accentuate the formative and didactic significance of worship and call for the need to give careful consideration to the place of Scripture, Christ, and Trinity in song-selections and preaching. The last chapter proposes and elaborates on seven key elements that need to be included in a local church curriculum: access, baptism, commitment, deepening and developing, engagement, follow-up, and grace. The conclusion expresses faith, hope, and optimism in the church's ability to run effective education and formation ministry, anticipating that leaders will rise to the challenge.

This is a well-organized book in easy-to-read English. It aptly addresses the challenges and prospects of Christian education across denominational lines, though evangelical churches and leaders will find it more useful. It provides Bible-centered principles and challenges leaders to review their teaching ministry, content of worship, and goals for Christian formation. The authors comprehensively and insightfully assess how we approach education in the church. However, the size could be reduced substantially without significant effect on the key principles. I suggest that a concise version be published for pastors who are too busy to read a book of this size and yet too sluggish not to benefit from the rich insights it offers. I highly recommend it to pastors and seminary students as an indispensable tool and to Christian educators as a timely reminder to step up to our calling and service.

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Richard D. Phillips. *The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men*. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2010. 175 pp. \$15.00.

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Richard D. Phillips's very readable and instructive book is published by the Reformation Press, part of R. C. Sproul's Ligonier Ministries. Phillips is a Presbyterian pastor now based in Greenville, South Carolina. He has an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary and an MBA. His book reflects both his pastoral experience and his academic studies, with the latter lightly applied. He previously served as a military officer and is married to Sharon, with whom he has five children.

Many Christian books on masculinity rehash concepts that are popular in secular writing such as those in Robert Bly's *Iron John*, imposing them on Scripture often with ingenious results. Phillips, however, brings out themes from within the biblical narratives and ably applies the Christian doctrines of creation, fall, and redemption to men and masculinity today.

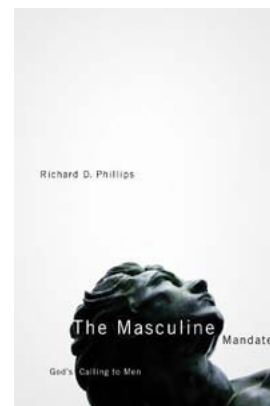
Indeed, he rightly takes issue with the central contention of one of these Bly adaptations, Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*, that the 'core of a man's heart is undomesticated'. He observes that even if Adam was created in the wildness outside the garden, he was placed by God inside it, so that 'his life would be shaped not by self-centred identity quests but by covenantal bonds and blessings' (p. 7). He believes that the answer to nearly 'every question about God's intentions for men and women . . . is: go back to the garden' (p. 4).

From Gen 2:15, Phillips identifies two key concepts for masculinity upon which he bases the whole book. *Avad* (work) is 'labour(ing) to make things grow', which he discusses throughout the book in terms of 'nurturing, cultivating, tending, building up, guiding and ruling'. *Shamar* (keep) is 'protect(ing) and sustain(ing) progress already achieved', which he develops in terms of 'guarding, keeping safe, watching over, caring for, and maintaining' (p. 8).

These concepts of work and protection undergird the masculine mandate of servant-leadership which is explored in man's sacred calling to work as a human created in the image of God, designed to lead as a Shepherd-Lord (chs. 3–5). Phillips explores this masculine mandate in marriage (chs. 6–8), parenting (chs. 9–10), and friendships and church involvement (chs. 11–12) before a concluding chapter on men as servants of God.

Chapter 7, 'Marriage Cursed and Redeemed', is particularly excellent in linking the curses of Gen 3 to the redemption found in Jesus, the promised seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). Phillips shows clearly that the curses seen as a result of man and woman's first rebellion push the woman in an unwholesome way towards her husband while pulling the man away from his wife. The poisonous consequences resulting from this distortion of God's original purpose for men and women find their antidote only in Christ. God is saying in effect that 'you can't enjoy marriage without returning your heart to me' (p. 74).

Phillips applies the Reformation doctrine of grace to the marital relationship, showing that it is only as a Christian man is 'forgiven and sanctified by God in Christ' that he can 'have compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience toward his wife (Colossians 3:12)' (p. 76). The practical outworkings of this 'new man' are clearly developed from the Eph 5 passage with one quote from an unnamed friend of the author standing out:



I used to think that if a man came into my house to attack my wife, I would certainly stand up to him. But then I came to realize that the man who enters my house and assaults my wife every day is me, through my anger, my harsh words, my complaints, and my indifference. As a Christian, I came to realize that the man I needed to kill in order to protect my wife is myself as a sinner. (p. 87)

‘Working and keeping’ in a man’s relationship with his children was developed in the areas of *discipleship* and *discipline*. The former was more novel, stressing (*à la* Tedd Tripp) the importance of fathers not demanding external conformity of behaviour but seeking to win their children’s hearts by giving them theirs (Prov 23:26). With illustrative extracts of his father’s letters to him from the Vietnam War, he suggests that a godly father plants good things in the hearts of his children by praying, working, playing and reading with them (p. 99).

This book falls firmly into the ‘complementarian’ camp, which might grate those who support an egalitarian position, but his biblical insights will challenge and inspire men from either theological fold. Although Phillips has a military background, he does not come across as ‘macho’ or ‘patriarchal’ in the way that ‘complementarians’ are sometimes accused of doing. Finishing off a study of masculinity looking at Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a role model for men is thought-provoking.

One criticism that can be leveled against this stimulating read is his presupposition that miracles and prophecy belong only to the apostolic age (p. 166n16), which might raise the hackles of charismatic readers and many NT scholars.

*The Masculine Mandate* is aimed at the man in the pew rather than the undergraduate religious studies or theology student, but its many insights into biblical masculinity will be useful for students, pastors, and preachers alike. It will give any man, whether single or married, much on which to reflect, and will challenge him to examine whether he is really living his masculinity in the light of Scripture and the character of Christ.

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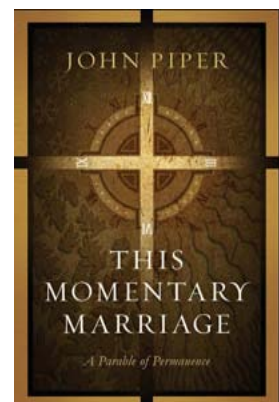
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John Piper. *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009. 191 pp. \$17.99.

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Books on marriage abound with advice on how to deal with finances, handle conflict, or enhance your love life in order to build a better marriage. Yet, like covering mold with a layer of paint, many of those books address issues mainly at the surface. *This Momentary Marriage* is different. John Piper ventures deep below the surface in order to “consider a vision of marriage higher and deeper and stronger and more glorious than anything this culture—or perhaps you yourself—ever imagined” (p. 20). His hope is to free readers from “small, worldly, culturally contaminated, self-centered, Christ-ignoring, God-neglecting, romance-intoxicated, unbiblical views of marriage” (p. 21).

Piper presents a God-centered vision of marriage that is grounded in the Bible and is based upon two main points. First, marriage is the *doing* of God.





Second, it is the *display* of God for the glory of God since “the highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists” (p. 25). Thus, this book about marriage is not ultimately about marriage. It is about glorifying God and exalting Christ in all things.

While this book does not seek to offer advice for everyday marriage problems, it is profoundly practical because it offers a vision that is transformational, getting to the root of many marital troubles. This vision of marriage sets the agenda for thinking about specific issues, rather than the other way around. In the course of the book, Piper engages with major themes of the Bible in relation to marriage: creation, sin, redemption, justification, the new covenant in Christ, and the kingdom of God that is now and not yet. This is exemplary for how Christians are to think about every area of life. The issues that he addresses include marriage relationships and roles, singleness, hospitality, intimacy and pleasure, procreation, and divorce and remarriage.

The following examples illustrate Piper’s discussion of specific issues. One relates to marriage and permanence. Since marriage involves two people who are sinners (and also have strange idiosyncrasies!), marriages will be sustained and grow in love by grace, forgiveness, and patience. That is, staying married is not first about “staying in love” but about a covenant-love that is modeled on and displays the covenant-love of God. Further, Piper concludes that because marriage represents the union of Christ and the church, which will never be broken, divorce and remarriage is never justified, for it misrepresents that union.

The biblical vision of marriage that is laid out in this book also has implications for singleness. Since marriage is momentary (because life is short in view of eternity) and temporary (because marriage belongs only to this age), singleness is a witness to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. In part, it is a declaration that spiritual regeneration takes precedence over physical generation, so that the single person, like the eunuch in Isa 56, may be more fruitful than those who are married with children.

Some of Piper’s conclusions will not convince everyone, as two examples will show. First, after noting that procreation is relativized and that some may choose to remain single, he concludes by analogy that a married couple may choose to be childless. Yet while the Bible clearly and radically commends singleness as a means for serving God and a witness to the dawning of a new age (1 Cor 7), there is no such commendation of voluntary childlessness in marriage. Rather, the primary choice is singleness or marriage and children. In one respect, the choice is about how one may serve God most effectively. In another respect, marriage and procreation, alongside singleness, represent two forms of life that witness to different aspects of God’s purposes in the present age.

Second, many readers may question Piper’s view that divorce and remarriage are *never* justified (though remarriage is justified after the death of a spouse). Piper’s case for this position is strong because it upholds a high view of marriage that takes seriously God’s purposes for marriage in creation and redemption, especially as it is intended to represent the union of Christ and the church. Further, it accounts for all of the biblical texts on divorce in a consistent and reasonable way. However, some will not be convinced that the exception clause in Matt 19:9 refers exclusively to sexual immorality during the betrothal period rather than in marriage itself, or that 1 Cor 7 does not permit remarriage after an unbelieving spouse divorces a believer. Others may wonder if the metaphor of marriage as a picture of Christ and the church is made to bear too much weight, without concession to human sin and hard-heartedness, by not allowing for divorce and remarriage in any cases when the marriage covenant has been ruptured by adultery.

There ought to be ongoing, robust discussion of these issues, seeking to discern a biblical, gospel-saturated perspective. *This Momentary Marriage* is engaging and convicting. It is well worth a careful examination for anyone seeking to understand a biblical view of marriage, for pastors preaching or counseling on marriage, or simply for a devotional meditation on the profound meaning of marriage.

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David Powlison. *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010. xvii + 331 pp. £29.99/\$39.99.

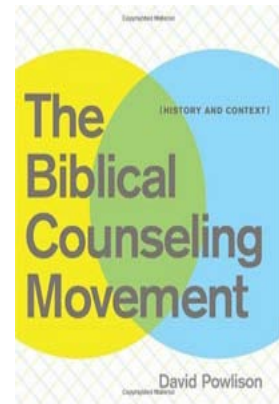
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When Christians struggle with life's problems, who is best equipped to help them? Should we turn to churches and pastors or the expertise of the mental health professionals? This is the issue underpinning Powlison's fascinating account of the biblical counseling movement. As 'history' it takes us from the origins of the movement in the 1960s through to the early 1990s. The 'context' concerns cultural issues in the church and world as well as the personal characteristics of some of the key actors. All had a bearing on the way the history played out.

At the start of what is an unusually readable adaption of a doctoral thesis, Powlison describes his intention to explore the biblical counseling movement in relation to the anti-psychiatry critics of the 1960s. In response to what they saw as the over-medicalization of life, writers like Rosenberg took issue with psychiatry for claiming jurisdiction over the 'ordinary problems of life'. At much the same time, a pastor by the name of Jay Adams was becoming increasingly troubled by the 'defer and refer' attitude he saw developing in many churches. Mental health professionals were the 'experts', and churches were increasingly handing responsibility for pastoral care to them. The biblical counseling movement Jay Adams helped to found opposed this trend. According to Adams, troubled people in the churches didn't need mental health experts but pastors because the wisdom they needed wasn't found in secular psychology but in the Bible.

Unusually for a historical account, the author is a part of the history he describes. He became editor of *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, the flagship publication for the biblical counseling movement. He was a faculty member at CCEF (the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation Adams founded). Though he sought 'to write this history as a relatively detached observer', Powlison does, of course, 'hold views on many of the issues . . . described' (p. 15). But any lack of objectivity is hard to spot, and what we get is a history written by someone on the inside who understands his subject intimately and cares passionately about it.

The first main chapter describes influences that shaped Adams. It was a time when 'the therapeutic was triumphant', when 'psychiatry and psychotherapy [had] displaced the cure of souls, reifying the medical metaphor and so ordaining "secular pastoral workers" to take up the task' (p. 22). Evangelical psychotherapists who wanted to take both Bible and psychotherapy seriously were setting about the task of 'integration'. Though unhappy with the 'leave it to the experts' message, it was only when Adams



encountered the anti-psychiatrist Mowrer that his concerns were crystallized. In Adams' own words, 'Mowrer did two things for me. First he *destroyed* the Freudian system in my mind. . . . Second . . . he shook my faith in the mental health professionals. . . . He gave me confidence to go forward' (p. 36).

The third chapter describes the genesis of the biblical counseling movement. *Competent to Counsel*, published in 1970, was the watershed. Adams voiced concerns felt by many pastors, for whom three issues were prominent: 'a commitment to the Bible, an inability to handle people's deep problems [and] an unease with the secular psychologies' (p. 62). Adams believed he was fighting a 'turf war' for the right to help people with their problems. His combative writing style wasn't likely to win over his opponents, but that was never his intention. He was writing for sympathizers. He was writing to stir up a grass roots movement who would resist the spread of the therapeutic and restore confidence in the church and the Scriptures.

Three chapters provide an excellent summary of his approach. After surveying those who came for counseling at CCEF, Powlison describes the problems Adams believed sin creates for us and then how 'speaking the truth in love' works for our restoration. Theory is fleshed out with plenty of detail about the way Adams' approach worked out in practice.

The final three chapters describe Adams' critique of secular psychology and the backlash this produced from evangelical psychotherapists. Adams was strident in his critique. The theories of Freud, Rogers, and Skinner contradicted the Bible by suggesting 'problems of living could be resolved by use of "the Spade, the Mirror, or the Biscuit,"' which denied 'the need for salvation in Christ and the ministry of the Word' (p. 158). The evangelical psychotherapists, meanwhile, questioned Adams' use of Scripture, accusing him of proof-texting and ignoring context. They said he focused on behaviour and ignored motivation, that he didn't make enough allowance for the effects of suffering or being sinned against, and that his entire approach smacked of legalism rather than grace.

In the 1980s, 'while the evangelical psychotherapists enjoyed spectacular success, capturing the mind, the respect and institutions of conservative Protestantism' (p. 202), biblical counseling began to fade. Though maintaining the support of a loyal group of pastors, Adams's failure to engage with his critics and isolationist stance created problems that caused the movement to stall. But the last section of the book points to a more hopeful future. The history (because it stops in the 1990s) gives only a glimpse of the resurgence to come, but Powlison adds three appendices, which he says, 'show explicitly where I stand'. They demonstrate how Powlison and CCEF, while respecting the heritage of Adams, have learned from their critics and arrived at a more nuanced form of biblical counseling. It explains why their influence is growing and why many are finding their approach such a rich resource in their own lives and ministry.

With regard to Christian counseling, this book shows how we got to where we are. And while counseling continues to be so influential both on the world and the church, the questions this book raises and the case it makes for putting the gospel at the heart of counseling aren't just pertinent to those working in this field; they matter to all of us.

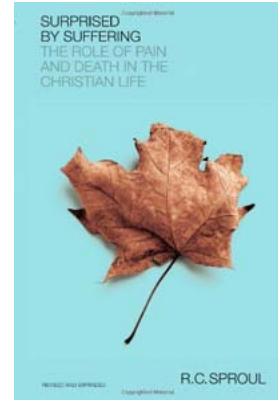
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R. C. Sproul. *Surprised by Suffering: The Role of Pain and Death in the Christian Life*. 2nd ed. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2009. xi +156 pp. \$15.00.

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R. C. Sproul is a Reformed theologian, teacher, and pastor. He is the founder of Ligonier Ministries and is currently the Senior Minister at St. Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Florida.

*Surprised by Suffering* is divided into two parts. Part 1 addresses the perennial problem of why human beings suffer. Sproul asserts that suffering is 'not uncommon' and 'not random' (p. xi). Pain and suffering is part of human life. The author's purpose is to inform and encourage Christians so that they are not taken by surprise when they are hit by suffering (p. xi). He argues that pain, grief, persecution, and other forms of suffering leave Christians confused, perplexed, and full of questions (p. 1). We should not see suffering as something strange!



Suffering places heavy burdens on us. It leaves one perplexed, but it should not lead one to despair. Suffering is God's way of redeeming humanity, and believers suffer according to God's will (p. 18). God uses Christian suffering for the good of other people. Christians are called to participate in Christ's suffering. The fruit of our suffering results in our praise, honor, and glory when Christ comes to bring us our ultimate salvation. We must not miss this meaning and purpose of suffering.

Using contemporary life experiences and Scripture, Sproul rejects the notion that people suffer because they have sinned. He argues there is no direct correlation between a person's sins and his or her suffering (p. 30). Many innocent people suffer at the hands of wicked people. God has a purpose for human suffering. God meant suffering for good (p. 31). God is sovereign. He ordains everything according to his purpose and overrules and turns injustice, pain, and suffering for the good of humanity. 'Our suffering is part of the total plan of God,' and 'God can work through evil to accomplish His plans' (p. 38).

The Bible speaks of God's power, authority, and sovereignty. God's providence allows him to turn pain, suffering and tragedies for the good of those who love him (p. 44). If we understand God's sovereignty, we will understand that human suffering has a purpose (p. 45). Therefore, Christians can trust God in their sufferings no matter what. Christians can mourn, cry, and protest over suffering, but they must never lose their trust in God. We must hope in God.

Part 2 of the book looks at life after death. Although human beings do not know what the future holds, God does. Death, humanity's ultimate suffering, is a vocation. It has divine purpose. Death is part of God's purpose for humanity. God has called each person to die (p. 49). However, Christ has defeated death. Christians who die in faith will share life with God together with those who have gone before us. Citing and arguing from the Scriptures, Sproul asserts that there is hope beyond the grave. Jesus through his teachings gives Christians hope of eternal life.

In particular, the author argues, Christ's resurrection from the dead is a guarantee for the Christian's hope of life after death (p. 114). At the resurrection, Christ will usher Christians into his kingdom where there will be no chaos, sin, death, and pain. A Christian's death, therefore, is not a loss but a gain. God will dwell with his people in the holy city, all effects of the curse will be removed, and Christians will enjoy the presence of God forever.

The author concludes, 'Our divine vocation is not ultimately to suffering, but to a hope that triumphs over suffering' (p. 134). The book also has an appendix that gives some insightful and helpful answers to some contemporary questions relating to suffering, evil, and death.

The author gives a balanced treatment of the subject matter, addressing the issue of pain and suffering from solid biblical and theological foundations. He relates well the problem of suffering to life experiences, which makes the book more practical and appealing to anyone who reads it. His critical stance on contemporary views on the issue of suffering by challenging some of the unbiblical basis for their arguments is commendable. His treatment of suffering is not just theoretical but practical.

One weakness in the book is that although the author states that God's purpose for suffering is the ultimate salvation of humanity, he does not discuss what especially the purpose of suffering for the Christian is. Does suffering have any immediate benefit or add any value to our lives? He was silent on this issue.

Another weakness is the author's failure to address human responsibility for reducing suffering in our world today that is the result of evil structures created by humans. The author seems to accept suffering and pain as a norm that we must accept at all costs without the balancing call to reduce pain and fight evil. Notwithstanding these weaknesses, I recommend the book to all those who are suffering, to pastors who minister to those suffering, and theological students who are wrestling with the question of why people suffer.

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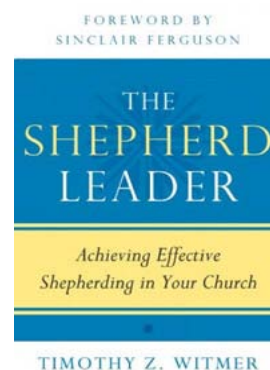
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Timothy Z. Witmer. *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010. 240 pp. \$17.99.

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When the Lord Jesus restored Peter to a useful place of service, he charged Peter with the responsibility to feed his sheep (see John 21). The image of the shepherd as a caring and wise keeper of the flock runs throughout Scripture as an endearing and enduring picture of the Lord and his servants. While all Christians confess that the Lord is their shepherd (Ps 23 and John 10), they also acknowledge that God has given under-shepherds (elders or pastors) to the church to be the caring keepers of God's people (1 Peter 5:1–2). It is an awesome responsibility to be a shepherd in a local church. Any man who takes the task seriously knows that it is not an easy job, and he will welcome all the sound counsel and biblical wisdom he can find.

Thankfully Tim Witmer has given elders a guidebook that is biblically sound, pastorally sensitive, and practically useful. These three descriptions capture the three-part outline of the book. In the first section, covering the biblical and historical foundations of shepherding, Witmer surveys the relevant OT and NT (chs. 1–2) data. He then asks where all the shepherds have gone and provides an historical overview of the elder's role from the second to the nineteenth centuries, from the Middle East to Europe to America (ch. 3). Witmer highlights the writings of Samuel Miller of



Princeton and two Scottish ministers who developed thorough expositions of the elder's work: Thomas Chalmers and David Dickson. Witmer concludes the first section of the book with a chapter on the elder's authority (ch. 4). By and large, Western culture is opposed to authority structures. Yet shepherds are called to lead with authority. What kind of authority do they have? Witmer outlines five characteristics. An elder's authority is (1) derived, (2) exercised for the well-being of the sheep, (3) directed by Scripture, (4) accountable to the Chief Shepherd, and (5) to be submitted to by the flock. Witmer concludes by looking at two abuses of authority in the "Shepherding Movement" and emerging church.

The second section of the book covers a comprehensive matrix for understanding the tasks of the shepherd-elder. Shepherds know the sheep (ch. 5), feed the sheep (ch. 6), lead the sheep (ch. 7), and protect the sheep (ch. 8). "These four functions address our most basic needs" (p. 102). Witmer develops his discussion of these four activities with sound biblical exegesis and applies the elder's responsibilities on both macro- (church-wide) and micro-levels (personal). Witmer points out that it is important to understand this macro/micro-distinction because many elders think of their roles only on the macro- or decision-making level. True shepherding, however, also involves a micro-level where the elder is involved in people's lives.

The final section covers three chapters that help the elders of a church put a shepherding plan together. Here Witmer covers the seven essential elements of an effective shepherding ministry. A shepherding ministry must be biblical, systematic, comprehensive, relational, include the four shepherding functions (knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting), and include accountability and prayer. In the closing pages of this chapter, Witmer's application is probing and convicting. He writes, "It is sad to consider how much of the work of the Lord is carried out in our own strength, without seeking the Lord's blessing. As leaders we are often called upon to lead the congregation in prayer publicly, but is our private prayer life as vital as it should be" (p. 221)? The final two chapters cover the implications of a shepherding ministry and suggestions for implementation (chs. 10–11). After the conclusion, Witmer includes several forms for elders to use to keep up with their tasks and an article on arguments against term-eldership by John Murray.

The basic thesis of *The Shepherd Leader* is that "the fundamental responsibility of church leaders is to shepherd God's flock." Too often elders see themselves as board members rather than pastors. Witmer's book will go a long way in helping to correct that misguided notion. Witmer gets to the heart of the issue: God has called elders to exercise a biblical, loving, and caring ministry among his people. Elders are not just to make decisions; they are called to mold people into the image of Christ.

*The Shepherd Leader* is a wise, balanced, and useful tool for teaching and ruling elders no matter what denominational or non-denominational affiliation your church may have. It is a great resource for leadership training as well as an excellent refresher course for men who are already serving as elders. We are using it at Grace Church, and I encourage every pastor to do the same.

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Andrew Wommack. *God Wants You Well: What the Bible Really Says about Walking in Divine Health*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2010. 224 pp. \$14.99.

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Andrew Wommack's new book *God Wants You Well* is a deeply flawed and pastorally dangerous book. Unfortunately, the brand of theology it represents is hugely popular and influential. Pastors should be aware of this theology and able to offer informed biblical responses to it. The title of Wommack's book conveys his basic thesis: God's will is that no Christian suffer physical illness or poverty. It is always God's will for Christians to be well. Wommack never clearly explains what he means when he says that God 'wants' believers well, but he seems to mean more than the basic claim that God doesn't intrinsically enjoy the sickness and suffering of his people (a claim with which all Christians would agree). Wommack means that God never purposes anything other than the physical and financial well-being of his people. According to Wommack, it is 'false teaching' to claim that 'God is the One who causes people to die' or to say that God 'puts sickness on you to humble you for some redemptive purpose and to perfect you through all this suffering' (p. 23).



Wommack believes the cross of Jesus has *already* redeemed believers from sickness and disease and purchased complete physical healing for them. 'Healing is a done deal, and is available to us now exactly the same as forgiveness of sins' (p. 13). Moreover, the cross also redeems believers from financial poverty. In 2 Cor 8:9, Paul says that Jesus became poor so that through his poverty believers might become rich. Wommack takes Paul literally. Jesus' death and resurrection provide for Christians 'forgiveness of sins, healing, deliverance, and prosperity' in this life (p. 20).

All this raises an enormous question: if God wants all believers to be well, why are so many believers *not* well? Wommack's answer is mercilessly logical, crystal-clear, and repeated frequently throughout the book. Here's an example: 'If God wants us well, and we aren't, this means we have to accept some degree of responsibility' (p. 41). Some people don't experience healing 'because they don't understand how to receive healing properly' (p. 43). Wommack hereby absolves God of responsibility for the sickness and poverty of believers, but in so doing, he lays that responsibility at the feet of the sick and the poor.

What are the pastoral results of this theology? The devastating consequences are clear in Wommack's story of a young couple with a brain-damaged four-year old son who died despite fervent prayers for healing (pp. 44–47). Wommack told the grieving parents, 'I don't believe this was God's will. . . . He didn't allow this to happen. . . . It's either my fault, your fault, both of our faults, or things that we don't understand.' The grieving couple prayed, 'and God showed them some areas where they had allowed fear, doubt, and unbelief in. This had hindered their faith and kept them from receiving the miracle they needed. Because they received the truth, they repented and were able to overcome that fear.' Note what Wommack says here: the parents' sin of unbelief resulted in the death of their child. They were responsible and needed to 'repent.' What has gone wrong enough in Wommack's thinking to lead to such cruelly devastating pastoral counsel? I'll highlight here four significant problems with Wommack's book.

First, Wommack embraces a terribly over-realized eschatology. He argues that illness and even death (p. 88) can be overcome in this age. The Bible never makes such a promise. It suggests, to the

contrary, that the total removal of sickness and death must wait until the last day and the age to come, at which point God will swallow death and wipe away all tears (Isa 25:8). In this age, our 'outer nature' is wasting away (2 Cor 4:16), and only at the coming of Jesus will we receive resurrection bodies (1 Cor 15:23). That's why Paul says we are *waiting* for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). Wommack's theology is unable to account for the universal presence of human death, which is the ultimate and most radical form of sickness and disease. Does every human death imply a specific lack of faith for healing? Wommack appears to suggest just that (p. 88). But the Bible indicates that in this present, sinful age, men are appointed by God to die (e.g., Ps 90; Heb 9:27) and nowhere promises that death will be overcome in this age. In fact, even the people Wommack claims to have raised from the dead will all die one day. None has been granted a resurrection body in this age.

Second, Wommack ignores the many biblical passages that contradict his teaching. The clearest example of this is his complete lack of reference to Job. In Job's view, his suffering is the will of God: 'The Lord gave, *and the Lord has taken away*; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1:21). Job specifically attributes his *sickness* to God (2:10), and Job does not sin in what he says (1:22; 2:10). Equally striking is Wommack's complete bypassing of 1 Cor 11:27–32. This passage demonstrates that in some cases the illness and even death of believers is the will of God. It therefore flatly contradicts Wommack's claim that Jesus would not 'put sickness on you' (p. 23).

Third, Wommack argues that Christians are redeemed from sickness and poverty but not from persecution. This distinction does not hold up in the real world because persecution for the name of Jesus frequently *causes* poverty, lack of physical well-being, and sickness (Heb 10:34). Paul was certainly not prosperous (cf. 1 Cor 4:11), and in Rom 8:35 he places 'famine' alongside persecution as things that happen to Christians. If persecution still persists in this present age, why not sickness? Wommack's answer is that God allows the persecution of Christians because he loves the persecutors and wants them to repent (pp. 76–77). But Luke 22:42 suggests another reason: Jesus understands that his crucifixion is the will of God. God did not want Jesus 'well'—God wanted Jesus dead in order to accomplish his great redemptive purposes (Isa 53:6; Rom 8:32; Luke 22:42; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). If God in his wisdom willed the suffering and death of his own Son, can he not will suffering and sickness for the *followers* of his Son in order to accomplish his sovereign purposes?

Fourth, Wommack's interpretation of the Bible results in a strange and unbiblical portrait of a God removed from the details of life. God becomes remarkably *absent* in Wommack's portrayal. Many Christians testify that much (or even most) of their growth in holiness has occurred through suffering (cf. Ps 119:67, 71). But according to Wommack, although someone may learn character-transforming lessons through illness, that was *not* God's plan. Apparently all this character-transformation through suffering happens apart from God (pp. 75–76). Later in the book, Wommack presents an almost deistic vision of God, who sets up 'laws' of healing and is then severely limited by those laws. The healing of individuals is 'not now up to God; there are laws through which our faith has to function' (p. 140). In this highly mechanistic view, one just needs to know the laws of healing and apply them properly for the healing to 'work.' If you don't follow the rules and say the right thing, God can't heal you even though he wants to (p. 143).

Other critiques could be added, including Wommack's lack of even basic knowledge concerning matters of biblical interpretation such as text criticism (see especially chs. 12 and 14). At the end of the day, Wommack's pastoral concern in writing the book is genuine but misguided. He thinks the view that God wills sickness embitters people against God (p. 12) and makes them passively lie down under their



illnesses (p. 24). But this is not necessarily the case. In fact, belief in God's sovereignty over sickness and suffering has proven a tremendous comfort to countless Christians through the ages. Sarah Edwards' letter upon learning of the death (through illness) of her husband Jonathan is one example: 'Oh that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hands on our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had him so long.' Again, the view that God wills sickness for his people clearly does not require a passive response to suffering. Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* is proof of this: it advocates both the view that God is sovereign over sickness and the view that believers should 'eagerly and earnestly . . . seek God for healing' (p. 1069).

Where the theology of *God Wants You Well* is embraced, Christians will come to have smaller views of God and an unbiblical, joy-killing, guilt-producing understanding of their responsibility for sufferings that are in fact beyond their control and totally within the control of a sovereign, loving God. For the protection and strengthening of God's people, it is important for pastors to be aware of this book (and the theology it represents) and to be able to articulate a truly biblical understanding of the relationship between God, suffering, and sickness.

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