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Preaching the Bible (Part 2)



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Editorial Introduction



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&

Dennis Phelps, PhD

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In the fall of 2014, Nathan Finn, a member of the JBTM editorial advisory board, emailed me (Adam) to suggest that the journal dedicate one or two issues to the topic of preaching the various types of biblical texts, soliciting articles from pastor-scholars who would address preaching the specific literary genre, or types, as well as provide sermons which illustrate those principles. I presented the idea to colleague and friend Dennis Phelps, who serves as J. D. Grey Chair of Preaching at NOBTS. After a period of prayer, reflection, and discussion, we extended invitations to a group of experts in the field of biblical studies and/or preaching to contribute articles and sermons for a two-volume release of JBTM. The present issue represents the second installment of that series. The first issue contained the following articles by these contributors:

- **Introduction** – Jim Shaddix, W. A. Criswell Professor of Expository Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina
- **Hebrew Historical Narrative** (in Pentateuch and Historical books) – Robert D. Bergen, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs; Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Hannibal-LaGrange University in Hannibal, Missouri
- **Hebrew Poetry** (in Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs) – Jeffrey G. Audirsch, Associate Professor of Christian Studies at Shorter University in Rome, Georgia
- **Hebrew Wisdom** (in Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) – Daniel I. Block, Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois
- **Hebrew Prophecy** (in the Major and Minor Prophets) – Paul D. Wegner, Director, Academic Graduate Studies Program; Professor of Old Testament Studies at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California

Each essay in the previous and current issues provides guidelines for exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics that are significant for that particular literary genre. The view which underlies all the articles and sermons is that each genre should be interpreted and applied according to different principles. All the contributors assume a high view of Bible-driven preaching and are in general agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message.

The present issue of the journal features the following articles and sermons by these contributors:

- **Preaching Christ from the Old Testament** – Russell Meek, Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana
- **Gospels** – Robert H. Stein, Senior Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky
- **Greek Epistles** (in Pauline & General Epistles) – David Allen, Dean of the School of Preaching; Distinguished Professor of Preaching; Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching; and George W. Truett Chair of Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas
- **Greek Apocalyptic** (in Revelation) – Gerald L. Stevens, Professor of New Testament and Greek at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana

It was our desire to include an article and companion sermon on Greek Narrative (in Acts), but circumstances did not allow the content to be ready in time for publication. The articles and sermons are followed by a large number of book reviews in the fields of theology, biblical studies, history, and Christian ministry. It is our desire that the articles, sermons, and book reviews in this issue will spur Christian leaders toward improved exegetical and hermeneutical work which will result in the bold proclamation of God's Word and multitudes of changed lives.

With Christ on the Road to Emmaus



Russell L. Meek, PhD

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The idea that we should preach Christ from the Old Testament,¹ once a given in church history, has recently experienced a rebirth after its near death at the hands of modern critical biblical studies.² This return to the Emmaus road is most welcome, especially for

¹It may be important to distinguish briefly between the terms Christocentric/Christ-centered and Christotelic as applied to preaching from the Old Testament. Some authors prefer to avoid the former two terms (Christocentric/Christ-centered) because of associations its inherent dangers (discussed more fully in the body of this essay below). The thought is that a self-consciously Christocentric sermon runs the risk of allegorization, avoiding the moral instruction of the Old Testament, and flattening the theology of the Old Testament. I've heard the Christocentric hermeneutic referred to as the "Christ under Every Rock" hermeneutic. A Christocentric, or Christ-centered, sermon on the Old Testament will seek to preach Christ as the *center* of the particular Old Testament passage under consideration. In contrast to this method, some scholars have proposed a Christotelic hermeneutic, or a hermeneutic that sees Christ as the *telos*, or end, of all Scriptures. The terms refer to very similar ways of interpreting and preaching the Old Testament, and in the end Christocentric and Christotelic sermons end up in the same place—pointing to Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The term Christotelic is the more accurate term for the methodology presented here, which sees Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. That said, it may rightly be asked whether the Old Testament can be Christotelic without being Christocentric. That is, if Christ is the end of the Old Testament—and he is—is he not also its center? Thus, it may be best to talk generally about preaching Christ from the Old Testament, even though the phrase becomes unwieldy. This debate is ongoing and would require far too much space to flesh out fully here. Ultimately, those who would use Christotelic and those who would use Christocentric have the same goal, namely to see the Old Testament rightly preached, the church edified, and the gospel spread around the world.

²This essay will interact with but a small portion of the plethora of resources that demonstrate this trend. In addition, note that B&H Academic is in the process of publishing an entire commentary series devoted to preaching Christ from the Bible, Old Testament included (Christ-Centered Exposition; edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida). As of the time of writing this, Zondervan has published the first Old Testament volume in its Story of God Commentary, which seeks to "not only [examine] the ancient message of the Old Testament but also [look] at the text from a New Testament perspective to describe its continuing relevance for Christian life and, most importantly, how this ancient text anticipated the coming of Jesus" (Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, Story of God Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], xi).

those of us whose career is to teach the Old Testament.³ The current essay will attempt to answer a few questions about preaching Christ from the Old Testament, such as why it should be done and what some of its inherent dangers are, and provide a methodology for doing so. The methodological reflections are by no means novel or unique but are rather developed from principles taught in hermeneutics and homiletics classes and books around the world. Nevertheless, I hope that, in formulating them here as they apply specifically to preaching Christ from the Old Testament, readers will be encouraged to turn again to the front of the book and take a long walk with Christ on the road to Emmaus.

For many people the answer to this question is self-evident. After all, things did not go so well for Marcion, notwithstanding the continued publication of New Testament-only Bibles (sometimes with Psalms and Proverbs!).⁴ However, despite agreeing with the notion that the Old Testament should be preached, anecdotal evidence from members of evangelical churches suggests that the New Testament is preached much more often than the Old. Thus, we begin here by offering reasons why we should still endeavor to preach from the Bible Jesus read.

A proper understanding of the Old Testament is essential for a proper understanding of the New Testament because the latter is in conversation with the former.⁵ For example, Jesus's interactions with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath, sacrifices, and proper devotion to God make little sense outside of the context of their understanding of the Old Testament. How could we understand the Sermon on the Mount outside of the Old Testament, for Jesus was explaining the true intent of the Old Testament law. And how could we fully comprehend the books of Romans and Galatians, not to mention Revelation, without reference to the Old Testament? If we rely only on the New Testament for instruction and reproof, then we severely limit our ability to understand and apply *the New Testament*, for we are hearing only half the conversation. Yes, we can understand the big picture—that Jesus Christ died for our sins—without hearing the conversation partner, but we're left in the dark regarding the lion's share of echoes, allusions, quotations, responses, and general cultural memory of the Old Testament. And thus the Old Testament must be preached so that the New Testament can be fully understood.⁶

³The title of course comes from the Luke 24 passage, but it is also a reference to my ordaining church in Kansas City, MO, Emmaus Church. I am thankful to have sat under the preaching of men who deal faithfully with the Old Testament, endeavor to lift high the name of Christ, and tell the story of God's redemption of humanity from the whole Bible.

⁴The Marcionite controversy has been covered well in the relevant literature. For a few accessible discussions of the issue and its continuing relevance for today, see Angela Tilby, "Marcionism: Can Christians Dispose with the Old Testament?" in *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe*, ed. Ben Quash and Michael Ward (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 73–80; and J. J. M. Roberts, "The Importance of the Old Testament for the Church," *Christian Studies* 21 (2005–2006): 15–25.

⁵Richard B. Hays, "Can the Gospels Teach Us How to Read the Old Testament?" *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002): 405–10.

⁶The present project is much too limited to fully examine the ways in which the New Testament

Jesus and Paul (and the other Apostles and authors of the New Testament) considered the Old Testament Scripture—it constituted their entire Bible.⁷ Paul was talking about the Old Testament when he said, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17 HCSB). And Jesus was talking about the Old Testament when he said, “You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about me” (John 5:39 HCSB), and again when he said, “If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31 HCSB). We must therefore preach the Old Testament because Jesus and the Apostles upheld it as Scripture.

A third reason to preach the Old Testament is that it is for our benefit. As noted above, it is useful for “teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16 HCSB). We must remember that Paul spoke these words *about the Old Testament*. Christians are inheritors of the promises of God, the fulfillment of God’s promise to make Abraham a great nation (see Gal 3). And therefore the Old Testament is written for our benefit.⁸ If we find ourselves doubting God’s goodness, sovereignty, love, or moral standards, then we can look to the Old Testament to remind us of who he is and what he requires. Not to preach the of God’s faithfulness to Israel, kindness to Gentiles, and mighty acts in the Old Testament is to rob the church of a great testimony to its faith. Indeed, God’s work in the Old Testament calls the church today to faithfulness and steadfastness.

The answer to this question is of course self-evident, but it bears repeating here as we contemplate preaching Christ from the Old Testament. We preach Christ because he is the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2 HCSB). He is God in the flesh, the Word of God incarnate, the second Person of the Trinity. He is the one who came as an infant, lived a sinless life, was crucified, buried, and raised to life by God the Father. He is the conqueror of sin and death, and with Paul we proclaim that this gospel we have received is “most important” (1 Cor 15:2). In sum, we preach Christ because he is the most important aspect of the Christian faith. There is no pleasing God apart from Christ, and there is most certainly no salvation apart from Christ. Therefore, sermons in the Christian church must be filled with Christ from start to finish. If such is not the case, then I fear our preaching will be little more than lessons in morality at best, and heretical at worst.

relies upon the Old Testament. For further study, see e.g., G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, ed., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); David W. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible: A Study of Some Modern Solutions to the Theological Problem of the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010); Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁷Melinda Thompson, “Reading Leviticus 19: Issues for Interpretation,” *ResQ* 57 (2015): 105. See also John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 77–78.

⁸*Ibid.*, 103.

Having established first that we must preach the Old Testament in order to fulfill the mandate to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and second that we must preach Christ because he is the cornerstone of our faith, we turn now to the question of why we should preach Christ from the Old Testament. I offer here four reasons, though I am certain there are many more.

First, Jesus taught that the Old Testament pointed directly to him, and his “self-understanding . . . [is] rooted firmly in the Old Testament story.”⁹ That was his message on the Emmaus Road, and that was his message long before his resurrection from the dead. For example, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, when the rich man asks Abraham send Lazarus to warn the rich man’s five brothers so they could avoid his fate, Abraham responds by telling him that “They have Moses and the Prophets; they should listen to them. . . . If they didn’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:29, 31). In addition, Jesus condemned his interlocutors because “You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me” (John 5:39 HCSB). We would do well to preach the Scriptures in accordance with Jesus’s testimony that the Old Testament testified to him and his work.¹⁰

Second, the apostles preached Christ from the Old Testament.¹¹ As with the importance of preaching Christ generally, this point should also be self-evident because, after all, the Old Testament is the Scripture to which the apostles had access. For affirmation of this, simply read Peter’s Pentecost sermon, which utilizes Pss 16; 110; and Joel 2 as its base text.¹² Paul also preached Christ from the Old Testament, as passages such as Acts 13 and Acts 17 indicate. And the Ethiopian eunuch was converted after Philip explained to him the meaning of Isaiah 53.¹³ While we will later discuss a methodology for preaching Christ from the Old Testament, we can at least now affirm that Jesus and the apostles have modeled for the church that Christ should indeed be preached from the Old Testament.¹⁴

⁹Waldemar Janzen, “Teaching the Old Testament: The ‘Problem’ of the Old Testament Revisited,” *Direction* 40 (2011): 188. See also Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 43; Hays, “Can the Gospels?,” 415.

¹⁰Note also John 2:21–22, in which the disciples “. . . remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made” (HCSB). As Hays (“Can the Gospels?,” 413) points out, “the ‘Scripture’ that they believed was Psalm 69.”

¹¹*Ibid.*, 44.

¹²Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 44.

¹³*Ibid.* See also Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 1.

¹⁴Johnson (*Him We Proclaim*, 101ff) rightly points out that the early church fathers and Reformers likewise read and preached the Old Testament Christologically. For discussion of the history of the church’s reading the Old Testament through a Trinitarian hermeneutic, see Aubrey Spears, “Preaching the Old Testament,” in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God’s Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 388–408.

In addition to the witness of Jesus and the early church, these final two reasons to preach Christ the Old Testament speak to its practical benefit for the church. Third (continuing our count from above) preaching Christ from the Old Testament helps the church avoid moralism. That is, when we preach Christ from the Old Testament, it moves the church beyond regarding the Old Testament as a series of stories that features men and women whom we should and should not emulate.¹⁵ Moralism is a somewhat common way to preach the Old Testament that goes something like this. In a sermon series on, for example Abraham, a preacher could say that Abraham was a man of faith; he left his homeland, nearly sacrificed his son Isaac, and God made an everlasting covenant with him. The congregation should therefore try to be like Abraham. On the other hand, the preacher could in the next sermon look at the failures of Abraham: Abraham sinned against God by lying about his wife, Sarah. Christians should not lie and therefore we should not emulate Abraham.¹⁶

Of course, such sermons are not entirely bad. The narratives of the Old Testament *were* written to encourage us to faithfulness and warn us of unfaithfulness. Paul says in Romans 15:4, “For everything that was written long ago was written to instruct us, so that we might have hope through the endurance and encouragement that the Scriptures give us.” And in 1 Corinthians we read in reference to the wilderness generation that “. . . these things became examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did” (1 Cor 10:6) and “. . . these things happened to them as examples, and they were written as a warning to us, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11). In that same chapter Paul lists several imperatives for the Christians at Corinth (and us today), including avoiding idolatry, sexual immorality, grumbling, and testing Christ.

Thus, when preaching the Abraham narratives, the preacher can and should point out Christians shouldn’t lie and that we should be people of faith. In fact, Paul points to Abraham for this very reason (see Rom 4). But there is much more to the Abraham narratives than a simple “do this; don’t do this.” Preaching Christ will ensure that we do not gloss over the true import of the Abraham narratives: the faithfulness and goodness of Yahweh, how he expects his people to respond to him, and what it means to be a follower of Yahweh.

Fourth, we should preach Christ because it will help the church avoid legalism. This was a common issue for Israel, the early church, and for us today. Simply stated, legalism is the view that all God demands from his followers is a rigid application of his laws to their lives. Such a view misses completely the heart of both the Old Testament and the New

¹⁵See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 80; David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: Ten Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013), 55–56;

¹⁶Many thanks to my colleague William R. Osborne for our discussions on preaching Christ from the Old Testament, particularly as it relates to preaching the Abraham narratives.

Testament, and it ultimately led to the exile of the people of Israel and later Jesus's fierce condemnation of the Pharisees. Legalism places faith in a person's ability to keep God's law instead of placing faith in Christ, the fulfillment of that law.

In the book of Galatians Paul takes up this issue, arguing forcefully that the gospel plus law keeping is in fact no gospel at all.¹⁷ What God requires, instead of slavish devotion to the law, is faithfulness to the Lord that develops as a response to his faithful love. As Paul states, "Christ has liberated us to be free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery [that is, supposed righteousness gained through legalism]" (Gal 5:1). Now that such freedom has been attained, we must not "use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal 5:13-14). Thus, there is law keeping in one sense, namely that followers of Christ will love each other (and thus keep the law; see Matt 22:37; Luke 10:27), but this law keeping results from a love for God, not a desire to earn salvation through keeping the law.

Paul's treatise on law keeping in Galatians is pertinent here because preaching Christ helps us to rightly understand the Old Testament and therefore to avoid the legalism that had ensnared the Galatians.¹⁸ Returning to our discussion of Abraham, a preacher could rightly preach the importance of obedience to God from the Abraham narratives (in fact, James does just this; see Jas 2:14-26). However, such a sermon can easily veer into legalism, as someone might say, "In order to please God, I must obey God like Abraham did. If I obey in all things, then God will love me, be pleased with me, bless me, etc." A Christocentric/Christotelic (and thus theocentric¹⁹) sermon will also emphasize the importance of Abraham's obedience, but it will focus especially on the fact that Abraham's obedience springs from God's faithfulness to him and the relationship that resulted therefrom. The person hearing a sermon that focuses on God's faithfulness to Abraham may also walk away thinking, "In order to please God, I must obey God." But that thought will (hopefully) be followed with, "God is pleased with me already because of the sacrifice of Christ. I can now obey God because of the right relationship Jesus secured on the cross." The physical outcome may look similar (both people obey God), but the Christocentric/Christotelic sermon will lead the parishioner to obey God *because* God has already established a relationship with him, *not* in order to establish that relationship through law keeping (and therefore for the latter parishioner has *truly* obeyed God).

Despite the reasons outlined above for preaching Christ from the Old Testament, some

¹⁷Monte A. Shanks, "Galatians 5:2-4 in Light of the Doctrine of Justification," *BSac* 169 (2012): 191.

¹⁸James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 10:427. Note that Shanks ("Galatians 5:2-4," 191) objects to the term "legalism" as "too kind a word for this contamination of grace."

¹⁹See Edward Klink, III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

may be reluctant to do so for a number of reasons. We will briefly address three dangers: allegorizing the Old Testament, ignoring the Old Testament's moral instruction, and flattening the theology of the Old Testament.

The danger of allegorizing the Old Testament often stems from abuses of allegorical interpretation, and its first cousin, typology, in the Old Testament's history of interpretation. According to Duvall and Hays, allegory is "a story that uses an extensive amount of symbolism."²⁰ The allegorical method of interpretation, practiced extensively in the early church by the Alexandrian school, often interpreted the Old Testament as a series of symbols that in some way pointed to Christ. Unfortunately, this "paved the way for later theologians to see Christ everywhere in the Old Testament, without regard for the authorial intent of the inspired author."²¹ Perhaps the most famous examples of this abuse are allegorical expositions of Christ and the tabernacle in which every detail of the tabernacle, down to its pegs, in some way point to Christ.²² There is no denying that the tabernacle points to Christ. It is he who "tabernacled" (John 1:14) among us and made a way for humans to have a right relationship with God (see Heb 9). Yet we also know intuitively that making symbolic connections down to the tent pegs of the tabernacle stretches credulity and certainly goes well beyond the author's intended meaning.²³ We must avoid such reliance on (over)allegorization when preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

Another objection to preaching Christ from the Old Testament is it runs the risk of overlooking the legitimate moral instruction the Old Testament offers.²⁴ This danger is the flip side of the danger of preaching the Old Testament as a series of narratives depicting right and wrong behavior (moralism) or as a series of laws to be followed in order to earn God's favor (legalism). It manifests itself in overemphasizing the "gospel" aspects of the Old Testament.²⁵ For example, in preaching the narrative of David's affair with Bathsheba, the preacher could rightly emphasize God's faithfulness to David in calling David to repentance through the prophet Nathan. Such an emphasis is consistent with the biblical

²⁰J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 208.

²¹J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, and C. Marvin Pate, "Allegory," in *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 20–21.

²²Duvall and Hays (*Grasping God's Word*, 211–14) examine two especially egregious works: Louis T. Talbot, *Christ in the Tabernacle* (Wheaton, IL: VanKampen, 1942) and Martin DeHaan, *The Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1955).

²³On the importance of authorial intent in interpretation, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

²⁴See Jason Hood, "Christ-Centered Interpretation Only? Moral Instruction from Scripture's Self-Interpretation as Caveat and Guide," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 27 (2009): 50–69.

²⁵For an overview of this "gospel" emphasis in the Christocentric school of preaching and its methodological roots, see Hood, "Christ-Centered Interpretation Only?," 50–54.

text and also demonstrates the gospel focus of the Old Testament. God calls sinners, of whom even King David is one, to repentance. What's more, God has now provided the perfect sacrifice through his Son, Jesus Christ. However, the danger lies in overlooking the reason for David's repentance—he sinned. The preacher would be remiss to avoid or ignore the obvious moral issue here, namely that God forbids both murder (of Uriah) and adultery (with Bathsheba), each of which have serious consequences for David (the death of the baby and eventual near-collapse of his kingdom; see 2 Sam 12–24; 1 Kgs 1–2). Thus, while focusing on the redemptive aspects of the David and Bathsheba narrative, the preacher must not overlook the moral teaching made explicit in this episode. Preaching Christ from the Old Testament must not entail *not* preaching morality when such is highlighted in the text being preached.²⁶

The third objection to preaching Christ from the Old Testament is that it flattens the theology of the Old Testament.²⁷ As with the previous two objections, this danger can be avoided through rigorous hermeneutics and faithfulness to the biblical text. This danger manifests itself most clearly when we move straight from an Old Testament passage to a Christological application. Returning to our example of Abraham, his narratives contain deep, rich theological reflection in their own right. After walking with God for many, many years, believing God's promises to him, and seeing the birth of his promised child, Isaac, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice (literally sacrifice!) him. That part of Abraham's story ends with God rescuing Isaac—providing a ram, as Abraham had assured Isaac God would do (see Gen 22:8)—and reaffirming his own covenant with Abraham (see Gen 22:15–18). The modern reader who knows the story of Jesus's death on the cross—his substitutionary atonement—will be leaping out of her seat because of the clear Christological connection between the Akedah and Christ. However, such a clear path to preaching Christ from this Old Testament narrative poses a serious danger to the preacher. What other theological depths beg to be plunged in this narrative? Should the preacher glide over the faith of Abraham, the importance of obedience, what it means to fear Yahweh, and Yahweh's radical command to kill the very seed through whom the promise (Christ!) would come? By no means! We must preach Christ from Gen 22, but we must also preach the theology of this passage *in its own right* before moving forward to its Christological implications.

The question becomes, then, how do we preach Christ from the Old Testament while avoiding the dangers outlined above? The remainder of this paper will present a methodology for doing just that.

²⁶Again, thanks to William R. Osborne for this observation.

²⁷David C. Deuel warns against this by encouraging preachers to “look to the total theological message.” See David C. Deuel, “Expository Preaching from Old Testament Narrative,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), 281.

A vast amount of literature addresses this very question.²⁸ This brief overview is neither groundbreaking, unique, nor original. However, I hope that including a succinct methodology here will benefit those seeking a way to faithfully preach Christ from the Old Testament.

The first, and most important, step in preaching Christ from the Old Testament is to understand the meaning of the text in its context.²⁹ This almost goes without saying, but rightly understanding the meaning of a passage is so fundamental to preaching it well that it deserves pointing out here. Understanding the original meaning of the passage will also help the preacher to avoid the danger of flattening the passage's theology. Note that this step includes the difficult work of exegesis and all that entails, such as studying the passage's historical-cultural context, performing word studies, outlining the passage, etc. The first and most important step, then, in preaching Christ from the Old Testament, is simply to do the hard work of faithfully exegeting the passage *in its original context*.

In Christian proclamation, simply repeating the original meaning of a passage to the congregation is woefully insufficient. The preacher must proclaim the Word of God as the word *to his congregation*. Therefore, the second step in preaching Christ from the Old Testament is to determine how the original meaning of a passage applies to the modern-day church, in particular the congregation one pastors. In so doing, the preacher must be careful to keep in mind that he is preaching the Old Testament *as Christian Scripture*. Therefore, having determined the original meaning of the passage, the preacher must then ask if and how the New Testament impacts that meaning.³⁰ Does Jesus's death on the cross impact the application of your passage? For example, if one is preaching from Leviticus 22 regarding acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices, the complete sacrifice of Christ must be taken into account because it significantly alters how this passage is applied to the Christian church today.

Finally, in the midst of determining the meaning of a passage in its original context and determining how the New Testament reality of Christ's death and resurrection impacts that meaning, the preacher must take great care to think through the redemptive-historical

²⁸See, for example, Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*; Merida, *Faithful Preaching*; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971); Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Model* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); Randal Pelton, *Preaching with Accuracy: Finding Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014).

²⁹The methodology presented here closely follows that of Duvall and Hays in *Grasping God's Word*.

³⁰This is a crucial step in the hermeneutical process that Duvall and Hays added in later editions of *Grasping God's Word*.

realities of a passage, which is where preaching Christ from the Old Testament becomes most evident. Returning again to our example of the Abraham narratives, the preacher must avoid preaching a legalistic sermon that overemphasizes Abraham's obedience at the expense of God's faithfulness. He must avoid preaching a moralistic sermon that emphasizes how to avoid sin like Abraham did (in some cases). He must avoid connecting the Old Testament passage through unwarranted allegorization. He must avoid jumping straight from Abraham to Christ without first considering the meaning of the Old Testament passage in its context.

In order to avoid all these pitfalls in preaching from the Old Testament, the preacher should determine how Jesus is the fulfillment, completion, *telos* of the passage being preached. Thus, when preaching the Akedah (Gen 22), the preacher must of course work through the original meaning of the passage and its theological implications for the original audience. But in order to be faithful to preach the passage *as Christian Scripture*, he must also highlight God's redemption of Abraham and Isaac, his provision of the ram, and how such points forward to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the *ultimate* fulfillment, or end, of Genesis 22 in that he is the ultimate sacrifice. God did not spare even his own son, as he spared Abraham's, but instead gave him up for us. Put simply, preaching Christ from the Old Testament means holding fast to the original meaning of the passage while also highlighting its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

In sum, to preach Christ from the Old Testament, the preacher must preach the biblical text faithfully with an eye to how Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of that particular Old Testament passage. Moralism and legalism should be eschewed, and yet the moral teaching of the Old Testament must be maintained *when that is the point of the passage*. Allegory should also be set aside, for Jesus can rightly be preached as the fulfillment of the Old Testament without resorting to comparing the nails holding down the tabernacle to the nails in Christ's hands and feet. May we preach the Old Testament faithfully, and in so doing may we make clear that Jesus Christ is the One to whom the whole counsel of God points, not through hermeneutical gymnastics, but rather through the hard work of faithful exegesis and proclamation of Scripture's truth.

Sermon: O God, Break The Teeth in Their Mouths



Russell L. Meek, PhD

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*Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?
Do you judge the children of man uprightly?
No, in your hearts you devise wrongs;
your hands deal out violence on earth.
The wicked are estranged from the womb;
they go astray from birth, speaking lies.
They have venom like the venom of a serpent,
like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
so that it does not hear the voice of charmers
or of the cunning enchanter.
O God, break the teeth in their mouths;
tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
Let them vanish like water that runs away;
when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted.
Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime,
like the stillborn child who never sees the sun.
Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns,
whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!
The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.
Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
surely there is a God who judges on earth." (Ps 58 ESV)*

Introduction

When I was six years old my father left my mother after a years-long affair. From then on I spent the majority of my time with my grandmother, Mimi, a devout Christian woman whose witness eventually led to my repentance and faith in Christ. She passed away from cancer when I was twelve, but not before I saw her, her hair nearly gone, sing "Amazing Grace." I couldn't understand how she loved and trusted God. It just didn't make sense to me. After my grandmother passed away, my mother married a very angry, abusive, Christian man. I blamed my father for not being around to protect us. All this, plus a consistent problem with drug and alcohol abuse, combined to create an angry, hard-hearted young man.

I became a Christian when I was eighteen years old. I distinctly remember thinking of that time I heard my grandmother singing, and the Holy Spirit moved in my heart to call me to him. I was a sinner. I needed saving. And that grace she sang about truly was amazing. God did a great work in my life on that day, but the hard work of forgiveness was yet to come. Psalms such as this were foundational in the transformation God wrought in me, and that is why I would like to speak to you today from Psalm 58.

An “Imprecatory” Psalm

This psalm is what is commonly known as an imprecatory psalm, that is, a psalm of imprecation, or cursing. The term refers to the psalm’s content, which includes the psalmist’s request that God would bring harm to his enemies. The name, however, is a bit of a misnomer, as the psalmist’s request is not so much a curse as it is a cry for justice, as we will see below. As in the other imprecatory psalms (Pss 5; 10; 17; 35; 58; 59; 69; 70; 79; 83; 109; 129; 137; 140), the psalmist is not calling down a curse on someone in the way we think of such things. Instead, he is asking God to bring about God’s own justice in accordance with his nature (God is a just God) and his covenant promises to his people. In our psalm, David is asking God to act justly against the wicked, those who do not act justly themselves. Therefore, as we seek to understand how this psalm points to Christ and applies to the Christian life today, we will refer to it as a “justice psalm.”

The Indictment (Verses 1–5)

In verses 1–5 the psalmist issues a very strong indictment against “gods.” The ESV and NASB have the term “gods” in verse 1. If you’re reading another version, such as the NIV, NLT, or NET, you will see the term “rulers” instead. The difference in these two options in translation is because the Hebrew term *elohim* can be translated either way, depending on the context of the passage. Rather than choose one of these translation options, I think it is best to understand the author’s use of *elohim* as a clever play on words—a rhetorical device common in poetry. While referring to actual people in his own context, David is introducing the idea that “gods,” that is, false gods, gods that are not real, are no gods at all because they do not deal justly. He picks up this idea again in the final verse of the chapter when he proclaims that God’s justice will cause people to say that “surely there is a God [the same term in Hebrew] who judges on earth.”

Verse 2 answers the questions of verse 1. The rulers of this earth do not do what is right; in fact, they “devise wrongs” and “deal out violence on earth.” Readers of the Old Testament know that this surely should not be, as Deuteronomy 17:14–20 (ESV) outlines what a proper king is to do:

When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, “I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,”

you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, “You shall never return that way again.” And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

A proper ruler, therefore, is one who rules rightly; he does not do evil but instead meditates on the Torah “all the days of his life.” He is to keep the commands of God, which include justice for the poor, the orphan, and the widow, ethical behavior toward others, and most importantly the sole worship of Yahweh alone. The role of a king is clear both to the psalmist and his hearers. This ultimate king, we know now, is Jesus Christ himself. He alone can completely fulfill all that is required in the law, and therefore he alone is the rightful King of all the earth. We know from Revelation 19 that this King, King Jesus, will one day take his rightful place as ruler of the earth, and in Revelation 20–22 we learn that he will right the wrongs the psalmist laments here.

Verses 3–5 describe not only the rulers of verse 1 but also wicked people in general. They are “estranged from the womb” and “go away from birth.” They are constantly lying and refuse correction. Like snakes, their mouths are filled with venom, and they refuse to submit to the snake charmer. The author’s use of snake imagery reminds us of the first time we encounter a serpent—that fateful day in the garden of Eden when sin—and death through sin—was first introduced (Gen 3; see also Rom 5:12–14).

Here we would do well to stop and consider about whom this passage speaks. I noted previously that the author is referring to “the wicked,” that is, the rulers address in verse 1. However, the serpent imagery reminds us of the plight of all humans. Are you wicked? Have you gone astray? Could those in your charge describe you as the psalmist describes these rulers? We have all heard the story of the boss who hounds the father, who in turn hounds his wife, who in turn hounds her children, who in turn go kick the dog. So, while it’s very easy to read this passage and point fingers at those in authority over us, we must be cautious in crying foul. We must also rejoice that there is good news coming for those on both sides of this equation (and most likely we find ourselves in both positions—as unjust sufferer and unjust persecutor)—God will be shown as just (v. 11), and that justice culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Rom 3:26—Christ is “just and justifier”), something for which our Old Testament forebears longed (see Heb 12:39).

The Cry for Justice (Verses 6–9)

Having outlined the abuses of the “rulers” in verses 1–5, the author now turns to his cry for God’s justice on them. Verse 6 states, “O God, break the teeth in their moths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD.” This proves to be a quite difficult verse for many to reconcile with the Christian faith, which calls for Christians to love our enemies and “turn the other cheek.” How, then, can our own Bible contain pleas for God to destroy our enemies? Here it is important to remember that the psalmist is using vivid, arresting language to ask God for help. The lion imagery calls to mind the rulers mentioned in verse 1, as the lion was in the ancient Near East—as it is now—a symbol for kings and those in authority. Furthermore, the request to break the lion’s teeth and tear out its fangs is an image of rescue. The psalmist is asking God to rescue him from the grasp of those who would destroy him.

The psalmist continues his cry for justice in verse 7 by asking God to make them vanish like “water that runs away.” He further requests that “their arrows” would be “blunted,” again calling to mind the imagery of rescue in the previous verse. Again, David is asking God’s protection from those who would harm him.

The first part of verse 8 reminds me of a time when I was a young boy; I couldn’t have been older than seven or eight. I grew up in central Arkansas, and there slugs would come out at night and attempt, for whatever reason, to make their way across my front porch. Every summer morning I could walk onto the front porch and see the slime trails left behind by their late-night escapades. I have an older brother who, at the time, was much more mischievous than me. He somehow found out that you could pour salt on slugs and they would dissolve into slime. I still shudder at my brother making me watch him bring those slugs to their fateful end. Essentially, the psalmist is asking that the rulers of verse one be like those slugs my brother dissolved into slime—certainly a harrowing image.

The second part of verse 8 is much more difficult to read, as David uses the powerful imagery of a stillborn child to request God’s justice. This imagery is indeed upsetting, and like verse 6 it creates a strong emotional response in the reader.

David ends his series of metaphors calling for the end of the wicked with a picture of blazing thorns. If you’ve ever had raspberry bushes, then perhaps you know what he is talking about. In my last home the previous owners had planted a nice raspberry patch whose fruits my dogs enjoyed much more than me. After harvest season the raspberry bushes had to be cut back in order to ensure a full crop the following year. That responsibility landed on me. After trimming the bushes, I would burn their thorn-laden branches. It only took a few tries before the stack of branches would erupt into a fiercely hot, crackling fire, and it was only a few minutes before the fire consumed its prey. More quickly than that, the psalmists asks, may God sweep away the wicked.

What is David trying to communicate with these vivid images of the demise of the wicked? And how does that apply to us today? First, we must note to whom David is speaking. Whereas in verse 1 he addresses the “rulers” to describe their wickedness, in verse 6 he transitions to addressing God. This is crucial for understanding the passage because we see here that David’s “curse” on his enemies is in fact a prayer to God. And, as noted previously, the contents of this prayer, that God would destroy the wicked, is a prayer for God’s justice to be executed. Second, we note that David himself does not enact that for which he prays. As king of his nation, certainly he had the power to enact justice, but in this prayer he is instead asking God to bring justice. I would submit to you that this is one of the most important ways Christians today can confront injustice. We can offer honest prayers to God that request his actions on our behalf.

The Resolution (Verses 10–11)

Verses 10–11 bring resolution to David’s prayer of justice. Using the eschatological imagery of vast amounts of blood (see Rev 14:20), verse 10 promises that “the righteous will rejoice” when God executes justice. The idea of rejoicing over the execution of God’s justice makes many of us uncomfortable, and understandably so. However, think about how the government today executes justice. We rightly rejoice when a murderer is arrested, tried, and convicted of the crimes he has committed. Think also of martyrs, such as the twenty-one young Egyptian men killed by the Islamic State, or the slain witnesses who cry out in Revelation, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10). Is it not right to rejoice when God sets right these wrongs?

Psalm 58 ends by returning to the question posed by verse 1, “Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly?” The response there was negative, which led David to vividly ask for God’s justice. Now in verse 11 David answers the question affirmatively. Because of the justice God will bring, “Mankind will say, ‘Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.’” In this we most certainly can rejoice. For though it may appear that things have gone awry—and indeed they have—there is a God who judges rightly on the earth, a God who is both “just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:26). And while God will one day punish sinners, there is time today to repent, for God has already poured out his justice on the cross, where Jesus Christ took on the penalty for our sins.

Conclusion

As a young Christian full of anger and rage, I latched on to psalms such as these. They gave me a way to work through my anger at the injustice I felt I had experienced. They showed me I could pray honestly to God and ask him to bring about judgment. It was cathartic to ask God to break the teeth in my stepfather’s mouth. As I prayed these prayers, pouring my

heart out to God, I learned that sometimes God's justice looks differently than I think it should. My stepfather eventually did stop being so angry and abusive, and well before God smashed his teeth, as far as I could tell. He and my mother reconciled, and I couldn't have been angrier. Like Jonah, I was "angry enough to die" (Jonah 4:9). How could it be right for him simply to repent and get a free pass on the years of suffering he inflicted on us? So, while psalms like this played a crucial role in God healing my heart, I was still like the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. My debt was so great that I would never be able to repay it; I needed a savior, and Christ saved me. God graciously convicted my heart, and I realized that God did mete out his justice, but it looked differently than I thought it would. Instead of hellfire and brimstone on the unrepentant, it was forgiveness through Jesus's death and resurrection. And if God forgave me all my sins, who was I to withhold the same from my stepfather? I had to learn to forgive as Christ had forgiven me. And I had to see that God makes brothers from enemies. That is the beauty of the gospel. So as you contemplate David's cry for justice today, I urge you to consider the justice God wrought on the cross, the eschatological hope we have in Christ, and most of all to turn your heart also the cross of Christ, where alone there is forgiveness for sin.

Preliminary Considerations in Preparing a Sermon from the Gospels



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The Choice of a Sermonic Text of Passage

Choosing a sermonic text involves numerous and varied circumstances. When preaching a series, sermons are frequently suggested by the content of the biblical passage or the subject matter that is the focus of the series. The present sermon is not associated with any series, so no such restrictions were involved. As I reflected on a possible subject, the thought came into my mind, “What if this were the last sermon I ever preached?” Several suggestions immediately came into my mind. My first inclination was to choose a difficult New Testament text or passage that is confusing and not understood by most people and try to explain this clearly and accurately perhaps for the first time. As a professor of New Testament such a possibility would be quite tempting. After all, are not professors often known for preaching on little known, unclear subjects that are confusing and making them even more confusing? As I began to reflect on the idea of preaching something new and unique, however, two thoughts came to mind that caused me to realize that this would not be a very good idea.

First I thought of the likelihood of my discovering some text in the Bible that no one else has understood correctly and that I would be the first person to discover its true meaning. Over the years I have heard people preach new and original interpretations of biblical texts, and I think that I can say, if my memory does not fail me, that in most instances there have been good reasons why no one in the history of the Christian church had ever come up with such an interpretation. How likely is it that Bob Stein would come up with the correct meaning of a text that no one in the whole history of the Christian church ever came up with before? It is not impossible, but how likely is it?

The second thought that came to mind was, “If I really came up with a new, unique, and correct interpretation of a Biblical text that no one has ever understood before, how important could this teaching be?” Do we really believe that the divinely-inspired writers of the Bible thought as they wrote, “I know that no one will understand what I am writing

for nearly two thousand years but this is very important”? Did God really seek to hide his revelation from his people for thousands of years? Does this not sound foolish? When we speak of the Bible as God’s “revelation,” this does not mean that the Bible “conceals” God’s truth but rather that it “reveals” it. Note how various biblical writers addressed their readers.

In Luke 1:1–4 the Evangelist writes,

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitness and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught. (emphasis mine)

Note that Luke wrote his Gospel in order that his reader, a man named Theophilus, might know that what he had been taught was true. This does not sound like Luke is seeking to hide something in his Gospel that no one would understand for two thousand years.

In John 20:30–31 the Evangelist writes,

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in His name. (emphasis mine)

Again it does not look like John is writing a secret code that no one would understand for thousands of years. He writes to his readers expecting them to be able to understand what he has written and as a result, by believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, receive eternal life.

In 1 John 5:13 the apostle writes,

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (emphasis mine)

Here also it does not appear that John is thinking that no one would understand what he wrote for two thousand years.

What is important for us to know concerning how to enter into a living relationship with God and what is important to know in order to live a life pleasing to him is written clearly in the Bible and is constantly repeated. One can only get into trouble by emphasizing that which is not constantly repeated in the Bible and concentrating instead on what occurs only once or twice. Think of what a huge theological practice and theology one religious group has built around 1 Corinthians 15:29 where Paul says, “Now if there is no resurrection,

what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?” No one really understands what Paul meant by this reference to being baptized for the dead. I am sure that Paul’s original readers in Corinth knew what he meant, for Paul had been their pastor for over two years. As a result they had over two years of his teaching and preaching to assist them in understanding what he meant. We, however, do not. This is the only place in all of the Bible where baptism for the dead is mentioned. Yet in one religious group a huge institution for genealogical investigation has been created in order to baptize stand-ins for dead relatives. To major in a minor, incidental teaching in the Bible will result in an unbalanced understanding of Christian teachings. To major in a minor, incidental teaching in the Bible that no one understands can only lead to error. Major Christian doctrinal teachings and major Christian ethical teachings receive major treatment in the Bible. As a result, if this were the last sermon I ever preached, I would not want to preach on something that no Christian has understood for two thousand years and that is referred to only once or twice in the Bible! No, if this were my last sermon, I would want to preach on something important and constantly repeated in the Bible.

During my forty-five plus years of teaching and writing, the focus of my attention has been on the Gospels. I guess you could say that it is the area of the Bible of which I am least ignorant. Although the two Gospels I have most dealt with are Mark and Luke, the text for my last sermon is found in the Gospel of John. It is a famous passage, often the first passage of the Bible people learn and memorize. It is called by some “the gospel in a nutshell.” It is John chapter three, verse sixteen. There we read,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Determining the Goal of the Sermon

At first glance it might appear self-evident as to what the goal of a sermon on John 3:16 would be. The literary form or genre found in John 3 is that of an historical narrative. It is not a work of fiction. It refers to real people, Jesus of Nazareth and Nicodemus. The latter was a real person, belonging to a real sect of the Jewish people called the Pharisees (3:1), a member of the Sanhedrin (a ruler of the Jews, 3:1), and a leading teacher of the Jewish people (“the” teacher of Israel, 3:10). The author of the Gospel expects his readers to understand the account as stemming from a real incident and conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. He does not expect his readers to assume that this is a stenographic account of the incident and conversation, so that it is not always clear whether we are reading the actual words of Jesus and Nicodemus or the Evangelist’s inspired interpretation of the incident. (Note in 3:11 the switch from the first and second person “I” and “you” in 3:3–11a to the “we” and “our” of 3:11b–d, and then to the “I” and “you” of 3:12 and the third person “No one” and “him” of 3:13ff.)

Most people in reading the Gospels usually want to learn about what Jesus said and did. In the case of John 3:16 this would mean that we are interested in understanding what Jesus meant by the words he said in this verse. Simply reading a red-letter edition of the Bible in which the words of Jesus in the Gospels are printed in red, however, will not do. All one has to do is raise the question, “What did Jesus mean by the expression ‘eternal life?’”, and the issue becomes clear. “Eternal life” is an English expression and the English language did not exist in Jesus’ day. It came about by the interaction of the Germanic language of the Angles and Saxons, who invaded *Angland* in the fourth and fifth centuries, the French of the Normans after the battle of Hastings in 1066 in which William the Conqueror defeated the Saxons, and the Latin of the church and clergy of the period. If we learn Greek, the language of the Gospel of John and the New Testament, we still have a problem. For raising the question, “What did Jesus mean by the expression “eternal life” (*zōēn aiōnion*), we encounter a similar problem, for the mother-tongue of Jesus was not Greek but Aramaic. He most probably knew some Greek (the extent is debated), but speaking to a Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus, in Jerusalem, the language of this conversation was almost certainly not Greek but Aramaic. Thus to try to understand what Jesus meant in his conversation with Nicodemus would require our determining of the exact meaning of the Greek terms in John 3:16 and then translating them into Aramaic. This involves what is known as the “Quest for the Historical Jesus,” and the various problems with such a quest are well known.¹

The Context(s) of the Text

The context(s) of a text are the main pathway for understanding the meaning of a text. The nearer a context is to the text the more helpful it is; the more distant it is the less helpful it is. Thus an Old Testament book such as Job is less helpful for understanding our text in John than a New Testament book such as Luke. Luke, on the other hand, is less helpful than 1 John, and 1 John, while very helpful, is less helpful than the Gospel of John, itself. The reason for this is that in seeking to understand what the biblical writer, John, meant by his text, Job thinks less like and uses a vocabulary less like that of John than Luke. Luke, on the other hand, thinks less like and uses a vocabulary less like that of 1 John, and 1 John thinks less like and uses a vocabulary less like that of John. Thus the best context for understanding John 3:16 is John 1:1–3:15 and 3:17–21:25, because this writer(s) thinks more like and uses a vocabulary more like the writer of John 3:16 than the others mentioned above, and our goal is to understand what the author of John 3:16 meant by the words he used in this verse.

¹For a succinct discussion of the issues involved in such a quest, see Robert H. Stein, *Jesus, the Temple, and the Coming Son of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 17–41.

It is helpful to note that many of the key terms and theological emphases found in 3:16 are found with great frequency throughout his Gospel. This is evident by the following chart:

English	Greek	John	Matthew	Mark	Luke	1 John
love(verb)	<i>agapaō</i>	37x	8x	5x	13x	28x
love(noun)	<i>agapē</i>	7x	1x	0x	1x	18x
world	<i>kosmos</i>	78x	9x	2x	3x	23x
believe	<i>pisteuō</i>	98x	11x	10x	9x	9x
life	<i>zōē</i>	36x	7x	4x	4x	14x
eternal life	<i>zōēn aiōnion</i>	17x	3x	2x	3x	6x

The frequent appearance of the vocabulary found in John 3:16 throughout the Gospel (and also 1 John) reveals that this verse serves as a summary of the message of this book.

We can narrow the most important context for this verse even more closely by pointing out that the immediate context in which John 3:16 is found, i.e., John 3:1–21, is more helpful than other chapters found in John. Thus careful attention must be paid to the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. After Nicodemus' courteous, introductory statement of praise in 3:2, Jesus gives a reply that seems abrupt and strange, for Nicodemus has not asked any question. However, "The Lord answered not his words, but his thoughts."² Jesus' answer, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again (3:5)", indicates that what follows involves the issue of how one can enter the kingdom of God. After a dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus in which a connection is made between being born again and the work of the Spirit (3:5–8), Nicodemus' ignorance concerning being born of the Spirit (3:9–12), a reference to the coming of the Son of Man (3:13), and an Old Testament reference to Moses lifting up a bronze serpent in the wilderness (3:14–15; cf. Num. 21:4–9), we come to our text, the most famous verse of the Gospel of John. This is followed by a closing summary (3:17–21) concerning the consequences of believing and not believing in the Son of God: salvation for those who believe; continued condemnation for those who do not believe.

Grammatical Analysis of John 3:16

Within the text, itself, the biblical author has chosen various terms and grammatical forms that assist the reader in understanding the desired meaning he has sought to convey to his reader. One involves the verb tenses he has chosen. The tense used for the verb "love" is an aorist. It is not a present tense. John states that God "**loved**," not "**loves**," the world. Thus he is not referring to an attribute of God such as God's omnipotence,

²B. F. Wescott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction* (London: Murray, 1908), 1:105.

holiness, omnipresence, omniscience, etc. Instead he is referring to an act of God in which he manifested his love to the world. It refers to something done in time and space. John is referring to something God has done at some time in some place. It refers to a time, Good Friday, and to a place, called Golgotha or Calvary! God “loved” and “gave,” and this love in which God gave his Son points to an event! Elsewhere John describes this in 1 John as follows:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

Compare also Paul in Romans 5:8,

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

From the very beginning the cross has been the chosen symbol of the Christian church, and it will always be so. In the crucifixion of the Son of God we have proof of God’s redemptive love for sinful humanity in his having given his Son to die for the sins of the world. For those who deny God’s love toward the world, we need only point to the cross!

A second very important grammatical marker in the text is the Greek term *houtōs*. Usually this is translated as “so” – “for God **so** loved the world.” But “so” can be translated as an adverb (“so much”) or as a comparative particle or conjunction introducing an adverbial clause (“so, i.e., in this way”). Here the context of the Gospel of John is decisive. The term *houtōs* is found fourteen times in John. In the thirteen other instances (3:8, 14; 4:6; 5:21, 26; 7:46; 11:48; 12:50; 13:25; 14:31; 15:4; 18:22; 21:1) it clearly functions as a comparative particle and should be translated as “thus; thusly; in this manner; so also accordingly; similarly; etc. Consequently, it would appear that 3:16 should not be translated, “For God so very much loved the world that . . .” but rather, “For God loved the world so, i.e., in this manner, that . . .” We must conclude therefore that “so” does not describe the degree of God’s love (it does not serve as an adverb) but describes rather the manner of his love (it serves as a comparative particle introducing how that love was manifested). The love of God in John 3:16 does not describe an attribute of God understood as an undefined, continual, never-ending temperament, and world-force wishing good and well-being upon the world. It rather points to an action of God performed in the past, on Good Friday, in which he gave his Son as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world with the consequence that humanity need not perish but can be forgiven of their sins and granted eternal life.

Organizing the Sermon

The text centers on the relationship of three “characters”: God (he); the world (whoever); and the Son (him). Accordingly, I chose to divide the sermon into three parts: the world and its desperate condition; God and his love for the world; and the Son of God and his sacrificial death for the world.

If This Were My Last Sermon



Robert H. Stein, PhD

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Introduction

When I was asked to fill the pulpit for today's service, the thought came into my mind, "What if this were the last sermon I ever preached? What should I preach on?" Now do not misunderstand me, I have not received any prophetic insight that this will indeed be the last time I ever preach, but it made me think. What if? What if this were in fact the last sermon I would ever preach? What should I choose as my subject? My first inclination was to think about choosing a difficult text in the New Testament that no one has ever understood and try to explain it clearly and accurately for the first time. As a professor of New Testament, to preach on such a subject would be quite tempting. After all, professors sometimes preach on things no one has ever heard of before. As I began to reflect on the idea of preaching on something new and unique, however, two thoughts came to mind that made me realize that this would not be a very good idea.

First, I thought of the likelihood that I might discover some text in the Bible that no one else has understood correctly and that I would be the first person ever to discover its true meaning. I have told students through the years that if they come up with some new and unique interpretation of a biblical text, they may indeed be correct, but they should first take a deep breath and think. Why is it that no one in the history of the Christian church has come up with this interpretation until now? Why is it that great scholars in the early church such as Irenaeus, Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, or great Reformation scholars such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancton, or great post-Reformation scholars such as Bengel, Holtzmann, Michaelis, or great scholars in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries such as Westcott, Hort, Lightfoot, Lagrange, Zahn, Schlatter, or great scholars of more recent times such as Vincent Taylor, Joachim Jeremias, C. F. D. Moule, I. Howard Marshall, Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, etc.—why was it that they never came up with such an interpretation, whereas I have? Over the years I have heard people preach new and original interpretations of biblical texts and I think I can say, if my memory does not fail me, that

in almost every instance there has been a very good reason why no one in the history of the Christian church came up with such an interpretation! How likely is it that Bob Stein would come up with the correct meaning of a text that no one in the whole history of the Christian church ever came up with before? It is not impossible, but how likely is it?

The second thought that came to mind was, if I really came up with a new, unique, and correct interpretation of a biblical text that no one has ever understood before, how important could this teaching be? We hear a lot about people breaking Bible codes and discovering secrets in the Bible that no one knew before, but in such cases I think we need again to take a deep breath and think. Do we really believe that the divinely inspired writers of the Bible thought as they wrote, “I know that no one will ever understand what I am writing until the twentieth-first century, but this is very important.” Does God really seek to hide his revelation from his people? Doesn’t that sound foolish? The Greek terms *apokaluptō* and *apokalupsis* in the New Testament mean to “reveal,” not to “conceal.” Similarly, the English word “revelation” comes from the verb “reveal”! The Bible certainly does not give the impression that its authors intended to conceal things from their readers. When we speak of the Bible as God’s “revelation,” this does not mean that the Bible “conceals” God’s truth, but rather that it “reveals” it. Let me read to you how various Biblical writers addressed their readers:

In Luke 1:1–4 the Evangelist writes,

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, *so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.* (emphasis mine)

Luke wrote his Gospel in order that his reader, a man named Theophilus, might know the truth of what he had been taught. This does not sound as if Luke is seeking to hide something in his Gospel that no one would understand for two thousand years.

In John 20:30–31 the Evangelist writes,

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and *that by believing you may have life in His name.* (emphasis mine)

Again it does not look like John is writing a secret code that no one would understand for thousands of years. He writes to his readers expecting them to be able to understand what he has written and as a result by believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they might receive eternal life.

In 1 John 5:13 the apostle writes,

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so *that you may know that you have eternal life.* (emphasis mine).

Here again it does not sound like John is thinking that no one would understand what he wrote for two thousand years.

And we could go on and on. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 7:1 Paul writes, “Now for the matters you wrote about . . .”, and answers specific questions that the Corinthian Christians have asked him. It is absurd to think that Paul thought that no one would understand what he wrote until two thousand years later. What is important for us to know concerning how to enter into a living relationship with God and what is important for us to know in order to live a life pleasing to His is written clearly in the Bible and is constantly repeated. One can only get into theological trouble by emphasizing that which is not constantly repeated in the Bible and concentrating instead on what occurs only once or twice.

Think of what a huge theological practice and theology one religious group has built around 1 Corinthians 15:29 where Paul says, “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are people baptized for them?” Now no one really knows what Paul meant by this reference to being baptized for the dead. I am sure that Paul’s readers in Corinth understood what he meant, for Paul had been their pastor for over two years. As a result, they had over two years of his teaching and preaching to assist them in understanding what he meant. We do not. This is the only place in all of the Bible where baptism for the dead is mentioned. Yet one religious group has created a huge institution for genealogical investigation in order to baptize stand-ins for dead relatives. To major in a minor, incidental teaching in the Bible that no one understands can only lead to error.

Major Christian doctrinal teaching and major Christian ethical instruction receive major treatment in the Bible! As a result, if this were the last sermon I would ever preach, I do not want to preach on something that no Christian has understood for two thousand years and that is referred to only once or twice in the Bible! No, if this were my last sermon, I would want to preach on something important and constantly repeated in the Bible. Therefore if you hoped to hear something this morning that is unique and that no one has understood before, I am afraid you are going to be disappointed.

During my forty-five years of teaching, the focus of my attention has been on the Gospels. I guess you could say that this is the part of the Bible of which I am least ignorant. My main area of study has concentrated on what is called the Synoptic Gospels, i.e., the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Of these I am most familiar with Mark. Yet my text this morning does not come from Mark or Luke or Matthew. It comes rather from the

fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. It is a well-known text. In fact it may be the best-known verse in all of the Bible. I believe that as a child it may have been the first Bible verse I ever learned. It is found in the third chapter of John and is verse sixteen. If you have a Bible or New Testament with you this morning, I encourage you to turn with me to John 3. If you did not bring a Bible with you, please take the Bible in the rack in front of you and turn to page _____. There we read:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in His shall not perish but have eternal life.

The context of this verse involves a conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. In the opening two verses of John three we read,

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

Nicodemus is described quite positively in verse 1. He is a Pharisee, i.e., a member of the most influential Jewish sect. (Today we would probably call them a “denomination.”) The Pharisees have a bad reputation among Christians. There are several reasons for this. According to Matthew 23 there were numerous hypocrites among the Pharisees, and some of them bitterly opposed the ministry of Jesus. Some tended to be quite legalistic in their thinking. Yet religious hypocrisy and legalism are usually a parasitic growth that feeds off the finest and noblest piety. Religious hypocrisy and legalistic thinking is usually associated with religious groups that take their religion very seriously and earnestly seek to keep God’s commandments. Unfortunately in seeking to keep God’s commandments, even the smallest commandments, they sometimes concentrate on the letter of the law and lose sight of the spirit and divine intention of these commandments. This was true in Jesus’ day as it is today. In general, however, the majority of Pharisees in Jesus’ day were positive examples of morality. Nicodemus is portrayed as a devout and pious Pharisee. He is not in any way portrayed negatively in our account. He is also described as a ruler of the Jews. This indicates that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body in Israel. This consisted of seventy leaders of the people and the high priest. Today we would call him something like a “senator.” He is also referred to in verse 10 as not just “a” teacher in Israel but as “the” teacher of Israel, i.e., the well-known and respected teacher of Israel. In John 7:45–52 we read that Nicodemus protested against the desire of some fellow Pharisees to condemn Jesus, and in 19:38–42 we learn that he assisted Joseph of Arimathea in the burial of Jesus.

The greatness of John 3:16 is evident for a number of reasons. For one, it is a wonderful summary of the biblical message encapsulated in just twenty-six words in our English

translation (the NIV) and twenty-five in the Greek text of the New Testament. It has been called the “gospel in a nutshell.” Its greatness is also due to the fact that it talks about three very important people: God; Jesus, the Son of God; and us, who are created in the image of God. What it teaches about God, Jesus, and us is extremely important. We know this because this teaching is repeated time and time again throughout the Bible. Let us look first of all as to what it says about us. What John 3:16 says about us is that

1. We are the Kind of People for Whom Jesus Christ Had to Die

There is much concern today that people should develop a good self-image of themselves. We emphasize that we should feel good about ourselves. After all, does not the Bible in its very first chapter say that we were created in the very image of God? “Shame” and “guilt” are feelings and thoughts that we are told to avoid, because they lead to low self-esteem. And there is some truth in this. Self-hatred, despising oneself, can lead to all sorts of personal and social problems. Yet we must remember the first chapter of Genesis, which speaks of us being created in the image of God, is followed by chapters two and three which speak of sin and murder, and in the past pastors and theologians spoke more frequently about human depravity, the fall, all humans having sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Within our great text we learn an important truth about ourselves that is repeated throughout the Bible. Elsewhere Jesus says in:

Mark 2:17, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Luke 19:10, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”

And in our text we read that the Son came in order that we “shall not perish”! The dreadful state in which we find ourselves, however, is not merely something that will take place in the future. Already now we stand condemned before God. Look what John writes in the two verses following our text:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

C. S. Lewis, the great British spokesman for the Christian faith during the middle of the twentieth century, has rightly said,

[Christianity] . . . has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness. (*Mere Christianity*, Book I, Chapter 5)

Christianity is for sinners. The Christian faith is, however, for all people, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

“There is no one righteous, not even one.” (Rom 3:10)

Does this Christian teaching lead to a negative self-image? It does if our self-image is based on a false idea of our being basically good and ignoring or even denying our sin and guilt. The fact is our text tells us that **We are the Kind of People for Whom Jesus Christ Had to Die**. We are the kind of people Jesus tells Nicodemus in verses 3 and 7 that need to be “born again.” A realistic, Christian self-image should not be based on a false impression of our own goodness but on the fact that, despite our being sinners, we are loved by God. John 3:16 allows us to have a realistic and positive self-image. This is not based on an untruth of our own, supposed good character, which is all too often far from praise-worthy, but it is based rather on the great truth found in our text. It is the truth that God loves us. It is God’s undeniable love for us that provides us with a true sense of worth. This, however, is not so much a self-worth but more importantly a “God-worth” that is based on the fact that God loves us.

The second important truth that our text teaches us is about God. It tells us that God loves the world.

2. God Loves the World

People like to talk about “God’s love.” It is a popular theme, and no one will get into trouble preaching about God’s love for the world. For many people, however, the content or way in which God loves the world has little to do with how the Bible says God loves the world. Society tends to think of God’s love as some undefined, non-condemning, sentimental feeling of good will by God that permeates the air we breathe. In our text God’s love is described rather specifically. God loves the world “so.” Whereas many tend to interpret “so” as an adverb meaning “so much,” (God loves the world so very much that he gave His only Son), “so” actually refers not to the “extent” or “how much” of God’s love but the “manner” or “the way” he manifested his love. It is not an adverb describing the degree that God loves us but as a comparative particle or conjunction introducing an adverbial clause. In other words “so” describes not the “amount” of God’s love but “the way” in which God’s love us.

The word “so” (*houtōs*) is used fourteen times in the Gospel of John and never refers to the degree, amount, or “how much,” but describes rather “the manner in which” something is done. It is used twice more in John, chapter three. In 3:8 “so” describes that just as one cannot see the wind but only hear its sound, “so” in a similar manner one does not see the Spirit entering into the life of a believer but only the resultant, changed life brought about by the Spirit. In 3:14 “so” describes that just as Moses during the Exodus lifted up an image

of a serpent for people to see and believe and thus be healed from their snake-bite, “so” in like manner the Son of Man would be lifted up on a cross and people who would believe in his would be saved from the condemnation of sin. In John 3:16 “so” describes “how” or the way in which God loved the world. He loved the world in this manner, “He gave his only Son.” When the New Testament talks about the love of God, it does not refer to some ambiguous and vague atmosphere of divine love pervading and permeating the world. On the contrary, it refers to a specific love revealed in the greatest act of love the world has ever known. Listen to how this love is described elsewhere:

Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 John 4:9, “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.”

1 John 4:10, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 John 3:16, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us”

John 3:16, “For God loved the world so, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The New Testament knows nothing about God’s love for the world that is not in some way connected to his sending his Son to die for our sins.

On our first sabbatical Joan, our children, and I spent the year in Heidelberg, Germany. Our two oldest children, Julie and Keith, attended fifth and six grades at Bunsen Gymnasium, named after the inventor of the Bunsen burner. Steve attended first grade at the Grundschule in the village of Schlierbach. During the week I would go to the theological library of the university to study and write. During lunch I would often walk around the old city of Heidelberg. One day, while in downtown Heidelberg, I visited one of the old churches. Often there is a cemetery next to these churches, and on this particular day I walked in one of the cemeteries and looked at the various gravestones and their inscriptions. As I did so, I came across one gravestone that not only mentioned the name and dates of the person buried there, but it had a Bible verse inscribed on the tombstone. It was our text, John 3:16. I was very upset, however, because someone had desecrated the tombstone with bright, red paint. This made me quite angry, but my anger quickly turned to sadness as I read what the person had written on the tombstone. The person had painted on the tombstone the words *Mich liebt kein Gott*, which means: “No God loves me!” I became sad and wanted to tell him, “Friend, look up. Look up! Look at the top of the church steeple. Do you see the cross? God loves you. God has proven his love for you. Christ died for you.” Our text tells us that God loves us. He loves the whole world. The term “world” does not include just part of the world but the whole world. And it involves you and me here this morning. God

loves the world and does not want any to perish but that all should come to repentance and believe in his Son (2 Peter 3:9).

Friends, every time you see a cross from this day forward, whether on a church steeple, on a necklace, in a painting, or whatever, if you do not remember anything else I say this morning, remember this: The cross of Jesus Christ is proof that God loves you! It is God's confirmation of this wonderful truth!

The third and final point that we need to look at in John 3:16 involves what it says about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Our text tells us that

3. Jesus Christ, God's Son, Died for Us

God gave his one and only Son for us. This brief summary does not tell us how the death of Jesus Christ is able to keep us from perishing and give to us eternal life, but this is made clear in the rest of Scripture. Listen to how the New Testament explains this:

2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Theologians can explain this much better than I, but I love the way that the old hymn writer put it,

In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood, Hallelujah what a Savior!

Conclusion

Well I haven't shared with you this morning something new that you have never heard before. There has been no unique insight into something hidden for two thousand years. But if this were the last sermon I would ever preach, I wanted to share with you "the old, old story of Jesus and his love." I wanted to share with you the glorious gospel that has once and for all time been delivered to the world. Our text is very well-known, but please don't let its familiarity blind you to the wonder of its message. Well-known texts of the Bible are usually well-known because they contain great and important biblical truths. Our text tells

us first of all about our awful and desperate situation.

(1) We are the kind of people for whom only the death of the Son of God could bring forgiveness and eternal life. It tells us secondly that God loves the whole world and that

(2) God has demonstrated once and for all time that He loves us in this manner: He sent his Son to die on our behalf. The cross has forever proven God's love for us! And thirdly our text tells us that

(3) Jesus, God's Son, by his death on the cross offers eternal life for all who believe and trust in him.

Our text reads,

For God loved the world so, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Preaching the New Testament Letters



David L. Allen, PhD

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I have always been an advocate for expository preaching. In more recent years, this term has been used with such elasticity that sometimes preaching marches under this banner that is not really expositional in nature. What's worse, instead of expounding the text, some preachers skirmish cleverly on its outskirts. Instead of preaching prophetic truth, they are pirouetting on trifles. Without a text to ground the sermon, the preacher becomes something of a magician who, with conjuring adroitness week after week, keeps producing fat rabbit after fat rabbit out of an obviously empty hat.

For more than twenty years now I have been using the term “text-driven preaching” to describe what I think expository preaching should be. In text-driven preaching, sermons should be not only based upon a text of Scripture, but should actually expound the meaning of that text. The biblical text is not merely a *resource* for the sermon; it is the *source* of the sermon. A sermon not only *uses* a text of Scripture, but should be *derived* from a text of Scripture, and should *develop* a text of Scripture. We are not just preaching sermons; we are preaching texts.

Basically, text-driven preaching attempts to stay true to the substance, the structure, and the spirit of the text.¹ The “substance” of the text is what the text is about (theme) and what is it saying about it. Homileticians sometimes speak of this as the “subject and compliment” or “topic and assertion.”

The “structure” of the text concerns the way in which the author develops the theme via syntax and semantics. A text has not only syntactical structure but also semantic structure, and the latter is what the preacher should be attempting to identify and represent in the sermon. The “spirit” of the text concerns the author-intended “feel” or “emotive tone” of the text which is influenced by the specific textual genre, such as narrative, expository, hortatory, poetic, etc.²

¹See Steven W. Smith, *Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons Like Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), who first used these descriptors several years ago.

²Ibid.

While I was a pastor of two churches for twenty-one years, I preached through books of the Bible, including many of the New Testament letters. I believe the best way to approach preaching the letters is to divide the letter up according to its paragraph structure from the Greek text. This can be accomplished with the assistance of a Greek New Testament and exegetical commentaries. A good English translation that is paragraphed can be of assistance for those who have never studied Greek. Sermons on the letters of the New Testament would take a minimum paragraph unit of text and develop that text via explanation, illustration, and application.

What is the role of the text in preaching? The word “text” comes from a Latin word meaning “to weave,” and refers to the product of weaving, hence “composition.” The word is used figuratively to express structured meaning in speech or writing. Stenger provided a good definition of “text: “a cohesive and structured expression of language that, while at least relatively self contained, intends a specific effect.”³ Textual structure is a network of relations and the sum of those relations between the elements of the text.⁴ If we are to preach the letters of the New Testament well, we must pay careful attention to textual structure and meaning relationships within texts.⁵

Throughout my years as a pastor and professor of preaching, the letters of the New Testament have been my favorite texts to preach. The health of every church depends on the message of each of these letters being carefully and clearly presented to the people of God. Discipleship, spiritual maturity, in fact, all growth in Christ, is dependent upon knowledge of and obedience to God’s word as expressed in the preaching of the New Testament epistles.

The letters of the New Testament include Romans through Jude and are divided into two Major sections: the Pauline Epistles (Romans–Philemon) and the General Epistles (Hebrews–Jude).

³Werner Stenger, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 23.

⁴*Ibid.*, 23–24. From a semantic standpoint, there is a finite set of communication relations that exists for all languages which functions as something of a “natural metaphysics of the human mind” (see Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, Topics in Language and Linguistics (New York: Plenum, 1983), xix. These relations are catalogued, explained and illustrated by Longacre and in a more “pastor friendly” way by J. Beekman, J. Callow and M. Kopesec, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981), 77–113.

⁵Helpful works on the structure of the letters of the New Testament and their exegesis include the following: Tom Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Herb Bateman, *Interpreting the General Letters* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013); Richard Erickson, *A Beginner’s Guide to New Testament Exegesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); and Darrell Bock & Buist Fanning, *Interpreting the New Testament Text* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).

To preach these letters well, knowledge of their discourse genre⁶ is important. The linguist Robert Longacre identified four basic discourse genres which are language universal: narrative, procedural, hortatory and expository.⁷ All four of these genres, along with sub-genres, occur in Scripture. Significant portions of the Old Testament are narrative. The Gospels and Acts are primarily narrative in genre. Procedural discourse can be found in Exodus 25–40 where God gives explicit instructions on how to build the tabernacle. Hortatory genre is found in the prophetic sections of the Old Testament as well as in the epistolary literature of the New Testament, though it is by no means confined to these alone in the Scriptures. Expository genre is clearly seen in the New Testament letters.

All the letters of the New Testament fall under the genre of expository and hortatory discourse. They are explanatory of doctrine and call for action via exhortation. In every New Testament letter, there are several exhortations expressed by the authors ranging from direct imperatives and/or hortatory subjunctives, to more mitigated forms of command such as “should” or “ought.” Sometimes the structure of the body of these letters is bipartite with respect to doctrine and application. Ephesians is an example, where Ephesians 1–3 constitutes doctrine (not a single imperative occurs), and Ephesians 4–6 constitutes practical application via many exhortations. Sometimes the exhortation is interwoven throughout the letter in alternating fashion as in Hebrews. Hebrews 1 is expositional in nature, followed by Hebrews 2:1–4 which is hortatory. Hebrews 2:5–18 is expository, followed by more exposition in Hebrews 3:1–6. This is in turn followed by exhortation in Hebrews 3:7–19, and so on.

To preach these letters well, a knowledge of the general structure of a letter in the first century is important. With the exception of Hebrews, all the New Testament letters follow a tripartite structure: 1) formal opening, 2) body, 3) conclusion. The opening usually includes the name of the author, the location of the recipient(s), greeting, and/or a prayer/benediction. Letters are written to specific congregations or individuals and the circumstances surrounding the addresses cannot always be known.

The body of a New Testament letter includes doctrine and application. Exhortations are common and may be interspersed throughout or primarily located in the latter portion of the letter. Sometimes formal features such as diatribe and hymnic/confessional statements occur. The former is found in Romans 3:1 and 6:1; the latter in Philippians 2:6–11; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Timothy 3:16.

⁶See David Allen, “Fundamentals of Genre: How Literary Form Affects the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Craig Larsen and Haddon Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 264–67.

⁷Longacre, *Grammar of Discourse*, 3. See also Beekman, Callow and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 35–40.

The conclusion is usually brief and may include one or more of the following: author's personal situation or travel plans, prayer, commendation of fellow workers, prayer requests, greetings, final instructions/exhortations, or a "grace" benediction.

The following chart illustrates this tripartite division for each of the General Epistles.

The General Letters – Hebrews-Jude

<u>General Epistle</u>	<u>Letter's Opening</u>	<u>Letter's Body</u>	<u>Letter's Conclusion</u>
<u>Hebrews</u>	1:1-4	1:5-13:21	13:22-25
<u>James</u>	1:1	1:2-5:20	None
<u>1 Peter</u>	1:1-2	1:3-5:11	5:12-14
<u>2 Peter</u>	1:1-2	1:3-3:6	3:17-18 (Doxology)
<u>1 John</u>	1:1-4	1:5-5:20	5:21
<u>2 John</u>	1-3	4-11	12-13
<u>3 John</u>	1-2	3-12	13-15
<u>Jude</u>	1-2	3-23	24-25 (Doxology)

Preachers should take note that there are four basic types of meaning conveyed in every text and context: referential, situational, structural, and semantic. Referential meaning is that which is being talked about; the subject matter of a text. Situational meaning is information pertaining to the participants in a communication act; matters of environment, social status, etc. Structural meaning has to do with the arrangement of the information of the text via grammar and syntax of a text. Semantics has to do with the structure of meaning

and is in some sense the confluence of referential, situational and structural meaning.⁸

Most of us are trained to observe structural meaning; we are intuitively aware of referential meaning and situational meaning, but we often fail to observe the semantic structure of a text. In preaching the New Testament letters, the preacher will want to analyze carefully each one of these aspects of meaning for a given text.⁹

The painstaking work of exegesis is the foundation for preaching the letters of the New Testament. I operate from the fundamental maxim that exegesis precedes theology and theology is derived from careful exegesis. Sermon preparation involves exegesis and preaching involves exposition. The noun “exegesis” means “to lead out the meaning.” Exegesis is a procedure for text analysis. “Exposition” means “to explain the meaning.” Expository preaching is laying open a text in such a way that its original meaning is brought to bear on the lives of contemporary listeners. Preaching is translating the meaning of the text into the language of the people.

Thus, to preach well, it is vital to understand certain basics about the nature of language and meaning. Enter linguistics.

Textual meaning is structured beyond the sentence level. When the preacher restricts the focus to the sentence level and to clauses and phrases in verses, there is much that is missed in the paragraph or larger discourse that contributes to the overall meaning and interpretation of the text. The paragraph unit is best used as the basic unit of meaning in expounding the text of Scripture. Text-driven preaching should at minimum deal with a paragraph (as in the epistles), while in the narrative portions of Scripture, several paragraphs which combine to form the story (pericope) should be treated in a single sermon since the meaning and purpose of the story itself cannot be discerned when it is broken up and presented piecemeal.

⁸See Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 8–13.

⁹John 1:1 furnishes an example of the importance of lexical meaning at the semantic level. Notice the threefold use of *eimi*, “was,” in this verse. Here a single verb in its three occurrences actually conveys three different meanings: (1) “In the beginning *was* the Word” (where *eimi*, “was,” means “to exist”); (2) “and the Word *was* with God” (where *eimi* followed by the preposition “with” conveys the meaning “to be in a place”); (3) “and the Word *was* God” (where *eimi* conveys the meaning “membership in a class: Godhood”). See J. Waard and E. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 72. Notice also in John 1:1 that *logos*, “word,” occurs in the predicate position in the first clause but is in the subject position in the second clause. In the third clause there is again a reversal of the order creating a chiasmus: *theos*, “God,” is placed before the verb creating emphasis on the deity of the “Word.” (Ibid.) Lexical meaning is not only inherent in words themselves, but is determined by their relationship to other words in context. A knowledge of a text’s situational meaning is vital for the preacher because meaning does not simply reside in the words of a text themselves and their structural relations, but in the total context in which an author uses them.

Text-driven preachers must strive to examine not only the form but also the meaning of all levels of a text with the goal of understanding the whole.¹⁰ Text-driven preaching looks beyond words and sentences to the whole text (paragraph level and beyond). Every biblical text is an aggregate of relations between the four elements of meaning which it conveys: structural, referential, situational, and semantic. The superior value to this approach to textual analysis in preparation for preaching is that it allows one to see the communication relations within a text in their full extent. Restricting exegesis to a verse by verse process alone often results in the details of the text violating the overall message. It becomes hard to see the forest for the trees. Here the chapter and versification of the Bible can hinder as much as help.

Language units of meaning cluster together to form other units of meaning.¹¹ Language makes use of the concept of “embedding,” where a clause can embed several phrases or another clause and a sentence may embed with it several clauses or sentences. In 1 John 1:5, the dependent clause “that God is light and in him is no darkness at all” embeds two sentences: “God is light,” and “In him is no darkness at all.” The second sentence is connected to the first sentence with the coordinating conjunction “and,” but semantically, the actual meaning conveyed could be construed in a cause-effect fashion: “because God is light there is no darkness in him at all.” Finally, notice that this clause (introduced by the Greek conjunction *hoti*, “that”) serves to identify the content of the message which the apostles declared: “God is light” All of these facts are important in preaching this text.

Languages make use of content words and function words. Content words are such parts of speech as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Function words are articles, prepositions and conjunctions. Content words derive their basic meaning from the lexicon of the language. Function words derive their functional meaning from the grammar and syntax of the language. Of course lexicon, grammar, and syntax combine to give content words and function words their meaning in a given text. It is especially important in preaching the New Testament letters to pay close attention to the function words in a text. For example, the Greek conjunction *gar* always introduces a sentence or a paragraph that

¹⁰B. Olsson, “A Decade of Text-linguistic Analyses of Biblical Texts at Upsalla,” *Studia Theologica* 39 (1985): 107, underlined the vital importance of discourse analysis for exegesis when he noted: “A text-linguistic analysis is a basic component of all exegesis. A main task, or the main task of all Biblical scholarship has always been to interpret individual texts or passages of the Bible. . . . To the *words* and to the *sentences* a textual exegesis now adds *texts*. The text is seen as the primary object of inquiry. To handle texts is as basic for our discipline as to handle words and sentences. Therefore, text-linguistic analyses belong to the fundamental part of Biblical scholarship.” See also the excellent chapter by G. Guthrie, “Discourse Analysis,” in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. D. Black and D. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 253–71.

¹¹See the discussion of this verse in Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec, *Semantic Structure*, 18. See also J. Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 365.

is subordinate to the one preceding it,¹² and usually signals that what follows will give the grounds or reason for that which precedes. This is immensely important in exegesis and sermon preparation.

Languages employ a verbal structure. Verbs are the load-bearing walls of language. Understanding their function within the text is vital to identifying the correct meaning which the author wants to convey. Hence, I recommend the discipline of “verb charting” during the exegesis phase of sermon preparation. In Greek, for example, so much information is encoded in the verb (tense, voice, mood, person and number + lexical meaning). Identifying the main clauses and subordinate clauses in a text is crucial for identifying the semantic focus of the author.¹³

Another important aspect of textual analysis for the preacher is called “pragmatic analysis.” Pragmatic analysis asks the questions “What is the author’s purpose of a text?” and “What does an author desire to accomplish with his text.”¹⁴ The text-driven preacher is always attempting to accomplish something with every sermon. All verbal or written communication has at least one of three purposes: (1) affect the ideas of people, (2) affect the emotions of people, and (3) affect the behavior of people. Preaching, like all verbal or written communication, should have all three of these purposes. We should be attempting to affect the mind with the truth of scripture (doctrine). We should be attempting to affect the emotions of people because emotions are often (some would say always) the gateway to the mind. Finally, we should be attempting to affect the behavior of people by moving their will to obey the Word of God.

With these principles in mind, what are the steps to take in preaching a New Testament letter? I would suggest the following twelve-step method of sermon preparation:

1. Pray! Preaching is a spiritual event. It cannot be accomplished apart from our dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Prayer should undergird the process from start to finish.

¹²Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, *The Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 834.

¹³If a New Testament text has a string of verbs in the aorist tense and then suddenly a perfect verb pops up, there usually is significance to this tense shift. See, for example, Romans 6:1–5 where this very point is illustrated by the use of the perfect tense “have been united” in v. 5. In the Abraham and Isaac narrative of Genesis 22, at the climax of the story, there is a sudden onslaught of verbs placed one after another in staccato fashion in the Hebrew text in Genesis 22:9–10. This has the effect of heightening the emotional tone of the story and causes the reader/listener to sit on the edge of their seat as it were, waiting to find out what happens. In the exegetical process, one should pay close attention to verbals as well (participles and infinitives), as these often play crucial modification roles.

¹⁴A. Kuruvilla has reminded us of the importance of this aspect of text analysis for preaching in his *Privilege the Text!: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013).

2. Read the text several times in English. This will allow you to get a “feel” for the text. The great preacher G. Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel fame used to read through a book of the Bible fifty times before he would write sermons from it.
3. Do translation work from the Greek text. Of course, not everyone has the training and tools to work in the Greek text, but even if you don’t, utilize the tools that are available to assist in this area.
4. Before you begin the nitty-gritty detailed exegesis of your text, take the time to make notes about what you observe in the text. Remember Rudyard Kipling’s faithful friends: “I have six faithful friends who have taught me all I know. Their names are what and where and when and how and why and who.” Jot down notes of what you see in your text.
5. Investigate the background of the book of the bible and your text. Before preaching through one of the letters of the New Testament, the wise preacher will want to study the provenance and background of it. This includes issues of authorship, date, recipients, theme, purpose, and outline. This information can be found in works devoted to these introductory matters or at the beginning of commentaries.
6. Interpret the text using sound principles of hermeneutics and exegesis. Begin at the paragraph level, then move to the sentence & clause level. There are several steps to take at this point. First, determine the paragraph boundaries in the letter. For example, if you were preaching a series of sermons through Hebrews, here is the paragraph structure of the book from the Greek text:

1:1-4
1:5-14
2:1-4
2:5-18
 2:5-9
 2:10-18
3:1-6
3:7-19
4:1-11
4:12-13
5:1-10
5:11-14
6:1-8
6:9-12
6:13-20
7:1-28
8:1-6

8:7-13
9:1-15
9:16-28
10:1-18
10:19-25
10:26-39
11:1-40
 11:1-3
 11:4-16
 11:17-40
12:1-3
12:4-11
12:12-17
12:18-29
13:1-6
13:7-17
13:18-25

Once paragraph boundaries are determined, identify the discourse genre of the paragraph. As noted above, there four basic discourse genre: narrative, procedural, hortatory, and expository. Virtually all the paragraphs of any of the letters of the New Testament will be either expository or hortatory.

Third, identify the sentences in the paragraph of the Greek text. Then identify the independent clauses and the subordinate clauses. Determine the relationships of the subordinate clauses to the independent clauses. Fourth, identify all the verbs and verbals (participles & infinitives) in your text. Parse all verbs, noting especially their tense, voice, and mood.

Fourth, identify how the sentences (if more than one in your text) relate to one another. Which convey primary information and which convey secondary information? Keep in mind that any sentence or clause beginning with the conjunction *gar* “for” in Greek is introducing a clause or sentence that is subordinate to the preceding clause or sentence. If your text contains more than one paragraph, determine how the paragraphs are related to one another. Is the paragraph introduced by a conjunction? This will help you to determine the semantic relationship of the paragraphs to one another as well.

Fifth, many pastors find it helpful to diagram the passage using either a syntactical or block diagram.

Sixth, having identified the sentences and clauses and their relationships, move to the phrase level in the exegetical process. Identify phrases in the paragraph, especially

prepositional phrases. Determine the syntax and proper translation of the phrases. Pay careful attention to the genitive phrases in Greek as they can sometimes be interpreted in different ways. This is especially important with the objective and subjective genitives. For example, a phrase like “the love of God” can mean “God’s love for us” or “our love for God.” Context is the key to making such determinations.

Seventh, having identified the sentences, clauses and phrases, move to the word level. Do word studies of significant words in the text. Also note things like lexical repetition, words in the same semantic domain, etc. It is important to have access to a good Greek lexicon for this step in the process.

Eighth, do comparative translation work on your passage. Compare at least three or four different translations. This will allow you to check your own analysis and translation to this point and give you helpful ideas of how to express things in your sermon.

Ninth, consult at least three commentaries for further study and analysis. Commentaries generally fall in three categories: exegetical, expository, and devotional. Each provide helpful information in sermon preparation. Exegetical and Expository commentaries focus on textual meaning, whereas devotional commentaries focus more on application.

7. Determine the Central Idea of the Text (CIT). This step allows you to ask and answer two crucial questions of the text: What is the author talking about? What is he saying about what he is talking about? Unless you can answer those two questions, you cannot write a sermon that will help your people answer them.

8. Develop the sermon outline from the outline of the text. The essence of text-driven preaching is to allow the structure of the text to inform the structure of the sermon. If the text has one main point and three sub-points, the sermon should have one main point and three sub-points. A sermon should have as many points as the text has and these should be expressed in terms of main points and more subordinate points as the text expresses this information.¹⁵

¹⁵John Broadus offers sage advice in his *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Sons, 1894), 309–10: “One difficulty is the proper handling of the details in a text. If we simply take the topic and the heads (points) which the passage affords and proceed to discuss them in our own way, that is not an expository sermon. . . . An expository sermon is one where the leading ideas and its details are suitably explained and made to furnish the chief material of the discourse. In order to manage this, we need to study the details thoroughly, so as to master them, instead of being oppressed by them. . . . Then we must select and group. Here the inexperienced preacher often errs. Having minutely studied the details of the passage, he desires to remark upon a greater number of points than the limits of his discourse will allow. Thus it becomes so crowded that the hearer follows with annoying difficulty, and none of the numerous points presented have time to impress themselves upon his mind.”

9. Write out the sermon body (exposition, illustration, application). Now that you have completed the exegetical work, you are ready to put it all together in the sermon. Here is where all the creative juices should flow. If you write out a sermon manuscript, be sure to write it as you would preach it.

10. Write out the conclusion. The purpose of a conclusion is not just to stop the sermon; it is to conclude. Good conclusions answer the questions: So what? What difference does this make? Am I willing to let God make the difference in my life? In a series of brief, crisp, telling sentences you are bringing the whole thrust of your message to bear upon the people. Like a lawyer, the preacher asks for a verdict.

Keep several principles in mind when writing your conclusion.

- 1) The conclusion should reflect the main points of the text.
- 2) The conclusion should be fitting to the sermon.
- 3) The conclusion should be clear and brief. Don't circle the airport several times before landing!
- 4) Don't underestimate the element of surprise!
- 5) Make personal application. Use the second person personal pronoun "you." Appeal to individuals for a definite response

There are many types of conclusions. A conclusion may:

- 1) Summarize the gist of the text.
- 2) Apply each main point summarized.
- 3) Utilize one or more of the basic human appeals: love, fear, duty, reason, etc.
- 4) Utilize contrast. For example, if main thrust of the message was negative, conclude with positive thrust.
- 5) List and meet anticipated objections.

However you choose to conclude your message, be sure to include a definite invitation for the unsaved to come to Christ.

11. Write out the introduction.

The introduction, like the conclusion, has several purposes. A good introduction should accomplish four objectives:

- 1) Capture Attention.
 - 2) Gain Interest.
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- 3) Declare Intent.
 - 4) Bridge to the body of the Sermon.

The length of the introduction should be short. I would recommend no more than two to three minutes. Every sentence in the introduction should be carefully crafted and should connect the “then” of the biblical text to the “now” of contemporary life. The listener should be able to answer the question “What does this text have to do with me?”

12. Get the sermon in your mind and heart. Practice the introduction and key transitions. Rehearse it in your mind several times. I recommend rehearsing some of the key sections orally.

Wanted: Dead and Alive! Romans 6:1–14



David L. Allen, PhD

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Romans 6:1–14 comprises two paragraphs in the Greek text, but because they are so linked semantically, they should be taken together in preaching. Romans 6:1–11 is paragraph one. In verses 1–10, Paul presents three grounds or reasons for the imperative in verse 11. Romans 6:12–14 is the second paragraph and serves to exhort the readers to action on the grounds of what is stated in verses 1–11. I have attempted to reflect this structure in the sermon.

They called him the Mad Monk of Russia. He was the religious and political confidant of Empress Alexandra of the Romanov family at the turn of the last century. He justified his profligate lifestyle by teaching the more we sin, the more God's grace is magnified. If sin led to an increase of grace, then we should increase our sin to give God a chance to increase His grace.

Therefore, Rasputin concluded: It is every Christian's duty . . . to sin! No wonder he was called the Mad Monk of Russia!

Well, Mr. Mad Monk, meet the Apostle Paul, who responds to such an egregious slur upon grace by thundering forth, "Let it never be!" Now, I doubt there are any Rasputins reading this right now. You who know that you are free from the penalty of sin; and yet you struggle with the power of sin in your daily life. That sin that you dread has won victory in your life again. You have committed it; confessed it; and committed it again. You have prayed about it; you have fasted over it; you have begged God to help you overcome it. You have done everything under the sun you know to do, and yet to your chagrin that sin still wins victory in your life.

There is only one solution; a funeral. You need to attend a funeral with me today. Whose funeral? Why, it is your funeral! Romans 6 is your obituary. Paul says you have died to sin. Remember the wanted posters in some western movies? "Wanted: Dead or Alive!" God wants you dead . . . and alive! Dead to sin and alive to God through Christ!

Paul begins verse 1 with a question—a rhetorical question. “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?” Now, why on earth would Paul ask such a question? If you think it about it, it is a logical question. Look back at the last two verses in Romans 5: “And the Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life.”

When Paul’s Roman audience heard that, he could imagine one of his hearers/readers in gasping, “Paul, don’t you know if you do away with the Law . . . if the Law cannot quell sin, how in the world do you think grace will do it? Why, if you tell people they are under grace, it will be ‘Katy, bar the door!’ They will just live any old way they want to!” It is a logical question given what Paul says in chapter 5.

It is also a natural question. It is a natural question because even people who are Christians know that sin is fun. Everybody knows that sin is fun! Now don’t sit there like you are so super-spiritual! If you could escape the penalty for sin, and still enjoy the act of sin, are you interested? My flesh is—and so is yours!

Verse 1 is a logical question, and it is a natural question. Paul answers the question in verse 2: “Let it never be!” I like the way the New English Bible puts that, “No, no!” Or if you want the John Wayne version, “Not hardly!” Paul’s expression is the strongest form of negation possible in Greek grammar.

Then he continues in verse 2, “How shall we who died to sin . . .,” stop right there. Mark those three words: “died to sin.” How shall we who died to sin still live in it? What does it mean to say “I have died to sin?” Did you notice it says “sin” singular, and not “sins” plural? If you walk through these verses, you will discover that the word “sin” occurs ten times, but it never occurs in the plural. When Paul talks about sin, his focus is not so much individual sins such as lying, gossip, or lust. He is rather personifying sin as an authority over your life. What Paul intends to convey is this: “How shall we who have died to sin’s authority still live in it?”

What does that phrase, ‘died to sin,’ mean? I have found sometimes it is helpful to understand what something does mean by clarifying what it does not mean. There are at least two things that this phrase does not mean. It does not mean I have reached a place of sinless perfection in my life. Have you ever met a Christian who says, “Yeah, I was saved twenty-five years ago, and I have come to the place where I don’t sin anymore. I haven’t sinned in over five years. I’ve reached sinless perfection.” I have actually had one or two people tell me something like that. When you meet someone saying that, you just mark it down in your book that you are dealing with a nut burger. You are dealing with someone who is about a dozen fries short of a Happy Meal. Sinless perfectionism is not taught in the Scripture—not in this life. There will come a time at glorification when that is true. But the

fact is we are still capable of sinning; and we remain in that condition as Christians until the Lord takes us to heaven.

To be “dead to sin” also does not mean that you are somehow now unresponsive to sin. I’ve heard preaching all of my life on these verses. I’ve heard preachers say we are like a corpse, a cadaver, and a corpse is unresponsive to all stimuli. You can walk over there and kick that corpse and it is unresponsive. Thus, we are unresponsive to sin.

Now, there are three problems with that. (1) It is contrary to experience. Anybody who is a Christian and has half their spiritual wits about them knows that you struggle with the reality of sin. (2) You have the problem of v.12 which commands us not to sin. If it were not possible to respond to sin, Paul would not have commanded us not to do so in verse 12! (3) Did you notice there are three times in Romans 6:1–11 where the phrase “dead to sin” occurs? It occurs in verse 2 and verse 11, both talking about believers. Now, watch it. It also occurs in verse 10, in reference to Jesus. A fundamental principle in hermeneutics is when you have a phrase that occurs more than once in the same context of Scripture, you do not interpret that phrase differently in that paragraph unless there are clear reasons to do so.

Look at verse 2; we died to sin. Look at verse 10; Christ died to sin. Now, if “died to sin” means that Jesus has become unresponsive to sin, that implies there was a time when Jesus was responsive to sin. And to say that is not only wrong, it is heresy!

Well, if it doesn’t mean that, Paul, what in the world does it mean? I hear Paul respond, “I’m glad you asked because in the next several verses, I am going to explain to you what that phrase means and why and how it is true that you are dead to sin.” As a matter of fact, Paul says, “I am going to do that so that when I arrive in verse 11, I am going to tell you to do something on the basis of the truth that you are dead to sin. Well, Paul, you’ve got my attention!

Paul’s answer to his rhetorical question is summarized in three truths taught in vv. 3–10; three truths that every Christian needs to “know.” Notice the use of the word “know” in verses 3, 6, and 9. All Christians are “dead to sin,” but some of us act as if we don’t know it!

It is like the situation with the headless turtle. Two Irishmen were walking along and they saw this turtle. Its head had been severed from its body. The head was lying there, but the turtle’s body continued to walk around. One Irishman said, “Look there. That turtle is dead.” The other said, “No it’s not, that turtle is alive!” They got into a heated debate. O’Brien was walking by, and they said, “O’Brien, come over here and settle an argument for us. O’Brien said he would be happy to do so. They said, “Look at this turtle. There’s his head lying here, but his body is walking around over there. I say that turtle is dead. He says that turtle is alive. What do you say?” O’Brien took one look at the headless turtle walking around and said, “Well, he’s dead, . . . but he doesn’t know it!” That is the way many Christians are. They are dead to sin’s authority, but they don’t know it.

The first thing we need to know is in verses 3-5. "I died to sin's authority through my union with Christ": "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism so that as Christ was raised from the dead so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become (notice all these past tense verbs in here: have died, have been buried, have been united, have become) united with Him in the likeness of His death, then we also have become united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection." Paul is saying this: "you died with Christ to sin's authority by virtue of being united to Christ in His death, His burial, and His resurrection."

This passage is not teaching about the doctrine of baptism, though Paul may be using baptism to illustrate his point. What happens in baptism? Baptism symbolizes not only the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. You say, "Well, now wait a minute. How can that be true? How can I die with Christ? How can I have been buried with Him? How can it be true that I was raised with Him? I wasn't there at the cross when Jesus died. I wasn't there when they laid Him in the tomb. I wasn't there when He rose again from the dead." No, you weren't there physically, but you were there representatively. You were there positionally in Christ. God treated you positionally there at the cross when Jesus died, at the tomb when He was buried, and three days later when He rose from the dead. Then you say: "When did that happen to me?" It happened historically at the cross, but experientially at your conversion. The moment you became a Christ, you were identified with Christ. Look at the word in verse 5: "I have become united." That is the perfect tense in Greek. My union with Jesus is settled now and for all eternity. I have been, I am now, and I always will be united with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Because this is true, This I can live the Christian life.

What is true of Jesus my representative is now true of me. All believers died with Christ. Your death certificate has two dates on it: the date Jesus died on the cross and the date you were saved from your sins. I am united with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection. Look into that grave where you were buried and see what God sees. The winding sheet of Adam's curse put off and folded up forever. Here the glad announcement concerning yourself: "He is not here; he is risen with Christ! See the linen clothes of imputed righteousness which you now wear by grace." As He is, so are we in this world!

Several years ago I went to Manila to preach and teach for a week. While there, the church assigned me a driver to shuttle me. Everywhere I went that driver would take me. At the time I was there, the President of the Philippines, Estrada, had been arrested for corruption and there had been a military coup. There were military guards and checkpoints everywhere—at the airport exit, at mall entrances, even at residential entrances. We pulled up to a checkpoint to exit the airport parking lot and a guard leaned into the window of our jeep, looked back at me, and said to the driver: "Americano?" The driver said, "He's with me." Immediately they opened the gate and off we went. We came down the road three

or four miles and came to another checkpoint. A guard leaned into the window and said: “Americano?” My driver said, “He’s with me.” They permitted us to pass. Later we came to a checkpoint where there were guards everywhere. One leaned into the window and the muzzle of his machine gun was only inches from my nose. “Americano?”, he said. At that point I blurted out: “I’m with him!”, pointing to the driver!

In a sense, That is what Paul is saying of you in terms of your union with Jesus. You are with Him! As a Christian, you are permanently identified with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. That is the first truth you must know in order to understand why it is you are dead to sin’s authority.

The second truth you need to know to consider yourself dead to sin’s authority is found in vv. 6–8: Your crucifixion, burial, and resurrection with Jesus puts your old sinful life out of business. “Knowing this, that my old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be done away with. So that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” There are two phrases that are critical: “old self “ and “body of sin.” That phrase “*old self*” is Pauline shorthand for who you were in Adam before you were saved. In Romans 5 I discover that Paul draws a contrast between Adam and Christ. Paul views all people before salvation as being “in Adam.” Adam is the representative head of the human race. When he sinned, all his offspring inherit a sin nature. What happens to our representative is true of all whom He represents! The same is true of those who are “in Christ.” Just as sin’s authority has been broken with respect to Jesus because of his death, so those who are in Christ have had the authority of sin broken in their lives.

Paul says that our old self “was crucified with Him.” Notice the tense of the verb is past. Paul is saying here in these verses that by virtue of your identification with Christ you were crucified with Christ. That old relationship of who you were in Adam has been broken and changed. Paul is not talking about a change in nature here. You still possess a sin nature even as a believer. A change certainly takes place at conversion, but Paul is not talking about a change in nature. He is talking about a change in relationship. There is a change in relationship to sin. Sin no longer has authority over me. What I was in Adam was crucified with Christ. Why? Paul answers: “in order that our body of sin might be done away with.” What does the phrase “body of sin” mean? The phrase is Pauline shorthand to refer to the fact that when you sin, you do so through your body. You sin with your eyes. You sin with your ears. You sin with your tongue. You sin with your hands. You sin with your body. The body is the theater whereby sin expresses itself. Paul says that this body of sin has been “rendered inoperative” so that we no longer have to be slaves to sin. Paul is not saying that you never sin. Rather, he is saying if you sin as a Christian, it is your choice. You don’t have to sin. But, when you do, it’s your choice. Do you see the difference between a person who is not a believer, and a person who is a believer? A person who is not a Christian has no choice but to sin. They are sinners by nature. They have no choice in the matter. They are not able not to sin as Augustine said. But a person who is a Christian is able not to sin as

Augustine said. If you sin, it is because you choose to. You don't have to sin because sin's authority has been broken.

Verse 7 says that those who have died to sin's authority are "freed from sin." Christians are not freed from the possibility of individual acts of sin, but we are freed from sin's authority. If you choose those acts of sin, it's a choice that you make. Paul is inveighing in these verses do not make that choice. Why? You are no longer under the authority of sin.

Paul continues in verse 8 that if we have died with Christ we believe we shall also live with Him. In the future, after the resurrection of all believers at the coming of the Lord, we will live with Him. Yet even now we live with him because his resurrection power informs our life now. This is resurrection victory over the power of sin in my life!

When I was in Manila I toured the island of Corregidor where two major battles during the Second World War were fought. I made the 53 minute journey by boat in Manila Bay to the little amoeba-shaped island three and one-half miles long and a half mile wide. Did you know that on that little island in 1942 there were no less than 45 cannon and mortars. One of the largest was Battery Hearn—a huge howitzer with a 12-inch bore that could belch a shell 15 miles in any direction. But as I gazed on it I realized it was absolutely powerless. Why? Just before the Japanese invaded that island in May 1942, the last order General Wainwright gave was that all of the firing mechanisms of all those big guns would be removed and sunk in the ocean so they could not be used by the Japanese when they arrived. There they stand today. Huge guns! But absolutely powerless. Couldn't shoot a BB two feet. You know why? Because they have been rendered inoperative. That is what has happened to the authority of sin in your life. The big guns of sin have been rendered inoperative. You don't have to live under sin's authority.

The third thing we must know to consider yourself dead to sin's authority is in verses 9-10: "Christ having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God." I am now freed from sin's authority. Sin has not authority over me anymore. I am not liberated from the presence of sin or the possibility of sin, but from the power of sin!

These are the three truths that we must understand in order to obey the command to consider ourselves dead to sin's authority. After General Wainwright surrendered the forces on Corregidor, he was captured by the Japanese to a Manchurian prison camp. He was the highest ranking American officer during the Second World War to be incarcerated in a prison camp, languishing there for three years. While he was there, his Japanese captors made fun of him and humiliated him. He was severely mistreated. When the war ended, an Army colonel surreptitiously came to the camp and informed the general that the war was over. The next morning the Japanese came into his room like they had in the past. They

didn't want to tell the general. They just began to mistreat him like they had done every day for three years. Suddenly, the old general sat up in his cot. "I'm in command now. These are my orders." So startled were they that they fled from the room, and one of them was heard to exclaim, "He's been told. He's been told. He's been told."

Do you see what Paul is saying to you today? You don't have to live under the authority of sin. The war is over. You've been told! You've been told! Now here is the point of vv. 3-10: because you are in union with Christ, his relationship to sin is now your relationship to sin. He died to sin's authority. What is the penalty of sin? Death. But he rose again, and he took you with him. He identified you with himself permanently in his death, burial, and resurrection. Sin's power has been broken in your life.

I. Consider Yourself to be Dead to Sin's Authority. (6:1-11)

On the basis of these three truths we come to Paul's main point in v. 11: "Consider yourself" (the word is *logidzōmai* in Greek). It refers to a numerical ledger or log. Notice the first three letters of the Greek word: "log." A pilot keeps a log, a numerical record, of miles flown. The word is also a banking term. Look at the ledger. Consider yourself—it's a fact; bank on it; go ahead and write your check on God's account; there's money in his bank to pay for it! You are dead to sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. Jesus' relation to sin is now your relation to sin. He voluntarily submitted to sin's penalty by dying on the cross in our place as our substitute. Three days later He arose from the dead, and He has identified us with Him permanently. His victory over sin is my victory over sin!

It would be a great tragedy for you as a Christian not to realize that the war has been ultimately won and sin has been dethroned. Sin is a defeated tyrant. You are now in Christ, the victor. Consider yourself dead to sin's authority in your life!

II. Consecrate Yourself to Serve in God's Army (vv. 12-14).

Paul comes to verses 12-14 and applies this truth that we are dead to sin's authority. After doctrine comes duty. "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God . . ." That word "*instruments*" is literally the word "weapons" in Greek. Paul is employing a military metaphor.

Did you know that my body is a weapon? Well, it is! My body is a weapon. You can't tell it by looking at me, but my body is a weapon. I'm dangerous...and so are you. Even though we are saved from the penalty of sin, as Christians we can choose to surrender our bodies to sin's power. When we sin, we are surrendering our body parts to the arsenal of the enemy! Why would you do that?

Some of you are saying you just can't get over your gossip. That internet pornography. You just can't quit. You just can't stop your lust. You are still losing the battle with some sin in your life. But remember what God says in verse 11: we are to consider ourselves to be dead to sin's authority in our life.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin;
He sets the prisoner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood avails for me.

Well did Charles Wesley write, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin." That's what Paul is saying. The power of sin can be broken in your life when you recognize that you are united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Therefore, don't present those eyes God has given you as an instrument for the enemy as you look upon pornography. That marvelous auditory system called an ear which you have; don't use that to listen to filth. That broadcasting system called a voice that God has given you; stop using it as a weapon in the arsenal of the enemy.

When the war ended in the Philippines, American pilots flying over those islands saw something very unusual. They would see little Filipino farms in the typical Filipino way of planting crops. Then occasionally out in the middle of the jungle, they would find a farm where the crops were arranged in pristine symmetry. They knew that was not the Filipino way of farming. That's the Japanese way of farming. They discovered that many of those young Japanese soldiers never went back to Japan when the war ended in 1945 because of their humiliation. They just faded into the jungles of those many islands of the Philippines and took up farming. And some of them are still there to this day.

Now imagine, you get on a plane. You fly to Manila. You get on another plane and fly to the remote island of Lubang. You take a jeep into the inner recesses of the jungle. You find one of those farms being farmed by an old Japanese soldier. You see him out there in the field. He's wearing his cap. He is old now—in his 80s. You walk over to him, tap him on the shoulder, and when he turns around, you throw up your arms and shout, "I surrender. Don't shoot. I surrender." That old decrepit Japanese former soldier shuffles over to his hut and reaches down with trembling hands into an old trunk and retrieves an old rusty rifle. With back bent and hands shaking, he turns and shuffles back to where you are. He points that rifle at you while you stand there with your hands up saying, "I surrender." That's what it would be like for you as a Christian to surrender the parts of your body as weapons to the arsenal of the enemy. Every time you sin, you surrender to a former tyrant, a defeated enemy, and you say, "Here are my eyes; I am going to use them for you. Here are my hands; I'm going to use them for you." "Here is my tongue, I'm going to use it for you!" Paul says such an egregious sin against the greatness of grace is unthinkable. Don't do it! It's spiritual treason!

Rather, consecrate yourself to serve in God's army. Paul says: "present yourselves to God." He says present yourselves first to God, then your body parts as weapons for righteousness.

Paul concludes with verse 14: "For sin shall not be master over you. You are not under Law, but under grace." Notice when Paul was talking about Jesus in v. 9 he said: "Death shall no longer have mastery over him" because He died to sin. Now in verse 14 Paul says: "Sin shall not be master over you." The law must be abandoned as our hope of justification. No one is justified by the Law. Now we discover that the Law must be abandoned as our hope of sanctification as well. Grace and law are opposites. Keeping the law is an attempt at holiness in order to achieve union with Christ. Grace is union with Christ in order to achieve holiness! Grace, in her regal robes, ascends the throne having defeated the usurper Sin and Satan. Sin's tyranny is shattered.

So next time you come to one of sin's checkpoints, and old sin comes knocking at your door, you and Jesus go to the door and when sin claims authority in your life, you just point to Jesus and say, "I'm with Him! I'm with Him! You have no authority in my life! I'm with Him!"

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his (and the last word in the text) grace!

Amen.

Greek Apocalyptic



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Apocalyptic Thought

Apocalyptic can be used to mean both an ideology and a style of writing. As a style of writing, such literature was popular all across the ancient Mediterranean world, so not particularly Jewish in origins. The genre was adopted and adapted, however, by Jewish writers from about 200 BC to AD 200. The popularity of this Jewish literature seems to parallel times of historical crises in Jewish life. Such moments would include the sacrilege of the Jewish temple by the Syrian ruler Antiochus IV Epihanes in 167 BC, addressed in Daniel 7–12, another temple episode related to the Roman general Pompey in 63 BC, disruption in the Zadokite line of Jewish high priests by Jewish Hasmonean rulers commencing with Simon in 142 BC, giving rise to the Qumran movement, the census revolt in Galilee led by Judas the Galilean in AD 6, first-century messianic pretenders such as Theudas (Acts 5:36), Caligula's edict to install an image of himself in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in AD 40, the abusive Roman procurators in Judea in the lead up to the First Jewish War of AD 66–70, whose catastrophic results gave rise to 2 Esdras and 2 Baruch, and the Simon bar Kochba messianic rebellion of the Second Jewish War of AD 133–35. Almost all of these crises involve the oppression of the Jewish people by Gentile kings and their kingdoms. In the face of this sometimes brutal oppression, with its accompanying sense of social, political, and religious powerlessness, the question of God's sovereignty for an oppressed Jewish population was inevitable and the desire for the reign of God's justice and righteousness inescapable.

Sources

In other cultures, source material for apocalyptic included Near Eastern mythology, especially from Babylon (Marduk fighting Tiamat, dragon of the primordial sea) and Persia (Zoroaster and the climatic final battle of forces of light and darkness). Such literature produced stock symbolism, such as the sea as a place of chaos, with which any ancient mariner would resonate after enduring a storm at sea (Dan 7:2–3; Rev 13:1), or the great final battle at the end of history.

Jewish adaptation of apocalyptic style seems to have developed out of the groundwork of the Jewish prophetic movement. Jewish prophets evoke a perspective that God was working in history. That is, prophecy is optimistic. Nathan denounced king David's adultery (2 Sam 12:1–14). Habakkuk anticipated an invasion of the Chaldeans (Hab 1:6). Jeremiah condemned the Jerusalem temple (Jer 7:4). Isaiah viewed the Persian king Cyrus as God's anointed (Isa 45:1). Jewish apocalypticists, in contrast, evoke a perspective that God would have to work in spite of history. That is, apocalyptic is pessimistic. This mindset assumed the world to be so evil God's only option was to break into history himself and disrupt the normal flow of events to bring about his will. Daniel sees a stone not cut with human hands (Dan 2:34). Zechariah sees the Lord God himself coming with his holy ones (Zech 14:5). Isaiah sees the Lord coming in fire and chariots like the whirlwind (Isa 66:15). We can note entire units of Scripture that are suffused with apocalyptic ambience of the inbreaking of God, such as Isa 24–27, Zech 9–14, and all of Zephaniah and Joel. In other words, already in the prophets we can begin to trace this nascent apocalyptic mindset of the inbreaking of God to disrupt historical processes that later matures into an entire genre of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

Eschatological

Eventually, this apocalyptic thought of God's inbreaking becomes eschatological. That is, the basic topic becomes the "end time" or the "last days." Since history inexorably (and infuriatingly for those trying to pull the eschatological trigger) kept marching on, God's final solution to human evil had to be displaced in apocalyptic thought to the end of history to function as a motivating expectation. So, the inbreaking awaits the end of the world to be revealed. Apocalypticism and apocalyptic movements *by definition*, then, assume (1) the end of the world and that (2) this end is imminent. Otherwise, no reason to write would exist. So, apocalyptic writers never actually "prove" the end of the world, despite the exorbitant fuss that they do. In truth, apocalyptic writers first *presume* the end of the world in their innate pessimism about the present world and simply seize upon anything and everything in politics, culture, or society as "signs" that the presumed end is imminent. Those deeply anxious about politics, culture, or society in their own world are ripe for this apocalyptic message. The time of God's decisive inbreaking is unknown but sure, the archangel Jeremial assures the apocalyptic visionary in 2 Esdras (2 Esd 4:36). World chaos, however, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and its people in AD 70—that is, the total collapse of the Jewish world in Judea—assuredly proves for this visionary of 2 Esdras that the end of the world undeniably has to be imminent. God breaks into the chaos, stops the presses, executes judgment, and consigns the wicked to punishment and vindicates the righteous with paradise, and we can all catch our breath with this hope after history has hit us hard in the solar plexus to knock the optimistic wind out of us.

Secret

Knowledge about all this end time drama is what is secret from the masses but disclosed (*apokalypsis*, unveiled, revealed) to the enlightened few through dreams, visions, and interpreting angels and preserved in literary form. The secret knowledge requires an “inside track” to unlock. Only the specially chosen, the truly elect, have this inside track. This inside track to knowing the signs of the times is illustrated at the Jewish settlement at Qumran. Their unique *peshirim* interpretation of the biblical prophets pointed to historical events of their own community as drawing history one more step closer to the dramatic denouement of the imminent end. So Qumran in its *War Scroll* makes ready to fight the imminent final battle, trusting God to intervene at the precipitous last moment. The inhabitants believed no one else in Judea had this special information as did Qumran. When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out in AD 66 and general Vespasian marched down from Galilee to Jerusalem, Qumran quickly concluded this war with Rome was the beginning of the end to which they had the inside track. Qumran inhabitants, therefore, faithfully went out to confront these Roman legions fully persuaded they were seeing the end of days and fully confident with their “inside track” knowledge they knew the glorious end of the story. They did see the end of days, just not the glorious end of the story expected in their apocalyptic drama.

Redeemer

The primal stories from Babylon and Persia and in Greco-Roman mythology often involved a redeemer figure. The Jewish plot for the apocalyptic drama of the inbreaking of God involved a redeemer figure as well. The profile for this Jewish figure typically drew from Davidic kingship traditions. Like David specially was anointed to his office and rule by God’s prophet (1 Sam 16:12), God’s future deliver in the end time would be a specially “anointed one” (hence, the term “Messiah”). So, Messiah for many was the active agent ushering in the end of days in Jewish apocalyptic (2 Bar 29:3; 39:7; 4 Ezra 7:28; 12:32).

But Messiah was not the only redeemer figure in Jewish apocalyptic thought. With a growing interest in angels, angelic hierarchy, and archangels in the time between the testaments, Jewish apocalyptic thought sometimes gave the redeemer role to an archangel. A premier candidate for this role was the archangel Michael. We see initial stages of this angelic redeemer role in the presence of the archangel Michael in the Daniel material (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1). In Jewish literature, Michael becomes a “general” or “chief captain” (2 *En.* 22:6; 33:10). He is specially privileged as one of only four allowed to stand before God (1 *En.* 9:1; 40:9). Michael functions as a mediator and intercessor (*Asc. Isa.* 9:23). Thus, he mediates between God and Moses at the giving of the law at Sinai as the “angel of the presence” (*Jub* 1:27; 2:1). Michael even gets a little of the limelight in the New Testament (Jude 9; Rev 12:7; cf. Acts 7:38).

Apocalyptic Language

The language of revealing this special knowledge of the end time drama regularly was visionary and symbolic. As visionary and symbolic, the message content often involved the story of a visionary and the visionary's interpreter who ushers the visionary into a deeper, truer perception of his context and his world. We briefly survey these principal characteristics.

Visionary

Practically, apocalyptic language *had* to involve *vision*, because the "information" in question was assumed unknown just by looking around with ordinary eyes. A shift in regard to visions is evident in moving from prophetic to apocalyptic writers. For the prophets, visions were occasional, sporadic, and incidental. Further, prophets leave the impression they actually experienced their visions in some auditory or visual form. In addition, prophets in their work never dealt exclusively with visions alone. For the apocalyptic writers, in contrast, visions were everything. They were foundational, normative, and a constant, if not exclusive, focus. In fact, visions appear so crucial to the genre that the impression left by apocalyptic writers is that their visions are as much literary devices to achieve a literary effect as actual experiences of the authors.

This impression of vision as a literary artifice of apocalyptic genre is reinforced by the prevalence of pseudonymity among apocalyptic works. Apocalypticists assigned their works falsely to a famous Old Testament figure who predated the actual time of the document. The renowned authority figure "validated" the "prophecy." Unsurprisingly, this Old Testament figure sees the future perfectly. Prophetic perfection, though, is only because the history that is "seen" by the patriarch is the history already known to the real author of the apocalypse. Predictably in this literary game of pseudonymity, the actual author always gives away his own context.¹

Symbolic

Functionally, the language *had* to involve *symbolism*, because the "information" in question was more about a controlling ideology than a concrete object. The controlling ideology may be God's sovereignty in conflict with kings and their kingdoms, but the message is communicated with ferocious beasts and their battles. The meaning of the symbolism, in other words, was no real mystery. The meaning was divined easily by the reader before turning the first page. The reason for this easy read of apocalyptic symbolism is that the historical context was well-known to the original audience: their own persecution

¹The moment the apocalyptic vision becomes vague and indeterminate, one has reached the time of the actual author. Whoops. Cat is out of the bag.

and oppression as God's people. So, whether king Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus IV, or a Roman emperor, the issue at hand quickly boils down to Gentile kings and their kingdoms oppressing the people of God, and *which* king and *what* kingdom was no secret to the original audience.

Zoomorphism

The favorite form to symbolize kings and their kingdoms was animals. Use of animals to symbolize human realities is called zoomorphism. Apocalyptic writing was highly zoomorphic, and no wonder. The ancient world already was highly zoomorphic. Even your basic run-of-the-mill political propaganda was zoomorphic. The most famous image of the king of Babylon preserved to this day in the British Museum is a weird concoction of the colossal body of a bull, gigantic wings of an eagle, and massive front claws of a lion, all surmounted with a human head clearly decked out as the king of Babylon. This imposing and intimidating composite "beast" stood at the main gate to the city of Babylon to warn all who entered therein that they were entering the domain of one whose armies could sweep down like a predatory eagle easily dispatching its prey, whose authority was as strong as a raging bull in the ring, whose ferocity was as an attacking lion who, with one quick slash of a front paw, in a moment could eviscerate an opponent into lifelessness. Message received. No one familiar with this zoomorphic game actually thought Nebuchadnezzar was a bull, or an eagle, or a lion. John likewise has his own zoomorphic political propaganda in his innovative composite beast in Rev 13 that functions as a subversive counter-rhetoric targeting imperial Rome. Message received.

Visionary and Interpreter

Correspondingly, as apocalyptic language tended to be visionary and symbolic, apocalyptic characters regularly involved a seer and a visionary guide. The seer has an experience accompanied by a vision he does not understand. Good luck for him, a visionary guide shows up at the propitious moment of confusion to lead the visionary into a deeper understanding of the meaning of his vision. The interpreter guide often is an angel. Since Judaism in the period between the testaments was absorbing more and more interest in angels and demonology, as evidenced in the book of Tobit in the Apocrypha, then the apocalyptic genre that developed in the same period also reflects such interests. So, the common interpreter of Jewish apocalyptic visions became angels.

Apocalyptic Literature

Examples

The premier examples of Jewish apocalyptic literature would be *1 Enoch*, *2 Esdras*, and *2 Baruch*. A new resource that has redrawn the map for understanding the importance

of apocalyptic thought within its Jewish context is Qumran. The Qumran community in particular prized apocalyptic writings. For example, multiple fragments of *Jubilees* were found in the Qumran caves, as well as multiple copies of four of the five units of *Enoch*, as well as the *Testament of Levi* and *Testament of Naphtali*. In addition, while not strictly an apocalypse as a genre of writing, Qumran's own community document, *The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, is suffused with apocalyptic thought.

In the New Testament, the book of Revelation is the premier example of the apocalyptic genre. In fact, this book gives the genre its definitive compositional form and ethos. What is distinctive about Revelation, however, is that the book is not pseudonymously attributed, as are a number of Jewish apocalypses. Thus, its authority is not contrived. Again, directly linked to not being pseudonymous and carrying its own authority, Revelation also has no need to feign past history in the guise of future prophecy.

Illustration: 2 Esdras (4 Esdras, 4 Ezra)

We choose 2 Esdras to illustrate the form and content of Jewish apocalypse. We choose this document because, as a part of the Apocrypha, the book is easily available to English readers.² In addition, this work was written almost at the same time as the book of Revelation (c. AD 100). The two works when read together are like echo chambers for their similar symbolic language. Together they illustrate that the symbols themselves are stereotypical, part of the apocalyptic writer's common toolkit, and not unique. Authorship of 2 Esdras pseudonymously is ascribed to Ezra (Latin, Esdras), but the real context is patently clear that the author is responding to the catastrophic disaster of AD 70, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the loss of the Jewish nation (2 Esd 10:20–21).

As is common in Jewish apocalypses, an angel interprets Ezra's visions. Ezra's interpreter is the archangel Uriel (2 Esd 10:28–33, 40). Further, 2 Esdras well illustrates how zoomor-

²Unfortunately, the history and name of the document is complicated. The basic form of the book available today traces back to Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Jerome assigned four books to Ezra, and designated them with numbers as 1, 2, 3, and 4 Esdras. Protestants thoroughly confused the matter through their Geneva Bible edition by completely renaming Jerome's Ezra documents. They renamed Jerome's 1 Esdras as Ezra (except for a small addition to Ezra 4, almost the same as the Masoretic Ezra of the Hebrew Bible) and 2 Esdras as Nehemiah, and Jerome's 3 Esdras as 1 Esdras and 4 Esdras as 2 Esdras. Clear as Mississippi mud? The bottom line is, 2 Esdras usually refers to the same document as 4 Esdras. Not only is the name of the book confusing. The book's history also is complicated. The original Jewish work is chapters 3–14. Christians, however, copied and heavily used the book. In fact, Christians so used the book they added two chapters of their own at the front of the work, chapters 1–2, to subvert the book's Jewish message and assert God's total rejection of the Jews. These two Christian chapters are called 5 Ezra. The last two chapters, chapters 15–16, also are considered later additions as well, though who is responsible for them is debated. These added last two chapters are called 6 Ezra.

phism is the standard venue for apocalyptic visions. The most famous image is an eagle rising from the sea with twelve wings and three heads (2 Esd 11:1). The eagle is the last in a series of four animals who are the four great world kingdoms. Since the eagle was the universally known symbol of Rome set on the standards of the conquering Roman legions, this eagle imagery is none too subtle. The indictment of the eagle Rome is clear:

You, the fourth that has come, have conquered all the beasts that have gone before; and you have held sway over the world with great terror, and over all the earth with grievous oppression; and for so long you have lived on the earth with deceit. You have judged the earth, but not with truth, for you have oppressed the meek and injured the peaceable; you have hated those who tell the truth, and have loved liars; you have destroyed the homes of those who brought forth fruit, and have laid low the walls of those who did you no harm. (2 Esd 40-46)

The connection to Rome is made clear by reference to Daniel's four beasts and four empires: "The eagle that you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom that appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel" (2 Esd 12:11). The eagle's wings and heads represent a complicated series of rulers and their kingdoms (2 Esd 10:11-35).

More zoomorphism comes in the form of a lion. The lion rouses from the forest to speak to the eagle with a human voice (2 Esd 11:37). The reader finds out later the lion is Messiah (2 Esd 12:31-32). Thus, traditional lion of the tribe of Judah Jewish messianic imagery makes its way into the zoomorphism of Jewish apocalyptic, and no one is scratching their heads about the meaning of the symbolism. This lion also facilitates resurrection to judgment and consignment to final punishment (2 Esd 12:33). With this resurrection language, the author reveals the impact of Pharisaic traditions.

Further illustration of the use of stereotypical apocalyptic images can be seen in the following extended passage (2 Esd 5:4b-9). Cosmic disturbances convey that God in heaven is involved. Earthly disturbances and human chaos convey that human history is at its final denouement.

and the sun shall suddenly begin to shine at night, and the moon during the day. Blood shall drip from wood, and the stone shall utter its voice; the peoples shall be troubled, and the stars shall fall. And one shall reign whom those who inhabit the earth do not expect, and the birds shall fly away together; and the Dead Sea shall cast up fish; and one whom the many do not know shall make his voice heard by night, and all shall hear his voice. There shall be chaos also in many places, fire shall often break out, the wild animals shall roam beyond their haunts, and menstruous women shall bring forth monsters. Salt waters shall be found in the sweet, and all friends shall conquer one another; then shall reason hide itself, and wisdom shall withdraw into its chamber.

Eschatologically, the emphasis in 2 Esdras on signs of the times is clear: "Now concerning the signs: lo, the days are coming when those who inhabit the earth shall be seized with great terror, and the way of truth shall be hidden, and the land shall be barren of faith" (2

Esd 5:1, NRSV). Periodizing past history to bring the reader to the present crisis also is clear: “But if the Most High grants that you live, you shall see it thrown into confusion after the third period” (2 Esd 5:4a). Indeed, Jews had lived to see this chaos and had been thrown into absolute confusion after the Romans destroyed their nation. Prophecy fulfilled. Thus, “The Most High has looked at his times; now they have ended, and his ages have reached completion” (2 Esd 11:44). Clearly, the reader has arrived at Ezra’s perfectly predicted end of time.

The hope for restoration of a destroyed Jerusalem and devastated Judea in the post-AD 70 trauma rings out clearly: “For indeed the time will come, when the signs that I have foretold to you will come to pass, that the city that now is not seen shall appear, and the land that now is hidden shall be disclosed” (2 Esd 7:26). The redeemer agent of this new Jerusalem is Messiah, and his messianic reign is four hundred years: “For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years” (2 Esd 7:28). Notably, the extent of the messianic reign in Jewish apocalyptic has no set time. *The time of the messianic reign always is symbolic*, usually related to establishing parallels with events from Jewish history (forty years in the wilderness, four hundred years of captivity in Egypt, seventy years of exile in Babylon, etc.). Use of numbers as symbols, especially the number seven, as in the book of Revelation, is transparent throughout the text (seven ways, 2 Esd 7:80; seven orders, 2 Esd 7:91; seven days, 2 Esd 7:101; 9:23; and so forth).

Revelation has the well-known imagery of a woman as a city, Babylon, although in a pejorative sense (16:9; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). The echo of the same imagery of a woman who is a city in 2 Esdras is impressively similar, though in a positive sense. John’s Babylon is a decadent woman, obviously rapacious Rome, seated on seven hills (Rev 17:9). The woman in 2 Esdras, however, is the resplendent new Jerusalem that replaces the presently destroyed Jerusalem. Further, John’s New Jerusalem has extraordinary dimensions (twelve thousand stadia a side, enough to cover the entire Mediterranean basin, Rev 21:16). Likewise, the coming Jerusalem in 2 Esdras also has extraordinary size (2 Esd 10:27, 55). Ezra’s story of his vision of a woman who transforms into a city has great dynamics of plot and tension to draw in the reader. As a literary artifice, the two-chapter presentation is impressively developed (2 Esd 9:38–10:59). A summary of the story will suit our purposes here.

Ezra earlier had been told by Uriel the angel to go and stay in a field where no house had been built nor any foundation of any building. In the field with nothing else to do, Ezra’s mind wanders off to grieve the loss of Jerusalem. His ruminations suddenly are interrupted by seeing a woman weeping, who had obvious signs of mourning in her torn clothing and ash-covered head. The woman’s distress distracts him from his thoughts on Jerusalem’s tragic fate. Ezra inquires the cause of her grief and embittered spirit and deep distress. The woman answers that she had been married thirty years but barren, a common Old Testament theme (cf. Sarah, Gen 11:30; Hannah, 1 Sam 1:2). God finally gave her a son, and

she nurtured him lovingly with much care, but he died tragically on his wedding day. The woman in her grief has escaped those trying to comfort her out into this field where she intends to mourn, fast, and herself die.

Hearing this sad story, Ezra becomes angry, because the woman seems strangely oblivious to the greater grief of Zion's loss, "the mother of us all" (2 Esd 10:7). So, Ezra reprimands the woman, "You are sorrowing for one son, but we, the whole world, for our mother," and, after reminding the woman about the destruction of Jerusalem, later exhorts, "Now, therefore, keep your sorrow to yourself, and bear bravely the troubles that have come upon you" (2 Esd 10:8, 15).³ He points to the greater sorrow of Jerusalem, "For you see how our sanctuary has been laid waste, our altar thrown down, our temple destroyed" (2 Esd 10:21). He then enumerates the exact conditions of Jerusalem's inhabitants in the immediate and awful aftermath of the Roman siege (2 Esd 10:22–23).

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the woman begins transforming before Ezra's eyes into a dazzling and glorious city, tremendous in size, with the cry of her voice shaking the very earth. Ezra, terrified, falls down like a corpse (2 Esd 10:30; cf. Rev 1:17). The angel Uriel reappears to reassure Ezra and give him the interpretation of the terrifying and awesome vision he has just seen. The woman is Zion. Her thirty-year barrenness is symbolic of the three thousand years in the world before any offering in Solomon's temple, whose temple service was the woman's son. Bringing up the son with much care was the continual Jewish observance of the temple service in Jerusalem. The son's death was the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple service. Ezra is told not to fear taking in the vision of the vast city and its glory, a city that has come about in a field where no foundation of any building had been, "because no work of human construction could endure in a place where the city of the Most High was to be revealed" (2 Esd 10:54).

This story in 2 Esdras of a weeping woman who transforms into a glorious city becomes a potent metaphor for expressing a sense of tragic loss yet abiding hope in the face of overwhelming historical circumstances. For this Jewish author, a better time for God's Messiah to arrive triumphantly to turn the tables on ruthless Rome simply could not be found. He chooses to express this hope in apocalyptic dress because the venue's dramatic, symbolic imagery will hit the audience in the gut and garnish the desired emotional response from his readers to be encouraged to adopt the same vision and hope that, despite present circumstances, God's new Jerusalem is right around the corner. In apocalyptic, a picture is worth a thousand words.

³So much for Ezra's counseling skills or empathy.

Interpretive Guidelines

Exegetical Guidelines

The most important principle of hermeneutics for exegesis is observing genre. Fundamentally, Revelation's opening verses quickly make clear that the document is a hybrid mix of three genres: apocalypse (Rev 1:1), prophecy (Rev 1:3), and epistle (Rev 1:4). This hybrid genre invokes six interpretive corollaries, two for each genre.

That Revelation is an apocalypse means (1) the language is highly symbolic,⁴ and each apocalyptic author feels free to (2) innovate the symbolism of his source material. The meaning of John's stereotypical symbolism is not hard once the immediate context is established, and the seven letters to the seven churches in Rev 2–3 make Revelation's immediate context obvious. John speaks to issues of Rome and imperial ideology and consequential political, social, and cultural challenges to faithful witness for believers in first-century Asia Minor. Further, the meaning of John's symbolism is no mystery at all, since that meaning is self-declared: the symbolism figures the church (Rev 1:20) and concerns believers of Asia Minor (Rev 2–3). John subverts all his source material to preach Christ, whether Jewish (e.g., Rev 7) or Greco-Roman (e.g., Rev 12). Revelation preaches Christ and the cross (Rev 1:5; 5:5–6) and the believer's faithful witness (Rev 12:11). So Revelation as apocalypse is highly symbolic, but the meaning of the symbolism also is highly transparent. Revelation is about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Further, Revelation's use of its symbolism also is highly innovative. Daniel famously had a vision of four different beasts rising up out of the sea, a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a ten-horned beast; further, these four beasts represented four different kingdoms (Dan 7). John also has a beast rising up out of the sea, clearly using Daniel's material, but John's beast composites all four of Daniel's beasts into one; further, John's one beast represents only one empire (Rev 13).

That Revelation is prophecy means (1) the basic burden is calling God's people to obedience, and (2) this prophecy is in canonical concord with the core of the New Testament. Jewish prophecy fundamentally arose in Israel not to forecast the far-off future but to warn of imminent judgment without repentance and obedience to God right now. The burden of prophecy is forthtelling, not foretelling, and Revelation's prophetic burden is no different. The church is called to repent (2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19), as well as the world (9:20, 21; 16:9, 11). Likewise, if Revelation is prophetic, the presentation of Jesus must concord with the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus wins by dying on a cross, and dying is the path to victory in Revelation (Rev 12:11). The cross is how God conquers evil, not nuclear holocaust.

⁴Simple grammatical statistics bear out Revelation is symbolic. John uses "like" or "as" coming and going. For example, John uses "as" (*hos*) seventy-one times, more than all the General Epistles combined. Again, John uses "like" (*homoios*) twenty-one times, compared to only twenty-four times in the entire rest of the New Testament.

That Revelation is epistle means (1) the document has historical specificity, and (2) the document should be read as a unitary whole. When John wraps up his apocalypse in epistolary form by beginning and ending the document as an epistle (Rev 1:4; 22:21), he does something no other apocalyptic writer did. He tells his Christian audience to read the book like one reads a Pauline epistle. That is, one reads 1 Corinthians as meant for a real audience of Corinthian believers in a real church actually established by Paul, in a real city called Corinth in the real Roman province of Achaia under the Roman proconsul Gallio. In Revelation, John likewise intends the reader immediately to assume the material of Revelation is meant for a real audience in a real church in a real city in a specific place and time. Further, just like one would read Romans carefully beginning to end knowing the meaning of chapter 1 is intended to contribute to the meaning of chapter 11, then John intends Revelation to be read as a unitary whole, with the meaning of a crucified Christ as a slaughtered Lamb in Rev 5:6 contributing to the meaning of a rider on a white horse with his robe “baptized in blood” in Rev 19:13.

Homiletical Guidelines

Homiletic themes would focus on Revelation’s theology and Christology. Primary theological emphases are on God’s sovereignty and divine judgment (and a careful reading shows not just final judgment). Primary christological emphases are on Christ’s work of atonement as the decisive and conclusive way God conquers evil in the world and on Christ’s church as the primary place this work of atonement moves out into the world through faithful witness by believers. A related theme of witness is that God will vindicate the righteous for their suffering, faithful witness.

Observation of apocalypse as highly symbolic should be alert the interpreter to the stereotypical nature of the symbolism and that the meaning is actually not that mysterious nor the language that strange once set into the context of other apocalypses. When all is said and done, even with the sun suddenly shining at night and the moon shining during the day, and blood dripping from wood, we still are just talking about grief over the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (as one example). Observation of apocalypse as highly innovative should alert the interpreter to work to stay *inside* of Revelation to interpret Revelation. Let John actually say what he means (because he will if the interpreter will let him). Do not shackle the author’s meaning to the meaning of a source John used.

Observation of prophecy as burdened with forthtelling should keep the interpreter’s feet on the ground of the needs of believers in first-century Asia Minor before flying off to a future thousands of years later that would have meant absolutely nothing to the original audience. The interpreter of Revelation would do well to drive constantly to call God’s people to faithful witness with assurance of the vindication of the righteous. Observation of prophecy as requiring New Testament concord should help the interpreter not draw a picture of Jesus from Revelation unrecognizable in the four Gospels. If the cross is the

crux of the Gospels, prophetic New Testament concord requires the cross to be the crux of Revelation. The interpreter of Revelation would do well to drive constantly to Gospel truths, not future speculation. The interpreter needs to work to recononize Revelation as preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, not bogus future forecasts constantly falsified.

Observation of epistle as having historical specificity should remind the interpreter to look for first-century correlates of the imagery before enduring wild speculations derived from the modern world. For example, the description of the locusts of Rev 9:3–7 is much easier seen as a straightforward allusion to Parthian cavalry, the most feared enemy of Rome, especially since the locusts' heads are described as having "human faces" in the first place, as well as that Parthian warriors distinctly wore long, flowing hair in battle array, and shot both a volley of arrows forward in charging toward the enemy as well as a volley of arrows backward in racing away from the enemy, so "stung" from both front and back. Observation of epistle as requiring a unified interpretive approach would, once again, alert the interpreter to stay *within* Revelation to interpret Revelation appropriately. John is told the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" has conquered (5:5), but when he looks around to see this Lion, John only sees a "slaughtered Lamb standing" (Rev 5:6). Here the reader has the hermeneutical key to how John manipulates traditional material as a Christian writer. He always is baptizing everything unto Christ, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman tradition. Revelation 5:5–6 is the premier moment of hermeneutical insight into the essence of Revelation's message and the doorway into John's theology and Christology. Thus, for a unified approach, when the interpreter is presented with a rider clothed with a robe "baptized" in blood coming out from heaven (Rev 19:13), noting that "baptized" is a most unusual verb choice here and should grab the reader's immediate attention, the question of whose blood is this surely must be raised. And if this rider goes out "to make war" (Rev 19:11), but the only weapon he has is a sword that comes "from his mouth" (Rev 19:15), the question exactly what sort of war is this surely must be raised. Further, the attentive reader already knows these questions have been answered previously in Rev 12:11. That type of reading between Rev 5 and Rev 19 is a good example of homiletically working toward a unified reading of Revelation.

Greek Apocalyptic Sermon "The Third Nativity" Rev 12:1–6, 13–18



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I want to speak to you this morning about the third nativity. We're very familiar with two nativity stories in the New Testament. Most of us are not aware that the New Testament actually has three nativity stories. We're very familiar with Matthew's nativity story. Matthew has the magi and all those other elements that give us the famous props and scenes for Christmas plays. We're also very familiar with Luke's nativity story with the famous hymn, the Magnificat of Mary, and the other wonderful songs representative of God's poor who sing out to God that his righteousness will defend them in their day of need. So we know well the stories that give us those manger scenes and angels declaring glory to God in the highest to the shepherds. These stories become a part of our pageantry and the pomp and circumstance of our Christmas season. So, we're very familiar with two of the nativity stories in the New Testament. However, we are much less familiar with the third nativity story. In fact, some may never even have heard this story.

Indeed, the New Testament does have a third story of the nativity. That third nativity, however, is wrapped up in apocalyptic. This mysterious apocalyptic style obscures the message for a hearer untrained in apocalyptic ways. The third nativity in the New Testament is in Revelation 12. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to this twelfth chapter of the book of Revelation. Here in this chapter you have another Christmas story, just not as familiar to you as the other two Gospel stories. With chapter twelve, John has composed another word for us for Christmas season. Listen again to what John wrote.

And a great sign appeared in the heaven. A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head, a crown of twelve stars. She was with child, and she cries out agonizing to give birth. And, another sign was seen in the heaven. Behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads, seven diadems. His tail dragged a third of the stars of heaven, and he threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was going to give birth in order that when she gave birth, he might devour her child. She bore a male child who is going to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron. And her child was snatched to God and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness where she has there a place prepared by God in order that she might be nourished one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Then comes the story of Michael and a war in heaven in verses seven through twelve, which interrupts the dragon story. Jumping over the six verses of the Michael story, we move down to the thirteenth verse to pick up the dragon story again with which chapter twelve started.

And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to earth, he pursued the woman who bore the male child. And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place where there for a time and times and half a time she is nourished away from the presence of the serpent. The serpent cast out of his mouth behind and after the woman water like a river in order that he might sweep her away like a flood. The earth helped the woman and opened up its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon cast out of its mouth. The dragon became enraged at the woman and went off to make war with the rest of her seed, those who keep the commandments of God and maintain the testimony of Jesus.

In this passage we have the third nativity in the New Testament. This nativity story, however, is wrapped up in the cloak of apocalyptic language, which renders the story less recognizable. Apocalyptic language breathes cosmic terms and ideas in grand images on a cosmic stage. John makes apocalyptic language crucial to his point. With apocalyptic language, John dramatically can evoke the cosmic significance of that manger story.

What John realizes is most difficult to understand about the Christmas story is that the mundane is supercharged with cosmic significance. The other two nativity stories present shepherds out in a field, a young woman who is pregnant, humble people gathered around a humble woman and her infant child. The whole manger scene in the Gospels is so down to earth, so humble in estate in means and capabilities. Yet, God has chosen this very mundane setting to act decisively to save humankind. Hard to see heaven when one is so focused on earth. In the Gospels, the angels are the tip-off to the cosmic significance, but the message is rather subtle. So, this cosmic significance to the Christmas message is hardest to translate into our current experience. Certainly this story makes a great play, but when I go home that night after seeing that Christmas pageant, I know that I never have seen an angel, and I know that an angel never has spoken to me. Does such a story even apply to me?

So the Christmas story comes to me again here in John's Apocalypse, but with much greater emphasis on this cosmic significance that only is hinted in the Gospels. We quickly see where John takes this cosmic story by the end of chapter twelve. John winds up his story at the end of chapter twelve with these words left ringing in our ears, "And the dragon became enraged at the woman and went off to make war with the rest of her seed, those who keep the commandments of God and maintain the testimony of Jesus." The dragon's war with the woman's progeny is John's brilliant enwrapping of this Christmas story into my life. John is saying that the cosmic significance that bears upon the life of the Messiah is found most powerfully in the believer's own personal story. You may not be a shepherd out in the field actually hearing a chorus of angels, but you need to hear the message of the angels in order to garnish the significance of what Christmas is about.

Why? Because this Christmas story really is not about shepherds in the field. The story is about me. The story is about me and my life and my world. We read in the New Testament how this event was supercharged with cosmic significance. But how do I translate the significance of this manger story into my personal experience right now this Christmas season? That translation is the challenge John has given to us.

How did John work to compose the challenge of this third nativity in Revelation 12? He used to great advantage two existing cultural traditions and baptized both unto Christ. The first tradition was Greco-Roman. This tradition was the dragon story. The second tradition was Jewish. This tradition was the archangel Michael story. Let's follow how John masterfully has blended these two traditions together in chapter twelve to create another version of the Christmas story.

First, John used Greco-Roman traditions of a dragon story. For this part, John used standard apocalyptic themes. He built a cosmic stage. For this cosmic stage, he took a chapter from famous Greco-Roman dragon stories common in his day. These stories are always about explaining evil in the world. Founding stories explain why the world is broken and that the only solution for a broken world is a redeemer who comes to fix everything. The evil in the world regularly in these stories is played out in a dragon character. The redeemer has to defeat this dragon, by whatever name he is called. What John can seize upon in these cosmic dragon stories is that they always acknowledge that this present world is in a mess, that this world is evil, and that the world does need a redeemer. Thus, such stories have expectations of a redeemer figure built into them. This redeemer figure saves humankind. So, dragons are very common in these redeemer stories to set the stage for cosmic conflict, and such dragon stories acknowledge that humans need saving.

You know, encountering a dragon as a main character in a story is not totally extraneous to our own stories today, especially those from Hollywood. A dragon as a dramatic concept is something that has made directors such as Steven Spielberg (*Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*) and Ridley Scott (*Alien*) a lot of money. Whether from the depths of the boundless ocean, or the depths of a primordial past, or the depths of deep space, such directors have capitalized on the drama of a great dragon coming up out of the depths to capture our imagination on the movie screen. *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Alien*, evoke exactly the kind of imagery that John calls upon here in chapter twelve with his fiery red dragon. Humans have a visceral reaction to dragons coded into our DNA, so we always respond emotively to such images. In his chapter twelve, John shows he has the gift to be a great Hollywood director. He skillfully utilizes a dragon image out of the common cultural storylines of his day. Thereby, he provokes a visceral reaction from his audience. He grips their attention with a story genre they easily recognize. He then is able dramatically to bring home the truth that the cosmic significance of Jesus must be personalized. Using a common dragon story from his day to mesmerize the attention of his audience to personalize the point of the story of Christmas explains what John is doing in this imaginative chapter.

Second, John used Jewish traditions of the angel Michael and a war in heaven. For this part John used standard Jewish themes. Notice very carefully in chapter twelve that John has “sandwiched” the dragon story with a middle part of the passage we did not read. This middle part begins in verse seven. Notice how in verse seven the subject shifts abruptly and unexpectedly to Michael the archangel and a battle in heaven. Michael and the angels of heaven are fighting a dragon. In Jewish tradition, Michael is a redeemer of Israel who saves Israel from her enemies. By combining the two stories of a dragon and a redeemer, John reframes the Christmas story on a cosmic stage to make clear who is Israel’s and the whole world’s true redeemer.

Further, in the way he combines the two traditions, John tells us that the Christ story does not begin in Bethlehem in a manger. John insists that Jewish tradition about Michael fighting the battles of God on behalf of God’s people and defeating God’s final opponent, the dragon, has been realized in Christ, the Messiah. Revelation 12 teaches that the story of Jesus begins before Bethlehem. That is, the story of Jesus has cosmic significance. The battle that takes place for this little child in a manger is a battle that has taken place from the beginning of time. John is saying the battle already has been fought in heaven. John is claiming that the redeemer figure so prominent in Jewish tradition as Michael the archangel is actually Jesus the Christ. He baptizes Jewish Michael tradition unto Christ. For John, Michael is not the redeemer figure. The redeemer figure is Christ.

So, John clearly has innovated on the Jewish Michael tradition in this middle part of chapter twelve. The question is, If Jesus is the true redeemer, not Michael, just how does Jesus “conquer” the dragon? In the Jewish story, Michael with the angels fights a war in heaven to defeat evil. How does Jesus, true redeemer, actually wage the battle? The answer to this question and the key to understanding John’s transformation of the Michael tradition is to pay attention to the hymn that climaxes this unit. John’s innovative transformation is transparent in verse eleven. John records a hymn that is sung. All Revelation’s most important theology is in Revelation’s hymns. Here is John’s key theological maxim, the heartbeat of the book of Revelation,

And they conquered him through the blood of the Lamb.

Any victory of Christ as redeemer to be proclaimed at Christmastime is a victory bought by blood. This victory is the victory of a Lamb that is slain. This victory is the victory of a child that is born to die. This victory comes through suffering and death on a cross, and this victory translates the cosmic story directly into my life through my witness. This very point of witness is epitomized in the climatic words of the hymn with its last phrase that clarifies what the blood of the Lamb empowers:

They conquered him through the blood of the Lamb, and through the word of their testimony.

That Lamb's blood empowers the believer's testimony, and that testimony is precisely how the cosmic significance of the Christmas story begins to translate into my personal life. I find myself participating in this victory in as much as I use this story as the basis for my witness in the world around me. In my witness, I bring light to a very dark world. I participate in the story of God's restoration of God's people, of how God moves to take care of his people.

On this theme of God's care and provision, notice how John's dragon story includes a Jewish wilderness theme. That is, wilderness is Jewish tradition again. Once again, John is innovative. Wilderness is that place and time in Israel's experience when Israel was dependent totally upon God, even for daily food. God gave Israel daily manna to gather up and to eat. So, John communicates God's care for witnessing believers by incorporating a wilderness theme into this passage. The rabbis developed traditions about the manna bread God had provided the Israelites to eat in the wilderness. They turned the historical wilderness manna into a symbol of the food of the end time that God would feed his people in a future paradise. God would provide his people this future manna food, a symbol of meeting all their needs. John incorporates such wilderness themes with their Jewish implications of the end time by having the woman in his story surviving in the wilderness through God's nourishment. This part of the plot symbolizes God feeding his people. So the restoration of God's people so important in Jewish tradition is what Messiah presently is doing among his own people, believers in Asia Minor. God though Jesus the Messiah is bringing a restoration of all that he has done in calling his people to be a light in the world.

This restoration became necessary because God's people disobeyed him. God's people moved away from doing God's will. This disobedience is the story of Israel and her kings. Israel's disobedience resulted in exile. Yet, God was able to offer redemption even in the face of exile. Jewish prophets said that a redeeming God would redeem even rebellious Israel. God would bring Israel back to Jerusalem. As Jeremiah proclaimed in the original Hebrew in Jer 31:21,

*Ha-tzee-vee lach tzee-u-neem
See-mee-lach, tam-roo-reem
Shee-tee lee-baich, lam see lah
Derech ha-lacht
Shu-vee, be-too-lat Yis-ra-el
Shu-vee, el a-ray-yeech alleh*

Stand up markers for yourselves
Stand up signposts for yourself
Set your heart toward the highway
the way by which you walked
Return O Virgin of Israel
Return to these your cities

“Return O Virgin of Israel, return to these your cities,” Jeremiah proclaimed. In this expectation of a return, Jeremiah was insisting that God would accomplish his purposes even in the face of catastrophic judgment. In spite of catastrophe, the exile of his own people when they had to be judged, Jeremiah believed that God still would win in the end. When difficulty and trial in exile overwhelms the story of God’s people, Jeremiah insists that God still will accomplish his purposes. For Jeremiah, the God of the beginning is the God of the ending.

John felt the same was as Jeremiah. In the book of Revelation John’s own hope in God’s sovereignty over all of life translates into God’s title. In Revelation, God declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” God is claiming, “I am the One who starts this story, and I am the One who will end this story.” Now that Jesus has come, John sees that this story of God working out his salvation for his people translates into the birth pains of the messianic era inaugurated by the coming of Jesus the Messiah. The Messiah is how God ends Israel’s story. The birth pains of the messianic era are the woman who is in labor in Revelation 12. The woman is bringing forth Messiah, the conclusion to God’s story of redemption. She establishes the messianic community, her offspring. Her offspring become Israel restored. Israel witnesses faithfully, even in persecution.

How does this hope of the Alpha and Omega God who covers the whole story of Israel translate for John and his community? This truth ends in a word about testimony, if one reads verse seventeen the way John intended. In this verse, the dragon becomes wrathful as John slows down narrative time here. We have raced through eons of time in a cosmic story of a dragon who has opposed God forever. That story now slows down to focus intently on a manger. The manger is the same, on-going, cosmic story. So, in the manger now we see the cosmic story playing out, not as in war in heaven, but as a conflict on earth. The conflict climaxes in the life of the child. The dragon opposing this child brings all kind of suffering and evil into this child’s life to the point that this child has to suffer and die on a cross, a cruel cross, as the dragon fully exhausts his wrath on the child at the cross.

But the cross is not the end of the story. The story does not begin in Bethlehem, nor does the story end at Calvary. The story goes on. John continues to slows down the narrative of cosmic time. He contemporizes what is happening in this story of opposition and conflict when he says in verse seventeen that the dragon goes off to make war with the “rest of her seed.” The “rest of her seed” would be believers. For John’s original audience, these would be believers in Asia Minor who are in persecution, who are enduring harm and damage on behalf of their testimony, because they “keep the commandments of God and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.” Thus, John’s third nativity reveals that the Christmas story inevitably becomes a story about the witness of believers.

So, the Christmas story continues in the story of my witness in my world. My job is to recognize that in the daily living patterns that I have, Christmas is playing out. Thus, at Christmas time we have the greatest opportunity for witness. Indeed, maybe for us in

America the best opportunity to witness this great, glorious coming of the Christ Child comes with the Christmas season. This season gives us a natural opening to witness to those around us. We can invite others to Christmas pageants. We can expose them to the Christmas story. However, in the end, the real drama is not played out on a church stage. The real drama is played out in my life. In truth, Christmas pageants do not save many people. The real drama that saves other people is in our personal witness to Jesus. This Christmas story needs to be lived out faithfully, incarnated in my life, so that the dragon does not have his way three hundred and sixty-four other days of the year. This Christmas pageant must play itself out in my own personal life through my faithful witness.

For John, the whole point of Christmas is that we understand its cosmic significance, that a dragon is out there, and has been for eons of time, and he is doing everything he can to vent his wrath and anger upon the children of the woman. To what does John's third nativity story call me? In the end, the story calls me to faithful testimony about Jesus. In America, we do not seem to be that challenged to have a faithful witness, quite frankly. Christmas time in a strange way also reveals our greatest weakness. We can play in the drama on a nativity stage at church, but we do not live out the drama on the personal stage of our lives, at least, not at the cost of other believers around the world. In China and Korea, in Russia, in Indonesia, in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan and other places convulsing with conflict, believers are extraordinarily challenged to live out this Christmas story. Believers around the world have a hard time hearing the voice of the Christmas angels as they witness about Jesus Christ. John says we need to make this cosmic story a real part of our own lives. My challenge this Christmas season is to find my point of witness. If God called upon me to be faithful even if persecuted, would I be as faithful as believers in Asia Minor who confronted the dragon for real face to face in the worship of the Roman emperor? That imperial stage for first-century Asia Minor was quite the drama. The third nativity, then, is this cosmic Christmas story working itself out in believers' lives in faithful witness. Where is the drama of Christmas in your life?

***The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology.* By Osvaldo Padilla. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 264 pages. Paperback, \$26.00.**

Osvaldo Padilla is associate professor of New Testament at Beeson Divinity School. Two years before joining the faculty there, he earned a PhD at the University of Aberdeen (2006). His dissertation was “The Speeches of Opponents in the Acts of the Apostles: Their Function and Contribution to Lukan Historiography.” It became the gist of his first book, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology is Padilla’s second book. It consists of six chapters, ranging from seventeen to forty-eight pages. An introduction (eight pages) precedes the book’s body. A bibliography (227 entries/13 pages) and three indices (author, subject, and Scripture/six pages) follow it. Describing his work, Padilla writes, “It is an ‘advanced’ introduction” (13). Accordingly, it does not have a single thesis but two convictions that provide coherence.

Chapters 1–4: Historical

Luke is “a serious historian, who in the Acts of the Apostles has given us a wholly dependable portrait of the early church” (18).

Chapters 5–6: Theological

“The mighty works of God that are described in Acts cannot be understood unless they are explicated by God himself” (19).

Chapter 1 addresses the authorship of Acts. Padilla, supporting Luke as the author, presents four kinds of arguments: literary, exegetical, traditional, and consequential. He cites Papyrus 75, *Against Heresies* by Irenaeus, the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke, and the Muratorian Fragment. He notes that Irenaeus quoted the “we” passages of Acts as well as two epistles of Paul (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:9–10). He then refers to recent research by Claus-Jürgen Thornton and Martin Hengel, both of whom appealed to early traditions.¹ Hengel’s extensive review of literature from the Greco-Roman period reveals that writings rarely circulated anonymously, therefore countering the long-standing assumption of New Testament scholarship about the gospels. Padilla closes with the significance of Luke as the author: being an eyewitness, the “beloved physician” gives credence to the content of Acts. A biographical sketch of Luke, if included, would have been fitting.

¹See Claus-Jürgen Thornton, *Der Zeuge des Zeugen: Lukas als Historiker der Paulusreisen*, WUNT 1.56 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) and Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

Chapter 2 tackles the genre of Acts. Padilla explains, “The decision we reach concerning the genre of Acts . . . has significant repercussions for the way we approach the book” (42). He evaluates four suggestions: epic, ancient novel, history (traditional view), and historical monograph. His conclusion is Acts compares to Hellenistic historical monograph “in the Jewish tradition” (62), akin to Old Testament historiography and Second Temple works like 2 Maccabees. The historical monograph covered less time because its subject matter was smaller than a history. It, like Acts, was episodic, combining narrative and speech. Unlike the historical monograph, Acts is theocentric.

Chapter 3 explores how Luke writes history. Padilla advances three assertions. First, Luke was a theological historian. Four technical terms in the third gospel’s preface (1:1–4) serve as proof: *pragma* (“event”), *plēroō* (“to fulfill”), *autoptēs* (“eyewitness”), and *parakolouthēō* (“to follow”). Second, Luke packaged his theological history in a beautiful narrative. Padilla depicts him as a gifted storyteller, highlighting six literary techniques that the Evangelist employed: telescoping, epitomizing through hyperbole or summary, selectivity, prolepsis, synchrisis, and dramatic irony.² Third, Luke was a responsible historian. Padilla aptly defends Acts against criticisms that stem from the professionalization of history, a nineteenth and twentieth-century development which redefined history as objective science (*i.e.*, just the facts). He demonstrates how postmodern historiography would appreciate Acts because it values narrative (plot) and rhetoric (persuasion) in written histories.

Chapter 4 focuses on the speeches in Acts. Padilla assesses Luke as a reporter. Was he trustworthy? Consequently, Padilla surveys Luke’s “peers,” a host of notable Greco-Roman historians: namely, Thucydides, Polybius of Megalopolis, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Lucian of Samosata.³ They more or less adhered to two criteria for reporting a speech: accuracy⁴ and fit.⁵ Padilla subsequently argues, “Luke should be viewed as a responsible reporter of speeches. To be sure, the speeches are given in his own words; he may add to clarify them. . . . I do not believe that Luke fabricated speeches in order to show his rhetorical ability” (138). Two facts attest that the Evangelist did not embellish. First, the speeches in Acts are considerably shorter than speeches in Greco-Roman histories. Second, the pairing of speeches (actual or concocted), how Greco-Roman historians preferred to convey opposing viewpoints, occurs only once in Acts (24:10–21 and 26:1–32).

Chapter 5 also focuses on the speeches in Acts; specifically, 2:1–41 (Peter), 7:1–53 (Stephen), 10:34–48 (Peter), 17:16–31 (Paul), and 26:1–32 (Paul). Padilla selected each one

²At the beginning of this section (88–107), Padilla apprises readers, “We call attention to three procedures [Luke] employs” (88). What those three procedures actually are, however, is unclear.

³Padilla also mentions Diodorus Siculus and Tacitus.

⁴Summary would suffice; a transcript was not expected.

⁵The competency of the speaker and the circumstance of the speech dictated how a speech would be reconstructed.

based upon “length and strategic placing” (152). He gives careful attention to narrative context, key words or phrases, and theological motifs. Afterward, he consolidates the theological content of the five speeches into four doctrinal synopses: God, Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology.⁶

Chapter 6, according to Padilla, is the “climax” (18) of the book. It initiates a dialogue with postliberal theology to answer the question, “On what basis, if any, does Acts justify its truth-claims about Jesus Christ?” (200) A thirteen-page answer appears after a twenty-three-page profile of postliberalism. Padilla intended to help his readers understand what this new movement is, but he fails to define concepts like prevenience, coherentism, mediate beliefs, Reidian foundationalism, first-order, and second-order. Padilla reasons that postliberal theology qualifies as a relevant resource because it “concentrat[es] on the identity of Christ by means of narrative” (219). At the same time, he seems reticent about how useful it might be, stating, “What we have learned from postliberalism *may* [italics mine] illuminate how we interpret certain parts of Acts” (224). The chapter, in fact, concludes with more criticism than praise of postliberal theology.

Regarding the truth-claims of Acts, Padilla effectively examines four speeches: 2:1–41 (Audience: Jews), 10:34–48 (Audience: God-Fearing Gentiles), 17:16–31 (Audience: Greeks), and 26:1–32 (Audience: Roman Citizens). Padilla asserts that the speeches are where Luke “appeals to his readers on how to defend the faith before the public” (226). Each of the examined speeches insists that Jesus is Lord and Messiah (truth-claim) by employing as many as four justifications: miracle, Jesus’ resurrection, scriptural fulfillment, and apostolic witness. How postliberalism directly contributed to Padilla’s analysis is not apparent.

The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology is easy to read because Osvaldo Padilla is an adept writer. Its substance flows through questions that Padilla poses and answers. Along the way, he engages his readers with comments set apart by parenthesis or hyphen. An occasional illustration (e.g., 39–42, 137) “seasons” the content. A preview and a conclusion bracket every chapter.

Padilla successfully bridges two worlds, past and present. Relying upon in-depth Greco-Roman knowledge, he recreates the historical setting of Acts. Fluent in recent scholarly trends, he offers a fresh reading of Acts. The insights that result benefit both scholar and practitioner. Overviews of narrative criticism (33–35), genre theory (43–52), ancient history-writing (124–38), and postliberalism (202–24), for example, can inspire further study and therefore affect a lecture already delivered or yet-to-be prepared. An abundance of hermeneutical helps can aid sermon-building. Padilla’s “high view of Scripture” (147–49; see also 199) undergirds this book.

- Ivan Parke, Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi

⁶Padilla observes, “Lukan theology is theology of the Spirit” (196).

***Anyone Can Be Saved: A Defense of “Traditional” Southern Baptist Soteriology.* Edited by David L. Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 193 pages. Paperback, \$24.00.**

David L. Allen is the dean of the School of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He holds a PhD from the University of Texas at Arlington, and his more recent publications particularly related to this book’s subject matter are *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (B&H Academic, 2010) and *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (B&H Academic, 2016). Eric Hankins, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fairhope, Alabama, holds the PhD degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Adam Harwood serves as associate professor of theology and the MFarland Chair of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He holds a PhD from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and his publications include *The Spiritual Condition of Infants* (Wipf & Stock, 2011) and *Born Guilty?* (Free Church, 2013), both of which relate to the subject matter of *Anyone Can Be Saved* (ACBS).

The book is arranged as a series of essays addressing and developing each article of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation, which is commonly referred to as the Traditional Statement (hereafter TS). While initially published as independent articles in the *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry*, this volume brings together these essays to accomplish the primary tasks of elaborating each article of the TS and articulating a “traditional” (i.e. non-Calvinist) Southern Baptist soteriology.

The book begins with David Allen assessing the current debate over Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention (hereafter SBC). Allen affirms that Southern Baptists’ theological agreements outweigh their disagreements. He also affirms that even Calvinist have a welcome place within the Southern Baptist Convention. By the same token, he also affirms that Traditionalists have a right to critique Calvinism without accusations of denying cardinal doctrines of the faith. His central thesis is that both sides of the Calvinist/Traditionalist debate should accurately understand one another and seek to cooperate to win the world for Jesus Christ.

Eric Hankins, the chief architect of the TS, next writes on the issue of savability (which addresses the book’s subtitle). By savability, Hankins means that: “[A]nyone who hears the gospel is the object of the Spirit’s saving ministrations and can respond with repentance and faith or rebellion and unbelief” (10). He also defines what is meant by “Traditionalist” (namely, what he says is the majority of Southern Baptists, and who do not embrace Calvinism).

After supplying the TS, the book then goes into a detailed development of each article of the TS beginning with “Article 1: The Gospel,” by David Hankins. The argument is made

that by God's design, everyone can be saved. Next, Harwood tackles the issue of whether Adam's sin causes inherited guilt on his offspring (i.e. all humanity). Primarily through exegetical analysis, then through historical and systematic theology, Harwood concludes that the Calvinists' appeal to total depravity does not mean an individual is incapable of trusting Christ except by divine monergism; furthermore, he concludes with a denial of inherited guilt to the offspring of Adam.

David Allen then develops Article 3 of the TS by affirming unlimited atonement (that Christ died for the sins of all people thereby allowing all people the opportunity to be saved). Article 4 is a response to the Calvinistic view of Irresistible Grace. Therein, Brad Reynolds affirms that salvation is all of grace and not of works, yet such grace can (and is) resisted by individuals. In Article 5, Ronnie Rogers denies regeneration prior to faith, soteriological monergism, and the passivity of converts while affirming both salvation as the work of God and the responsibility of all people to respond to the gospel of Christ.

Eric Hankins returns to develop Article 6 on election. Understanding election not as God's choice of persons but as God's choice of a people and plan, Hankins compares the New Testament doctrine of election to Israel's election in the Old Testament and finds support therein for a covenantal, Christocentric, and corporate model of election.

Article 7 is developed by Steve Lemke and addresses the issue of the extent of God's sovereignty. Denying that God's sovereignty causes either acceptance or rejection of Christ, Lemke affirms that God foreknows those who will freely respond to Christ for salvation while rejecting a "meticulous providence" which believes God controls and causes everything in the universe (including an individual's salvation).

Braxton Hunter then develops Article 8 by both critiquing Calvinistic compatibilism while affirming a "soft libertarianism" which affirms that all human agents are free to choose between real options. Steve Horn affirms the eternal security of one's salvation in Christ in Article 9. There, Horn states that the basis of this security is one's belief in Christ. Preston Nix authored the commentary on Article 10, "The Great Commission." There, he reminds Southern Baptists (and all readers) of the important task Christ has given both to proclaim the gospel and to mature disciples.

Harwood then returns to address what is perhaps the most serious accusation against the TS (suggested by Roger Olson and Al Mohler), that the TS leans towards semi-Pelagianism. Harwood seeks to discredit this claim from internal evidence by the TS, the inapplicability of the Council of Orange to the TS, the differences between the modern historical context with that of the fifth-century semi-Pelagians, and the incorrect premises of Olson. The book closes with Lemke providing a survey of various models of divine sovereignty and human freedom. While mostly descriptive, Lemke concludes with a "soft libertarian/decisionist" perspective as described above.

The book succeeds in its purpose of providing a much-needed elaboration of the TS while also outlining the soteriology of those who identify as “Traditional” Southern Baptist. As is claimed in multiple places in the book, this work is not intended to serve as the final word on Baptist soteriology, and it will no doubt be a source for additional conversations concerning Calvinism in the SBC.

While each chapter merits a thorough response and a more developed review, some brief observations will be made. As a professor with interest in Reformation soteriology and as a Southern Baptist pastor who participated in the 2012 LifeWay Research study on Calvinism (and marked himself as a non-5-Point-Calvinist), I (like many) identify with many points of the contributors of this work. Allen is correct that there is more that unites Southern Baptists in theology (and dare we say soteriology in particular?) than what divides. Calvinist readers will find much in this book with which they can agree. Allen’s description of the current climate of Calvinism in the SBC is fair and will not likely receive much criticism from his counterparts. Moreover, there is much with which a Calvinist can agree on with David Hankin’s chapter on “The Gospel.” Preston Nix’s chapter on the Great Commission will receive little (if no) criticism from the SBC-Calvinist community. Also, Lemke’s description of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom provides a fair (though perhaps unbalanced) presentation of views, though qualifications would likely be made by Calvinists in his portrayal of the “soft determinism/compatibilism” view.

While there are many areas of common ground, there are a few general queries that remain. A continuous question the reader has is whether the authors of this book adequately define and address Calvinism in the SBC or a form of hyper-Calvinism which many Calvinists within the SBC reject. The majority of bibliographic references in the book are sources used to support the claims of the TS and its proponents. Little interaction is given to the writings of Calvinists, and virtually no sources are cited of Southern Baptist Calvinists themselves.

A second general question the reader has concerns the continuous assertion that most Southern Baptists are not Calvinists (and the like). These claims are not substantiated by evidence, and no references to empirical studies are made to substantiate these claims. On one occasion, Eric Hankins states, “Calvinism has never been the dominant voice” of the SBC. He continues, “Despite the claims of a Southern Baptist theological golden age of Calvinism . . . there is simply no denying that most Southern Baptists do not think of themselves as Calvinists and that the prospect of such an identity is disconcerting” (12). Here, Hankins cites the 2012 “SBC Pastors Polled” LifeWay study. It is important to note that Hankins’s claim cannot be substantiated by reference to this study. The LifeWay study itself did not find (contrary to Hankins’s claim) “that most Southern Baptists do not think of themselves as Calvinists” and that the prospect is disconcerting. The survey was not

of Southern Baptists in general but of Southern Baptist pastors' perception of whether or not they perceive their congregations are Calvinistic. These are two different things. Moreover, the LifeWay study did not poll Southern Baptists as a whole on whether they view Calvinism as disconcerting; they only polled Southern Baptist pastors to see if they as pastors are personally concerned about the impact of Calvinism within the SBC. This is significant because they claim to represent the majority of Southern Baptists (and identify this group as "Traditionalists") without any evidence of them being the majority.

Steve Horn's claim that the basis for eternal security is one's personal belief in Christ will likely receive criticism from the SBC Calvinistic community. Adam Harwood had what is quite likely the most difficult subject matters to address. In his commentary on Article 2, "The Sinfulness of Man," Harwood convincingly makes the case that individuals do not inherit guilt from Adam's sin. He helpfully reminds readers that the phrase "every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin" in the TS is identical in wording to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and thus disarms many critics who accuse Traditionalists of semi-Pelagianism. At the end of his commentary on Article 2, the reader understands Harwood's case that the sin of Adam does not lead to inherited guilt (regarding justification). Even if it is the case that people are not reckoned guilty due to Adam's sin, this reviewer wonders if spiritual death still applies because of Adam's fall (which concerns regeneration). This question will not be raised again until this matter is taken up by Harwood later in the chapter titled "Is the Traditional Statement Semi-Pelagian?" There, Harwood adequately addresses many—but not all—of the concerns critics have regarding semi-Pelagianism in the TS. This possible connection between Adam's fall and human spiritual death proves the need for continual dialogue among Southern Baptists (regardless of their affiliation with Calvinism), with a recognition from all Southern Baptists that proponents of the TS are decisively not semi-Pelagians.

Most of the authors of each respective chapter are irenic in their writing, providing a "Defense of 'Traditional' Southern Baptist Soteriology" without sounding defensive. The authors of *ACBS* tackle a very interesting topic, have provided a helpful elaboration of the TS, and raise more issues which must be explored in cooperative Southern Baptist dialogue on Calvinism.

- *Daniel Kirkpatrick, University of the Southwest and Southeastern Baptist Association, Hobbs, New Mexico*

***The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life: Ethical and Missional Implications of the New Perspective.* Edited by Scott McKnight and Joseph Modica. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016. 209 + xiv pages. Paperback, \$22.99.**

The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life is an anthology containing eight articles written by a venerable who's-who list of Pauline scholars including: N. T. Wright, James D. G. Dunn, Bruce Longenecker, and Scot McKnight. Given this list, it is not hard to imagine that this work is sympathetic toward the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) movement, which has gained much traction since the seminal essay "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West"¹ was delivered by Krister Stendahl on September 3, 1961, and *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress, 1977) was penned by E. P. Sanders. The editors, Scot McKnight, the Julius R. Mantey Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary, and Joseph B. Modica, University Chaplain and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University, previously collaborated on *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not* (IVP Academic, 2012).

The overarching thesis of this work is that "a new-perspective reading of Paul . . . offers much to an understanding of the Christian life" (xiii). The essence of such a NPP reading centers on the concept of *mimesis* (i.e., imitation) as reflected in the editors' epigraph of 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Become imitators of me, just as I also (am) of Christ" (v).² The editors state that the purpose of this work is to investigate how "the apostle Paul understood the Christian life" (xiii), and the chapters are written with this purpose in mind.

In chapter 1, Dunn investigates Christian living within Galatians, and focuses on the centrality of faith and the gift of the Spirit (2). Paul's own conversion evinces this (4–6), as well as the faith that is to be displayed by the church (7–10). Dunn's thesis is that we cannot "understand Paul's theology and gospel unless we recognize this fundamental nexus of faith and Spirit at its heart" (17). Chapter 2 features Lynn Cohick's study in Ephesians, and suggests that "the NPP plays an important role" in rightly understanding discipleship as well as "the communal and transformational aspects of Paul's gospel" (20). Longenecker takes the helm in chapter 3 in his study of the ethicality of Christian living (47). Longenecker explores the concepts of "faith works" (i.e., Gal 5:13—"through love *become slaves* to one another") and Torah observance against the contours of Paul's theological landscape (47–48, emphasis original). Chapters 4–5, by Patrick Mitchel and Timothy Gombis respectively, both explore the empowering role of the Spirit in Christian living. Mitchel suggests that Christian living is *solus Spiritus* (i.e., Christians are to live by the Spirit alone and not under the yoke of *Torah*), while Gombis argues that the focus of Paul's conception of Christian living is the church (91, 104). The Spirit enables Christians to live in community, not in isolation from one another (104, 113–15). Chapter 6 deals with "the ecclesial life" (125). However, McKnight seems to overemphasize the *horizontal*

¹This essay was later published in *Harvard Theological Review* 56.3 (1963): 199–215.

²This is my translation from the Greek text of 1 Cor 11:1.

(ecclesial) dimension of Christianity to the neglect of the *vertical* (individual responsibility/relationship with God) when he writes that the “church was Paul’s obsession” (143). In chapter 7, Tara Leach discusses Wesleyanism in light of the NPP, and issues a clarion call for balance between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of Christianity (177). Lastly, Wright discusses the concept of Paul’s missional hermeneutics in chapter 8, and notes the importance of Philippians 2:14–16 in missional living (179, 184–87). Rather than a Platonic or Epicurean reading of Scripture, Wright suggests, “our task, in the Spirit, is to plant signs of God’s coming kingdom” (180).

In terms of strengths, Longenecker’s chapter, “Faith Works and Worship,” steals the show in properly wedding Christian living and dying together (49–50). Longenecker sees the importance of Philippians in a robust, Pauline theology of Christian living. Second, this work covers numerous theological motifs important to Christian living including: ecclesiology, pneumatology, missiology, Christology, soteriology, ethicality, and sanctification (xiv). This serves as a helpful corrective to many Pauline theologies in which ecclesiology, pneumatology, and missiology are rarely (if ever) discussed. Third, the editors honestly admit that there are shortcomings within the NPP, OPP (Old Perspective), and apocalyptic readings of Paul—albeit they see the NPP as “the *best* prism through which to read and interpret *all* of Paul’s letters” (xiv n.10, italics in the original).

As in any anthology, some chapters are stronger than others, and this work is no exception. Perhaps the weakest link in McKnight and Modica’s *catena* is chapter 7 due to its narrow focus on Wesleyan-Holiness theology. While McKnight is to be commended for proffering such a wonderful publishing opportunity to a promising M.Div. student (195), the essay targeted a very small percentage of the readers of this work. While intending to produce “A Symphonic Melody,” what this chapter actually achieved was more akin to a cacophonous gong in comparison to the ecumenical tenor reverberating throughout the rest of the book. Second, as a whole, this work fails to adequately address the concept of Christian dying. As Rollin Ramsaran,³ John Behr,⁴ and the Apostle Paul have explained, the concepts of living and dying are inextricably linked and should not be separated (Phil 1:20–26). However, the greatest weakness of this work (in the opinion of this reviewer) is its limited focus on Galatians and Ephesians, while ignoring other key Pauline texts dealing with Christian living. It would have been better if this volume was expanded to include the *Hauptbriefe* (i.e., Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians)—thus, bypassing the criticisms of scholars who reject the Pauline authorship of Ephesians—or a comprehensive study of Christian living throughout the entire Pauline corpus. Instead, readers are left with a rather

³Rollin A. Ramsaran, “Living and Dying, Living Is Dying (Philippians 1:21): Paul’s Maxim and Exemplary Argumentation in Philippians,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity; ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 336.

⁴John Behr, *Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), 24–25.

hodgepodge, bits-and-pieces approach that fails to address the entirety of Paul's thoughts on the important issue of Christian living.

In sum, *The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life* is an important step forward in the OPP and NPP debate. Had this work been expanded to include a broader swath of Paul's writings (at least the *Hauptbriefe*) and an adequate discussion of Christian suffering and dying, it would have been vastly improved. Readers looking for a robust and holistic Pauline theology of Christian living will be left wanting. Despite these quibbles, this text serves as a helpful and well-written introduction to the debates surrounding the NPP and Paul's conception of Christian living.

– Gregory E. Lamb, *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina*

***Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission.* By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 341 + x pages. Paperback, \$28.00.**

Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission is Michael J. Gorman's latest contribution to his "accidental" Pauline trilogy (2–3). Gorman's previous volumes in the trilogy include: *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Eerdmans, 2009), which was a sequel to his earlier volume titled: *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Eerdmans, 2001). One of Gorman's major purposes in penning *Becoming the Gospel* was to fill the lacuna of "union with God and mission" that was lacking in his previous works (4). Interestingly, Gorman, a prolific author who holds the Raymond E. Brown, chair in Biblical Studies and Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University, is a professed "United Methodist" who just happens to teach in a "Roman Catholic Institution."¹ This information proved useful in understanding Gorman's affinity for the Wesleys (16, 48, 271) as well as his tendencies toward perfectionism throughout his work (64, 237, 239).²

Gorman's thesis is conspicuously placed at the beginning of his work. He writes, "The central claim of this book . . . is that already in the first Christian century the apostle Paul wanted the communities he addressed not merely to *believe* the gospel but to *become* the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God" (2, emphasis original). So for Gorman, Paul's letters were not written exclusively for *doctrinal* purposes, but for *incarnational*, *participatory*, and *missional* purposes. In other words, for Gorman, Paul's primary purpose in penning his epistles is that of "transformative participation

¹Michael J. Gorman, "Cross Talk—*Crux Probat Omnia*: Life through the Lens of the Cross," n.p. [cited 28 April 2016]. Online: <http://www.michaeljgorman.net/about>.

²This is mainly evinced in Gorman's flattening of justification and glorification, which will be discussed further in my critique below.

in the life and character of God revealed in the crucified and resurrected Messiah Jesus” (4). Gorman calls this transformative participation “theosis”—the proper, theological framework for missions (4).

Bedrock to Gorman’s project are the concepts of “theosis” and “missional hermeneutics.” *In nuce*, theosis can be defined as “becoming like God by participating in the life of God” (3). So the concept of participation, not ontological equality, is important for Gorman. This is a key distinction in Gorman’s schema in separating his orthodox view from being pantheistic, or of the ilk described by John Breck, which suggests “a literal ‘ontological’ participation in the being of God.”³ For Gorman, theosis is synonymous with other related terms such as *deification* and *Christosis*,⁴ which focus on such incarnational interchange texts⁵ that deal with God’s/Christ’s becoming human so that humans can become like God/Christ (3–4). However, for Gorman theosis necessarily and *a priori* takes on a corporate dimension.

Another seminal concept within Gorman’s schema is *missional hermeneutics*. In describing “missional hermeneutics,” Gorman posits a participatory endeavor where various academic and ecclesial disciplines *intentionally* come together as one. In his words; “Missional hermeneutics is neither the same as missiology nor the same as hermeneutics as it has been normally practiced. Rather, missional hermeneutics is what happens when missiologists, biblical scholars, and ecclesial leaders intentionally work together to probe the biblical text for what it says about the *missio Dei* and about our participation in it” (51). So for Gorman, the *missio Dei* is at the heart of Paul’s letters in inviting the various ecclesial communities to which he is writing to participate in joining alongside him in *becoming a living, breathing sermon*—i.e., a living portrait of the gospel of Christ.

In chapter one, Gorman explains how the *missio Dei* permeates the very warp and weft of Pauline thought. Gorman explains how our justification includes both *vertical* (juridical) and *horizontal* (missional) dimensions and is participatory in nature, not merely individualistic (24, 26). Gorman then proceeds to outline his conception of “missional hermeneutics” in chapter two. Gorman posits that Christians who read Paul’s letters as *Scripture* should also read them *missionally*. In other words, reading Paul’s letters missionally allows Christians to participate corporately within the *missio Dei* in becoming the gospel (61–62). Gorman examines 1 Thessalonians and the theological triad of faith, love, and hope in chapter three as well as the so-called, “Christ hymn” of Philippians 2:6–11 in chapter four. Chapters five through six explore the theme of “becoming the gospel of peace” through Romans and Ephesians respectively, while chapter seven, Gorman’s longest chapter, explores the theme

³John Breck, “Divine Initiative: Salvation in Orthodox Theology,” in *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, ed. John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 117.

⁴These terms find their ancient theological formulation in the writings of the Greek Church Fathers such as Irenaeus and Athanasius.

⁵See e.g., texts such as 2 Cor 5:21; 8:9; Gal 3:13; Phil 2:5:11.

of “becoming the justice of God” in the Corinthian correspondence. Lastly, chapter eight surveys the theme of “becoming the gospel of God’s justice, righteousness, and glory” through Romans. In this final chapter, Gorman helps his readers “see” familiar theological concepts, such as justification by faith, the righteousness of God, etc., through a new lens—missional theosis. For Gorman, the central theme of Romans is theosis, and “theosis is inherently missional” (261).

Gorman’s greatest strength in this work is his focus on the *missio Dei*. For Gorman, “missions” is neither just a line item on a church budget nor an activity reserved only for the spiritual elite on foreign soil. Rather, for Gorman, missions is the heartbeat of the church and should be part-and-parcel with authentic Christian living. Second, Gorman recognizes the inseparable *centripetal* and *centrifugal* aspects of the *missio Dei*. While scholarship has often bifurcated these concepts between the Testaments, Gorman sees them as two synergistic sides of the same coin.

As good as Gorman’s work is, it is not without faults such as Gorman’s view of theosis as the central theme in Pauline theology. Gorman claims that Pauline theology is a “theology of theosis” (3). Any claim that a singular center of Pauline theology exists (despite the pervasiveness of theosis) runs the risk of adopting a canon-within-the-canon approach as well as flattening the diversity, nuance, and detail that exists throughout the Pauline corpus. Another troubling aspect of Gorman’s work is that he seems to collapse justification together with glorification. Gorman explains, “*Paul does not conceive of sanctification as a stage of salvation between justification and glorification*” (283, emphasis original). Given the biblical evidence supporting the diachronic process of sanctification (e.g., Phil 3), it appears that Gorman has gone too far.

In sum, *Becoming the Gospel* is the crowning, missional jewel of Gorman’s Pauline trilogy. While cautious scholars should give pause to Gorman’s more controversial conclusions, Gorman’s project is a lucid, well-written, and artful addition that helps to fill the lacuna of missiology so often lacking in Pauline studies. I particularly appreciate Gorman’s highlighting of both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our salvation in that we should not neglect our own participation within the *missio Dei*. However, this is not to neglect or exclude the diachronic process of sanctification, which Gorman tends to diminish in his work (283).

- Gregory E. Lamb, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina

Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective: Ancient and Contemporary Approaches to Theological Anthropology. By Marc Cortez. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 264 pages. Paperback, \$27.99.

The thesis of Marc Cortez, associate professor of Theology at Wheaton College, is that anthropology should be shaped primarily by Christology—that is, Jesus Christ is the model of God’s intention for humanity. In service of this thesis, Cortez surveys seven theologians who advocate a Christology-shaped anthropology: Gregory of Nyssa, Julian of Norwich, Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, John Zizioulas, and James Cone. As one would expect in surveying theologians who come from a wide range of historical settings and articulate very different theologies, their particular application of Christology to anthropology varies widely. However, they all share the fundamental affirmation that anthropology should be framed by Christology.

Gregory of Nyssa affirmed an apophatic anthropology defined not by its current state but by its future *telos*. Humans in their ultimate resurrected state will be radically transformed, including still retaining a gendered identity but not biological sexuality. For Martin Luther, to be fully human one must receive the righteousness of Christ through justification by faith. For Friedrich Schleiermacher, full humanity comes as persons achieve the God-consciousness of Christ. Karl Barth views true humanity to be most clearly seen in election through Christ. John Zizioulas views personhood as the fundamental ontological category and asserts that true personhood is expressed primarily through relationality and community. For James Cone, true personhood is experienced as we join Jesus the Liberator in liberating all the oppressed of society. Again, what these varied approaches share in common is that Christ is seen as the ideal or model for fully realized humanity.

One may question, however, the value Cortez’s choice of theologians to utilize in support his thesis. For evangelicals, at least, only Gregory of Nyssa and Martin Luther (and perhaps Karl Barth) have theologies acceptable to evangelicals. Julian of Norwich’s theology is driven by an extra-biblical vision that some find to be of dubious authenticity due to it coming during a critical illness she experienced. Friedrich Schleiermacher is a paradigmatic liberal theologian who elevates experience over revelation. Karl Barth voices neo-orthodox notions of biblical inspiration and universalism. John Zizioulas is a Greek Orthodox theologian and thus differs at significant points from evangelicals. James Cone’s black theology also gives greater authority to experience than the biblical revelation. Had Cortez addressed the thought of some more recent evangelical theologians, it would have given stronger support to his position.

One of the side benefits of this volume is that it provides an insightful lens through which to view the theologies of each of these respective theologians. Studying how each theologian’s Christology informs their anthropology offers a unique perspective by which to interpret each of these theologies. However, Cortez presents each of these theologies without any significant reference to their historical setting. It would have been helpful to

explore, for example, if Gregory's engagement with the monastic movement impacted his perceptions of human sexuality, how Julian of Norwich's status as a woman in fourteenth-century England and her health crises may have shaped her perspective, or how Cone's experience of racial discrimination in early twentieth-century America may have shaped his perspective. Introducing the historical and cultural setting of each of these authors would have enriched the volume. The book does provide a helpful bibliography, author index, and subject index.

Cortez's concluding chapter is an outstanding contribution. He summarizes and frames each of these varied approaches to a Christology-informed anthropology. Cortez shares definitions of both a "*minimally* christological anthropology" in which "(1) Christology warrants important claims about what it means to be human and (2) the scope of those claims goes beyond issues like the image of God and ethics." He also proposes a "*comprehensively* christological anthropology" in which "(1) Christology warrants ultimate claims about true humanity such that (2) the scope of those claims applies to all anthropological data" (225, italics his). Cortez also affirms that a Christology-driven anthropology is "Christological but not Christomonistic"—that is, the anthropology is centered in Christ but is informed by additional factors. The author also notes the tension between soteriological universalism and anthropological exclusivism. Some of the thinkers surveyed by Cortez, such as Barth and Cone, appear to have left the door open to soteriological universalism. This concept, however, is at odds with the notion that one must become fundamentally more Christlike to be human. Although Cortez has written one additional volume applying Christological anthropology to the mind-body problem, expanding this concluding chapter to advocate clearly and defend his version of Christological anthropology would be a significant contribution.

Christian anthropology is an area that needs more contributions such as this volume. *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective* is a valuable addition to this field that is crucial to the contemporary church.

- Steve Lemke, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Church History for Modern Ministry: Why Our Past Matters for Everything We Do.* By Dayton Hartman. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016. 112 pages. Paperback, \$12.95.**

Church history is one of those seminary courses that certain students devour and other students despise. Typically, the self-described practical students tend to question the value of investing ten percent of their MDiv credits on a bunch of dead people, many of whom did not even do church in a way that would work today. Every semester, church historians teaching those courses face a segment of students who openly doubt the value in studying ancient figures arguing about obscure details of theology.

In his recent book, *Church History for Modern Ministry: Why Our Past Matters for Everything We Do*, Dayton Hartman presents a defense of the benefits of church history for the local church. Based on his conversion to the value of church history, forged in the furnace of pastoral ministry, Hartman demonstrates the practical value of studying dusty tomes and contentious debates.

The brief volume is divided into six chapters. In Chapter One, Hartman explains the benefits of a historical understanding to local church ministry: it helps address social issues, it encourages healthy discipline, it teaches present pastors about past challenges, and informs the contemporary church's view of the future. Having presented this apology, the second chapter presents a defense of creeds as a grounding point for contemporary Christian belief. The faith once delivered to the saints has been hammered into concise summaries of the biblical witness, so it makes sense to include these pithy summaries in modern worship as well as discipleship programs. Hartman introduces some practical steps for adding creeds to Sunday services, as well as catechism.

Chapter Three commends church history for enabling the present pastor to imitate earlier pilgrims in the faith journey. By hearing about Clement of Rome, Augustine of Hippo, and Spurgeon of London, the twenty-first century minister can model his life after someone who lived well and left an honorable legacy. In the fourth chapter, Hartman argues that the apologetics of the past offer help to today's preacher. Mayberry is no more in America and the respect for Scripture has dwindled in popular culture; history reveals how previous generations of Christians proclaimed the gospel to an unbelieving, uninterested world without compromising truth.

In Chapter Five Hartman deals with the complex and contentious topic of cultural engagement. Here, too, the author finds resources that show how saints of old shaped their world around the true, the good, and the beautiful. The past teaches the contemporary pastor that cultural relevance means much more than a fauxhawk, a beard, and torn jeans; the people of God need pastors who understand the times and are engaged in the world around. The sixth chapter concludes the body of the text with an exhortation for pastors to look for today's solution in yesterday's news.

The back matter of *Church History for Modern Ministry* is more than only endnotes and indices. Those vital tools are included, but Hartman also offers a helpful guide to beginning studies in church history, one appendix that discusses the favorite apologetic accusations against Christianity (e.g., Calvin murdered Servetus), and another appendix that collects and briefly comments on some early creeds and modern catechisms. These short additions add value to the concise apology for church history.

For those that are already convinced of the value of studying history for local church ministry, this volume will seem inadequate. No topic is discussed in depth. There is little

actual history in the book at all. However, if this volume is placed in the hands of a skeptical seminary student, it might do some good. Even better, if this volume found its way into a local association's discussion group, it might encourage some pastors who never received academic training to value the tradition of Christianity and enrich their ministries through history.

The chief weakness of this volume is that its target audience is not clear. Although sometimes considered a throwaway section, a preface or short introduction with an explanation of the target audience of the volume and the proposed structure of it would have been beneficial. Many contemporary books could be improved by being a bit shorter, but in this case, the sixty pages of main text could have been improved with more explanation of the purpose.

Other than that weakness, the book fills an important role among helpful resources for the local church. The book is a reminder that the past matters. It is an encouragement for the lonely pastor that his deacons are not the first to attempt a coup. This book pushes the contemporary minister to recognize that he stands on a different shore of the same ocean from the faithful pastors of previous generations. The same sorts of cultural waves have been crashing since the first century, trying to undermine the truthfulness of Scripture. *Church History for Modern Ministry* may be the tool that unlocks the treasury of a rich theological history for the local church leader who has forgotten his seminary days or never had the opportunity to spend time in school. This short text would also make an excellent auxiliary reading assignment for a church history course for a college or seminary; it might prevent a student from doubting the value of history.

- Andrew Spencer, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma

***The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach.* Edited by Michael Welker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. 406 pages. Paperback, \$45.00.**

This volume, as its title promises, offers a multidisciplinary approach to understanding human personhood. Contributions by scholars in the disciplines of theology, biblical studies, philosophy, ethics, psychology, biology, physics, and law represent their perspectives on personhood. The cast of contributors also reflects an international diversity, with scholars from England, Scotland, Germany, India, Japan, and the United States.

The book is divided into four sections, each of which addresses a different aspect of the overall topic. The first section presents introductory questions, including an interesting article by Andreas Kemmerling (professor of philosophy at Heidelberg University) on "Why Is Personhood Conceptually Difficult?" Michael Welker (senior professor of systematic theology at Heidelberg University) contributes a valuable article exploring the implications of the biblical concepts of flesh, body, heart, soul, and spirit for understanding human

personhood. Philip Clayton (professor of philosophy of religion and theology at Claremont Graduate University) proposes a “multifaceted unity” view of Christian anthropology.

The second section addresses scientific perspectives on personhood. John Polkinghorne (professor emeritus of theoretical physics at Cambridge University) explores how scientific views can be blended with unique human capacities toward an integrated anthropology. Malcolm Jeeves proposes how the human uniqueness as manifested in the *imago Dei* is embedded in mind/body and neuropsychology. Warren Brown (professor of psychology at Fuller Graduate School of Theology) and Jeffrey Schloss (professor of biology at Westmont College) propose an emergentist view of personhood.

Perspectives from the Christian biblical and theological tradition are represented in the third section. Andreas Schüle (professor of biblical theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary) offers helpful insights to the richness of the Hebrew words *nephesh* (soul) and *ruach* (spirit) in the Old Testament. Likewise, Gerd Theissen (professor emeritus of New Testament at Heidelberg University) explores the New Testament concepts of flesh, body, soul, and spirit in contrasting the Christian understanding of a transformative anthropology with the gnostic notion of restorational anthropology. Volker Drecoll (professor of patristics at the University of Tübingen) and Eiichi Katayanagi (professor emeritus of anthropology at Kyoto University) investigate key concepts such as the *imago Dei*, *persona*, and *relatio* in Augustine’s anthropology in their articles. Markus Höfner (teaching assistant in systematic theology at Bochum University) offers valuable insights on the development of the concept of “heart” in Melancthon’s anthropology from his earlier *Loci communes* to his later *Loci praecipui theologici*. Origen Jathanna (professor of theology at United Theological College in Bangalore) examines the concept of body in Indian Christian anthropology.

The final section addresses contemporary theological, ethical, and interdisciplinary challenges to Christian anthropology. Berndt Oberdorfer (professor of theology at Augsburg University) and Stephan Kirste (professor of law at Heidelberg University) address the concept of human dignity in relation to the *imago Dei* and the law. Frank Vogelsang (director of the Evangelical Academy in Rhineland) addresses the nature of human embodiment, and Isolde Karle (professor of theology at Bochum University) investigates the significance of gender in anthropology. William Schweiker (professor of theological ethics at the University of Chicago) explores how the inward witness of conscience informs human personhood. Günter Thomas (professor of systematic theology at Bochum University) applies the concept of personhood in modern bioethical dilemmas.

These articles are rich in content and diverse in approach. Unfortunately, space does not permit a detailed discussion of the individual articles. However, the book as a whole offers a valuable contribution to the field of theological anthropology which scholars will want to read carefully. This book would have helped my church members when I served as pastor of a church near a national research university with faculty members and graduate students in the sciences, as they sought to make sense of how their scientific knowledge

integrated with their Christian faith.

Well-informed, concerned evangelical Christians, however, may be concerned with several aspects of this work. The hermeneutical presuppositions and approaches utilized by some of the contributors will concern many evangelicals, as will the commitment of many of the contributors to an emergentist view of the origin of the mind and the contributors' commitment to theistic evolution. The volume, however, affords insights from multidisciplinary and multinational perspectives, and that is the unique contribution of this volume to Christian anthropology.

- Steve Lemke, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment.* By Douglas A. Sweeney. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xii + 391 pages. Hardcover, \$74.00.**

Over the last several decades, studies on the great American pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards have significantly increased. While studies on his philosophy, theology, and ethics have abounded, one important area has often been understudied—Edwards's bibliology. Doug Sweeney, Director of the Jonathan Edwards Center and Chair of the Church History & History of Christian Thought Department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has gradually brought Edwards's bibliology out of the shadows in the last several years. In his most recent monograph—*Edwards the Exegete*—Sweeney argues that Edwards's life and ministry cannot be rightly understood apart from his biblical exegesis (ix). From his study, he identifies four primary methods of exegesis in Edwards's bibliology: canonical exegesis, christological exegesis, redemptive-historical exegesis, and pedagogical exegesis (x).

Sweeney begins in Part One by focusing on Edwards's prolegomena. Here, he points out that Edwards devoted much of his life to the study of the Bible. Many upon reading this might think, "Well, of course." Surprisingly, this has been frequently overlooked in scholarly research. And Edwards's commitment to the Bible is significant, as Enlightenment ideals were initiating controversy surrounding the Bible's authority and reliability. To reveal both the seriousness and habit of his study, Sweeney identifies Edwards's use of lexical and historical aids, work in the original languages, and his involvement in historical criticism. Edwards held the conviction that believers have the advantage of understanding the Bible. He affirmed the need for special revelation, and he used both internal and external evidences for the Bible's credibility. For Edwards, believers learn from Jesus through the Scripture, and the Spirit guides them to rightly understand his Word. From this, Edwards emphasizes a canonical approach that calls for Scripture to interpret Scripture. As he carried this out, his interpretation can be observed as both literal and spiritual.

In Part Two, Sweeney addresses the canon of Scripture and Edwards's canonical exegesis. Edwards often read the Scripture theologically. His theological readings are seen in his understanding of structures, themes, and doctrines. But as he read theologically, the rule of faith served as his boundary. To illustrate this, Sweeney turns to Edwards's interpretation of Melchizedek. Edwards found Melchizedek to be a type of Christ. Sweeney notes, "Edwards rarely said much about Melchizedek or Christ's priestly ministry that had not been said before many times. But he said it with intensity and interest in the unified witness of the Spirit that exceeds that of most of biblical interpreters" (91). Sweeney also describes Edwards's typology, which helped him convey the beauty and harmony of the Scripture and, more importantly, point his parishioners to Christ and his glory.

Part Three examines the centrality of Christ in Edwards's exegesis. For Edwards, Christ is the primary theme and subject of the Bible. As such, he is the focal point of God's purpose of creation and redemption of the world. Sweeney explains that Edwards viewed the Bible as a letter from Christ to his people. It is the Word of God and the whole story of the Bible hinges on the incarnate Son of God. To demonstrate Edwards's christological exegesis, Sweeney examines his interpretation of Song of Solomon. Sweeney shows how Edwards read Song of Solomon the way many had before, as a picture of Christ and his bridegroom. Sweeney writes, "Any one of Edwards's notes about the nature of the Song will seem a stretch when read alone. When taken together, however, they form a plausible biblical pattern. And patterns, for Edwards, revealed important spiritual truths" (125). Through this, Sweeney affirms Edwards's interpretation of Scripture is sporadic but meant to be thoroughly Christocentric.

In Part Four, Sweeney goes on to observe Edwards's redemptive-historical exegesis. Edwards read the Bible as part of the grand narrative of redemption. He sought to build trust in the Scripture. To do so, he used the best sources he could and he engaged the emerging criticism of the Bible. In his study, Sweeney finds that for Edwards the Bible is the map of the world, redemption is the engine which moves the world, and God in his providence is the pilot who steers the world. To clarify this redemptive-historical method, Sweeney studies Edwards's writings on Revelation. He believed most of the prophecies had come to pass, but he warned against trying to determine the time. Edwards also advised against interpreting the book in a strictly linear way. Because of this, he believed the message of Revelation to be a story about the impending defeat of the whore of Babylon—the Roman Catholic Church—by Christ and his saints.

In the final section of his work, Sweeney assesses Edwards's instruction on life and faith, his pedagogical exegesis. Edwards sought human flourishing by molding his life to the Scripture. After providing a history of doctrinal exegesis in Edwards's immediate context, Sweeney shows that Edwards's life and ministry were marked by doctrine that is built upon the entirety of Scripture. Edwards believed doctrine always informed Christian practice. To illustrate this, Sweeney describes Edwards's doctrine of justification. While it reveals

Edwards's anti-Catholic zeal, many parts of it seem less Protestant, according to Sweeney. In this, Sweeney nevertheless shows Edwards to be of Puritan heritage but one who refused to read the Bible from one side or the other.

Edwards the Exegete will certainly serve as an authority on Edwards and his bibliology for many years to come. Sweeney's work will challenge and encourage its readership. As Sweeney identifies and explains Edwards's exegetical practices, he displays not only his knowledge of Edwards's work but also the most recent scholarship on Edwards today. If there is any doubt of this, one may simply look at the endnotes, which makeup over one-third of the book. And while the research is thorough and at times technical, Sweeney writes for a wide audience. He synthesizes his findings in such a way that both laypersons and academics may profit from the work. His own commentary on Edwards ought to move each of us to assess our own reading of the Bible and to seek the Lord anew in our study of Scripture. Anyone interested in biblical interpretation and Jonathan Edwards will be more than delighted when reading this book.

- Aaron L. Lumpkin, *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina*

***Ephesians*. By Allen Verhey and Joseph S. Harvard. *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2011. 291 pages. Paperback, \$35.00.**

Allen Verhey was professor of Christian ethics at Duke Divinity School until his death in 2014. His publications include various articles and books, including *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*; *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, and *The Christian Art of Dying*. Joseph S. Harvard was pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Durham, North Carolina, for thirty-three years. He is the former president of Durham Congregations in Action.

Verhey and Harvard attempt to make the epistle to the Ephesians applicable to believers. The authors are candid and portray themselves as humble evangelicals who seek to be illumined by the Spirit in interpreting this important Pauline epistle. The authors desire that readers would live or perform the purpose of the letter, which is to have right relationships in community (1).

The major themes of *Ephesians* include prayer, peace, restoration, the consummation of "God's good future," and community living. The authors provide persuasive discussions on the meaning of the text of the letter. Also, the writers seek to move readers from simply receiving new knowledge or perspectives to application in their contexts. In other words, the authors' priority is that their readers would emulate Christian behavior as a result of reading this work.

The outline of the book is aligned to that of Ephesians. The headings, and thus most of the theological content, follow the authors' aim. Because the authors have a goal in their commentary, readers might not agree with the authors' specific selection of titles used for the headings of subdivision of passages of the epistle. Nonetheless, the approaches Verhey and Harvard make to several of the sections are thought-provoking. For example, the authors title the section of 1:3–14, "Beginning with Prayer." Under this heading, the writers focus more on the fact that Paul is praying (giving a eulogy to God) than on the traditionally exploited issues of predestination or divine control (1:11). For some readers, not receiving commentary that is Calvinist or Arminian in approach might cause them not to see the work as reliable. However, the authors' aim is not to respond to divisive issues. Their commentary in "Beginning with Prayer" seeks to encourage believers to fulfill the vocation to *be* a praise of God's glory by responding to their call to lives of doxology displaying "something of the good future of God" (48).

As a theological commentary, the work does not focus on issues behind the text and accepts the text in its final form. The authors aim to encourage faith in Scripture, not to cause readers to doubt the Word. The edition also contains more than a theological commentary on Ephesians. Some interesting articles appear at the end of each chapter seeking to reflect on related issues to the previous discussion. Also, the work has text boxes with interesting facts, interjections, or quotes that make the read fresh and engaging for a diverse audience.

Unfortunately, the authors believe in post-modernity and its values. Verhey and Harvard seem genuine in their desire to be God-honoring. However, they favor a conciliatory and tolerant view towards all persons regardless of their lifestyles. For example, the writers see the church as an "inclusive community" that includes "people who are different from us in gender, race, class, nationality, and sexual orientation" (7, 11). Though many similar statements appear in the work, the authors do not fully disclose their views on gender issues. However, conservative readers will most likely be uncomfortable with the authors' progressive interjections. They also state, "Women may perform functions in the church that had been regarded as appropriate only for men" (143). Indeed, the authors are not necessarily agreeing with having women pastors, but do see the role of women in the church differently than complementarians. Positively speaking, the writers are simply seeking "a unity of peaceable difference," not to overturn genders (142). Verhey and Harvard seek to foment interdependence among Christians of both genders and nationalities since "the culturally formed norms that have been attached to gender" exist in Christ (143). Nonetheless, the progressive interjections function as perhaps subliminal messages that cause readers to think about their positions. For immature believers, these interjections can be dangerous.

On a positive note, the authors' work is valuable for pastors and theologians to exercise their faith and that of their churches. The writers seek to convey this as their ultimate aim (see preface). They accomplish this goal by appealing to the intellect and obedience to Christ in what Ephesians commands. The authors' theology is focused on changed hearts. For them, a renewed heart is what makes a believer, and renewed hearts what make a church, not numbers on a membership roll (168).

Conservative Christians can benefit from the scholarly and sophisticated flavor of the Verhey and Harvard. However, for some Christian groups (e.g., Southern Baptists), the authors' views on women in ministry and the positive tone concerning homosexuality and its compatibility with Christianity will not be appreciated. However, *as expressed in this work*, the writers' views on women and homosexuality are superficial. Again, these views are more interjections than fully-developed arguments. With these interjections, the authors seek to be conciliatory rather than expound dogma on those issues. Therefore, the authors might connect with mature conservatives in most points of the theological exegesis they do on Ephesians. I would recommend *Ephesians* to a Southern Baptist audience disclosing the issues mentioned above. Overall, the authors are true gospel teachers, although they are not conservatives.

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***Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches.* Edited by D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic. 501 pages. Hardcover, \$36.99.**

Eschatology is a Festschrift celebrating the theological and academic contributions of Dr. Craig Blaising, who has served as Executive Vice President and Provost of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary since 2002, following productive years on the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The first article in the Festschrift, by Steven L. James, offers a biography of Craig Blaising's academic achievements. Because perhaps Blaising's best-known works—*Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church* and *Progressive Dispensationalism*—address the doctrine of eschatology, the topic of this present work is apposite. More specifically, Blaising has advocated progressive dispensationalism, which Blaising and Darrell Bock have presented as the next phase in the evolution of dispensationalism, removing some of the perceived weaknesses of earlier versions of classical dispensationalism. *Eschatology* offers twenty-six articles by well-known evangelical scholars, all of whom have a personal connection with Blaising. Each of these twenty-six articles is worthy of attention, but space in this review does not afford such a detailed examination. This reviewer will highlight selected articles from each section of the book.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section, "The Doctrine of the Future and Its Foundations," features the following articles: "The Doctrine of the Future and Canonical Unity: Connecting the Future to the Past," by D. Jeffrey Bingham;

“The Doctrine of the Future and the Concept of Hope,” by Stanley D. Toussaint; “The Doctrine of the Future and the Weakening of Prophecy,” by Charles C. Ryrie; and “The Doctrine of the Future, the Doctrine of God, and Predictive Prophecy,” by John D. Laing and Stefana Dan Laing. The article by the Laings builds a strong case for the authenticity of biblical prophecy from biblical, theological, and historical foundations. In addition to the doctrine of divine revelation, God’s omniscience, eternity, and divine providence are employed to build the case for biblical prophecy. Historical fulfillments of biblical prophecy confirmed by archaeology are presented as further evidence for the truthfulness of prophecy. The Laings also offer several helpful hermeneutical tools for the appropriate interpretation of biblical prophecy, including understanding the covenant structure within the Bible, an awareness of the conditional nature of many prophecies, and the recognition that prophecy at times may have a dual fulfillment in history.

The second section of the book regards “The Doctrine of the Future in the Bible,” with four articles each regarding the New and Old Testament. The Old Testament articles include “The Doctrine of the Future and Moses: ‘All Israel Shall Be Saved’” by Daniel I. Block; “The Doctrine of the Future in the Historical Books,” by Gregory Smith; “The Doctrine of the Future in the Psalms: Reflections on the Struggle of Waiting,” by George L. Klein; and “The Doctrine of the Future in the Prophets,” by Mark F. Rooker. Block’s article focuses on the challenging topic of gleaning tidbits of eschatology from Deuteronomy. The article offers rich insights to the interpretation of Deuteronomy, built upon the “covenantal triangle” of the people of Israel, the land of Canaan, and YHWH. Drawing from Deuteronomy 4, 30, and 32, Block outlines the traces of eschatology in Deuteronomy. He notes the distinction between physical Israel and spiritual Israel in Deuteronomy, anticipating this concept in Romans 9–11. The eschatological restoration of Israel will restore the trilateral relationship of YHWH, the land of Canaan, and the people of Israel.

The New Testament articles in this section include “The Doctrine of the Future in the Synoptic Gospels,” by Darrell L. Bock; “The Doctrine of the Future in John’s Writings,” by David L. Turner; “The Doctrine of the Future in Paul’s Writings,” by W. Edward Glenny; and “The Doctrine of the Future in Hebrews and the General Epistles” by David L. Allen. Bock’s article presents a splendid summary of the eschatological teachings in the Synoptic Gospels, including the soon coming and delay sayings, the end referring to divine judgment, the tribulation preceding the end, the future involving our resurrection, a future for repentant Israel, and the renewal of the kingdom motif. Bock also surveys the eschatological teachings in the parables, the Olivet Discourse, and the teachings about the future of the individual. David Allen’s article on the eschatological teachings in Hebrews and the General Epistles addresses the concept of future rest, the future inheritance for believers, the future implications of the atonement, the New Jerusalem, and the “shaking” of all creation in Hebrews, as well as the teachings about the future in James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude.

Part three is the largest section of the book, featuring eleven articles on “The Doctrine of the Future in the History of Christian Thought.” The articles address the doctrine of the future in the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons, by Stephen O. Presley; Origen and Athanasius, by Bryan M. Litfin; Augustine, by Jonathan P. Yates; John Calvin, by Nathan D. Holsteen; Anabaptist Thought, by Paige Patterson; Jonathan Edwards, by Glenn R. Krider; Baptist Theology, by Kevin D. Kennedy; Dispensationalism, by Mark L. Bailey; Jürgen Moltmann, by Lanier Burns; Contemporary European Theology,” by Friedhelm Jung and Eduard Friesen; and Millennialism in Contemporary Evangelical Theology, by David S. Dockery. Paige Patterson’s article makes a valuable contribution in that the eschatology of the early Anabaptists is often associated with a few radical chiliasts such as Jan of Leyden, who instigated the Münster Rebellion, and Thomas Müntzer, leader of the German Peasant Revolt. However, as Patterson makes clear, the mainstream theologians of the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition (Menno Simons, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Pilgrim Marpeck) strongly opposed the radical chiliasts in favor of a more traditional premillennial eschatology. Glenn Krider’s article on Jonathan Edwards’s postmillennial eschatology is informative and helpful, particularly focused on Edwards’s *A History of the Work of Redemption*. It is curious that the postmillennialism of Edwards, a slave owner and pro-slavery advocate, does not envision the end to slavery as part of the coming millennium to fulfill the promise of release to the captives, and setting free those who are oppressed in favorable year of the Lord in a sort of eschatological year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18–19, cf. Isa 61:1–2, Lev 25:10). Kevin Kennedy’s article on Baptist eschatology is helpful in that it outlines consensus eschatological beliefs affirmed in all the key Baptist confessions, but also the points of disagreement between those holding various millennial views. David Dockery’s article presents an elegant survey of historical positions on eschatology, biblical concepts relating to eschatology, and key millennial positions.

Part four of the book examines “The Doctrine of the Future and Christian Ministry,” with articles on “The Doctrine of the Future and Pastoral Care,” by J. Denny Autrey; The Doctrine of the Future and Contemporary Challenges,” by R. Albert Mohler; and “The Doctrine of the Future and the Marketplace,” by Stephen N. Blaising. Denny Autrey’s article might seem to be a surprising topic in a volume on eschatology, but he masterfully weaves the threads of preaching and pastoral care with an affirmation of eschatological hope. Al Mohler’s article notes the eschatological vision of Augustine’s *City of God* as a model for contemporary engagement with culture.

The articles in this book comprise a valuable collection of diverse essays on eschatology, and Craig Blaising is deserving of this fine work done in his honor. Highly recommended.

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***Exploring Christian Doctrine: A Guide to What Christians Believe.* By Tony Lane. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014. 308 pages. Hardcover, \$30.00.**

Exploring Christian Doctrine is a theology textbook for beginners which was written by an accomplished theologian. Tony Lane (DD, University of Oxford) is professor of historical theology at London School of Theology. His publications include *A Concise History of Christian Thought* (Baker, 2006), *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (T&T Clark, 2002), and *Exploring Christian Thought* (Nelson, 1996). *Exploring Christian Doctrine* originated from his lectures to first-year undergraduate theology students. After an introduction and three chapters on theological method, Lane structures the other twenty-six chapters according to the biblical-theological framework of creation, sin and evil, redemption, and future glory. The author aims for an Evangelical and “eclectic” approach rather than a confessional approach (4). He attempts to achieve this goal by drawing from a broad range of Christian authors and confessions, including the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Reformed, Anglican, Baptist, and Lutheran traditions.

Lane’s book includes several unique aspects. First, he provides full quotations of Bible verses because he assumes—correctly, in my view—that most readers would neither know the verses nor take the time to find and read them if he had not provided them. Also, providing the scriptural text grounds the doctrinal explanations in the Bible and enables readers to readily assess the strength and relevance of the biblical support for the views. Second, Lane references relevant sections of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Boyd and Eddy’s *Across the Spectrum* (Baker, 2002 & 2009) which correspond to doctrines under consideration. Providing those references allows readers to compare Lane’s treatment of the doctrines as an Evangelical with the teachings of both the Roman Catholic Church and to explanations of various Evangelical views. Third, Lane includes brief sections in each chapter, such as “Error to Avoid,” “Sceptic’s Corner,” “Tension to Hold,” and “What do you think?” These sections allow Lane to explore, respectively, the following issues: misunderstandings of each doctrine, objections to Christian viewpoints with corresponding replies, seemingly contradictory aspects of a doctrine which should be maintained, and his answer to a doctrinal question posed to readers earlier in the chapter.

In the three chapters comprising the section titled Part A, “Method,” Lane concisely addresses the topics of knowing God, the Bible, and speaking about God. To illustrate the number of weighty topics treated briefly, consider the many subjects discussed in the twenty-eight pages of Part A: natural theology, special revelation, *sola Scriptura*, tradition, experience, authority and infallibility of the Bible, cataphatic and apophatic theology, analogy and metaphor, and the use of male references to God.

In Part B, “Creation,” Lane dedicates one chapter each to the doctrines of the creation of the world, the spirit world, and humanity. His treatment of these topics is balanced, and there are no surprises in those chapters. Part C, “Sin and Evil,” features Lane’s chapters

on sin, the fall and original sin, providence, and evil and suffering. This section contained several unexpected aspects. For example, Lane's chapter on the nature and effects of sin precedes his chapter on the fall and original sin. Readers might think such an arrangement is an oversight until they read Lane's explanation why he prefers his non-traditional order. First, Scripture says much about sin but little about its origin. Second, the reality of sin today is clearer than the doctrines of the fall and original sin. Third, the doctrine of human sinfulness is easier to embrace due to atrocities of the previous century, but since the post-Darwinian acceptance that "humanity is the product of a process of evolution over millions of years, the concept of a Fall has become more problematic" (79). Lane at this point does not deny the biblical account of the fall, but he presents what he considers to be a clear doctrine (sin) ahead of what he considers to be indistinct doctrines (the fall and original sin). Also interesting in Part C is that Lane's definition of original sin does not include original guilt, which he calls "a more controversial doctrine" (79, 82).¹

Parts D, E, and F on redemption comprise sixteen of the book's twenty-nine chapters. Part D, "Redemption: God and His Work," include chapters on the Law and the OT, the work of Christ, the person of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, Holy Spirit, Trinity, and God. Lane describes the biblical-historical material on the atonement according to the models of Christ as teacher, victor over Satan, the Second Adam, and atonement for sin. After adding the "central" aspect of penal substitution, Lane regards a rejection of penal substitution or any of the four models to be an error. Lane's chapters on the person and work of Christ as well as Christ's significance in light of religious pluralism are worth the price of the book. Parts E and F continue the consideration of redemption, distinguishing between personal and corporate. The chapters in Part E, "Redemption: Personal," address Christian initiation, baptism, justification and assurance, sanctification, and perseverance and reward. In the chapter on Christian initiation, Lane builds on the work of James D. G. Dunn to suggest four doors, or steps, to becoming a Christian. Based on fourteen conversion accounts in the book of Acts, Lane identifies these doors as repentance, faith, baptism, and receiving the Spirit. Identifying the paradigm for conversion in Acts is commendable, but one wonders if Lane made an adequate case for the last two doors. Most Evangelicals understand baptism as an act of obedience rather than a door to becoming a Christian. Similarly, receiving the Spirit might be better conceived as either *instantaneous with* or *a result of* becoming a Christian.

The chapters in Part F, "Redemption: Corporate," deal with grace and election, the church, and holy communion. Part G, "Future Glory," includes chapters on the end times, hell, and future hope. The final chapter appropriately focuses on the hope of resurrection for the new heaven and earth rather than solely the view that souls of believers go to heaven

¹Lane clarified in personal correspondence that he meant to make clear that he does believe in original guilt, but he intended to do so by asking questions rather than by providing an explicit statement.

after death. The presentation of the material might leave readers with the wrong impression that one should affirm the former while rejecting the latter rather (see especially 284). Instead, Lane asserts both/and by affirming a two-stage personal eschatology in which heaven is the destination for believers during the intermediate state; *next*, believers will be raised bodily upon the return of Christ to live in the new heaven and earth.

Lane's distribution of traditional doctrines in this framework of creation, sin and evil, redemption, and future glory results in the treatment of many doctrines under the single category of redemption. The sixteen chapters comprising redemption include part or all of the traditional doctrines of Christology, Pneumatology, Trinity, Theology Proper, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology. Although committing more than half of the book to one of four biblical-theological themes might not seem to be a balanced treatment, perhaps Lane's organization of the doctrines accurately reflects the proportionality of the biblical data and historical discussions.

While affirming Lane's approach of peaceably presenting the differing doctrinal perspectives, one wonders if he overuses the method of adopting a both/and approach among the views. His conclusions on salvation, baptism, and perseverance provide examples. Concerning salvation, Lane rejects the "polarization between Protestants, who teach that we become Christians by faith, and Catholics, who teach that we become Christians by baptism. The New Testament knows no such dichotomy" (180). Most Protestants would affirm that people become Christians by repentance and faith but would deny that people become Christians by water baptism. In another unusual move, Lane regards processes of credobaptism (infant dedication with the hope of a subsequent baptism as one's confession of faith) and paedobaptism (infant baptism with the hope of a subsequent confession of personal faith) to be "equivalent alternatives" (191). Is it possible, however, for a church to employ such a "dual practice" of differing views of baptism without altering one or both of the perspectives significantly? Concerning perseverance, Lane writes: "The New Testament seems to both affirm and deny the possibility of losing one's salvation" (216). Perhaps these both/and positions concerning salvation, baptism, and perseverance are the author's method of resolving competing interpretations of Scripture to present an "eclectic" theology. One wonders, however, whether those differing interpretations should be allowed to stand without forcing a reconciliation which would distort both perspectives.

Tony Lane's survey of Christian doctrine was a pleasure to read. The book seems to be ideal for introducing theology to teenagers and adults in both the church and the academy, as well as teaching international readers who are studying theology in English as a second language.

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***Four Views on Hell*. 2nd edition. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Preston Sprinkle. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 224 pages. Paperback, \$18.99.**

Four Views on Hell is a rebooted anthology, following the 1996 original, containing articles written from various perspectives within evangelicalism on the Christian doctrine of hell (9–14).¹ Contributors include: Denny Burk (professor of biblical studies at Boyce College, Southern Seminary) who studies the traditional view (i.e., “Eternal Conscious Torment” [ECT]); John Stackhouse, Jr. (professor of religious studies, Crandall University) who argues for annihilationism (i.e., “Terminal Punishment” [TP]); Robin Parry (editor, Wipf and Stock Publishers) who promotes “Christian Universalism” (CU), which Preston Sprinkle (the general editor) quickly distinguishes from pluralistic universalism—the view that “all roads leads to heaven” (13); and lastly, Jerry Walls (professor of philosophy, Houston Baptist University) who explains his view of purgatory (149–50), which makes a distinction between satisfaction (the Roman Catholic view of purgatory that the Reformers vehemently rejected) and sanctification, a “forward-looking process of perfecting that which is imperfect” (149).

The purpose of this work is to explore three key developments that have occurred in ecclesiastical circles since the 1996 edition: 1) the pervasive popularity of TP amongst evangelicals; 2) rising interest in CU (especially since the publication of Rob Bell’s, *Love Wins* in 2011); and lastly, 3) the cultivation of a “theological cross-pollination” due to a “growing” ecumenical spirit of dialogue between Protestants and Catholics, especially “among younger believers who find it difficult to write off the faith of their Catholic brothers and sisters” (10). Like all Counterpoints volumes, the format includes each respective writer arguing for his/her position, with the other writers offering a brief critique. Unlike the 1996 edition, the editor (Sprinkle) proffers his concluding reflections of each view (albeit, Sprinkle seems to favor the TP and CU views [195–202]), as well as the areas he sees in need of further exploration: the semantic ranges of key terms dealing with the doctrine of hell including *aiōnios*, *apollumi*, and *olethros*; and a historical-critical survey of the key passages in light of their ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds (205–06).

In his introduction, Sprinkle explains that each of the writers agree on the concrete existence of hell, but vary on the question, “What is hell like?” (11). Sprinkle argues that Scripture seems to promote a complex view of hell that can be taken in different directions depending on the theological framework of its readers (12), and implores readers to approach this work with an open mind in evaluating each view in light of the biblical/theological evidence (14–15). In chapter one, Burk defends his brand of ECT, and gives

¹Stanley N. Gundry and William V. Crockett, ed. *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

an exegetical explanation of the doctrine of hell from ten key, biblical passages (21–42).² Seminal to Burk’s thesis is that punishment is to be commensurate with the value of the thing/person offended (19). Since God has ultimate and infinite value, punishment against God should also be infinite in severity and duration—hence, ECT (20). Stackhouse presents his case for TP in chapter 2. Central to Stackhouse’s argument is that the punishment ought to fit the crime (66, 88). If humans and their sins committed against God are finite, then infinite suffering in hell is not a commensurate punishment by God, who is infinitely good (80). Parry argues for CU in chapter 3. Parry’s view does not deny that there will be eschatological judgment (hell) for those denying Christ. However, Parry sees that ultimately “God will reconcile *all* people” (101, emphasis original). Germane to Parry’s argument is the problem of “proof texting” between the various camps (102–03), as well as the need for a theological lens through which to evaluate the scriptural teachings on hell—the *regula fidei* (103). In chapter 4, Walls proposes that purgatory is compatible with evangelicalism, and can be seen from two perspectives: the ancient sanctification model (as promoted by Bede) and the subsequent satisfaction (penance) model (149–52). Bedrock to Walls’s thesis is the concept of “optimal grace” (“an accurate account of the gospel”), which is often not evinced in this lifetime, but is made available in purgatory (171–72). Of the four views presented in this work, Burk’s and Stackhouse’s views appeared to be the most steeped in Scripture, while Parry’s and Walls’s views relied more heavily on theological/philosophical scaffolding.

In terms of strengths, this work examines hell from four different viewpoints within evangelicalism—thus, allowing readers to make an informed decision regarding which view is most faithful to Scripture. Second, the book (mostly) has an irenic tone. Perhaps the sole exception to this is Stackhouse’s critique of Burk (45–46). Third, this work is easily accessible and seeks to promote further discussion on this important doctrine. The post-Reformation mantra *ecclesia semper reformanda est* permeates this work, and for this and other reasons, the writers are to be commended (15).

However, no work is without weaknesses, and *Four Views on Hell* is no exception. A major weakness is the discussion of purgatory in a book dedicated to the doctrine of hell. As Walls adroitly illustrates, the *telos* of purgatory—both in Roman Catholic and evangelical views—is not *hell*, but *heaven* (146–47). Walls’s essay seems incongruous in a work dedicated to the doctrine of hell (179). Second, Sprinkle explains at the outset that this book is supposed to be focused on the biblical account of the doctrine of hell, “All of the authors will derive and articulate their different views based on Scripture and theological reasoning” (14). However, the bedrock of Walls’s argument appears to be founded upon the philosophical underpinnings of Dorothy Sayers and C. S. Lewis—not on Scripture (149–73). Third, this

²Isa 66:22–24; Dan 12:2–3; Matt 18:6–9; Matt 25:31–46; Mark 9:42–48; 2 Thess 1:6–10; Jude 7, 13; Rev 14:9–11; and Rev 20:10, 14–15.

work omits the metaphorical view, which was included in the 1996 edition.³ The omission of views that deny the physicality of hell, could implicitly convey that evangelicals do not care what others think, and/or that evangelicals have nothing to say in response. Neither option should be true for evangelical Christians. Fourth, this book tended to represent the four choices monolithically, which seemed to this reviewer a severe flattening of the evidence as there are variegated approaches to each of the stated positions (especially ECT), which were not represented or alluded to in this book. Rather, this work implicitly created a false dichotomy when other options are available.

In sum, *Four Views on Hell* makes an important contribution in thinking through the evangelical doctrine of hell. While this book has some glaring weaknesses, it does further the discussion within evangelicalism, and introduces its readers to positions s/he might not have been previously aware of.

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³William V. Crockett, “The Metaphorical View,” in *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 43–76.

***Fundamentalism, Fundraising, and the Transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1919–1925.* By Andrew Christopher Smith. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2016. 249 pages. Hardcover, \$46.00.**

Andrew Christopher Smith (PhD, Vanderbilt) is currently assistant professor of religion at Carson-Newman University where he teaches church history, Baptist history, and is director of the Oxford Studies Program. Smith makes an important contribution to the study of organizational structure in a Southern Baptist context. It is based upon his dissertation research at Vanderbilt and is part of the “America’s Baptist” series published by the University of Tennessee Press. The series is edited by Keith Harper. This is the first book in the series.

Smith’s overall premise is that Southern Baptist churches are not as independent as one might think in today’s understanding of congregational autonomy. Although Baptists have enjoyed an historical expression of personal liberty, post-Civil War economics and practicalities necessitated a re-assessment of denominational procedures and led to a call for reform at the organizational level. Smith contends that northern-style fundamentalism (with an emphasis on personal holiness, biblical inerrancy, and responsibility for evangelization of the lost) appeared to be a more successful model than the previous, loosely organized Baptist effort in the South. In other words, the North’s success in the Civil War was seen, at least in part, as the success of industry and organization. With a more organized effort, perhaps Southern Baptists could harness the power of organization and accomplish more together than they could separately as individual churches.

Smith opens the book with an extended treatment of E. Y. Mullins’s seminal efforts at organizing Southern Baptists. Although he devotes only one chapter exclusively to Mullins’s efforts, Smith weaves his influence throughout the book. Mullins is characterized as the quintessential aristocratic pastor; well educated, cultured, and with a bent toward more progressive thinking. Mullins seemed to be the perfect man for the situation in that he advocated a more centralized hierarchy and was open to new ideas and methods. By harnessing the power of cooperation, he foresaw an evangelistic juggernaut that would win the world through Southern Baptist efforts.

Southern Baptists were simultaneously fighting northern-style Fundamentalism and ecumenism at the turn of the twentieth century. Most Southern Baptist leaders viewed both competing movements as too hierarchical and doctrinally out-of-step with prevailing thought. Ironically, Southern Baptists began to adopt some organizational ideas from northern Fundamentalists and gradually shifted toward centralization. This was accomplished primarily through articles published by more progressive Southern Baptist periodicals. In 1916, Southern Baptists formed the Executive Board which permanently bureaucratized the Convention and in 1919 and the Convention authorized the “Seventy-Five Million Campaign,” which was envisioned as the most ambitious fundraising effort to date.

The “Seventy-Five Million Campaign” was both a defensive and offensive tactic in response to the rise of ecumenism in the United States. It was defensive toward ecumenism and offensive toward evangelization. Particularly, the Interchurch World Movement was gaining momentum and Southern Baptists were adamantly opposed to interdenominational cooperation; such cooperation was untenable because it was seen as an attempt to encroach upon dearly held biblical doctrines.

Southern Baptists were not the only denomination to launch fundraising campaigns during this time. Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and other groups had fundraising campaigns but those efforts were much more modest. With the “Seventy-Five Million Campaign,” Southern Baptists were making a definitive statement of their intention to not only retain their numerical superiority (e.g. it is estimated that 40% of southern Christians were Southern Baptists in post-WWI America) but also to lead the way to world evangelization. The money raised in the Campaign was intended to be used in support of missions, Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries, and other church related efforts.

However, to accomplish this Herculean task, more organization was needed. E. Y. Mullins provided the impetus and R. L. Scarborough, director of the Seventy-Five Million Campaign, provided the ideological foundation for banding together in support of the cause. Previously, Southern Baptists were more personally individualistic and were less organized as a network of congregations. However, to accomplish this fundraising goal, more concentrated effort and loyalty was needed. Scarborough, with the cooperation of like-minded editors, began promoting the idea of power through unity. Many of the articles in denominational papers and Sunday school lessons openly suggested that disloyalty to the Convention (and churches) was tantamount to disloyalty to God. Great efforts were made to encourage individuals and churches to make pledges toward the campaign and Southern Baptists responded with enthusiasm. In all, \$92 million was pledged, far exceeding the goal of \$75 million; however, with hard economic times and the cooling of previous excitement, the campaign actually raised \$54 million, far below the goal. Some felt the campaign was too ambitious to begin with and that certain means to try to achieve it went beyond Baptist principles.

Most notable, some influential Southern Baptist pastors and editors such as Ben Bogard, J. R. Graves, and J. Frank Norris felt the Convention had gone too far by equating loyalty to the Convention to loyalty to Christ. J. R. Graves was perhaps the most vocal and as editor of a popular Landmark periodical in west Tennessee voiced frequent opposition to what he perceived as hierarchical heresy. Ben Bogard was involved in legal action against the presiding Convention president and J. Frank Norris vehemently opposed the centralized control exerted by the Convention. All three were subsequently excluded, willingly or unwillingly, from Southern Baptist ranks.

It is interesting to this reviewer that each of these men who were excluded went on to be influential in a growing independent Baptist movement. Ben Bogard founded the American Baptist Association in Arkansas (not to be confused with the American Baptist Convention in the North) and although he contended the ABA was not a convention per se, it operated along similar lines but attempted to grant more local church autonomy while salvaging the benefits of congregational cooperation. J. R. Graves became very influential in the independent movement largely through his promotion of Landmark ideals and J. Frank Norris became defacto head of a loose fellowship of independent Baptist churches originally focused in Texas and Michigan but would eventually expand to include most of the South and some of the North. In this sense, it is ironic that the Southern Baptist Convention initially spurned centralization and hierarchical control but eventually embraced it as a pragmatic way to counter the ecumenical movement. It appears to be a classic case of 'if you can't beat them, join them,' only in this case they did not join the other groups doctrinally but did so organizationally.

Throughout his book, Smith gives an in-depth treatment of all the prominent figures involved in the organizational transition and seems to be even-handed in his appraisals. He also gives extended treatment to the opposition (*vis-à-vis* biographical and positional sketches of Bogard, Graves, and Norris) and devotes an appendix to further analysis of J. Frank Norris's efforts to derail centralized control.

This book will be of particular interest to scholars, pastors, and students of Southern Baptist history, Southern religious history, cultural anthropologists, and scholars interested in organizational behavior in a religious context. Smith has dealt perceptively and fairly with a complex historical issue that is bound to excite emotions on both sides of the hierarchical / non-hierarchical ecclesiastical control debate.

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***God the Trinity: Biblical Portraits.* By Malcolm B. Yarnell III. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016. 260+xi pages. Hardcover, \$29.99.**

Malcolm Yarnell serves as professor of systematic theology, director of the Center for Theological Research, and director of the Oxford Study Program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree at Oxford University. A prolific author and editor, he was eminently prepared to tackle the subject of this book.

In the prologue to this work, Yarnell notes the diversity of opinion among evangelical scholars and church members about the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. He proposes to address two key questions: "Is the doctrine that God is Trinity a biblical doctrine? Is it, moreover, a doctrine that is necessary to believe?" (viii). At the end of the

book he answers both questions affirmatively (238). Drawing on the art of painting, Yarnell also proposes that he will organize his study around eight biblical texts or portraits that highlight the Trinity.

A summary of the eight chapters will illustrate the depth of Yarnell's research and the value of this book for many potential readers. The first chapter focuses on Matthew 28:19 and the theme of the name of God as a clue to God's identity. Yarnell insists on remaining true to the biblical idiom and critiques the elevation of propositional claims as central to theology. In a wide-ranging discussion, he interacts with several theologians, Bible scholars, and artists to develop his thesis that "God as Trinity is the transcendent pattern in the entire Bible, mysteriously revealed in the Old Testament, and more fully revealed in the New Testament" (23–24).

Chapter 2 highlights 2 Corinthians 13:14 and introduces classic theological terms such as economic Trinity, immanent Trinity, and the indivisible operations of the Trinity. The heart of the chapter, however, is a strong exegesis of the key verse. Chapter 3 turns to the Old Testament and the Shema, focusing on Deuteronomy 6:4–7a as the key text. The treatment notes the many meanings of the word "monotheism," including Trinitarian monotheism. Chapter 4 focuses on John 1:18. Here Yarnell raises the issue of the value of precritical exegesis and the patristic interpreters of the Bible. He critiques Enlightenment exegesis and argues for a recovery of patristic exegetical insights such as typology. Chapter 5 primarily deals with John 16:14–15 and focuses on the Trinitarian pattern of the "ascription of monarchy to the Father, generation to the Son, and procession to the Holy Spirit" (121). In chapter 6 Yarnell continues to explore John's gospel, moving to John 17:21–22. He includes several Trinitarian patterns in John's gospel and briefly mentions the classic *filioque* issue that contributed to the split between Eastern and Western Christianity. Chapter 7 discusses Ephesians 1:3–14. He again notes the difficulties with exegesis based on Enlightenment philosophy and highlights Karl Rahner's axiom about the relation of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. Yarnell summarizes the responses to Rahner offered by Fred Howard and Scott Harrower before offering his own view: "*The economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity truly but not exhaustively*" (173). The final major chapter, chapter 8, treats Revelation 5:6. One reason for including this text is to demonstrate that the Trinitarian pattern emerges in many biblical genres, including apocalyptic literature.

The book concludes with an "Epilogue" that includes ten theses which provide a helpful summary of Yarnell's perspective. In an Appendix, Yarnell offers new translations of three classic Trinitarian creeds.

Yarnell's book is a substantial contribution to the resurgence of academic interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in recent decades. Fellow evangelicals will welcome the strong emphasis on the biblical basis for this doctrine. Choosing to focus on a few texts allowed Yarnell to do some in-depth exegesis. He interacts well with a wide range of scholars and is

eminently fair in his assessment of their views. One of the distinctive contributions of the work is his emphasis on recovering the insights of precritical scholars such as the patristic era exegetes. While not dismissing the insights of some critical scholars, Yarnell calls for a more “holistic” method that makes room for typology (4). His regular use of artistic imagery reminds the reader of the importance of the imagination in understanding God and His Word (232–33). Yarnell also tackled a number of classic and contemporary issues in the academic study of the Trinity. He offers clear and concise summaries of issues such as the relation of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity, the procession of the Holy Spirit and *filioque*, and the relation of men and women in comparison to the relation of the three persons of the Trinity.

Overall, Yarnell’s book could be of help to many readers of this journal. For instance, seminary students at both the master’s and doctoral levels would benefit from his extensive documentation in footnotes, his excellent summaries of key terms and issues, and his exegesis of selected biblical texts. Although Yarnell tackles complicated and challenging issues, he is very readable. He is also sensitive to the relation of theology and the practical life of the church, especially its worship. The mere fact that a Baptist evangelical thinker has dedicated himself to the doctrine of the Trinity is noteworthy. The author and publisher should be congratulated for this contribution to a significant ongoing discussion of a classic topic.

- Warren McWilliams, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma

***Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament.* By Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016. 550 pages. Hardcover, \$49.99.**

The three authors of this work each serve as New Testament professors at Southern Baptist seminaries. Andreas J. Köstenberger is the senior professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Benjamin L. Merkle is associate professor of New Testament and Greek at the same seminary. Robert L. Plummer is a professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Each author has written books and articles focused on applying Greek grammatical insights to modern evangelical academia as well as local pastoral ministry.

The authors express three main goals in writing this book. The first goal is to offer college or seminary students with an intermediate Greek grammar that could be read both exclusively and sequentially. The book’s exclusive nature is not intended to imply that other grammars should not be consulted but only that the intermediate Greek student

does not need to purchase a Greek grammar, a Greek New Testament (GNT), a Greek workbook, and a Greek lexicon before they can begin studying. All of the necessary student resources are already embedded within the book. Thus, the book can be read from cover to cover allowing for the intermediate Greek students to “go deeper” into the Greek of the New Testament.

This first goal is very close to the second. The authors also wanted to help the teacher with planning and resources. Because of this, the authors divided the book into fifteen chapters, the same number of weeks in most seminary and college semesters. They have also provided numerous weekly quizzes, exams, PowerPoint slides, chapter summaries, and other online resources for the teacher to use within their classrooms.

Ultimately, as stated in the third goal, the authors hope to produce “pastors, missionaries, and Christian laypeople” who are “competent exegetes and interpreters of the Bible” (6). In other words, the authors would see this work as pointless if it did not encourage other to engage their local churches with exegetical Greek insight. This is not intended to promote pastors boasting in their Greek skills but for “the pastor’s study of the Greek text” to be “like undergarments—providing support but not publicly visible” (477).

The overall order of the book’s fifteen chapters is also related to the authors’ goals. Each chapter follows the same basic pattern: an introduction, the chapter’s objective, an explanation of the chapter’s contents, a chapter summary consisting of charts, practice exercises related to the skill explained within the chapter, a vocabulary list divided into words that should be memorized and words that should be recognized, and a guided reading from the Greek New Testament.

The basic structure of the book is divided into three main parts: 1) the history of the Greek language and the nature of textual criticism, 2) an updated Greek Grammar, and 3) applications of using the Greek language. The unique parts of this book are found within its first and third parts. Thus, more emphasis will be placed in summarizing those sections while less will be spent on the second.

The first section of the book consists only of chapter one. This chapter provides a concise explanation of the history of the Greek language and of the nature of textual criticism. The overview of the Greek language is rather basic while the textual criticism section is much more engaging. This section not only explains the basic rules of textual criticism but also supplies numerous concrete examples of how to spot many of the unintentional and intentional errors within the Greek New Testament. For example, while explain the unintentional error of hearing, the book provides a reference to “Matthew 2:6 in Codex Sinaiticus, where *ek sou* (‘from you’) has been wrongly heard and written as *ex ou* (‘from whom’),” and states that a similar error happens today when “writing ‘night’ when someone says, ‘knight’” (30). This section also engages some of the resent trends in

textual criticism. Though scholars, such as Bart Ehrman, seek to “redirect the discipline away from determining the original reading of the NT text,” this book affirms that “the long-established discipline of textual criticism should lead us to affirm . . . the original reading of the text” (34).

The second part of the book covers general Greek grammar and syntax. Much of the material found in this section is very similar to Daniel Wallace’s *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, and the authors do not attempt to hide this from their readers. In fact, William Mounce (author of the popular *Basic of Biblical Greek*) states that the book has a “substantive interaction with Wallace’s grammar” (iii). Even so, this section of the book distinguishes itself from Wallace’s grammar in two main ways. First, this book is much easier to read. Every grammatical category provides a linear chart that clearly identifies how the subcategories relate to the main ones. Second, this book does not always agree with Wallace. In examining the datives of possession in John 2:4, Wallace states that “the emphasis is on Jesus, and his disciples ‘tagging along,’” but this book views this emphasis as “over-interpreting the grammar here” (183). Thus, the main value of this section is the discussion these authors are having with the other well-known Greek grammarians.

The third section of the book spans over three chapters. Within these chapters the reader is provided with an overview of different ways to analyze Greek sentences, an explanation of how to perform proper Greek word studies, and a short encouragement to persist in utilizing one’s Greek language skills.

The book’s chapter on analyzing Greek sentence also introduces the reader to diagramming and the discipline of discourse analysis. This chapter is primarily concerned with helping students remember that they learn Greek “so they can read the GNT, savor its message and deliver that message faithfully to others” (451). Thus, in order to help achieve this goal, the reader is introduced to line diagramming, tracing, and phrase diagramming. This chapter ends with an overview of discourse analysis with the hope that many of the “helpful insights from discourse analysis” will find their way into “the preaching of the church” (461).

The last two chapters of the book warn and inspire the reader to utilize Greek appropriately. The chapter on word studies provides the reader with numerous mistakes to avoid, such as making a word mean more than it ought to. The book provides an example in a word study of the word “cellphone.” The book asks “what does ‘cell’ mean” and clarifies that a modern reader would never think cell meant “a blob or protoplasm” when attached to the word phone (478). The chapter on continuing with Greek provides some practical steps the reader can take to ensure that reading the GNT becomes a part of their journey in life.

Overall, this book is very helpful, clear, and concise. This book is written with the student in mind, whether this student is in college, a pastor, or a layperson. As stated above, this book is very easy to read and for any student with a basic knowledge of Greek it will provide a stepping stone to deeper understanding of the GNT. Thus, this book is highly recommended for any student desiring to “go deeper” into their knowledge of the Greek language.

- Ron Lindo, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***How to Preach & Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth.* By Christopher J. H. Wright. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 288 pages. Paperback, \$18.99.**

Christopher J. H. Wright is an Anglican Old Testament scholar who received his PhD in Old Testament economic ethics from Cambridge. He is serving as the International Ministries Director of the Langham Partnership and is the Chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group. Wright is the author of many books including *God's People in God's Land*, *Old Testament Ethic for the People of God*, *The Mission of God*, and *The God I Don't Understand*.

Wright divides this book into two sections. The first section seeks to answer the following question, “Why should we bother to preach from the Old Testament?” (17). Wright’s warrant for asking this question is that according to his experience “the Old Testament is too exhaustive for the pastor or Bible study leader and too confusing for the people” and many pastors find it easier “to stick to what we know—the New Testament” (17). In the second section of Wright’s book, Wright provides the reader with examples and opportunities to apply his principle methodology for preaching and teaching to many texts within the Old Testament. Wright’s methodology involves interpreting the Old Testament through the bible’s “metanarrative,” which Wright defines as “the narrative that stands above all the other stories in the Bible and includes them within itself” (88).

Wright begins the book by suggesting three reasons a pastor/teacher should make every effort to preach and teach from the Old Testament. First, according to 2 Tim 3:14–4:2, the “holy scriptures” that can make one wise unto salvation are the Old Testament texts or stories. Second, the Old Testament contains the “great foundational truths” that are presupposed within the New Testament (22). Third, the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus, and Jesus used the Old Testament to explain himself to his disciples (24). After defending these three main reasons, Wright spends the rest of this section defining the limits for how to properly understand how Jesus fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament and how pastors should interpret the Old Testament in light of Jesus’s resurrection.

Wright begins by setting limits for his terminology used throughout the book. Wright argues that there is a difference between a prediction and a promise. Wright states that a prediction “can be about something completely external and unconnected” to someone, while a promise “expresses a *long-term* [italics original] commitment and intention” (31). Wright goes on to explain that a prediction can only be fulfilled once, while the fulfillment of a promise happens “in all kinds of new ways and new circumstances” (31). The rest of the book ultimately hinges upon this idea.

Wright argues that since Jesus’ purpose was to fulfill all the Old Testament promises (not all of its predictions) many Old Testament texts that contain promises God gave to his people can ultimately be applied to Christ. For example, Wright argues that even though Ps 2:7 originally applied to “King David and his descendants” a reinterpretation applied these words to the Messiah (41). Wright explains that pastors should preserve the original meaning of an Old Testament text and that even though the Old Testament points to Christ, it is not all about Christ (53). Wright, then, explains different ways pastors can link Old Testament texts to Jesus, while not distorting each text’s original meaning.

Next, Wright explains that because the Bible’s metanarrative breaks down into six main stages, pastors must place their sermons into each stage within this metanarrative. Wright thus offers seven dangers that a pastor/teacher should avoid in using this method. From here, Wright gives examples of how a pastor should preach from the different types of texts contained within the Old Testament; these types include the Old Testament Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, and certain parts of the Wisdom literature. Wright states each type of text connects to the meta-narrative in different ways. For example, Wright explains the best way to place Proverbs within this metanarrative is a thematic approach because most of Proverbs “seems to tumble over one another like a great cascade” (275).

One of the highlights of the book is Wright’s high view of the gospel. Though the term gospel is not used within the Old Testament, Wright correctly acknowledges that ignoring God’s redemptive actions in the Old Testament limits one’s understanding of the gospel (47–48). But Wright’s high view of the gospel also highlights the weakness of his work. If the gospel only begins in the Old Testament and finishes in the New, then Wright unintentionally places the Old Testament in a secondary position to the New. Thus, Wright’s argument that Jesus used “the Old Testament Scriptures to explain himself to his disciples and help them to understand the *meaning* of his life, death, and resurrection” (24, italics added) causes problems for his promise-fulfillment theory. As Wright notes, Jesus used the Old Testament to explain the meaning of his life, death, and resurrection. Is that not the same thing as explaining the meaning of the gospel? In other words, even Wright’s statement suggests that both Testaments testify to God’s gift of salvation by faith through grace. This critique is not meant to imply that Jesus’s resurrection is not a necessary event, but only to challenge Wright to view the Old Testament on its own terms, just as he has the New. Scholars in the promise-fulfillment camp, of which Wright belongs, must seek to

answer this question proposed by their opponents (e.g., John Goldingay, *Do We Really Need the New Testament?*): How is the Old Testament just as authoritative for the Church as the New? Wright seems aware of this question, but he does not answer it.

Also, Wright does well to offer examples for how each type of text connects to the Bible's metanarrative in many different ways. Wright's examples are concise, focused, and helpful for understanding his method. Wright also includes a variety of ways to apply his methodology to the same text. This section in Wright's book is more helpful than the first and provides pastors with a good resource for applying Wright's method to any other text that fits within the same text type.

Overall, Wright's work will be most useful for the beginning pastor/teacher and will help to give many explains of efficient ways to navigate the vast amount of material in the Old Testament. But this book should also be used along with a good commentary on the Old Testament text being studied. Because Wright's sermon examples come from easily-interpreted texts, readers must look elsewhere when faced with more difficult questions than Wright's work seeks to answer. Even so, Wright has provided a fine resource that will serve both students and pastors.

- Ron Lindo, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***In Defense of Doctrine: Evangelicalism, Theology, and Scripture.* By Rhyne R. Putman. Emerging Scholars. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015. 468 pages. Paperback, \$44.00.**

Most scholars agree that doctrine develops, though the idea sometimes makes laypersons and even pastors nervous. Exactly how doctrine develops is a scholarly sticky wicket, especially for evangelicals with a high view of Scripture. In this groundbreaking monograph, based upon his dissertation written at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, theologian Rhyne Putman offers a "defense of constructive theology and doctrinal development from within a confessional evangelical tradition and respective of evangelical biblicism" (11). In other words, this is a learned treatise on a thorny topic by an avowed inerrantist who as a Southern Baptist theologian identifies with conservative "low church" and Free Church evangelicalism.

Putman is convinced that doctrinal development is *the* problem for evangelical theology, affecting not just academic theology but also preaching, worship, and mission. If we rally around the principle of *sola Scriptura*, how do we address issues left unaddressed in Scripture or answer theological and ethical questions apparently unasked by biblical authors? Putman argues that "postcanonical doctrinal development, is for evangelicals, a historical phenomenon best explained through the tools of contemporary hermeneutical theory" (20). He attempts to reconcile biblicism and constructive theology, two concepts

often seen as incompatible by those on both the obscurantist right and the gimmicky left. Throughout his book, Putman dialogs with two key evangelical scholars of contemporary hermeneutical theory: Anthony Thiselton and Kevin Vanhoozer.

In Defense of Doctrine is divided into eight chapters. Chapters one and two function as prolegomena for Putman's project. The first offers a mostly historical survey of the problem of doctrinal development—the transition from Scripture to doctrine. Putman examines various approaches to doctrinal development and interrogates evangelical concerns that such development contradicts the supreme authority of Scripture. He suggests doctrinal development does in fact occur, and is even necessary—the key question concerns the faithfulness or fittedness of particular doctrines. Putman looks to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) as an example of an interdisciplinary movement that takes into account Scripture, history, and hermeneutical theory as a model for how evangelicals can address the question of doctrinal development.

The second chapter surveys the hermeneutical features of various figures and movements within the history of doctrinal development. Some individuals such as John Henry Newman, Alister McGrath, and especially George Lindbeck become recurring figures in subsequent chapters. In many ways, doctrinal development only became a problem to be solved in the past 200 years as theologians wrestled with the legacies of the Enlightenment suspicion of the supernatural, Romanticism suspicion of doctrine, and postmodern suspicion of master narratives. Of course, evangelicals have yet to figure out how to “solve the problem,” which is why Putman's book is such an important work.

The middle chapters engage with Thiselton and Vanhoozer. Chapters three and four are expositions of how these theologians have engaged hermeneutical theory in service to evangelical theology. Thiselton has been influenced primarily by Hans-Georg Gadamer and takes a more descriptive, historically sensitive approach to theological hermeneutics. Development is not a problem to be solved and most concerns about doctrinal development stem from misunderstanding of the theological right and left. An ongoing dialectic between Scripture and context necessitates some development; theologizing never occurs in a contextual vacuum. A key concept in Thiselton is his “dispositional” account of Christian doctrine that “highlights the nature of implicit belief in the earliest Christian communities and the need for response to later challenges to the faith” (135). Putman finds this a particularly useful concept.

For his part, Vanhoozer is more concerned with prescriptive appropriation of hermeneutical theory in service to evangelical theological method. He draws upon Paul Ricoeur and speech-act theory to advocate a “theo-dramatic” vision of theology where theologians “perform” the “drama of doctrine.” As an advocate of TIS, Vanhoozer is less concerned with parroting biblical material and more concerned with making fitting theological judgments that are consistent with the Scriptures. He also improves upon Lindbeck's postliberal “cultural-linguistic” approach to theology by proposing a post-

evangelical “canonical-linguistic” model that affirms a high view of biblical authority and veracity and assumes Scripture corresponds in some way with actual reality that exists beyond the community of faith. Doctrinal development is simply wise theological improvisation when new contextual challenges arise that Scripture does not address.

In chapter five, Putman critiques modernist accounts of autonomous reason and postmodern relativism, each of which provides a different threat to biblical authority and faithful doctrinal development that is consistent with Scripture. He engages with questions of tradition and textuality from an evangelical position informed by Thiselton and Vanhoozer. He draws upon speech-act theory in particular in critiquing the anti-realism of postliberalism, a movement that has attracted the interest of many progressive evangelical theologians. If chapter five is focused on authority, chapter six is dedicated more to how religious language correlates with reality. Again, Lindbeck’s antirealist postliberalism is in view as a keen threat to an evangelical view of doctrinal development, while speech-act theory and insights from Wittgenstein, mediated through Vanhoozer, allow for a critical realist view of religious language that moves beyond mere propositionalism and accounts for the various genres in Scripture and the types of speech acts they represent. Furthermore, critical realism (or soft propositionalism) also allows for a diversity-in-unity approach to biblical interpretation that is faithful to the biblical material and fruitful for fitting doctrinal development.

In chapter seven, Putman addresses the thorny question of continuity in doctrinal development. He expresses appreciation for Thiselton’s dispositional account because it demonstrates that implicit, communal beliefs based upon Scripture can be refined and codified as doctrine develops over time. Putman draws upon Vanhoozer’s missiological account, which emphasizes contextualization, as well as his distinction between *ipse*-identity and *idem*-sameness: faithful doctrinal development transmits an *ipse*-identity that is in continuity with Scripture, but not an *idem*-sameness that simply says the same thing again, devoid of contextual changes and fresh challenges. Following Vanhoozer and David Yeago, the key for Putman is to balance improvisation and translation—a discontinuity-within-continuity. He ends the chapter by highlighting several case studies related to doctrinal development: biblical inerrancy as an expression of biblical veracity (Putman affirms it); pedobaptism as an expression of Christian baptism (he rejects this example as valid); and overpopulation as an ethical dilemma that contradicts the command to be fruitful and multiply (this one requires greater nuance depending upon one’s context and sensibility to canonical development of the theme).

The last chapter offers a final apology for an evangelical view of doctrinal development that draws upon the insights of hermeneutical theory. Much of this chapter is devoted to practical application. As a confessional evangelical, Putman advocates a hermeneutics of submission and trust: God is trustworthy, he speaks to us through his trustworthy written word, and we are called to submit to his will as it is revealed in those trustworthy words. We must rely on the illumination of the Spirit while cultivating a humble, teachable spirit

of our own. When we bear these truths in mind, while also engaging with insights of contemporary hermeneutical theory, evangelicals can write constructive doctrine that is also faithful to what Scripture teaches.

While Putman mines the riches suggested in Thiselton and Vanhoozer's respective contributions to hermeneutical theology, his engagement is never uncritical. A few examples will suffice. Putman questions whether Thiselton's descriptive approach provides an adequate description of the nature of heresy: "How should the church distinguish heresy from genuine doctrinal development?" (166). Putman also raises concerns about Thiselton's warm reception (if not full-throated endorsement) of Open Theology, a heterodox position incompatible with Putman's own confessional evangelicalism. Putman also periodically pushes back on Vanhoozer. For example, he questions whether a theo-dramatic account implicitly undermines *sola Scriptura*, making privileged interpreters such as pastors and professors necessary to understand Scripture. Putman also critiques Vanhoozer's seeming negativity toward Scripture memorization, at least in the latter's framing of his theo-dramatic methodology. Putman rightly notes that Scripture memorization is a clearly biblical principle to be heeded and even creatively suggests a memorization metaphor that Vanhoozer can incorporate into his theo-dramatic method: *rehearsal* (204). Again, these are only a few examples of Putman's critical engagement with his interlocutors.

I have few negative critiques of Putman's book. Stylistically, it reads like exactly what it is: a revised dissertation. It is laden with jargon and is repetitive at times. There are several typographical errors and missing words, though better copyediting would have taken care of these issues. Though already long, the book would have benefited from an early section (rather than a footnote) addressing the spectrum of evangelicalism and commending confessional evangelicalism; this terminology is quite new, yet Putman explicitly owns it on several occasions in his book. My larger concern is that Putman's fellow Baptist theologians will not engage his creative ideas because they are included in an expensive (though widely respected) series published by a Mainline Protestant denomination. I hope Putman considers either writing a condensed, less-technical version of the work, or at least publishes several summary and follow-up articles in the sorts of journals that are widely read by Southern Baptist scholars and engaged pastors (including this one).

In Defense of Doctrine is a signal contribution to evangelical theological method. Moreover, that the book is written by a Baptist theologian makes it all the more impressive; we have often been marked by suspicion of tradition and a view of biblical authority closer to "*solo Scriptura*" ("just give me my Bible!") rather than the historical principle of *sola Scriptura* ("the Bible alone is my supreme authority for faith and practice"). Though it is not his primary purpose, Putman encourages evangelical theologians to embrace a confessional-yet-critical biblicism and to engage with the constructive work represented in the ecumenical creedal consensus and the best of the Christian Intellectual Tradition.

Equally helpful is his argument for the validity of constructive theology, a discipline sometimes maligned in evangelical circles. Putman provides an *apologia* for the sort of constructive dogmatic work being written by evangelicals in series such as *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Zondervan) and *Studies in Systematic Theology* (T&T Clark), as well as the published proceedings from the Los Angeles Theology Conference (Zondervan). Of course, *In Defense of Doctrine* is not only an apology for constructive theology, but it represents a thoughtful work of convictionally Baptist constructive theology. I trust Putman will make many others. I also hope his work will inspire more of his fellow Southern Baptist theologians to write theology that is confessional, yet also constructive, for the glory of God, the health of the church, and the advancement of theological scholarship. Highly recommended.

- Nathan A. Finn, Union University, Jackson, Tennessee

***Interpreting Prophetic Literature: Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets.* By James D. Nogalski. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015. Paperback, \$25.00.**

Nogalski states the purpose for writing this book is to introduce “students to the process of understanding and interpreting prophetic literature” (1). His focus is more on the art of reading the prophets than an explanation of each prophet. Because this book is for the beginning student there are two tasks that he intentionally performs. First, he does not use technical Hebrew language and second, he uses examples from the prophetic literature. The book is divided into six chapters. This review will spend more time on the first chapter as Nogalski sets the foundation for the rest of his book in this chapter.

The first chapter, “Getting Started,” is a good introduction to the prophetic literature and prophets. Nogalski provides a brief, general introduction to the prophets, prophetic literature and even to the ANE culture. The introduction is centered around three main issues: transmission, shaping, and updating (2). Through this discussion Nogalski provides structure for the beginning student to learn to read prophetic literature. The way he suggests to make up for the lack of Hebrew knowledge by the beginning student is to consult multiple translations. Nogalski leads a discussion on the difference between word-for-word, dynamic equivalence, and free translations. He also shows which versions fall into each category. This helps the student in three ways; to see a word’s range of meaning, recognizing variant readings, and determining where prophetic speeches start and stop (11–12). He makes the point that the main purpose of biblical interpretation is to help bridge the gap between the ancient scripture and the modern faith community. He ends this chapter with three ways to read the prophetic literature which will help bridge the aforementioned gap.

In Chapters 2–4, Nogalski examines the actual interpretive process he prescribes for how to interpret prophetic literature. Chapter 2, “Analyzing Literary Parameters and Rhetorical Flow,” considers where a prophetic speech or rhetorical unit begins and ends. When it comes to speakers in the prophetic literature the reader should answer the question, “Who speaks what to whom?” For Chapter 3, Nogalski gives insight into understanding key words in the literature and illustrates the importance of understanding people, places and theological terms. Nogalski also gives credence for the beginning student to use many different resources at their disposal. This includes critical commentaries, bible dictionaries, maps, and other types of important resources. By using these it will help build the students knowledge base as they explore the world of prophetic literature. In Chapter 4, “Literary Forms and Rhetorical Aims,” Nogalski is explaining the different types or forms that prophetic literature can take. The types he discusses are poetry and narrative, judgment oracles, salvation oracles, disputations, trial speeches, symbolic-act reports, vision reports, and promises. This list is representative not exhaustive. Throughout this chapter Nogalski reiterates that interpretation is an art form and not just scientific study.

In Chapter 5, “Analyzing a Unit’s Relationship to the Context,” he explores the necessity for relating the verses and passages to the surrounding context. This is accomplished through five different aspects. These aspects are not necessarily explored individually or linearly but discovered as the student reads and evaluates these in light of the other elements and context. Throughout Chapter 6, “Common Themes in Prophetic Texts,” Nogalski probes the two main themes found in prophetic literature; judgment pronouncements and declarations of hope. Nogalski provides multiple examples from different prophets to illustrate these two main themes.

Chapter 7, “Developing a Hermeneutical Approach,” discusses how the student can apply the biblical text to the modern life. For Nogalski two main questions are vital to perform proper hermeneutics. First, “For whom is the modern message intended?” and second, “How does one adapt an Old Testament prophetic text for a modern community of faith?” It is by creating analogies that the principle’s from the prophets can best be illustrated and explained to the modern audience. From these analogies the direct application can then be asked of the audience. In conclusion, Nogalski reiterates how interpretation is an art and how the task is to bring biblical principles to modern congregations.

Interpreting Prophetic Literature Historical and Exegetical Tools for Reading the Prophets is for the beginning student and focuses on the prophetic literature and not specifically the prophets. Because this is for the beginning student there are two tasks that he intentionally performs. First, he does not use technical Hebrew language and second, he uses examples from the prophetic literature. Nogalski does reference Hebrew but does not use the actual Hebrew language. His use of scripture is best seen when one examines the Index of Scripture included at the end of the book. The vast majority of these examples in this index come from the actual prophets. Another useful feature are the charts placed throughout his book. These charts help illustrate the scripture text or other specific information that illustrates the subject matter.

Nogalski has a notes section at the end of the book divided by chapters. He does not use footnotes. This is a drawback to his writing as it interrupts the flow of reading. I would also like to see a subject index added where different topics, places, or people were discussed in the book. This is a well written book as it is easy to read and accomplishes its purpose for being written. Nogalski states up front his purpose is to introducing students to the process of interpreting the biblical prophets which he achieves. Nogalski's book is not an introduction to the prophets but to the prophetic literature and how to read and interpret this literature. I would recommend this book for the beginning student or as a resource for the advanced scholar. It is useful for the beginning student that wants to learn more about the prophetic literature or a class on any level that is introducing students to this topic.

- Michael Gill, Shorter University, Rome, Georgia

***An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek: Analysis of Prepositions, Adverbs, Particles, Relative Pronouns, and Conjunctions.* By Gregory K. Beale, Daniel J. Brendsel, and William A. Ross. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014. 96 pages. Paperback, \$15.99.**

The familiar adage “big things come in small packages” certainly holds true for Beale, Brendsel, and Ross's concise work, *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek: Analysis of Prepositions, Adverbs, Particles, Relative Pronouns, and Conjunctions*. Beale (PhD, University of Cambridge), a prolific author whose works also include *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (coedited with D. A. Carson), as well as numerous other monographs and commentaries, holds the J. Gresham Machen Chair of New Testament and serves as professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. Brendsel (PhD, Wheaton College) is the minister of the Mission Training Academy and Adult Education at Grace Church of DuPage in Warrenville, Illinois. Ross (M.Div., Westminster Theological Seminary) is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cambridge.

The authors conspicuously list their thesis and purpose for writing in their introduction, which serves as a prolegomenon to the authors' methodology and takes up nearly one-fourth of the book's contents. Perhaps the thesis of this work could be summarized as:

Meaningful extended communication is built on relationships (often logical) between the statements or propositions we make. . . . Attempting to discern logical relationships between propositions (which some refer to as ‘discourse analysis’) is a way of (1) making explicit what we might otherwise assume, in order (2) to test whether our assumptions are correct or incorrect or in need of refinements, with the result that (3) our understanding of a text is strengthened as we trace out an author's flow of thought in support of a main point. (5–6)

The purpose of this lexicon is “to demonstrate with clarity (1) the meaning of a great majority of conventional uses of words, and (2) how those words express logical relationships that language uses to communicate” (21). In terms of methodology, this work serves as an eclectic synthesis of four industry standard NT lexicons and grammatical/exegetical works (BAGD/BDAG 1979/2000, Wallace 1996, and Harris 2012), and melds this data with the findings from seminal works on discourse analysis (primarily that of Beekman, Callow, and Kopeseć 1981) for the “most common” and “significant” prepositions, adverbs, particles, relational pronouns, and conjunctions appearing in the Greek NT (6–7).

A plethora of strengths mark this lexicon. First of all, for the student or busy pastor, this reference work quickly and helpfully summarizes the often dizzying array of exegetical/interpretive options found in BAGD/BDAG—thus, saving time and helping to eliminate errors. Second, this work serves students as a great introduction to the value of discourse analysis, and helps to reveal how critical these often neglected, “little lexemes” are to the flow of argumentation and rhetorical strategy of the individual biblical writers. However, the chief strength of this work is its ability to simplify complex information into a succinct, easy-to-follow, tabular format. Once readers have become familiar with the authors’ nomenclature and system of categorization, they are well-equipped to both identify and make informed interpretive decisions regarding the “key linking words” between the various clauses and phrases in the Greek NT (5).

Yet despite its considerable strengths, *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek* is not without faults—as no work is. First, the authors concede that this project is essentially a, “summary of the work of others” (13). As such, this lexicon offers little in terms of an original contribution to NT studies, and is prone to repeating and perpetuating any mistakes in the sources it is summarizing. Second, the authors base their work on too few sources, and, in doing so, neglect other industry standard reference works such as Louw and Nida 1988–1989, Blass, Debrunner, and Funk (BDF) 1961, Robertson 1914, and Levinsohn 2000. Consideration of these additional, standard sources would have helped make this lexicon a more valuable and fully-orbed tool. A brief explanation regarding the authors’ rationale for their selection process—both in terms of the sources they chose to omit (e.g., BDF, Louw and Nida, etc.) as well as the criteria for what constitutes “significant” words included in their lexicon—would have been helpful (7). Third, and last, while this “interpretive lexicon” does currently fill an important lacuna in NT scholarship in proffering students and busy pastors an accessible reference guide and introduction to arcing (see BibleArc.com) and discourse analysis, past works, such as Friberg, Friberg, and Miller’s *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (2000), were seemingly rendered superfluous by the development of software programs such as BibleWorks. One must wonder how long it will be until software publishers incorporate similar data and tools into their programs—thus, eliminating the need for such a hardcopy version.

In sum, *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek* is a concise, supplementary tool to some of the standard works in NT exegesis and discourse analysis (especially, BAGD/BDAG, Wallace, and Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec). This work serves its readers well with an easy-to-follow format and system for categorizing logical relations, but the lexicon could have been easily improved by the addition of frequency counts for each of the lexemes as well as identifying (using standard eacpr nomenclature) where the terms actually occur. While certainly more of a starting point and not a “stand alone” tool (despite the authors’ comment on page 13), this handy, little reference guide should prove to be a useful addition to the library of anyone wishing to properly interpret, preach, and teach the Greek NT—especially the busy pastor.

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***Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians.* By Mark A. Tietjen. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016. 166 pages. Paperback, \$20.00.**

Mark A. Tietjen received his PhD from Baylor University. He has taught philosophy at the University of West Georgia, and he is currently Grace Palmer Johnston Chair of Bible at The Stony Brook School. He is also the author of *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue: Authorship as Edification*.¹

In *Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians*, Tietjen wades through the complicated works of Søren Kierkegaard. There are numerous scholarly writings on Kierkegaard, but in this work, Tietjen writes “for everyday people” (23). Kierkegaard often writes in esoteric philosophical and psychological concepts, and the average Christian will be lost by such musings. Tietjen seeks to “avoid . . . philosophical jargon; instead [he’s] aimed to translate [Kierkegaard’s] words and concepts” in a way that is easy to digest for the average Christian (24). Kierkegaard has much to say to a contemporary Christian audience, and Tietjen desires that “the reader might gain insight into how better to live a Christian life” (24).

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) is often viewed skeptically by evangelical Christians. To start, he is widely considered to be the father of existentialism. The existentialists of the early 20th century are, for the most part, staunchly atheistic, and Kierkegaard has become “guilty by association” in the eyes of many (35). On top of this, Kierkegaard’s writing style is indirect in method, meaning Kierkegaard never systematically states what he believes on certain Christian topics. Tietjen notes that a basic reading of Kierkegaard’s personal journals causes any fear of a heterodox Kierkegaard to “dissipate,” for “there is no reason

¹“Mark A. Tietjen,” *InterVarsity Press*, accessed September 22, 2016, http://www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/author.pl/author_id=7120.

to think his personal Christian beliefs were outside the parameters of classic Reformed, Lutheran orthodoxy” (36). Still, there are influential evangelicals who have written scathing assessments of Kierkegaard’s thought. Tietjen brings up Dave Breese’s work *Seven Men who Rule the World from the Grave*, wherein Breese claims Kierkegaard is purposefully confusing, simply concerned with passion rather than facts (38). Kierkegaard does indeed talk about passion, for in his Danish context Kierkegaard saw that Christian faith became assumed by the public, “reduced to a list of beliefs” (41). Tietjen explains that Kierkegaard does not deny objective truth, rather Kierkegaard emphasizes “the biblical view that the faith that transforms a human life reaches beyond the mind to one’s heart, soul and strength—to one’s passions” (41).

Kierkegaard originally writes to the predominately Christian nation of Denmark. Kierkegaard seeks to awaken his “Christian” country from the stupor of easy-believism. Tietjen notes that Kierkegaard attacks three popular views of Jesus running rampant during Kierkegaard’s life: the liberal view (that Jesus teaches us to be moral people), the Pelagian view (that Christians save themselves by good deeds, rendering the death of Jesus unnecessary), and the “grace-abuse” view (that since Christians are saved from hell, they do not need to live holy lives) (56–57). Kierkegaard stresses that Christ is the God-man, for humanity needs salvation from sin rather than simple moral guidance (63). Faith in Christ is not “a clever strategy to justify oneself before God,” rather it is “an *existential* category” where the truly faithful person casts himself upon the grace of Christ (69). Christ did not come to grant a blank check for licentious behavior, rather Jesus came “to be imitated” (73). Tietjen shows Kierkegaard’s counter-cultural, and biblically orthodox, view of Jesus—a message that still rings true today.

Kierkegaard’s understanding of the self is insightful. Kierkegaard explains that the self is inherently relational, both outwardly (for it relates to God) and inwardly (for it relates to itself) (90). The problem is that sin has corrupted both types of relations. The root issue of the self comes from the self not relating properly to its creator. Humanity fabricates numerous ways to mend this broken relationship, but only God can save the sinner: as Tietjen summarizes, “no amount of do-it-yourself exercises will suffice” (101).

The life of the Christian should be lived out daily (119). An authentic, passionate faith moves beyond Sunday morning service into every aspect of the Christian’s life. This living out of faith can offend others, but the life of faith should be modeled by “repentance and forgiveness” (125). Christians living out their faith can draw others into the fold. Jesus commands that the Christian love others, even “the unlovely” neighbors she may encounter (145). Love never gives up on those who do not believe, and Kierkegaard encourages all Christians to live lives of sacrificial love (157–58).

Tietjen does a masterful job explaining the prophetic voice of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard lived in a nation steeped in cultural-Christianity, so much so that the doctrines of the faith were viewed by most as nothing more than “understood directly and rattled off by rote.”² Tietjen makes comparisons to contemporary American “Christendom,” specifically calling out the American South (67, 120). Christians need to be careful to heed Kierkegaard’s warning. Turning Christianity into a set of propositions to be memorized and repeated misses the point of the Gospel. In Christ, Christians can have *communion* with God—that is, a personal relationship only afforded by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. While the facts about Jesus are objective truths, the purpose of faith is subjective: the individual must give her life completely over to God, rather than mere mental assent.

Tietjen’s explication of Kierkegaard’s understanding of the human self is intriguing. In a time where sin is often ignored, Kierkegaard’s relational understanding of sin is refreshing. Sin is often understood as a list of vices, but Kierkegaard notes the underlying issue: humanity has a relational problem. Because the individual is not properly relating to God, he can never properly relate to the world. Humanity is sick, and the only cure comes through Jesus Christ. Tietjen wonderfully highlights this theme running through Kierkegaard’s work.

Tietjen succeeds at making Kierkegaard’s thought approachable to the first-time Kierkegaard reader. Kierkegaard is difficult to read, and there is a high barrier of entry to his thought. Tietjen makes the esoteric comprehensible *without watering down the nuance of Kierkegaard’s thought*. This is truly commendable, and Tietjen ought to be praised for his work. He includes discussion questions at the end of every chapter, which makes this book ideal for a small group or book club. Tietjen also has a helpful postscript with suggestions for “where to start” when reading Kierkegaard. Tietjen brings Kierkegaard to the reader, and then he points the reader back to Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians is a pleasure to read. Tietjen brings a great resource to all Christians. This book is an excellent primer to Kierkegaard’s religious thought, and Tietjen shows how the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher can speak meaningfully to a modern audience.

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²Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay, in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 64.

***Knowledge, Thought, and the Case for Dualism.* By Richard Fumerton. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press, 2015. 283 pages. Paperback, \$37.99.**

It is hard to find many contemporary philosophers that defend dualism outside of religious circles. Yet, Richard Fumerton's latest work, *Knowledge, Thought, and the Case for Dualism*, is just that—a case for dualism from a religious outsider. In the book, Fumerton gives something of a non-traditional defense of property dualism. As he argues, there are significant overlaps within philosophy of mind and epistemology, so he seeks to show that property dualism is plausible given specific epistemic conditions. He writes, "I am interested in exploring the implications of a radical empiricist [similar to Locke] and internalist foundationalism, and an equally radical content internalism, for the philosophy of mind" (xiv). The work uses far more epistemology than metaphysics, but the aim behind any epistemic position is to show that property dualism is a creditable stance.

In Chapter 1, Fumerton "Sets the Stage." In defending property dualism, Fumerton spends a significant amount of time describing the knowledge argument. Simply put, the knowledge argument claims there are experiences exemplified in certain properties that cannot be classified as physical properties. These experiences have a quality that can only be labeled as mental properties. To add credibility to the knowledge argument, Fumerton discusses Frank Jackson's thought experiment of the neuroscientist, Mary. In short, the thought experiment attempts to illustrate that Mary would receive new knowledge if she saw red rather than simply knowing the neural interactions of experiencing red. Fumerton inculcates the reader with the debate and concludes that when Mary has the color experience, she comes to "believe and know a new proposition—the proposition that a certain kind of property is exemplified" (181). This property exemplification is a mental property—something, in Fumerton's argument, quite distinct from a physical property.

Another significant note here is Fumerton's clarification of the easy and hard problems. Many in philosophy of mind distinguish between two types of consciousness: access and phenomenal. Access consciousness is considered by some to be the easy problem of consciousness. These states are generally seen as things like beliefs, desires, and fear. Phenomenal consciousness, on the other hand, is considered by some the hard problem. Phenomenal states are those subjective states of experience that elude rigorous description by hard science. Fumerton, however, is a bit skeptical of the distinction between the two types of problems. He writes, "I'm not sure that there is really much consensus on how to understand the distinction between hard and easy problems" (22). A notable, and somewhat minor, deviation in this debate.

In Chapter 2, the largest of the chapters, Fumerton peruses the various views within philosophy of mind. As indicated, his specific position is property dualism, the view that human beings possess both physical and mental properties. This view receives the ire of physicalists—individuals that claim the only types of things that existence (whether those

be substances or properties) are physical things. So Fumerton's main objective is to show that there are "kinds of properties beyond those recognized by the physicalist" (36).

Two of Fumerton's most controversial and noteworthy arguments are in Chapter 3, "Ontological Priorities: Taking Phenomenology Seriously". Here he defends acquaintance-based foundationalism. Fumerton writes that "[f]oundationalism is best understood as the thesis that all justification ultimately depends on the existence of non-inferential justification" (94). That is, justification for any belief must be based on or eventually regress to a basic belief. In reference to the topic of dualism, Fumerton asks, what justification does one have for mental properties? He answers this question by arguing that we are more acquainted with our subjective, mental states than we are with empirical states. Indeed, as a radical empiricist, he claims one cannot be directly aware of any physical property. With phenomenal properties, however, we are directly acquainted in a way that is difficult to doubt. Thus, Fumerton claimed that his foundationalism, in conjunction with a correct view of acquaintance, is a reasonable epistemology that gives creditability to mental properties and avoids an errant view of the empirical senses.

A second notable point in this chapter is Fumerton's emphasize on the limitation of empirical science—particularly when attempting to study introspective, mental phenomena. He writes,

Perhaps I'm wrong in thinking that introspection of occurrent, conscious mental states would always trump any putative counter-evidence provided by empirical science. But if you are trying to convince me that I'm wrong I wouldn't suggest bringing a cognitive scientist into the discussion. It is just not their job to answer this sort of question—they haven't got the right sort of training to even address the question. It's their job to tell us what's happening to our bodies as we notice changes in our mental life....The cognitive scientist's empirical research will result in no information that has any bearing on whether the knowledge arguments are good or bad. (136)

Unfortunately, this move seems idiosyncratic in an age of scientism. Indeed, it is common for philosophers and scientists alike to abdicate such investigations to neuroscience, cognitive science, or psychology when discussing human consciousness. Yet Fumerton argues that consciousness is a topic that is best studied by philosophers.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Fumerton defends and tweaks the aforementioned knowledge argument. Here he argues that the knowledge argument, understood in the proper way, provides justification for holding property dualism. Elaborating somewhat from Saul Kripke, Fumerton claims that phenomenal states of consciousness are known directly. It is this direct identification of mental states that distinguishes them from indirect identification of physical properties and states. Thus, according to Fumerton, the thought I have while thinking of heat is different than phenomenal states like pain, which are induced by heat. This distinction fuels the awareness of the incommensurability of mental, phenomenal states from physical states.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Fumerton addresses several objections to property dualism and specifically to his argument for dualism. These are helpful in that they offer the reader clarification and forethought with regard to Fumerton's overall argument. He not only anticipates objections by future opponents, but in Chapter 7 Fumerton addresses common objections to dualism (e.g., causal overdetermination).

In Chapter 8 (a brief last chapter), "The Ubiquitous Self: A Brief Postscript," is not only a summation of the book, but is a further exposition of his argumentation. Here he bifurcates his position from traditional Cartesian substance dualism, discusses his understanding of the self (he favors a Humean approach), and ferrets through some reductionist ideas that possibly follow from his stance.

Though I think this book is massively valuable to the discussion of philosophy of mind, I do have one major qualm. I think Fumerton's arguments can be used to defend substance dualism, too (though I understand that few substance dualists are willing to accept his radical empiricism). Though not specifically opposed to substance dualism, Fumerton does note that he is uncomfortable with the notion. In fact, Fumerton rarely even uses words like "immaterial" or "nonphysical"—essential ideas for substance dualism. Substance dualism is a bit like the crazy uncle of metaphysics. Most know the view, but few actually spend much time with/on it. John Searle writes of substance dualism, "It seems impossible to make substance dualism consistent with modern physics."¹ This derision has led many philosophers with dualistic sympathies to property dualism. Fumerton concurs when he writes, "No form of dualism is all that popular now, but property dualism seems far more in vogue these days than substance dualism" (36). His main hesitance with substance dualism is the coherence of a substance, but this seems like a bit of hand waving to me (29–30). The traditional Aristotelian sense of a substance is not that fantastic. J. P. Moreland defines a substance as "basic in that they are not in or had by things more basic than they. Substances do the having; properties are had."² Thus, a substance is a fundamental particular. To be fair, perhaps Fumerton is just uncomfortable claiming that the self could bear certain properties, though such a move appears concomitant with his view. When I smash my finger with a hammer, it is not my body that is in pain, I am in pain. In this sense, pain is a property I (the self) possess.

Despite my apprehension with Fumerton's rejection of substance, his work is a compelling contribution. I dare say that most readers of this journal will find Fumerton's radical empiricism and radical foundationalism troublesome, but that need not take away from what he has done. Though he did not defend substance dualism (some version of which is the traditional stance of most orthodox Christians) he has given a putative attempt at unhinging the hold that physicalism has had in philosophy for the last 100 years. More to the point, he has offered the Christian dualist a positive affirmation that a reasonable understanding of human composition is consistent with divine revelation.

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¹John Searle, *Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

²J. P. Moreland, *Body and Soul* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 70.

***Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge.* By Kirk R. MacGregor. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015. 288 pages. Hardcover, \$27.99.**

For a little over thirty years now, the theory of middle knowledge (or Molinism) has enjoyed a resurgence of interest, with many theologians and philosophers claiming that it is the most promising way of reconciling God's providence with human free will. But while much work has been devoted to analyzing, criticizing, and defending Molinism, almost nothing has been written about its founder Luis de Molina. Indeed, many know little more about Molina than that he was a Spanish Jesuit who taught theology and philosophy in the university. This volume by historian, philosopher, and theologian Kirk MacGregor (PhD, University of Iowa) seeks to redress this situation.

MacGregor notes that the reason why most are ignorant about Molina's life is because, until now, no biography of Molina of any length (critical or otherwise) had been written. MacGregor states that his purpose is to compose a biography of Molina from 16th century primary sources for the purpose of presenting a fuller picture of his life and theology than has been available (15). Chapters 1 and 2 tell the story of Molina's early spiritual journey, conversion, entrance into the Jesuit order, and education at the University of Coimbra in Portugal. Chapters 3 through 5 present Molina's theory of middle knowledge and how he applied it to the doctrines of providence and predestination. Chapter 6 explores the backlash that Molina experienced because of his theory, particularly from the Dominicans Báñez and Lemos, which put Molina in danger of the Spanish Inquisition until the pope could assess the merits of middle knowledge for orthodoxy. Chapters 7 and 8 look at Molina's practical theology and concept of social justice that he developed while awaiting the verdict of Rome. Of particular interest here are Molina's insights on proper lending practices, the need for a free market economy, and the evils of the African slave trade. Chapter 9 covers the events from the papal commission's initial denunciation of Molina's theory in 1598 to Pope Paul V's final vindication of Molina posthumously in 1607. Finally, chapter 10 takes a look at the legacy of Molinism—why it was largely forgotten for roughly 350 years and how it is being fruitfully applied to contemporary theological and philosophical issues like biblical inerrancy, religious pluralism, the problem of evil, and creation.

The obvious benefit of MacGregor's work is that it provides the only lengthy biographical presentation of Molina's life and thought available at this time. But beyond this, there are some particular strengths worth emphasizing. First, in chapter 2 where he recounts Molina's university education, MacGregor details Molina's curriculum involving the study of Aristotle's works and explains key concepts that Molina gained from those works that helped him formulate his theory of middle knowledge. For instance, Aristotle's distinction between primary and secondary substances was helpful in explaining how God can know individual human essences as part of his own mind—and thus it not be the case that God bases predestination on his foreknowledge—without this entailing that individual human beings are part of the divine nature. Second, MacGregor's presents Molina's theory of

middle knowledge with a kind of clarity that will appeal to a general readership and not just specialists. This is advantageous given that MacGregor claims that Molinism is the only theological stance that consistently maintains both a traditionally strong view of God's providence and foreknowledge and human free will (249). Obviously, if this claim is true, then Christians in general, not just specialists, will want to have an understanding of the theory. Finally, MacGregor does a valuable service to theology by showing how Molinism is not Arminianism. Arminius borrowed the term 'middle knowledge' from "the schoolmen," but as MacGregor explains, Arminius misunderstood Molina's theory as claiming that God's knowledge of free decisions that humans make was postvolitional knowledge—i.e., knowledge acquired after God's decree to create the world—thereby making God's foreknowledge the basis of his predestination. On the contrary, Molina held that God's knowledge of such free decisions was prevolitional—i.e., it is logically prior to God's creative decree. Disassociating Molinism from Arminianism should remove much of the stigma that Molinism has had for many Reformed Protestants especially, which hopefully will help some at least to consider Molinism as a possible way to solve certain theological difficulties.

Unfortunately, this last strength also reveals the major weakness of MacGregor's book. MacGregor states that his purpose is to compose a biography of Molina's life and theology. But the book many times seems like a treatise on Molinism rather than a presentation of the life of Molina. One can first sense this in the introduction where MacGregor writes that Molina's story "will also help clear up misconceptions that have prevented detractors of his thought from giving him a fair hearing"—of which misconceptions MacGregor lists three: (a) Molina is Catholic and has nothing to offer Protestants, (b) Molinism is the same as Arminianism, and (c) Molina (and by extension, Molinism) has a diminished view of God's sovereignty (16–28). Moreover, throughout the book, MacGregor digresses into contemporary issues surrounding Molinism that Molina did not address, such as backwards causation, the grounding objection, and the idea of transworld damnation. By the time that the reader gets to the last chapter, it seems that the biographical quality of MacGregor's book has all but vanished as he focuses mostly on how Molinism has become a prominent theory in contemporary philosophy of religion. Indeed, MacGregor even spends some time reviewing his own philosophical work on an aspect of Molinism (261–69).

In short, the problem with MacGregor's book is that it lacks a clear purpose. The book purports to be a biography, but in many places, it comes across as a treatise. And because it seems at times to be a biography and at other times to be a treatise, it seems that some of the biographical aspects are deficient because MacGregor treats them in a more treatise-like fashion and that some of the treatise-like aspects are deficient because he treats them in a more biographical fashion.

To see how this is the case, consider just two examples. First, in chapter 4 MacGregor spends quite a bit of space discussing the problem of praying about things that have already

taken place, which introduces the issue of backwards causation (125–30). But in chapter 3, he only briefly mentions the grounding objection against middle knowledge (100). If MacGregor intends to present a biography, then briefly mentioning the grounding objection is understandable since this objection was brought against Molinism after Molina's lifetime. However, if MacGregor intends to present Molinism, then it seems odd that he would skirt by what he himself recognizes as "the most frequent objection to middle knowledge in contemporary philosophical and theological literature." It seems here that MacGregor is approaching his subject more as a treatise because he is willing to spend some time discussing the problem of praying about past events—which, MacGregor admits, Molina did not directly consider—but is also treating a part of this treatise in a more biographical fashion because he skirts over the grounding objection.

Second, in presenting Molina's view of providence, MacGregor considers what Molina would have said about God's creation of a world that obtains an optimal balance between salvation and damnation and, later, how Molina would have responded to the idea of transworld damnation. MacGregor provides references to places in Molina's *Concordia* that seem to imply that Molina would have said what MacGregor attributes to him about the above two issues. Now if one's purpose is to present Molinism as a position, then speculating about what Molina would have said is allowable if there is nothing that Molina said that would counter such speculation. Even if one is wrong about what Molina would have said, that does not necessarily affect the integrity of the position being presented. One could just simply say that this is what Molina should have said. But if one's purpose is to present a historical biography, then just listing references to the *Concordia* seems a bit irresponsible, for the goal is to present who Molina was, not who Molina should have been. As a historian, MacGregor would have done well to quote Molina's actual words so that readers can judge if the view that MacGregor attributes to Molina accurately reflects Molina's thought, not just the position of Molinism. In other words, it seems here that MacGregor is approaching his subject more as a biography because he considers what Molina would have said about certain issues, but is also treating this part of his biography in a treatise-like fashion because he fails to record Molina's words so that one can assess the historical accuracy of MacGregor's interpretation of Molina.

Ironically, perhaps it is this weakness of MacGregor's book that would make it beneficial for many readers. The book serves, in a way, as a very readable introduction for anyone interested in Molinism and how it is being applied to contemporary problems in philosophy of religion. Moreover, MacGregor goes out of his way to vindicate Molina in the eyes of many Protestants, pointing out that he held to a view of justification roughly equivalent to Luther and Calvin, belonged to a branch of Jesuits that were more focused on scholarship than blind obedience to the pope, and was not in agreement with Arminius. And those interested in the more pastoral side of Molina will find MacGregor's presentation of Molina's practical theology and theory of social justice refreshing, thoughtful, and anticipatory of economic, social, and moral developments that are usually more associated with developments in

Protestantism than Catholicism. All this seems to indicate, however, that MacGregor's work is more of an *apology* for Molina and Molinism addressed to Protestants rather than a historical biography. The book obviously has historical value; after all, it is the only presentation of the life and thought of Molina of any length available at this time. But I would recommend that readers judge this book primarily for its apologetic value. As a biography, the book is a good first attempt, but will eventually need to be replaced. As a treatise, the book will disappoint those looking for more than just an introduction to Molinism. Such readers are advised to turn to some of the more thorough presentations of Molinism that MacGregor lists in his bibliography. But as an apology for Molina and Molinism, the book is overall successful. At this point, Molinism is poised to solve a host of thorny difficulties that have historically been issues of major contention in the church. This alone is enough to recommend MacGregor's book, despite its flaws.

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***The Message of the Person of Christ: The Word Made Flesh.* By Robert Letham. In *The Bible Speaks Today*, edited by Derek Tidball. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013. 261 pages. Paperback, \$21.00.**

The Message of the Person of Christ (MPC) is Robert Letham's contribution to IVP's *The Bible Speaks Today* series, which carries volumes under the headings OT, NT, and Bible Themes. MPC is a recent contribution to the third category. Letham is professor of systematic and historical theology at Union School of Theology in Bridgend, United Kingdom. His publications include *The Work of Christ* (IVP, 1993), *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (P&R, 2004), and a forthcoming systematic theology (21).

Following a select bibliography, introduction, and prologue, MPC presents twenty-four chapters organized into the following five parts: Christ promised, Christ incarnate, Christ crucified, Christ risen, and Christ ascended. The book closes with a historical theology appendix as well as a study guide with a summary and questions for each chapter. Letham explains, "The purpose of this book is to show how the Bible, progressively and in greater detail, speaks to us of its central figure, Jesus Christ" (21). The author accomplishes the stated purpose, carving a path between traditional commentaries and sermon collections by providing exegetical treatments of selected texts to present a biblical theme. What follows are friendly observations and critical questions offered in a spirit of gratitude for Letham's work in this volume.

Letham rightly begins his study of Christ with exegetical treatments of OT texts. Many christological studies start with Scripture on the life of Christ but neglect the OT promises of his coming. One might wonder, though, if the book was titled accurately. Although the title promises the book will address the person of Christ, only two of the five parts deal

with content commonly categorized by systematic theologians as concerning his *person* (Christ promised and Christ incarnate). The other three parts concern his *work* (Christ crucified, Christ risen, and Christ ascended). For that reason, perhaps the book should have been titled *The Message of the Person and Work of Christ*.

The theology contained in the book is orthodox and extensive. Letham summarizes, “We have seen how from the start of the human experience, with its fall into sin, God the creator had planned that his Son take our nature, restore us to God and prepare us for an unimaginably glorious eternal future.” Also, “God himself acted, made himself known, and provided access to himself. That revelation, that deliverance and that access is found nowhere else than in Jesus Christ, who is God from eternity, who for us and our salvation took our humanity into union. This calls, on our part, for a response of faith and obedience, of joyful anticipation of knowing, loving and serving Christ as long as life shall last, and beyond into the endless vistas of the renewed universe” (227–28). Such passages prompted moments of doxological theology, praises to God that emerged as I contemplated God the Son.

When reading the prologue and Parts 1 and 2, a few observations arose. First, Letham writes that “if the incarnation and atonement were determined eternally, as the Bible testifies, so too was the fall of Adam” (29n13). Must readers who agree with Letham that “the incarnation was planned from eternity” (29) also affirm with him that Adam’s fall was determined from eternity? Second, Letham rightly addresses the fall of man. However, one wonders if his exegetical work on Gen 3 was weakened by the insertion of the extra-biblical and disputed concept of the covenant of works (31–32). Third, Letham’s repeated emphasis on the necessity of the eternal Son to take on genuine humanity to redeem humanity was especially helpful. In developing this concept, Letham follows John Owen in considering Jesus as having lived a Spirit-led and Spirit-enabled life (92). When considering the growth of Jesus’s knowledge, Letham follows Michael Polyani in claiming Jesus’s knowledge of his messianic role developed from latent to clear (92–93). Although rightly affirming that Jesus was and is fully human and without sin, Letham speculates that Jesus got into fights. He writes, “Did Jesus ever get into fights? The answer must be yes! Fighting is a process by which young males learn self-defense and so how to protect the weak from the threat of bullies” (94). This speculation does not seem to match the tenor of Jesus’s mission, which was to submit himself to wrongdoers at his trial and crucifixion then defeat his enemies by giving his life and being raised for their justification (Rom 4:25; 5:8; 1 Pet 2:21–24).

Parts 3–5 provide many insights into the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. As examples, Letham lists five “inter-relationships” concerning the raising of OT saints in Matt 27 (156–57) and explains briefly how the comment of the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus provides a framework for interpreting the OT in light of Christ (175, 179–80). His chapters on the ascension elucidate this doctrine which unfortunately receives too little attention in Christian theology. Letham explores the psalms of enthronement as

the OT background for the ascension (193–94). Also, he examines the doctrine through the categories of Christ’s offices of priest, prophet, and king, as well as the implications for humanity in this present age (200–207) and his message to the church today via Rev 1 (221–28). Unfortunately, Letham makes assertions about first-century Jewish thought or literature but cites only contemporary biblical commentaries (as examples, see 160n1 and 187n7). In these instances, Letham would have been better served in supporting his claims by citing sources from the fields of biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies.

Although not surprising, it was nonetheless disappointing to see that Letham follows the lead of Reformed presuppositions rather than the words of the biblical text under consideration. Hebrews 2:9 states Jesus “*might taste death for everyone*” (220, italics in the original). Rather than simply interpret “everyone” (*pas*) to mean “everyone” (as translated in English Bible versions such as the ESV, HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT, and others), Letham concludes that Jesus died for only some people. He justifies this interpretation of verse 9 by reaching back to verse 5 to limit the intent and extent of Jesus’s death, writing: “He did so for everyone who is a citizen of *the coming world, of which we speak*” (220, italics in the original). However, the reference in verse 5 to the coming world in no way limits the intent and extent of the atonement, which verse 9 states was made for everyone. Interestingly, when relating the necessity of Jesus’s genuine humanity to the redemption of humanity, Letham comments on Heb 2:10 that “the Son had to be one with those he was to save. Hence he and they *are all of one*. The following context points to this as meaning the sharing of common humanity” (103, italics in the original). In this way, Letham limits in Heb 2:9 the extent of the atonement to only those who will be redeemed, but he grounds the incarnation mentioned in verse 10 in the humanity shared by all people.

The historical essay, which appears as an appendix, summarizes the post-canonical doctrinal development which resulted from the questions addressed in the councils at Nicaea in 325 to Constantinople in 553. This seventeen-page section is densely packed with historical material and should aid readers in connecting the exegetical material in the book with the later development of the doctrine of the person of Christ.

Even with the questions and observations noted above, Letham’s book will be a useful resource for Christians, theology students, and church leaders.

- Adam Harwood, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans*

***Night Comes: Death, Imagination, and the Last Things.* By Dale C. Allison Jr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016. 184 pages. Paperback, \$18.00.**

Dale C. Allison Jr. is a New Testament professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and *Night Comes* grew out of lectures he delivered there in 2014 before he was a faculty member.

The goal of the book is not “to persuade through the arguments of an evenhanded historian.” Instead, the author describes the book as a “personal theological exploration.” He does not intend “to offer a full and balanced treatment of any topic but rather to share some scattered observations and suggestions” (ix). Allison easily achieved his stated intention. The overall development of the book is not scattered but progresses logically from chapter to chapter. However, the internal logic of each chapter sometimes is scattered.

The first chapter is concerned with the subject of death and fear. Allison related perspectives about death, hell, and annihilation from members of his family, asking why we are so afraid of death and concluding that it is a result of evolution. An “old and distant,” Bible does not speak in a relevant way to people today because of much longer life expectancies than ancient people (6). The author related that he was not comforted by Christianity after his own near miss with death, but was comforted by two encounters with a friend after her death. A loving God provides hope after this life.

The second chapter is “Resurrection and Bodies.” Literal bodily resurrection is not advocated, but rather a vague conviction that God will do something to keep people alive after this life pervades the chapter. According to Allison, the doctrine of a bodily resurrection has a long history of human development, has suffered from overly literalistic interpretations, and ultimately does not make sense.

Chapter three covers “Judgment and Partiality,” observing that many pulpits are silent about divine judgment. This is due to relativism, to a perceived conflict between judgment by works and justification by faith, and to the fact that genetic and environmental factors control our lives. Near death experiences through time and across cultures have influenced the development of ideas about judgment. In the end, a merciful judge takes care of the outcome, and judgment has no sting.

“Ignorance and Imagination” is covered in the fourth chapter, which addresses objections to the concept of life after death. The first objection is that focusing on life after death is harmful because it encourages people to ignore problems in this life. Allison shows that concern for the next life does not necessarily diminish involvement in this world. The second objection is psychological in nature, claiming that the idea that life goes on after death is just an illusion used to deny reality by self-focused individuals. Allison countered that “the promise of more than death” actually undermines a focus on the self. “Whatever else heaven may be, surely it must be the transition from vain self-importance

to disinterested love, the end of the ever-grasping self, the obliteration of I Me Mine” (80). The final objection is that life after death is just a fantasy. Allison does believe in an afterlife, but he posits that such belief is a “useful fiction” (83). That is, even if it were not true it is still useful in a religious sense. We are ignorant about the future, but we can share “Jesus’ idealistic orientation,” act ethically, and know that everything will be fine in the end (91).

Allison never has believed that people apart from Jesus go to hell, and this idea is foundational for chapter five, “Hell and Sympathy.” Many people have rejected the idea of hell, and the author claims that few believe in it anymore. Relativism, contemporary ideas about criminal justice, and a decline in the acceptance of torture have all been factors in this development. According to Allison, *aiōnos* in the Bible does not mean “forever” except when it refers to God, so the idea of an eternal hell is not biblical. Warnings about hell in the Bible simply are calls to repentance. In the end, mercy wins.

In the final chapter, “Heaven and Experience,” Allison explored different concepts of heaven. Though he does not assert that people become angels, he holds open the possibility. He described his own encounters with a deceased person as support for his position. Some understand heaven to be a big reunion, following the general trend toward more human-centered ideas about heaven in recent decades. One argument for heaven as a beautiful landscape is based on a vision that the author claims to have seen. Reports of near death experiences play a significant role in this chapter. In the final analysis, according to Allison, the Bible does not have many details about heaven, but we do have hope.

Everyone faces death. Ministers often help people face death and help their loved ones with the aftermath. A book like this one has great potential to encourage clear thinking that could serve as a solid foundation for ministerial practice. On that score it fails miserably. Allison provides all kinds of fascinating information, but much of it is not authentically Christian. His concern that churches address the issues of death and the afterlife is apparent throughout the book; but the answers that he offers are based on shaky and crumbling foundations.

The content of *Night Comes* is engaging, in part because of the wide variety of sources in its pages. The book is full of references to the Bible, Christian hymns, poetry, beliefs of various religions, history, philosophy, sociological analysis, and more. The sources were drawn from various cultures across time. The transparent, personal nature of the book makes it engaging as well. Reports of the author’s own close call with death, his encounters with a ghost, and his vision of heaven practically demand attention from the reader.

The book clearly was not written for an evangelical audience as its denials of an eternal hell and a literal future resurrection make clear. The author displayed a condescending attitude toward young earth creationists, people who believe in the rapture, and those who take biblical references to hell literally. The Bible is a book used by Allison as a source from

which to pluck ideas which appeal to him, discarding or even caricaturing ideas which do not.

Night Comes is not a book which would be useful to most practitioners of Christian ministry on the subject of death. For people with positive convictions about biblical truth and authority, the book may be useful in another way. It provides insight into what happens when feelings trump the Bible, when Scripture is filtered through popular opinion, and when personal experience is dominant. *Night Comes* ends with the vague hope that “light shines in the darkness” (150). People who trust Scripture already know that it does, and that the darkness cannot overcome it.

- Roland McMillian, *First Baptist Church, Richton, Mississippi*

***Paul's Divine Christology.* By Chris Tilling. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 322 Pages. Paperback, \$30.00.**

Chris Tilling is senior lecturer in New Testament Studies at St. Mellitus College and visiting lecturer in theology at King's College London. He has studied at the University of St. Andrews, as well as the London School of Theology. He has published on topics concerning Pauline christology/soteriology, the historical Jesus, biblical theology, and theological exegesis. The work at hand is his monograph on Pauline christology.

In *Paul's Divine Christology*, Chris Tilling seeks to contribute to the discussion of whether or not Paul did indeed understand Jesus of Nazareth to be divine. His primary interlocutors throughout the work are Gordon Fee, Larry Hurtado, Richard Bauckham, and James Dunn. He notes the significance of the works of Fee and Hurtado, claiming that though they were headed in the right direction, they were not successful in reaching the desired destination. He critiques Fee for forcing Paul's thought to fit the categories of Greek metaphysics. According to Tilling, Fee is wrong to suppose that Paul understands Jesus' divinity in the categories of Aristotelian ontology. Concerning the work of Hurtado, Tilling notes that though the worship of Jesus in the early church did indeed have unique elements, it is not unique in the sense that he, Hurtado, claims. According to Hurtado, the only worship in the ancient Jewish world that resembles the early church's worship of Jesus is that worship directed to Yahweh. Tilling, using evidence from the inter-testamental literature, shows this to not be the case. Taking his cue from the work of Richard Bauckham, Tilling holds that Paul understood Jesus' divinity through the lens of relationship.

As noted above, Tilling seeks to show that Paul understood Jesus' divinity in terms of relationship. He claims that Paul's language concerning the relationship of Jesus to believers parallels the Old Testament language concerning Yahweh's relationship to Israel.

Tilling then explores the undisputed Pauline corpus to show the evidence for his argument. He discusses the relation between Jesus and believers as seen in 1 Corinthians 8:1-10:22. His discussion here includes topics concerning the *Shema*, relational monotheism in 1 Corinthians 8:6, and the pentateuchal language of 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 as it pertains to Yahweh's relation to Israel.

Tilling further develops the thrust of his argument in chapter six, where he examines the rest of Paul's undisputed letters as they concern the Christ-believer relation. He here focuses on Paul's "Christ-shaped goals and motivations," (105) as well as the passionate nature of his, Paul's, Christ-devotion (130). By "Christ-shaped goals and motivations," Tilling means that Paul's chief end is for his readers to be conformed more into the image of Christ. He then goes on to discuss the presence and activity of the resurrected Jesus, his absence, and his communication to believers. Tilling especially notes that Paul genuinely believed that the resurrected Jesus communicated with him; he draws this primarily from 2 Corinthians 12:9. He devotes the following chapters to discussing issues of the Christ-relation pattern in Paul, the relation between Jews and other figures other than God, and how Paul's Christ-relation figures into the contemporary debate concerning divine Christology.

There are multiple strengths to Tilling's *Paul's Divine Christology*. First, Tilling's argument that Paul understood Jesus' divinity in terms of his, Jesus', relation to believers is very persuasive. He rightly points out the shortcomings of the approaches of Fee and Hurtado while noting their strengths. In his examination of Paul's undisputed letters, Tilling engages in exegesis that treats the text fairly and does not stretch its meaning to fit his agenda. He also rightly shows the shortcomings of the work of James Dunn, namely that he leaves too many questions concerning the primitive church's christology unanswered. Specifically, he argues that Dunn's understanding of Jesus' subordination to Yahweh does not prove convincing, and that he does not consider Paul's Christ-relation language adequately. Tilling's careful exegesis is quite impressive, and his results are very persuasive.

A second strength to Tilling's monograph is his treatment of the inter-testamental literature. In chapter nine, he analyzes documents such as the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Similitudes of Enoch* to analyze the Jewish relation to divine figures other than Yahweh. His analysis of the *Similitudes of Enoch* is especially impressive. He carefully explores the relationships that exist between Israel and the Son of Man figure and the Lord of Spirits figure. His exegesis of this document reveals that Paul's Christ-relation does not mirror the Son of Man-relation, but the Lord of Spirits-relation. The Lord of Spirits, in this document, is representative of Yahweh. Tilling, after showing that the Lord of Spirits-relation resembles Paul's Christ-relation, persuasively argues that this Lord of Spirits-relation *might* have provided some of the background to Paul's Christ-relation. This hypothesis is very intriguing, and Tilling's exegesis of *Similitudes* provides cogence to his argument.

The primary weakness of this monograph is its technicality and readability. Tilling's work is clearly written for fellow scholars and not the average layperson. As such, it is a very technical read, and it would most likely prove difficult for laypersons. The Greek phrases that he analyzes throughout the book are not transliterated into English, and they are seldom translated. Even those who know Greek but are not as literate in it as others will have to stop and translate many phrases throughout the book, or look them up in an English Bible. A well-founded knowledge of Koine Greek is preferable for engaging this work.

Overall, Chris Tilling's *Paul's Divine Christology* is an intellectually stimulating read, and is a great contribution to the ongoing discussion concerning Paul's christology. I would recommend this book to seminary/divinity school students and other scholars who are interested in the topic. Due to its technicality and lack of translations/transliterations, I would not recommend it for the average layperson. Tilling's monograph is a must-read for those interested in Pauline christology.

- Andrew Hollingsworth, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***The Presence of God: Its Place in the Storyline of Scripture and the Story of Our Lives.* By J. Ryan Lister. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 368 pages. Paperback, \$25.00.**

J. Ryan Lister is associate professor of theology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Lister achieved his MDiv and his PhD degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Lister's dissertation, "The Lord your God is in your Midst: The Presence of God and the Means and End of Redemptive History" (2010) forms the basis for his Crossway publication, *The Presence of God*. Ryan Lister's motivation in writing for the academy and the church is that the redemptive story might permeate relationships within the body of Christ and bring the Gospel message to the world. Lister's scholarly effort in cultivating a biblical theology of God's presence is vital to today's church practice.

Lister responds to current church culture where entertainment and emotion have become the affirming guide for identifying God's presence among his people, by asking the question, "How do we tune our ears to hear the beautiful melody of God's presence?" (20). He views the terminology surrounding the theme of God's presence as "vague," concerning what one means when stating or seeking to be in the presence of God. In the midst of daily distractions, Lister proposes to "show just how intrinsic this theme is to the story of Scripture and to our story" (22). Therefore he seeks to bridge the theological realization of God's presence found within the fabric of the redemptive story of Scripture to the awareness of God's presence within today's church.

Lister formulates his argument on two truths. First, “The presence of God is a central goal in God’s redemptive mission.” Second, “The presence of God is the agent by which the Lord accomplishes his redemptive mission.” Lister contends the thesis, “The presence of God is a fundamental objective in our redemption and, simultaneously, the means by which God completes this objective” (23-24). His methodology of working through such a theological clarification emerges from a “redemptive-historical standpoint,” thus Lister cultivates a biblical theology on the presence of God (24).

Lister first highlights God’s presence throughout the Scriptures as a “forgotten storyline” and delineates the biblical and theological foundation for the presence of God in the first two chapters. He calls for the recognition that God’s redemptive purposes for his people is seated within the context of his presence. Both the transcendent and immanent realities of God are discussed to highlight that God’s intention to be with his people comes from his aseity. God draws near to his creation due to the nature of who he is as God rather than any perceived need or necessity to be among his people. Lister makes the point that it is God’s “transcendence that leads to his immanence” (45). He states, “It is the absolute nature of God that allows him the freedom to be personal with the world” (46). The context therefore, of God’s presence and interaction within the world, has to do with who he is as God. Understanding this foundation is key to recognizing the redemptive story throughout Scripture.

Lister’s work is then divided into four parts encompassing one to three chapters each. Part one ties the presence of God to the inevitable goal of redemption for God’s people. Chapters three through five present the progression of the Old Testament narrative in relation to creation, the fall, and the covenants made through Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and King David. Lister further develops a canonical perspective in connection with the Old Testament covenant promises of his presence to the New Testament fulfillment of the new Adam, Jesus Christ, and the new covenant reality of his presence in the church. Lister demonstrates theological skill in navigating the redemptive thread which arises throughout these Old Testament “epochs” and effectively grounds the central theme of God’s “redemptive mission and the theological structure of Scripture” (141).

Part two is a presentation of God’s presence as a means of redemption throughout the Old Testament narrative. In chapters six through eight Lister further develops the interactive presence of God and his redemptive intent in connection with the Patriarchal sagas of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through the Patriarchs, Lister highlights the structure of more specific instances where God’s presence intervenes with mankind on a personal level to argue, “The redemptive presence of God is the driving force behind the story of salvation and its eschatological promises” (171).

Lister does an impeccable job in drawing out the significance of the Exodusto understand Israel’s lack of holiness before a holy God. The contrast of God’s holiness and the call

upon his people to follow him would only be noticed through the given law of God. The law delineates God's distinct character among his people by virtue of the rules, customs, and observations that God set into place for his people. The tabernacle itself becomes the social context whereby God's people are introduced to God's presence upon earth and the appropriate manner of approaching God in worship.

Israel's history through the cyclical judges and the Davidic kingdom are further noted by Lister as an intensified struggle between God's people recognizing his presence though they have sinned and the redemptive plan of God's gracious acts among them. Throughout the stories of the divided kingdom, Lister points out that though there had been repeated removal of God's presence during the exiles of his people, the prophets continued to declare that a new king would come through the future "Davidic" Messiah.

Parts three and four, encompassing chapters nine, ten, and eleven point to the fulfillment of God's presence through the person and work of Jesus Christ. He further advances the recognition of God's presence through the body of Christ by means of the power of the Holy Spirit among those who believe and walk with him. Lister suggests that due to the church being the new temple of God's presence the practical issues of ecclesiology are centered upon the Christ's eschatological mission and the sanctification of God's people through the teaching of the Word of God and church discipline. Lister concludes his work on the notion that our place in the story of redemption is focused upon the power of God's Spirit within the church for the purpose of redemption through God's presence within and through his people.

Lister's theological work is timely and relevant within today's church culture. Both scholar and student would benefit from understanding Lister's arguments in a day when church life has a skewed understanding of how and when God is present among his people. Such a biblical theology yields a much needed clarification toward defining the presence of God as presented throughout Scripture rather than using ambiguous terminology that opens the door to extreme reader-response type experience. Church planters of the twenty-first century would deeply benefit in gaining a thorough theological footing from Lister's work so as not to propagate further misunderstanding of how and when God is working and moving among the church. Lister's thesis will help pastors, missionaries, and seminarians in their effort toward conducting church life from within a rubric of God's presence even in facing the difficulties of living the Christian life.

- Kevin Cox, *Calvary New Orleans, Metairie, Louisiana*

***The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, Wesleyanism, and Pentecostalism. Revised and Expanded Edition.* By Ben Witherington III. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016. 320 pages. Paperback, \$39.95.**

Ben Witherington is a prolific author, regularly producing commentaries on New Testament books and monographs on topics in biblical theology. He also writes poetry and novels related to biblical studies. He posts daily on his blog, “The Bible and Culture,” as well. Currently, he is the Jean R. Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

The book reviewed here is a “revised and expanded edition” of his earlier *The Problem with Evangelical Theology* (2005). The purpose of both works is to examine the biblical foundations for several evangelical schools of thought. Witherington is an evangelical and a Methodist, but he offers an even-handed appraisal of each school of thought based on his exegetical studies of key texts used by these groups to defend their distinctive views. One of the author’s main arguments is that “all these Evangelical theological systems *in their distinctives* are only loosely tethered to detailed exegesis of particular texts” (6). Besides updating the previous book, Witherington has added a chapter on complementarianism to the section on Reformed theology and two chapters on Pentecostalism.

Part One treats “Augustine’s Children: The Problems with Reformed Theology” and consists of five chapters, including the new chapter on complementarianism. Witherington does not delve into the details of theological history but tackles salient views held by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. He presents close readings of key New Testament texts such as Romans 5 and 7 as a way to test the biblical basis for Reformed theology. For example, Witherington insists that Romans 7 is not about the “tensions in the Christian life” (31). Besides offering his own exegesis, he interacts with other scholars such as Dunn, Sanders, Marshall, and Wright. As a Methodist, he critiques the traditional Reformed views of election and perseverance. He affirms that the possibility of apostasy is a clear teaching of the New Testament. Witherington also criticizes complementarianism for lacking a solid biblical foundation. After reviewing several texts, including the household codes, he suggests that the direction of Paul’s thinking is towards mutual submission rather than patriarchy (104).

In Part Two, “On Dispensing with Dispensationalism,” Witherington tackles the theological system he considers as “clearly the most exegetically problematic” (109) of the views treated in the book. He devotes three chapters to subjects such as the nineteenth-century origins of dispensationalism, biblical prophecy, biblical apocalyptic literature, and, especially, the rapture. He also criticizes the dispensationalist view of Israel in light of his exegesis of such passages as Romans 9–11.

Part Three treats “Mr. Wesley Heading West” and consists of three chapters. Although he sees serious weaknesses in some Wesleyan or Arminian theology, on the whole Witherington insists this system is stronger than the others analyzed in his book. He focuses more on contemporary Arminianism than John Wesley’s specific theology (182). Witherington treats Wesleyan views of the kingdom of God (“dominion of God” is Witherington’s preferred translation), salvation, prevenient grace, and entire sanctification. Although he acknowledges some exegetical weaknesses to Wesleyan theology and the danger of becoming Pelagian (221), he prefers this system to the first two.

Part Four, “The Cost of Pentecostalism,” is the major new section to this edition of the book and contains two short chapters. Witherington clearly rejects the cessationist position and then notes the danger of experiential exegesis in some Pentecostal theology (226). He especially focuses on the work of Gordon Fee, one of his seminary professors. He and Fee both criticize the Pentecostal notion of subsequence, the view that a separate and subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit, such as baptism in the Spirit, because the view is not demonstrated in the Bible (231).

In Part Five, “The Long Journey Home: Where Do We Go From Here?” Witherington wraps up his study. First, he offers a summary of his conclusions so far. A major emphasis is the need for a new appreciation for the role of story and narrative in the Bible (246). As support, he points to the role of Jesus as storyteller and the Apostle Paul’s use of rhetoric in his letters. He notes that such a narrative focus fits well with the postmodern sensitivity to story, signs, and symbols (253). He includes a list of twelve suggestions for improving the way Christians do theology today (259–61). In a concluding “Coda” Witherington insists he is not calling for any “watering down of the key points of orthodoxy” (266).

A book that covers such a wide range of biblical texts and theological systems could be of interest and value to many readers. Fellow evangelicals would certainly evaluate Witherington on both his exegesis of key texts as well as his appraisals of the systems. For example, the traditional Southern Baptist affirmation of perseverance is challenged several times. Witherington argues the possibility of apostasy is clear in the New Testament. He insists “One is not eternally secure until one is securely in eternity” (155). Overall, however, one of the strengths of the book is his stress on the need for solid exegetical foundations for our doctrinal statements. Witherington treats the Bible carefully, noting contextual issues, discussions among first-century rabbis and pagan authors, and the role of rhetoric in Paul’s letters. He offers his own translation of the key texts he discusses.

Witherington is an excellent communicator. He often creates clever, catchy phrases to make a point. For example “Nick at Night” is the caption for his discussion of John 3. Sometimes, however, his comments might seem too pointed for some adherents of the views critiqued. For example, “American Christians are looking for the theological equivalent of comfort food and escapist entertainment, and dispensational theology is readily meeting these needs” (112).

For Baptist ministers and lay people who are willing to be challenged, however, this book would be a lively read. Witherington identifies biblical illiteracy as a serious problem among evangelicals today. This book might trigger some serious Bible study. He also reminds us that study of the biblical languages should be a key component in our college and seminary curriculums (243).

- Warren McWilliams, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma

***Prostitutes and Polygamists: A Look at Love, Old Testament Style.* By David T. Lamb. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015. 206 pages. Paperback, \$16.99.**

David T. Lamb, associate professor of Old Testament at Biblical Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and author of *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?*, asserts in his most recent book, *Prostitutes and Polygamists*, that we too often ignore the scandalous stories of sexual misconduct in Scripture, and to do so devalues the authority of Scripture and ignores an important resource for addressing today's sexually broken world. For Lamb, to pass over the stories of messed-up heroes of the faith is to "deny the power of God's grace, because as humans' bad behavior abounds, God's gracious behavior abounds even more" (22). The authors of the Bible make no apologies for revealing saints and sinners behaving badly. The Scriptures address a real fallen world, one in which human beings are sexually broken. If Christian parents and churches are going to teach about sex in the real world, particularly in a sexually obsessed culture, then, according to Lamb, they must speak not only about the ideal, which is marriage between one man and one woman as taught in Genesis 1 and 2, but also about the reality of sexual sin. Lamb asks rhetorically, "When the church whispers about sex and the culture yells about it, whose voice is going to be heard?" He continues, "if parents or churches want some good material to teach from, all they have to do is open their Bibles. Granted, it's confusing sometimes, but understanding will come through examination, not avoidance" (19). With humor and grace, Lamb attempts to interpret and apply difficult biblical passages in order to recover them for the teaching ministry of the church.

Lamb's work displays a number of strengths. First, he humbly tackles questions raised by difficult narrative passages. For example, how do we reconcile the obvious biblical ideal that marriage is a covenant of faithfulness between one man and one woman with the polygamy of Old Testament saints and what Paul Copan calls kooky Old Testament laws (at least to 21st Century Westerners)? What are we to do with Abraham and Hagar, or Jacob, Leah, and Rachel? How are we to apply the stories of Tamar or Rahab the harlot? How do we grapple with stories of rape, adultery, and incest in Scripture? How do we interpret the story of Sodom and Gomorrah? These are the subjects of Lamb's exegetical investigations. Second, Lamb sets the individual stories of sexual misconduct within the grand story

of salvation: “God uses messed up people to accomplish his purposes—polygamist like Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David, and Solomon, and even the unnamed Samaritan polygamist at the well” (84). Lamb reminds us that Tamar, the “pious prostitute,” is the first woman mentioned in the New Testament (95), and she is joined by Rahab the Harlot, Ruth, and Bathsheba in the lineage of the Son of God (Matt 1). A recurring and encouraging theme is that “a scandalous history reveals a merciful God” (146). In other words, Scripture offers hope, not merely condemnation, to those broken by sexual sin and exploitation. Third, Lamb does not compromise the sinfulness of sex outside of marriage or the traditional interpretation of what comprises sexual immorality. He does, however, acknowledge that some biblical texts are hard to understand. For example, polygamy falls short of God’s ideal for marriage, yet he confesses some ambiguity in how the Old Testament prepares the church-on-mission to respond to the practice of polygamy in cultures not reached by the gospel. His short conclusion is that sex outside the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman is “humans behaving badly.” The driving thesis, however, is forgiveness and the hope of reconciliation available to all sexual sinners.

Although Lamb keeps the reader engaged with entertaining prose and thought-provoking interpretation, some weaknesses detract from his project. For one, his humor does not always work, due in part to the nature of humor itself. Humor is contextual, cultural, and generational. What might be humorous or trendy to one person, might be an offense to another. What might be funny to someone growing up in the United States in the 70s might leave another clueless. Such is the danger of using humor.

More distracting are occasions where Lamb makes unsubstantiated, undeveloped, or careless claims; moreover, he sometimes misses opportunities to tie individual narratives more fully to the grand story of the gospel, which holds judgment and redemption in historical and eschatological tension. Perhaps constraints on the length of the book or his attempt to maintain a casual tone account for these weaknesses. Even so, he would do well at times to follow more consistently his own advice, “when it comes to the Bible, don’t make stuff up,” (81) or at least elaborate and clarify. For example, without substantiation, Lamb states that humans have two distinct natures—male and female, which is unified in human nature (37). One can acknowledge that men and women are different yet human, but to speak of two natures merging into one human nature raises Christological and soteriological questions. Jesus is a man. How does he represent both men and women salvifically? Lamb would do well to elaborate carefully what he means rather than leave it with the reader unexplained and undefended. Another example is the speculation that Boaz already had a wife when he married Ruth. Why add this conjecture when it was not deemed necessary, even if true, by the original narrator?

An example of a rhetorical device that might miscommunicate is found in Lamb’s description of the creation of man and woman—plan A fell short and its weird that God actually thought that providing a suitable helper for Adam from the other animals might

work (40–41). Although he states that the texts suggest that God knew from the beginning exactly what he was doing (46), Lamb does not satisfactorily demonstrate why God created the woman the way He did nor why the ideal of marriage as revealed is necessary to the plans and purposes of God in creation. Instead, he sought merely to defend an egalitarian position on the relationship between men and women.

An example of an unsubstantiated claim is found in Lamb's application of Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding feast. He sees this miracle as a way to show how Jesus provides abundantly, excellently, and unexpectedly, with application to sex and alcohol (55–56). The setting of the wedding feast and the provision of overabundant wine in John 2 is, however, traditionally seen as an announcement that the Messiah is present, the kingdom of God is manifest, and the Mosaic covenant is now fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. The theologically parallel passage in Mark 2:14–22 carries the same symbolic features. Jesus, the Messiah, is the bridegroom who is among the people and so the time is right to celebrate, to feast before a covenant making God. Inviting Jesus into our engagements and marriages is defensible, but not through the hook, "Jesus the Great Liquor Provider" (55).

An example of carelessness is seen when, in a fit of righteous indignation, Lamb declares, "unlike the Academy and the military, the Bible doesn't ignore stories of rape" (127). Although we should be passionately and loudly indignant about the way women are often mistreated sexually on college campuses and in the U.S. military, such a blanket and unsubstantiated denunciation of a category of institutions can slam the door on due process and justice, as we have seen recently in the United States.

Examples of missed opportunities actually draw from a primary strength in the book. Entering into covenant with God offers hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation to those who are sexually broken. But what then? Does reconciliation and forgiveness change people? Lamb does not address adequately how we ought to understand and respond to sexual sin and sinners within the covenant community. Although Lamb contends for and biblical texts and real life show the devastating effects of sexual sin, he essentially ignores the warnings of judgment and the instruction for right living that shows how serious God responds to sexual sin.

Perhaps more troubling is the way Lamb reduces the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah to hospitality and injustice. Though he assures the reader that the Bible, when it speaks explicitly, always condemns the practice of men having sex with men, he goes out of his way to show that Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities destroyed by God in Genesis 19 were not condemned because of homosexuality. Here, at least, Lamb makes a sustained argument, but ends up practicing what he condemns—unnecessarily reducing the sin of Sodom to one or a few sins. I agree with the basic premise that Sodom and Gomorrah were not condemned explicitly because of homosexuality. These cities were condemned because of wickedness, which reasonable included sexual immorality in multiple forms.

If you are a Pastor or teacher in the local church, *Prostitutes and Polygamist* provides a starting place for understanding love, Old Testament Style. The weaknesses above do not eliminate the overall benefit of the book. On individual passages, consult sound commentaries and other works, such as Paul Copan's, *Is God a Moral Monster*, to build a robust theology and ethic on sex and sexuality in this, our Father's world.

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***A Reader's Greek New Testament*. 3rd edition. Edited by Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015. 585 pages. Paperback, \$39.99.**

Richard Goodrich received his PhD from the University of St. Andrews. Currently, he is lecturer in the department of history at Gonzaga University. Albert Lukaszewski also received his PhD from the University of St. Andrews. He is co-chair of the Hellenistic Greek Language and Linguistics Section of the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. He has served as editor of the *Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament* and has a forthcoming work called *Grammar of Qumran Aramaic*.

The goal of *A Reader's Greek New Testament* is to facilitate rapid reading of the Greek New Testament (GNT). As the editors note in the introduction, acquiring a working vocabulary can be a significant hindrance to maintaining Greek. "One of the great barriers to reading is the problem of vocabulary acquisition. The student who enrolls in a seminary Greek course will spend a significant amount of time learning how Greek words change form depending on their role in a sentence (inflection) as well as how those words are arranged to express an idea (syntax). Vocabulary acquisition often emerges a distinct third among course objectives" (7). The typical Greek textbook will expose students to vocabulary words that occur fifty times or more in the GNT. *A Reader's Greek New Testament* aids the reader by providing brief definitions of words that occur less than thirty times on the bottom of the page on which they occur. The result is that the top two-thirds of the page is the Greek text with the bottom third containing definitions of words the reader might not know. Thus, the reader can focus on reading the text rather than looking up words in the dictionary.

When the first edition of *A Reader's Greek New Testament* came out in 2003, it met a real need. The best way to keep and improve in Greek is to spend time reading it, and this text facilitates that well. The second edition improved it greatly by adding the lexicon for words used more than thirty times, adjusting the font so that it was more readable, and adding the maps. The latest edition maintains these improvements and updates the text apparatus to incorporate the changes in the latest scholarly editions of the GNT, the United Bible Societies 5th edition (UBS5) and the Nestle Aland 28th edition (NA28).

The Greek text presented in this volume is the eclectic text behind the NIV. Differences between the text used by the Committee on Bible Translation for the NIV and the UBS5/NA28 text are noted in the apparatus. In addition, places where the NIV gives a variant note are cited in the apparatus. The text presented is different from the UBS5/NA28 in 588 places. Approximately 86% of the differences are related to words in brackets in the UBS5/NA28 text but were accepted by the Committee on Bible Translation (10). Even so, using the text behind the NIV rather than the standard Greek text is a weakness for this work.

The glosses provided for words used less than thirty times are based upon Warren Trenchard's *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*. Helpfully, the editors provide a range of meaning for each Greek term and not a single English equivalent. While providing multiple lexical glosses can be cumbersome, readers are able to gain a sense of the semantic range of a term which is helpful in interpretation. Words that occur more than thirty times are contained in a brief lexicon at the end of the work.

In a few places, different editorial choices would have been helpful. For example, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* provides the gloss for every occurrence of a term even if it is repeated in the same passage. The result is unnecessary repetition in the footnotes which can make the text less readable. Along the same lines, the gloss is always provided for proper names. While this might be helpful in places, there is often no need to provide the gloss for a proper name. Often times, the reader knows the meaning just by pronouncing the term. Giving the gloss for every proper noun leads to many footnotes that are not needed.

One of the strengths of this work is the practical size. *A Reader's Greek New Testament* is light and less than the size of the average thin-line reference Bible. Even so, the font is not unusually small or hard to read. In addition, the pleather binding is durable and feels good to the touch. The size and feel of this work make it much more likely to be carried around and not left in the study.

For comparison's sake, the United Bible Society has published a reader's edition that meets many of the same needs of this work. The UBS edition helpfully uses the UBS5/NA28 text rather than the underlying text of the NIV. The UBS edition also provides parsing information for all Greek verbs which readers will find helpful. However, the UBS edition is much more bulky and costs about twice as much, so some may still prefer *A Reader's Greek New Testament* as a text to carry. As a work that helps facilitate rapid reading of the Greek New Testament, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* is a helpful work.

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***Salvation and Discipleship Continuum in Johannine Literature: Towards an Evaluation of the Faith Alone Doctrine.* By Sujaya T. James. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2014. 283 pages. Paperback, \$179.95.**

Sujaya T. James received his BTh and MDiv from London Baptist Seminary. He received his MTh from Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary and his PhD in New Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary. He served as Vice President of Academic Affairs and Director of Biblical and Theological Studies at Carver College in Atlanta, Georgia, and is currently retired.

James's work seeks to evaluate the usage of Johannine literature by the advocates of the Faith Alone movement. The advocates of the Faith Alone movement state that the Johannine literature describes that a divide exist between the life of a believer and a disciple; they argue a believer is one who simply believes, while a disciple is one who does good works because of what one believes. In other words, the Faith alone movement argues, "There is every reason to believe that there *will* be good works in the life of a believer in Christ," but this belief is an "inference" drawn from Scripture. "*No texts says that*" (5-6, italics original). Being a believer does not necessitate that one will also be a disciple. Thus, James, through an analysis of two major themes found within the Johannine literature, argues against such a belief by pointing out how inconsistent such a belief is within the context of the Johannine literature.

James's work divides into nine chapters and follows a logical progression. In chapter 1, James introduces his argument and gives the rationale for making his argument. In chapter 2, James overviews the methodology used by the Faith Alone proponents for interpreting Johannine literature. In chapter 3, James explains how the Faith Alone movement interprets John's light and darkness motif. James then provides a counterargument for understanding the motif in the Gospel of John (chapter 4) and 1 John (chapter 5). Chapter 6 is very similar to chapter 3, but deals with the Faith Alone proponents' understanding of the Greek word *menō* in Johannine literature. Thus, a counterargument is then given for understanding *menō* with John's Gospel (chapter 7) and his first two epistles (chapter 8). Chapter 9 provides a conclusion to the work and summarizes its contents.

"You begin your Christian journey as a child of God and not necessarily as a disciple and a friend of Christ. The above statement captures the characteristic doctrine taught by [the] Faith Alone or Free grace movement" (1). Defining what the Faith Alone proponents mean by this statement is the purpose of James's first chapter. Within this first chapter, James explains the current influence of the Faith Alone moment and names Zane Clark Hodges as its "most influential proponent" (3). James argues that Hodges interpretation of Johannine literature is inconsistent with Hodges "denial of the inherent link between salvation/assurance and discipleship" (6). Thus, to demonstrate this inconsistency, James decides to give attention to John's usage of the light and darkness motif and John's usage of the

word *menō*. These two Johannine themes are examined because “a proper understanding of John’s use of them is important to a correct approach to his literature” and “Faith Alone teachers interact substantially” with these two themes (6).

James devotes his second chapter to describing the Faith Alone proponents’ view of the purpose behind the Johannine literature. The proponents believe that the entire Johannine literature has an “evangelistic purpose” in mind (11). James describes assigning this purpose to the Johannine literature as having no agreement among scholars. While James does not argue for a definitive purpose for the Johannine literature, James does argue that 1 John has a “polemical” or argumentative purpose (24).

The Faith Alone proponents’ view of the Johannine literature’s usage of the light and darkness motif is the topic of James’s next chapter. James explains that the teachers of the Faith Alone movement believe that when John speaks of someone being in the “light” (*phōs*) he is referring to them as being a believer, but that when John speaks of someone being in “darkness” he is referring not to an unbeliever but to a “secret believer” (33). The “secret believer” is someone who has adequate faith but in lifestyle is no different from an unbeliever (34). James determines that this analysis is inconsistent with the Johannine literature and devotes the next two chapters to defending this. Within these chapters, James concludes that John “used the symbol of light with respect to the believers and the symbol of darkness with respect to the unbelievers” and John’s writings insist “that the life of the believers possessed manifested itself in such qualities as obeying Christ and loving fellow believers” (97).

In chapter 6, the Faith Alone movement’s interpretation of the word *menō* within the Johannine literature is the topic of discussion. James demonstrates that the Faith Alone teachers do “interpret John’s [use of] $\mu\epsilon\nu\omega$ [*menō*] as representing the believer’s discipleship,” but not in the context of the permanent relationship with God (135). In other words, the believer that remains (*menō*) in Christ is a disciple, while a believer that does not remain (*menō*) in Christ is still a believer but one with an “interrupted or terminated” faith relationship with Christ (137). James’s counterargument demonstrates that John’s usage of the word *menō* implies a sense of permanence when used in the context of relationships (199).

In conclusion of the work, James states that the “Faith Alone scholars argue there is no inherent connection between salvation/assurance and discipleship. Johannine literature does not have room for such a notion” (234). James’s argument hinges upon referencing inconsistent quotes from the works of Faith Alone proponents, and exegesis of key texts and themes found within the Johannine literature.

James’s argument is clear and easy to follow. His usage of quotations, drawn directly from the words of his opponents, helps to verify his conclusions; even if one does not agree

with James's overall argument, one can still see the inconsistencies within quotations of James's opponents. James's exegesis of the Johannine literature is also very engaging and thorough. The work itself could use some editing; some subsections within James's chapters are more jagged than connected. This jaggedness is somewhat of a distraction from the overall work, which is very thoughtful and accurate.

This work would be helpful for the church member asking the "what comes next" question. Within his work, James provides many resources and explanations for understanding many Johannine passages. For example, in James's exegesis of the phrase "God is light" (1 John 1:5), he very clearly explains that this phrase is best understood as "having reference to God's self-revelation" (103). Thus, James's work will help church members to see that becoming a Christian (believer) goes hand in hand with desiring to see the full revelation of God (being a disciple); such a desire leads one away from asking "what comes next" to asking "how can I continue to look upon God's beauty?" (Psalm 27:4).

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***Systematic Theology: Volume 1, The Doctrine of God.* By Katherine Sonderegger. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015. 539 pages. Hardcover, \$49.00.**

Katherine Sonderegger is William Mede Chair of Theology at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. She holds degrees from Smith College (AB), Yale (STM, MDiv), and Brown University (PhD). She has served on the faculty at Bangor Theological Seminary and Middlebury College. She is ordained in the United Church of Christ (1977); she is also an ordained deacon (2000) and priest (2001) in the Episcopal Church, in which she was confirmed in 1993. She is also the author of *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

The work at hand is the first installment in Katherine Sonderegger's three-volume systematic theology. She begins this multivolume work by discussing the doctrine of God. Whereas many volumes in systematic theology begin by discussing theological prolegomena, this is not the case here. According to the author, topics of prolegomena will be taken up in the doctrine of faith, which will be discussed in the second volume. Sonderegger states, "Doctrine governs and generates method, not the converse" (xx). She tells the reader in the preface that this volume focuses on the Oneness of God, specifically his aseity. Throughout the work, she holds that God does not possess his attributes but that he, rather, is his attributes. Also of significance to Sonderegger's work is the concept of theological compatibilism, which holds that God is compatible with his creation.

Sonderegger begins her doctrine of God by discussing God's unicity, or oneness, contra theologians such as Barth, Pannenberg, and Moltmann, who begin by expositing the doctrine of the Trinity. She begins by asking the question, "What does it mean for Almighty God to be One?" (4). She answers the question by stating that the focus of God's oneness is not so much a matter of his number as it is a matter of his uniqueness. She states, "But because Oneness means 'without form or similitude,' this predicate cannot be a 'number,' nor can it be removal or separation. Oneness is far more radical than all that. . . Radical oneness, radical uniqueness, demands thought beyond any class, any universal, any likeness. This is an annihilating concreteness" (25). Sonderegger also addresses issues concerning theological epistemology in this section, especially regarding Kant's doctrine of the *noumena* and *phenomena*. In response to Kant, she states, "The problem that is God does not stem from our being unable to conceive or know or receive Him properly under the conditions of human experience. . . . The problem is that we *do* know God; or rather and better, that He *does* know us, and has encountered us as the one Living and True Lord" (40).

In Part II, Sonderegger discusses God's omnipresence. In this part, she defines God's omnipresence as his hiddenness: "God is the Hidden One" (49). She goes on to affirm that God, in his creation, reveals himself as this Hidden One (50). Of particular interest in this section of the book is Sonderegger's claim that atheism serves as evidence of the Hidden One. She states, "Rather, atheism *testifies* to the truth of the One God, his invisible Deity and Power, because God will not be left without His witness—even here, even in indifference and defiance. Modern atheism, even against its will, glorifies God in this way" (53). Also in this chapter, Sonderegger provides an excursus on the topic of theological compatibilism and epistemology. She clarifies that by "compatibilism" she is not discussing issues of determinism, but "metaphysical compatibilism" (84). This metaphysical compatibilism should not be confused with panentheism, the view that God is *in* all of creation. Sonderegger means that God is compatible with his creation; his being is compatible with the world. This is part of the Divine Mystery.

Sonderegger discusses divine omnipotence in Part III. She defines omnipotence as God's "holy humility" (151). She interestingly states, "Omnipotence is a *moral* doctrine. We do not begin to grasp the first thing about Divine Power if we do not recognize it as a form of Goodness itself" (151). Sonderegger continues to utilize her theological compatibilism in this Part, and this is what she means by God's humility. God's power, just like his presence, is compatible with his creation. As she does in the other parts of the book, Sonderegger references the burning bush; the bush is consumed, yet it lives. The burning bush shows how God's being is compatible with the creation. She divides this part on omnipotence into two sections: Divine Omnipotence *A Se* and Divine Omnipotence *Ad Extra*. Under the latter section, she discusses omnipotence as personal relation and the "mutable immutability" of God (294).

In Part IV, Sonderegger discusses divine omniscience. As with omnipresence and omnipotence, she approaches this topic from a different direction than do many theologians. She holds that eternal omniscience is the perfection of God's spiritual nature (335). As in the previous parts of the book, Sonderegger utilizes the concepts of God's subjectivity and objectivity to illumine this doctrine. Following her previous discussions of God's attributes in relation to his aseity, she states that God simply is his knowledge. Since he is both subject and object, this means that he is first person as well as third person knowledge. She uses this to exposit God's knowledge of evil. Since God is both subjective and objective omniscience, he knows evil, but does not succumb to it. She states, "And just this is the gospel, the good news we greet with joy. There is One who has looked into the abyss, who has examined the formless horror in its breadth and depth, who encompasses it, its sickness and malice, with the Wisdom that is good, and remains utterly sovereign and utterly undefiled by this sight" (375). Sonderegger also applies the subjective/objective motif to God's knowledge of persons. God not only possesses third person knowledge, or propositional knowledge, of his creatures, but first person knowledge as well. She states, "It is not that God observes, collects, and preserves the events and doings of His creatures, such that all my ways and wanderings are *in* Him, to be found again in Him as their eternal Home. No, it is rather that the intellectual act that is our knowing, and the intelligibility that is the ground of our rational act, are the communication of God's heavenly Wisdom to His frail creatures" (349). She further states, "God knows what it is like to be me—this very one" (359).

In Part V, Sonderegger discusses the topics of Divine love and the exegesis of Holy Scripture. She affirms that God is his aseity, that he is divine love. In her section of the interpretation of Scripture, she holds to a form of Theological Interpretation of Scripture. Though the tools of historical-critical methods are helpful in the task of exegesis, the Bible belongs to the church rather than the academy, and is God's tool that he speaks through.

Sonderegger has made a great contribution to the field of systematic theology with the work at hand. Her driving motif, the oneness of God, helps to provide balance in the multiple contemporary discussions of theology proper. Though her focus is on God's unicity, she does not deny that he is Trinity. She informs the reader that the doctrine of the Trinity will be taken up in one of the volumes to come. She provides fresh insight into the divine attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, without rejecting traditional orthodox understandings. Her concepts of theological compatibilism, as well as God's subjectivity and objectivity, provide the reader with interesting interpretations of the divine attributes. This especially comes to light in her discussion of omniscience. As divine subjectivity and objectivity, God has both first person and third person knowledge of his creatures: God knows what it is like to be me. There are some dangers here, however. This form of omniscience, as shown above, also informs God's knowledge of evil. God has subjective, as well as objective, knowledge of evil. Sonderegger affirms that this is part of his divine wisdom. One cannot help but wonder if this means that God has first

person knowledge of experiencing evil, or being evil. Is this compatible with the traditional Christian understanding of God being the good. Can God be the good and have first person knowledge of evil? Sonderegger affirms that this is so, but that it is part of the Divine Mystery. This is why theology must always be done through prayer, she says. All theology must be done with and through prayer.

There are some weaknesses, however, with Sonderegger's work. The primary weakness of the work is its obscurity. There are many places throughout the book in which it is not clear what Sonderegger is getting at. Though she attempts to explain concepts such as God's "mutable immutability" and "passible impassibility," it is still not always clear what she means by phrases such as these. One will also note how doxological the work at hand is. Though it is refreshing to read systematic theology that stimulates both the mind and heart to worship, there are times in this volume that Sonderegger's doxology muddles the information. This overuse of doxology adds to some of the obscurities noted above. Though Sonderegger should be applauded for including doxology in her work, using less might have made her work less obscure and more accessible. There are also places throughout the work, specifically in some of the author's explanations of compatibilism, that one wonders if Sonderegger is advocating for a version of panentheism, or even pantheism. Were it not for her frequent denials of both pantheism and panentheism, one might be led to believe that she advocates for one of these.

Another weakness of the work is her presentation of the doctrine of Scripture. Sonderegger seems to hold a Barthian doctrine of Scripture rather than a traditional evangelical view. According to Sonderegger's view, Scripture is not inerrant in the sense understood by Evangelicalism. Along with Barth, she seems to hold that Scripture becomes the Word of God when he chooses to speak through it. Such an understanding of Scripture will most likely not be welcomed by many American evangelical circles.

Overall, Sonderegger's volume will be a great addition to the library of theologians, as well as students of theology. Due to the technical nature of the work, as well as its obscurity, I would not recommend this work to laypersons. I would, however, recommend it to theological scholars and students. Sonderegger's theological compatibilism provides a great discussion partner for theologians to dialogue with, and I look forward to her forthcoming *Systematic Theology* volumes.

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***The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis. Second Edition.* Edited by Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013. 884 pages. Paperback, \$314.00.**

The subtitle of the current book nicely summarizes its purpose. The book has been printed to address the multifarious questions that stem from the practice of New Testament textual criticism (hereafter, TC). As the Latin phrase suggests, *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* details the current state of research regarding the text of the New Testament. Each of the twenty-eight essays contributes to the fulfillment of this purpose and expands upon the previous edition of the book.

The book is divided into six sections. The first section addresses issues related to textual witnesses. The second section explains matters related to various versions of the witnesses. The third section deals with the significance of other ancient resources in the study of the New Testament text and the place of the study of the non-manuscript witnesses. The fourth section explores the tendencies and history of the scribes responsible for the aforementioned resources. The fifth section details the state of textual organization and classification, and the sixth section rounds out the work with a collection of essays on the different practices, philosophies, and opinions within the current world of TC.

The first section, which spans chapters 1-4, is an exhaustive section on the witnesses of the New Testament. In this section, the respective authors cover important details regarding the continued study of the papyri witnesses, the majuscule witnesses, the minuscule witnesses, and the lectionary witnesses. Admittedly, there is some debate regarding how to classify the lectionary witnesses, yet, for organizational purposes, the editors keep the lectionary witnesses separate from the chapters on the Greek church fathers (Chapter 13), the Latin church fathers (Chapter 14), and the Syriac church fathers (Chapter 15). While it would be hard to say that any one section is worth the price of this particular book, it would be textual critical malpractice for any practitioner of the discipline to ignore the information found in these first four chapters.

The second section, which spans chapters 5-12, offers valuable information regarding the ancient versions of the New Testament. The versions covered in these chapters are Syriac versions (Chapter 6), the Latin version (Chapter 7), Coptic versions (Chapter 8), Ethiopic versions (Chapter 9), the Armenian version (Chapter 10), the Georgian version (Chapter 11), and the Gothic version (Chapter 11). In addition to these versions, the Diatessaron of Tatian (Chapter 5) is considered in relationship to Codex Fuldensis's significance for reconstructing the ancient document. As with the classification of the lectionary witnesses, there are disputes regarding the significance of the Diatessaron in reconstructing the "initial text" of the New Testament. This stems partly from the fact that there is no extant full copy of the Diatessaron. On the whole, the chapters in this section provide invaluable details about the ancient versions for the modern New Testament textual critic.

Section three briefly yet helpfully considers the significance of the works of various church fathers for the practice of TC. Chapter 13 clearly outlines the “current state of affairs” with regards to the works of the Greek Fathers and TC. In Chapter 14, the Latin fathers’ importance for TC is explored, and in Chapter 15, the Syriac fathers receive some attention. Chapter 16 is unique in that it breaks with the other essays that focus on manuscripts and moves to consider Greek witnesses found on ostraca, amulets, inscriptions, and quotations of the New Testament and other early Christian texts.

With Chapters 17-18, the book enters into its fourth logical section, providing helpful, yet brief details on scribal tendencies and their respective historical-social context. In Chapter 19, the focus of the book changes from scribes to the modern practice of New Testament TC and its variegated history, thus introducing the fifth logical section. Chapter 19 provides a brief history and explanation of how New Testament Greek manuscripts are analyzed and categorized for the practice of TC. In Chapter 20, the matter of textual clusters is evaluated in light of a shift from a “text-type” paradigm to a textual-relational paradigm.

Lastly, in the sixth section, comprised of Chapters 21-28, the methods and opinions of TC are considered in their most up-to-date forms. In Chapter 21, a history of criteria for evaluating textual variants is briefly given before a more substantial consideration of the current practice is provided. In Chapter 22, the matter of conjectural emendation is discussed and evaluated. In Chapter 23, one of the more important essays in the book, the goal of New Testament TC is considered in light of the move from a search for the “original text” to the discovery of the “initial text.” In Chapter 24, a survey of the most recent critical editions and apparatus of the Greek New Testament is provided. In Chapter 25, the discussion moves from practices in TC to positions within TC circles. In particular, Chapter 25 considers the revival of the majority text theory. In Chapter 26, thoroughgoing eclecticism is given a voice among the different positions with reasoned eclecticism being addressed in Chapter 27. Lastly, in chapter 28, “the utility of the manuscript tradition” (825) is investigated for the purpose of understanding the role that the Greek text of the New Testament plays in the historical-social reconstructions of antiquity.

Admittedly, it is difficult to register a critique of a book that essentially represents a literature review of an entire field of study. In brief, this is an important book for TC and the future of the field. NT scholars are indebted (and most likely in debt) on account of this collection of essays. If I had to mention one drop back to the book, it would be the excessive price. With a retail price of \$315.00, the book will most likely be relegated to a library reference work for students and scholars alike, which is a shame in light of the book’s beneficial material.

On a final pastoral note, while this book is certainly important for textual critics, it also possesses some helpful comments for pastors and laypeople that minister in an age of skepticism. Consider the following comment from Bart Ehrman. He writes, “Textual

scholars have enjoyed reasonable success at establishing, to the best of their abilities, the original text of the NT. Indeed, barring extraordinary new discoveries or phenomenal alterations of method, it is virtually inconceivable that the character of our printed Greek New Testament will ever change significantly” (825). For a scholar that tends to push the limits of credibility in his more popular-level works, Ehrman’s comment on the “reasonable success” of textual critics to establish the “original text of the NT” is enlightening. If one of the most ferocious opponents of Christianity, admits to the success of TC practitioners to essentially establish the original text of the NT, then rampant skepticism regarding “what the text really says” should end. While one may not agree with what the New Testament text says, it would be academically dishonest to act as if the Christians cannot know the contents of the New Testament with great certainty.

- Casey Hough, First Baptist Church, Camden, Arkansas

***A Theology of Biblical Counseling.* By Heath Lambert. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 344 pages. Hardcover, \$15.99.**

Heath Lambert serves as executive director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. He also serves as a visiting faculty member at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and as the associate pastor at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. Lambert is the author of *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, and *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace*. He is also the co-editor of *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture*.

The purpose of Lambert’s book becomes clear when he states that “Counseling is a theological discipline” (11). Though many counselors believe theology and counseling have nothing to do with one another, within this book, Lambert seeks to contest this belief. Lambert builds his contention upon three premises: a definition of theology, a definition of counseling, and the difference between biblical and Christian counseling. Lambert follows the works of Wayne Grudem and John Frame in defining theology as “what the whole Bible teaches us today about any given topic” (12). Lambert defines counseling as “a conversation where one party with questions, problems, and trouble seeks assistance from someone they believe has answers, solutions, and help” (13). As such, Lambert will argue that, in a general sense, counseling does not require a degree but a “vision of life” or a “worldview” that helps someone with a problem (called the counselee) deal with their problem. In other words, Lambert states that because every worldview has some relationship to how one views God and because counselors use their worldview to help counselees, counseling is in essence always theological (16–17). Lastly, Lambert explains that though biblical and Christian counselors agree on many things, they disagree on whether “the Bible is a *sufficient* counseling resource” (30, italics original). In other words, though Christian counselors would argue that counseling requires secular counseling strategies

while using the Bible as a supplement, biblical counselors would argue that there is no human counseling issue that is not also a theological issue addressed by Scripture. Thus, seeking to build upon the work of Jay Adams, each chapter within Lambert's book deals with a case study where Lambert has used systematic theology to help a counselee.

Each chapter within Lambert's book follows the same basic pattern. The chapter begins with an introduction containing a challenging counseling case study. The body of the chapter is then dedicated to explaining a theological truth, drawn from the categories of systematic theology, which will be applied to solving the problem presented by the case study. The conclusion, then, reminds the reader of the case study and demonstrates how the theological truth under discussion applies to the counselee(s)' situation.

The case studies within the book cover a wide range of counseling problems. These studies range from counselees dealing with anxiety (Chapter 10) and pornography (Chapter 11) to counselees dealing with a life of sexual abuse (Chapter 4) and the accidental death of a child (Chapter 7). Regardless of the issues brought to him by counselees, Lambert consistently argues that the contents of Scripture provide the counselee with an immediate and definitive solution. As Lambert states, "we want believers and unbelievers to respond in faith regardless of their problem and regardless of whether they currently have faith in Christ" (302). Lambert does not make this statement to the neglect of utilizing medical treatment (202), nor to the neglect of ever utilizing secular methods (22). But Lambert only intends to say that "we must affirm that no strategy, no intervention, no methodology or counseling system can ever produce the power our counselees need to change" (154). Lambert would argue that these other methods are helpful to an extent, but never fix the real problem of all counselees (150).

Because Lambert states that "it is impossible" in the confines of his book "to engage in anything like a comprehensive treatment of theology and its relationship to counseling" (33), he decides to limit himself to discussing doctrines that are "impossible to overlook in a theology of biblical counseling" (34). Thus, Lambert deals with eleven different theological concepts and their relationship to counseling; these include a theology of Scripture, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Suffering, and the Church. Though Lambert acknowledges that many of these doctrines are interrelated, he also argues for the importance of focusing on particular doctrines in light of certain counseling issues.

Lambert takes care to include within the conclusion to each chapter mixed results of the application of systematic theology to counseling problems. Though some chapters conclude with the counselees finding a solution to their problems, some end with counselees rejecting the counseling entirely. Such negative results do not lead Lambert to affirm that something is lacking within the methods of the biblical counseling movement. Instead, Lambert affirms that counselors "cannot open the eyes of a person's heart. There is only one Counselor and Teacher who can do that, and it is the Spirit of God" (169). In

other words, though Lambert would affirm that counselors can sometimes be ineffective or incorrect in their diagnosis, any failure of the biblical counselor is not found within his methods but in the counselee's rejection of the mercy of God if biblical counseling is done effectively (160–61).

Overall, Lambert's book is a very helpful and engaging introduction to both systematic theology and biblical counseling, but the book is wanting in one area. The book has an absence of a concise chapter defining the limitations of Lambert's thesis. Though Lambert clarifies and places parameters around his main thesis throughout the book, these clarifications and parameters are scattered and brief. This leads the reader to see these limitations as of minor importance when they are anything else. Lambert's work, which will be sure to have another edition, could benefit from the addition of a chapter that walks the reader through the limitations of his thesis so that these limitations are not missed within the overall work. With that being said, this book will be very useful for members of the local church and pastors seeking to deal with the numerous issues involved with ministry. As Lambert states, "Jesus has not given us the freedom to avoid speaking of him to others. It does not matter whether we label our conversations 'missions,' 'getting to know the neighbors,' 'lunch together,' or 'counseling'" (156). Thus, this book provides a platform for Christians to engage in the work of counseling for the sake of believers and those who are lost. Lambert would argue that every human problem that requires counseling is based on a theological misunderstanding of God. Thus, the goal of biblical counseling is the same as the goal of the church; to help people place their problems before a holy God, who is offering salvation through faith.

- Ron Lindo, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

The Theory and Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics: Essays in Honor of Elliott E. Johnson. Edited by H. Wayne House and Forrest S. Weiland. Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2015. 408 pages. Paperback, \$26.95.

As stated in the book's title, this commemorative volume was written in honor of Elliot E. Johnson. Johnson has taught at Dallas Theological Seminary for more than 40 years and has influenced numerous students in the field of hermeneutics. The editors of this volume, H. Wayne House and Forrest S. Weiland, are only two of the nineteen students who have gladly contributed article that seek to apply Johnson's hermeneutical method to different biblical texts. In fact, Johnson's work entitled *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* is referenced in almost every article. Thus, Johnson's students have sought to explain his hermeneutical method in light of current hermeneutical issues.

In order to do this, the volume was divided into two sections. The first section deals with the theory of biblical hermeneutics and defends a "literal system of interpretation"

(32). The second section puts the literal system of interpretation into practice. The volume, thus, moves from why one ought to interpret the bible “literally” to how one ought to do this.

The theory section consists of five articles defending a “literal” interpretation of the bible, each from a different perspective. Nathan Hoff begins this section with overviews of the current debate in the field of biblical hermeneutics. This debate holds two primary sides. On one side is the view that the text has a subjective meaning assigned by the reader. On the other side is the view that the author’s meaning is capable of being objectively discovered in the text (12–16). In explaining the subjective perspective, Hoff states that “the academic climate has become largely antagonistic to the notion that an author’s meaning is recoverable from the text he wrote” (12). But Hoff clearly demonstrates that this view creates a great difficulty for “people of faith” because a meaning that is not recoverable is also a meaning that holds no authority (13). Thus, Hoff persuasively argues for a “literal” or “objective” interpretation of the text in which the word “literal” means that “the text embodies the meaning of the author in a way that can be both identified and shared through the language of the text” (32). The rest of the articles, in the theory section, build upon this basic premise.

Tom Bulick describes how Johnson’s hermeneutical method has practically been taught to members of his church. With Johnson by his side, Bulick provides a detailed overview of how they have used a tool called *The Scrolls* to engage their church, from children to elders, in the task of objective hermeneutics (33–50). From here, Norman L. Geisler defends the objective interpretation method by defending that there is an Objective Mind (God). Geisler states that, “the only way to deny the *possibility* [italics original] of objective truth is to disprove a theistic God exists” (66). Since God’s existence cannot be disproven, neither can the possibility of objective truth.

Forrest Weiland’s article provides a balance to the conversation. Weiland acknowledges that those in the subjective camp do have some valid objections: one’s own historical circumstances (historical situatedness), one’s distance from the history of the texts themselves (historical distance), and one’s preunderstandings (69). But, after providing a counter argument for each of these objections, Weiland concludes that even if one cannot obtain complete objectivity one can obtain sufficient objectivity. “A valid interpretation is the one that is most plausible” and for the Christian is one that also involves the illumination of the Holy Spirit (85–86). Thus, the Holy Spirit’s role in hermeneutics is the purpose of the last article within the theory section. In this article, Paul R. Shockley argues that human limitations in objective interpretation are ultimately overcome by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Shockley explains that interpretation does not involve only one’s presuppositions but also one’s “intimacy with the God of the Bible” (110).

Overall, the theory section of the volume provides a general overview of why an objective exegesis of scripture is ideal for the Christian life. This section can at times be a little dry and dense in light of the numerous hermeneutical terms and definitions, but this section also provides some very helpful and practical insights. Bulick's article is the most practical one of the entire volume and will be very helpful for pastors seeking to teach their congregants how to study the bible for themselves. On the same note, Shockley's article provides a framework for both those who are overly spiritual and those who focus on exegesis alone. As Shockley explains, God has sent his Spirit to provide "cognitive and receptive assistance" for those who apply "healthy exegesis" to the text of the bible (118). Thus, one should not divide the Spirit and good exegesis, but should instead seek to have them both.

Within the practice section of this volume, one finds twelve articles that each apply the objective interpretation described in the theory section to numerous texts found within the bible. This is primarily done through viewing the bible as a historical narrative with a "dramatic" or "progressive" plot (125–32). Thus, as Charles P. Baylis states in his article, the single purpose of the Old Testament is "that God will be represented in the physical universe solely and totally through His Christ" (150). The next article by Jonathan Murphy applies this "dramatic" approach to the book of Acts under the title of "Narrative Criticism" (154). Murphy examines how the character of Barnabas is used textually throughout the narrative of Acts and concludes that the author uses Barnabas to project his agenda on the reader (167).

From here, the rest of the practice section applies narrative criticism to a diversity of textual situations. For example, David Klingler uses narrative criticism to defend that Matthew's quotation of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23 is in line with the Isaiah's original intent (205–232). Gregory V. Trull explains how the narrative of Acts 2 helps one to see how Peter provides a proper exegesis of Psalm 16:8–11 (287–308). Alexander R. Gonzales determines that the New Testament's usage of Jer 31:31–34 does not change the text's original meaning. The New Testament author's just utilize Jer 31:31–34 to serve different arguments that fit within the overall narrative of their monographs (309–334). And lastly, Stephen S. Kim demonstrates how the "Cana Cycle" (John 2:1–4:54) is structured to prove that one must believe in Jesus' words because Jesus is, in fact, the word (*logos*) of God (364).

Generally, the practice section of this volume is much more helpful and engaging than the theory section. But such is to be expected. Though the practice section provides the reader with twelve articles demonstrating how the theory works, the articles are somewhat lacking in their engagement of the Old Testament. The primary concern is only for how the Old Testament relates to the New, not how the Old Testament functions within itself. Though Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. has contributed an article stating that the Old Testament should be allowed to speak for itself, his article is far too brief to even demonstrate how this ought to be done.

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***Understanding Baptism.* By Bobby Jamieson. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016. 80 pages. Paperback, \$7.99.**

In 1523 Martin Luther wrote a baptismal booklet that would later be attached to his *Small Catechism* (1529). He wrote this booklet because he perceived “that those present understand nothing of what is being said and done.”¹ Though he erred on the issue of infant baptism, Luther was right to address the ignorance he detected among those receiving and witnessing baptism. A similar and equally admirable pastoral impulse has led Bobby Jamieson, a PhD candidate in New Testament studies at the University of Cambridge and former assistant editor for 9Marks Ministries, to write *Understanding Baptism*.

Understanding Baptism is a practical book (better: booklet) in ecclesiology aimed at a popular, non-academic audience. As a member of the *Church Basics* series, editor Jonathan Leeman explains, the work is “written for the average church member” (v). Within this booklet, Jamieson distills content from his recent work *Going Public: Why Baptism is Required for Church Membership* (B&H Academic, 2015) and expands its scope to include other basic issues.

Three audiences are targeted by Jamieson throughout the volume: 1) unbaptized persons who are considering baptism, 2) baptized persons who want to reflect more deeply upon their baptism, and 3) pastors and other church leaders who want to equip their people to think biblically about baptism (1–3). Jamieson has differing goals for each audience. For the unbaptized, he hopes that they will be convinced “to take the plunge” (2). For the baptized he hopes to “provide biblical answers to questions [they]’re asking—and even questions [they]’re not asking but maybe should be” (2). For the pastor and church leader, he hopes to provide a “useful resource for . . . members” (2).

Chapter 1, “What is Baptism?” examines the nature of baptism, providing and expounding upon an extended definition of baptism. Chapter 2, “Who Should be Baptized?” considers the mandate, benefits, and potential objections to believer’s baptism. Here Jamieson provides a credobaptist (believer’s baptist) answer to the question “Why should all believer’s be baptized as believers?” Chapter 3, “What about Infant Baptism?” extends the question of “who should be baptized?” (ch 2). This is the booklet’s longest chapter. Here Jamieson introduces major lines of paedobaptist (infant baptism) argumentation and his counter-arguments in favor of credobaptism. He also anticipates five paedobaptist objections to his arguments, concluding that “infant baptism isn’t baptism” (41). Chapter 4, “Why is baptism required for church membership?” summarizes arguments for requiring baptism for church membership, arguments Jamieson develops with greater detail in his

¹Martin Luther, *The Baptismal Booklet: Translated into German and Newly Revised*, in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, 371–75 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 371.

larger work *Going Public*. Chapter 5 “When is ‘Baptism’ Not Baptism?” considers the line between valid and invalid “baptism” via several theoretical scenarios. The practical aim of this chapter is to help individuals who were baptized under questionable circumstances or in questionable ways to think through the validity of that “baptism” as a sign of their personal faith in Christ. Finally, Chapter 6, “How Should Churches Practice Baptism?” briefly addresses the mode, administrator, result, context, and timing of baptism.

Understanding Baptism achieves the author’s goal of practicality and accessibility across the wide range of topics it addresses (e.g., nature, recipients, mode, connection to church membership, validity, etc. of baptism). Key to this achievement is Jamieson’s creation of a dialogue with his reader, in which he frequently frames an issue in the form of a question and then responds. This rhythm of question and answer appears at the high level of chapter titles, but it also extends to the sub-section and paragraph levels as well. The result is that the logic governing frequent topic shifts within a chapter remains clear to the reader. The practicality and accessibility of the work are important given its non-academic target audience.

Another strength of this booklet is Jamieson’s acknowledgment that credobaptism is more than mere personal profession. Recognizing that personal profession is a central feature of believer’s baptism, Jamieson also emphasizes the role of the local church. This emphasis is carried throughout the work (e.g., 7–8, 13–14, 46–47, 65–66), but it features prominently in his definition of baptism. Jamieson defines baptism as *both* “a church’s act of affirming and portraying a believer’s union with Christ . . .” and “a believer’s act of publicly committing him or herself to Christ and his people” (6; cf. 15; emphasis added). This dual aspect simply recognizes, “You don’t baptize yourself; there are always two parties involved. And both parties say something to each other and to the world” (6; cf. 8). The recognized place and role of the local church in this definition is an important corrective to an underappreciated aspect of believer’s baptism.

Given the volume’s economy of space (66 pages, each measuring 4 x 7), imbalances in the presentation are more apparent. The positive development of what baptism is (chs. 1 and 4; 20 pgs) receives less development and emphasis than the polemical issues of what baptism is not (chs. 3 and 5; 30 pgs). On the one hand, Jamieson’s attention to the baptismal debate is necessary given the contentious history between paedobaptist and credobaptist traditions and the pastoral problems that result. Consequently, *Understanding Baptism* will prove most helpful in counseling persons who have previously been baptized as infants to see the deficiency of such a baptism and aid them toward being baptized as a believer.

On the other hand, Jamieson’s emphasis upon the debate over baptismal validity (i.e., paedobaptism vs. credobaptism) means that he spends less time developing what baptism is. This is observed primarily at points where Jamieson makes a poignant observation about the meaning of baptism but does not develop it in full. For example, though Jamieson

rightly notes that baptism “dramatically depicts [a believer’s] union [with Christ] and all its benefits” (9), including the new way of life it inaugurates (cf. Rom 6:4; Col 2:11–12), he does not give the ethical aspect of this “new life” much development. Further, no attention is given to the eschatological reality of bodily resurrection to which baptism points. A discussion of how baptism emblemizes the Christian hope of resurrection would strengthen the development of baptism’s meaning, both for those looking toward believer’s baptism (audience 1) as well as those looking back at believer’s baptism seeking greater understanding (audience 2). Though this reviewer would like to have seen more positive development at points, the imbalance of emphasis does not negate the booklet’s value or achievement of the author’s purpose.

In providing this “brief book on baptism” (1), Jamieson has produced an introduction to believer’s baptism that will benefit each of his three target audiences. As Jamieson notes, “Baptism pictures and promotes the gospel” (71). *Understanding Baptism* provides light to those considering believer’s baptism, those who have already received it, and those who will administer it both to see and paint this gospel picture more clearly. For both Southern Baptists as well as those within the broader credobaptist tradition, *Understanding Baptism* is a helpful resource for leading unbaptized persons thoughtfully and biblically toward obedience to Christ’s Great Commission command.

– Jonathan D. Watson, Charleston Southern University, Charleston, South Carolina

***A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry.* By Abraham Kuruvilla. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. 214 pages. Paperback, \$21.99.**

Abraham Kuruvilla is professor of pastoral ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary and a practicing dermatologist. He received his MD from the University of Kerala in India, a PhD from the Baylor College of Medicine, and a PhD from the University of Aberdeen. He has authored several books, including *Text to Praxis* and *Privilege the Text*.

In *A Vision for Preaching*, Kuruvilla offers an integrated vision of how preaching relates to the rest of pastoral ministry. He asserts, “Through the two millennia of the church age, there has been a striking deficit in conceptions of preaching: a lack of clarity about how to derive valid application for a modern audience from a specific passage in the ancient text” (6). Throughout the work, Kuruvilla attempts to show how the preaching task is consistent with biblical and systematic theology; how it incorporates aspects of communication theory and rhetoric; and how it plays a key role in the spiritual formation of God’s people, through the working of the Holy Spirit, all for the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom and the exaltation of God’s name (12).

Kuruvilla's vision for preaching is set forth at the onset of his work and serves as the basic structure for the entire work. He states:

Biblical preaching, by a leader of the church, in a gathering of Christians for worship, is the communication of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture discerned by theological exegesis, and of its application to that specific body of believers, that they may be conformed to the image of Christ, for the glory of God—all in the power of the Holy Spirit. (1)

Following this definition, each chapter of the book unpacks individual elements of Kuruvilla's vision for preaching. In chapter 1, Kuruvilla argues for biblical preaching that focuses on a particular pericope which then is "the leading force in shaping the content and purpose of the sermon."¹ Kuruvilla urges for preaching through whole books because it guarantees that the voice of every pericope is heard sequentially, "enabling successive sermons to gradually develop the trajectory of a whole book" (26). Thus, preaching is *biblical*. In chapter 2, Kuruvilla states that it is the priority for the shepherd of the flock to exposit the Word of God while guiding the people in following God's demands. Thus, preaching is *pastoral*. In chapter 3, Kuruvilla contends that the preaching of Scripture is marked by the real presence of Christ, in the hearing of the divine voice (66). He states that the ideal place for this to occur is amongst the gathered body of Christ while being rendered by the qualified leaders of the church. Thus, preaching is *ecclesial*.

Kuruvilla says that preaching is *communicational* in chapter 4. He contends that the preacher must communicate the *what* of the text, which is the *thrust* of the text that must be conveyed to God's people. In chapter 5, Kuruvilla says that "all the segments of all the biblical pericopes make us the transcending vision of the *world in front of the text*" (106, emphasis his). Thus, preaching points to the theology of the text and is considered *theological*. As God's people are aligned with the precepts and practices of God's ideal world (the world in front of the text), the people begin to apply God's the Word of God to their lives. This leads to preaching that is *applicational*, which is discussed in chapter 6.

In chapter 7, Kuruvilla says that preaching is *conformational*. Conformation occurs when the people of God are conformed to the image of Christ through the preaching and application of the Scriptures (Rom 8:29).² Kuruvilla goes on to argue that preaching is *doxological* in chapter 8. He says that the glorification of God is the ultimate end of preaching. God is glorified as the image of Christ in each text that is displayed in the gathering of God's people, and as they respond with heart and voice to the revealed Christ. Finally, Kuruvilla discusses how preaching is *spiritual* in chapter 9. All of this conforming work of God's people is only accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹Kuruvilla quotes Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 52.

²Kuruvilla argues for a *christiconic* hermeneutic which is discussed below.

It is quite apparent that Kuruvilla is not a fan of what he describes as the “old” homiletic. He argues that the use of points, proofs, and propositions reflect the tendency to see preaching primarily as an argument. Kuruvilla states, “The preaching text gets analyzed, like a biological specimen, for information; it is dissected and diced to generate propositions and points for sermons—so much so that preaching became synonymous with argument, dependent on proofs and rules of evidence, as if in a courtroom” (76). He referenced John Broadus as perpetuating that tradition, which he states “continues to burden the field of preaching” (76). Kuruvilla further states, “The *modus operandi* of the ‘old’ homiletic is to put the text through a grinder and then to preach, in points, the pulverized propositional products that come out of the contraption” (77). He asserts that “communication of any kind—sacred or secular, spoken or scripted—is now being increasingly recognized as a communicator *doing* something with what is communicated” (77). He argues that this new homiletical persuasion is the preacher *doing* things with the text intending effects in the reader.³

Kuruvilla takes exception with those who believe in a Christocentric interpretation as well. Kuruvilla argues for what he calls a “christiconic” interpretation of Scripture. He says that “all interpretation of the Bible for preaching purposes must be consistent with this bedrock—the image of Christ portrayed by the canon. Since each biblical pericope portrays a facet of the canonical *image* (*eikon*; Rom 8:29) of Christ to which human beings are to be conformed, I label this model of interpretation for preaching *christiconic* (from ‘Christ’ and ‘icon’)” (136). Kuruvilla goes on to argue that christiconic interpretation is quite different from Christocentric interpretation. He says that Christocentric interpretation “finds Christ *explicitly* in every passage, even in Old Testament pericopes, whereas the christiconic reading, in consonance with the canonical purpose of God (see Rom 8:29), discerns an *implicit* depiction of Christlikeness in every pericope—the image of Christ” (138, emphasis his).

Though I do not agree with Kuruvilla’s portrayal of “old” homiletics or his view that those who hold to a Christocentric interpretation of Scripture find Christ *explicitly* in every passage, I still recommend this book so the pastor/teacher can see the importance of expositional preaching as it relates to pastoral ministry. Kuruvilla offers a vision for preaching that puts great emphasis on arriving at the truth of a text so that the congregation understands and makes application to their lives. His vision speaks to the tremendous responsibility that preachers have in delivering a Word from the Lord. These are truths that all preachers must ponder.

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³Some of the key advocates of the New Homiletic that Kuruvilla references include Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Eugene Lowry, and Thomas Long.

***What about Free Will?: Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty.* By Scott Christensen. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016. 304 pages. Paperback, \$17.99.**

Scott Christensen makes his position clear from the opening pages of his defense of compatibilism by testifying to the manner in which he adopted it, saying, "I was gripped with the truth of God's meticulous determination of all that transpires in time, space, and human history, including my salvation" (xi). Christensen begins and ends with no room for the conflation of determinism and libertarian views of freedom. In his second appendix, a review of Randy Alcorn's *Hand in Hand*, he clarifies, "God remains in full control of all the evil that transpires through his overarching decretive will and through his providential causal determination" (248). Nevertheless, the author maintains that freedom of the will does exist, albeit differently than libertarians imagine, and in a way that is consistent with human responsibility leaving God free of all charges against his goodness.

The claim that libertarianism represents a view in which moral responsibility holds true is countered with the corrective that it is not the ability to do otherwise that renders a person responsible, but "intention" (38). Intention, then, becomes the indicator of responsibility throughout the book. On Christensen's view, though God has decreed that man will commit a particular sinful act, the man is free and responsible so long as committing the act is what the man *intended* to do.¹ This, for the author, gets at the meaning of the biblical allusions to man's heart. Garnering biblical support, Christensen references: Prov 16:2; 1 Sam 16:7; Jer 17:10; 20:12; Gen 6:5; Matt 5:28; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; Rom 8:27; 1 Chron 28:9; and Acts 8:20–23.

In Chapter 3, the author explains the breadth of divine sovereignty with illustrations of an obviously divine plan. He provides a treatment of God's two wills in Chapter 4, and summarizes, "Thus, God's decretive will speaks of what *actually* happens, while his preceptive will speaks of what *ought* to happen" (86). This sets the stage for addressing good occurrences in Chapter 5.

Christensen demonstrates, in Chapter 6, the occasional "disharmony between God's two wills" (112). God has purposes that require evil actions taken by man. He "ordains the actions of evildoers and then holds them responsible for their sin" (131).

Chapter 7 focuses on compatibilism as it relates to human decision making. First the author says that "all our choices are free when they are made voluntarily." Secondly, he explains that "it is better to speak of people being free rather than the will being free" (136). The actions of man flow from his heart—from what he most desires. In Chapter 8 more support is added to this claim. Christensen reiterates, "Again, culpability for our actions

¹For a libertarian response, see David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), particularly Chapters 4 and 6.

stems from the intentions behind actual choices, not from the libertarian idea that we could have chosen otherwise” (154).

In Chapter 9, the author brings these elements to bear on the two biblically defined natures of man, and in true Calvinist fashion explains the ramifications they have for humans both unregenerate and regenerate in Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

Christensen demonstrates a clear understanding of the elements involved. Moreover, it is evident that in presenting the libertarian side of the coin, a thoughtful consideration of fairness was attempted. Further, he was willing to face, headlong, two of the most common criticisms of compatibilistic determinism—responsibility and divine culpability.

For Christensen, man is responsible for evil based on his *intentions*, not whether he could have done otherwise. Yet, a full-fledged criticism of the compatibilist framework should not sidestep the glaring fact that the intentions of man are *also* determined by God. Christensen does not disguise this fact, but it does take the shine off of the celebration of compatibilism. If compatibilism is true, God could have decreed that all men would “freely” serve only him. Because of this, when the author argues, “Human sin serves to highlight God’s righteousness as nothing else does,” one wonders if God is, therefore, dependent on man and his sin in order to receive full glory.² Though man is not coerced, God unchangeably determines the *will* that, in turn, determines the *action*. Man cannot do otherwise. Though the author doesn’t deny this, his use of illustrations, a great value in general, does take the edge off when it shouldn’t.

Criticizing Roger Olsen’s use of a free will theodicy, Christensen demands that libertarians have the same problem as compatibilists. He explains that “the Arminian God is like a police officer who stands by idly while the homeless man in the illustration is beaten to death. He didn’t order the killing, but neither does he stop it” (44). Yet, for the ways Christensen’s officer is like God, he is not like God in one important way. Namely, the officer cannot ensure that ultimate justice will one day be dispensed, for the abused or the abuser. Similarly, Christensen’s tapestry analogy, in which the back is chaotic (representing man’s perspective) and the front is stunning (representing the working out of life’s compatibilistic story to the glory of God),³ meets similar difficulties. He reasons, “If libertarianism were true, it would seem that the front side of the tapestry would be no different from the back side” (81). One can imagine the retort, “No. If libertarianism is true,

²See, Jerry L. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever be a Compatibilist,” *Philosophia Christi* 13.1 (2011): 75.

³For more on whether God’s purpose in creation was his glory, see Adam Harwood, “Review of *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*. By James M. Hamilton Jr.” *Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry* 8.1 (Fall 2013): 105–6, available at http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_10-2_Fall_2013.pdf#page=108. Adam Harwood writes, “Is such a view drawn from or read into the pages of the Bible?” (105).

the front would have a great deal of chaos as well as a great deal of beauty.” Arguably, that image is more consistent with biblical history and present experience. Though Christensen is a master illustrator, often his images spackle over significant cracks in the compatibilist wall.

It must be admitted that the author rallied the best biblical data used by Calvinist scholars to support his systematic. It must also be granted that Christensen labored to fairly characterize his opponents.⁴ However, responses to what Christensen holds, “decisively bankrupts” (225) libertarianism spring readily to mind at every turn. The same could be said for presented biblical data. For each text offered, libertarians have biblically faithful responses that deserve attention.

Nevertheless, this work is a fine addition to the ongoing debate regarding the nature of human freedom. It is encouraging to see the philosophical concepts presented in an understandable manner. It will clarify key points for the reader, but should be read alongside a competing libertarian effort rather than in isolation.

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***When Heaven and Earth Collide: Racism, Southern Evangelicals, and the Better Way of Jesus.* By Alan Cross. Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2014. 301 pages. Paperback, \$25.95.**

In a Christianized society where heaven and earth have collided, one would naturally expect its inhabitants to live by the tenets of the New Testament. As Alan Cross points out in his book, *When Heaven and Earth Collide*, white Southerners proclaimed themselves to be Bible-believers and their region to be a Christian society. In fact, a majority of Alabama’s white population claimed to be evangelical Christians in the decades immediately following World War II, with nearly 65% of them affiliating themselves with the Southern Baptist Convention. So, when Cross, a white Southerner and (at the time) a recent graduate of Golden Gate Baptist Theological (now Gateway) Seminary, arrived in Alabama in 2000 to pastor a Southern Baptist church, he came face-to-face with the state’s racist past. He wondered how a “Christian” society, like Alabama in the 1950s and 60s, could be home to so much racial violence and injustice. This book is the personal, moving account of his quest to answer this question and to show Christians the way forward towards racial reconciliation.

⁴For example, he made fine use of footnotes to add caveats revealing what libertarians might say in response.

Cross is to be commended for his generally well-informed and balanced approach to the thorny issue of Christianity and racism in the American South. His text and notes reference some of the most recent and respected scholarly works on the topic. For instance, he cites George M. Frederickson and Robin D. G. Kelley when asserting that the origins of white Southern racism are economic in nature, stemming from the attempt by whites to justify the economic exploitation of black laborers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although he absolves evangelicals of the blame for the advent of American racism, Cross joins Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith in condemning white Southern evangelicals for accommodating themselves to the prevailing racial mores of the South instead of declaring such mores to be contrary to the Word of God. In the end, Cross concludes with Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and David L. Chappell that heaven and earth did not effectively collide in the white South, and that the white inhabitants of the region were guided more by Greek philosophy and other concepts than by biblical Christianity. In short, far too many white evangelicals in the South embraced a Christianized civil religion that prioritized social stability and personal comfort over fidelity to Bible and its call for Christians to be characterized by sacrificial love and the pursuit of justice.

In turning his readers' attention to the way forward, Cross is careful to identify himself as a theological, social, and political conservative. He denounces the 1960s sexual revolution and its consequences, including abortion and same-sex marriage. Likewise, he acknowledges that free market capitalism has done more than any other economic system in human history to lift people out of poverty. But, Cross contends that if modern-day evangelicals are to avoid the mistake of their predecessors whose "Christianity" led them to sanction the racial status quo in America from the 1660s to the 1960s, then they must break free of their cultural captivity and be guided by what the New Testament teaches, not what modern-day American culture expects or even demands. Consequently, Cross calls upon Christians to, among other things, work for economic justice for laborers, to not engage in "white flight" from transitioning neighborhoods, and to no longer be viewed as merely an arm of the Republican Party. In fact, Cross notably argues that if previous generations of American Christians had done such things, if they had embraced New Testament Christianity rather than American civil religion, then not only would evangelicals have been on the "right side of history" in the matter of African American civil rights, but evangelical Christianity would likely be held in much higher esteem in America today. The radical social revolution that emerged in the 1960s, he contends, was hostile to evangelical Christianity because the revolutionaries considered evangelicals to be complicit in most of the real and perceived injustices in American society. In order to make amends for this missed opportunity and to positively change public perceptions of evangelicalism, American Christians must forgo their pursuit of the American Dream and instead live what Cross calls "the biblical way of life, the Way of Jesus, and the Way of the Kingdom of God" (242). Therefore, Christians must, among other things, prophetically and courageously critique American culture and society, and minister to the poor, the needy, and to outcasts. Christian churches are to cease being monolithic religious country clubs and rather be vibrant and multi-ethnic

expressions of the body of Christ on Earth. Interestingly, Cross identifies the use of racial quotas in church leadership as a “misstep” in the pursuit of a multi-ethnic body. Rather than utilizing such an artificial strategy, he calls upon church leaders to promote instead a genuine love for neighbor (all neighbors) among the flock.

Some scholars and well-informed readers may question some of the assertions made by Cross, but few will likely find fault in his overall analysis of where the evangelical church has been and should go in American society. Where they will find fault, however, is in the book itself. Cross’s argument regarding civil religion, for instance, would have benefitted from being laid out concisely and chronologically rather than somewhat haphazardly across the span of three chapters. Likewise, a significant number of the footnotes throughout the book are plagued by grammatical and formatting errors. More alarmingly, there are assertions, paragraphs and, in some cases, quotations lacking proper citation. While these and other issues are not insignificant, the fact of the matter is that Cross has written an important, although flawed book. Its message is one that every evangelical pastor and leader in America should read and take to heart.

- Brent J. Aucoin, *The College at Southeastern, Wake Forest, North Carolina*

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