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Book Reviews

Eric A. Seibert. ***Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God***. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. ix-xii + 347 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8006-6344-5. $22.00. Paperback.

While people of faith typically ignore Old Testament texts that portray God as violent, angry or destructive, in this book Seibert boldly engages these problematic texts. He thinks it is crucial to examine disturbing divine behavior in the OT and develop principles to understand and interpret these texts. He argues convincingly that it is important to think rightly about God because a person's view of God will shape not only their relationship with God, but also their own behavior.

In his introduction (pp. 1–12), Seibert narrates how he became interested in the Old Testament and specifically in the problem of its violent portrayal of God. He explains why he focuses on narrative texts (more familiar, more straightforward) and why it is important to ask questions of the text about its portrayal of God. Seibert begins chapter 1 (pp. 15–34) by listing many of the troubling texts by category and then moves on in chapter 2 (pp. 35–52) to discuss the perspectives of various groups of people who have problems with the OT's portrayal of God including pacifists, feminists, the dispossessed, atheists and people of faith. In chapters 3 and 4 he examines approaches to the problem, both ancient (e.g., changing, rejecting or salvaging the OT) and modern (e.g., divine immunity, just cause, greater good, permissive will) showing how none are fully adequate (pp. 53–88).

In chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 91–129) he first raises questions about the historicity of the OT using both biblical and archaeological evidence, and then addresses many of the concerns raised by asking the historical question. Chapter 7 (pp. 131–44) explains why OT narratives were written and chapter 8 (pp. 145–66) discusses the theological worldview of ancient Israel. Chapters 9 through 12 (pp. 169–242) lay out Seibert's strategy for reading these texts responsibly: distinguish between the textual and actual God, use a Christocentric hermeneutic, use discernment and stop ignoring troubling texts.

In the appendices he discusses the theme of violence in the New Testament and the inspiration of Scripture (pp. 243–80). He also includes an extended section

of endnotes and exhaustive bibliography (pp. 281–334) as well as indices of biblical references and modern authors (pp. 335–47).

Many evangelicals will find Seibert's provocative titles for the role of God in chapter 1 as offensive (e.g., God as Mass Murderer, Genocidal General, Dangerous Abuser), but what is more disturbing is that he does not discuss in depth most of the problematic texts he lists in chapter 1. After his initial extensive list, he does little in the first eight chapters to help OT readers actually study and make sense of God's troubling behavior in these passages. His aversion to "justifying God" prevents him from taking these texts seriously and examining them within their biblical context. For example, Seibert claims that within the text God often "kills indiscriminately" (p. 32); however in the examples he cites the text does give reasons for the judgment but he either ignores or glosses over them.

Additionally, his Christocentric hermeneutical solution to the problem which he finally lays out in Part 3 (chapters 9–12) is unsatisfactory. He argues that OT passages that describe a violent God can be rejected since that behavior is inconsistent with the character of God as revealed by Jesus in the Gospels. His conclusion is attractive since the problem of a violent OT God conveniently disappears, but many readers of the OT (myself included) will be unwilling to reject large sections of the OT because the God it portrays does not fit a certain perception of what he supposedly should be like. Seibert claims that his rejection of these violent texts does not make him a Marcionite (pp. 211–12), but his approach still smacks of Marcionism since it deems significant portions of the OT as unreliable. To some readers of the OT (particularly Jewish), his Christocentric criterion for rejection may seem arbitrary. Why not reject portrayals of Jesus that seem incompatible with the character of Yahweh? Also, his perspective of Jesus as nonviolent does not always fit the New Testament, as Jesus speaks about hell and judgment more than any other character in Scripture.

While evangelicals will have significant problems with his view of Scripture, he is to be commended for a well-written and thoroughly researched discussion of an important but often ignored subject.

David T. Lamb
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McDermott, Gerald. ***The Baker Pocket Guide to World Religions: What Every Christian Needs to Know.*** Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 144 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-7160-7. $9.99. Paperback.

In his *Baker Pocket Guide to World Religions*, Gerald McDermott provides a systemic sketch of the major doctrines of seven world religions: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism / Daoism, Christianity, Shinto, and Islam. The progression of the volume is not based on similarity in ideology (such as Hinduism and Buddhism's historical similarities but different ideological conclusions), but the order in which these religions were solidified as a unique belief set—it

is a chronological recount of the systematizing of these worldviews. The aim of the book, as indicated in the title, is to provide an overview of the key doctrines within each worldview; it is not the aim of the book to provide the historical setting and natural progression of thought within each worldview. If the reader is looking for a volume to put each religion "in its setting," then this is not an accommodating volume for that task. Another helpful insight about this volume is that it does not provide significant discussion about the nuances contained within each belief system (e.g., differences between Hassidic and Sephardic Jews). If the reader is looking for such a volume, again, this will not be a helpful resource. Neither of the two concerns mentioned here is intended to speak of a "downfall" in the volume's preparation and presentation; rather, these comments are intended to show what McDermott set out to do in the volume, and as such may not accommodate a reader's needs.

That being said, this volume provides an accessible and accurate portrayal of the essential beliefs contained within each religion. If you are looking to answer questions such as: why do Hindus believe in reincarnation (p. 20), what is significance of the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur (p. 41), what are the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism (p. 51), or why does Shinto believe in the inherent goodness of people (p. 104)—McDermott's book proves valuable. A number of stylistic elements in the volume are amenable to a beginner's understanding of certain beliefs and customs. For example, each chapter contains charts and sidebars that draw specific attention to: key terms, key figures, elicit quotes from contemporary practitioners, and (when applicable) major holidays and their significance. These effective stylistic moves make an already well-written book even more helpful for persons who need a good introduction to the worldviews represented in the volume.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of McDermott's work is the chapter on why it is important for Christians to have a general understanding of what the major world religions believe. McDermott correctly notes that one manner in which Christians might extend respect is by trying to understand what people believe and why they find that belief satisfying—the types of questions people are asking and how these beliefs purportedly answer them. Moreover, just as the Christian does not appreciate the core beliefs of Christianity being misrepresented, so others do not like it when their beliefs are not given the proper attention and representation. As McDermott notes, only after we have the truth about what others believe can we have a meaningful discussion about how these beliefs contrast those found in Christianity. What is more, a true representation of each belief system provides the necessary foundation for meaningful *dialogue* about how each religion answers questions about what is real, how can we know, who is man, what is moral, and who is God really?

I highly recommend this volume for persons who need a quick study in the basic ideas contained within seven of the most prominent world religions.

Jeremy A. Evans
Wake Forest, North Carolina

David L. Turner. ***Matthew***. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. xx + 848 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8010-2684-3. $34.64. Hardback.

In recent years a number of new commentaries on Matthew have appeared, including those by Keener (1999), Green (2000), Luz (2001–2007), Schnackenburg (2002), Wilkins (2004), Nolland (2005), Witherington (2006), and France (2007). Joining the list is David L. Turner's *Matthew*. Turner is Professor of New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan (1986-present). Previously he taught at Grace Theological Seminary (1980–1986) and Baptist Bible College (1976–1979). A self-described "generalist," he recently completed a Ph.D. at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. His dissertation focuses on Jesus' role as the ultimate rejected prophet in Matthew 23:32. Turner has also published several articles and essays on Matthew.

His commentary is part of the BECNT series, edited by Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein. All contributors write from an evangelical perspective with the aim of providing quality commentaries for both pastors and teachers. Like other authors writing for this series, Turner is especially concerned that his work will serve the needs of the church (p. 8). The writing's clear style and thoughtful theological observations contribute to this goal.

A survey of Turner's conclusions on selected introductory issues shows that usually he follows either the evangelical conservative mainstream or the general consensus of Matthean scholarship today. In regard to genre, Turner sees Matthew's Gospel as a theological interpretation of "selected traditions" which its author viewed as historically reliable (p. 5). He specifically defines Matthew's genre as "theologically interpreted history" (p. 8). As to the Gospel's overall structure, he follows others (e.g., Carson, Davies and Allison, Hill, Meier) who identify five blocks of discourse material that are placed side by side five distinct narrative sections (pp. 9–10). Furthermore, Turner favors a pre-A.D. 70 date (p. 14) and contends that Matthew's audience is likely a "Christian Jewish community (or multiple communities in various locations)" (p. 15).

The author lists five distinguishing features of his commentary (pp. 3–4). First, he follows primarily a narrative-critical approach as opposed to a source-critical approach, which results in relating Matthew's parts to its whole rather than reading Matthew as an expansion of Mark. The benefit of this methodology is that Turner interprets the Gospel of Matthew on its own terms. Second, he seeks to explain Matthew within the context of Second Temple Judaism(s). This leads him to argue that the author of Matthew wrote to Christian Jews who were still in contact with non-Christian Jews in the synagogue. Third, in keeping with the goals of the BECNT series he provides both analysis and synthesis with the aim of supplying a comprehensive yet concise summary of historical-exegetical and literary-theological issues. By his own admission this methodology limits his interaction with current scholarship (pp. 3–4). Nevertheless, the reviewer found this to be one of the more commendable features of the commentary, for Turner succinctly

summarizes the most essential theological aspects of a passage (e.g., pp. 204–7, 486, 592–93). Readers desiring a more detailed discussion of a text are pointed to addition scholarship in the footnotes. A fourth distinctive feature of the commentary is its progressive dispensational perspective. Though this position differs with earlier classical dispensational views, particularly in regard to the nature of Scripture's continuity, it nonetheless affirms key dispensational positions (e.g., imminence of Christ's coming, pp. 593–94; future national conversion of the Jews, p. 476). Fifth, he attempts to provide a translation that follows the principles of dynamic or functional equivalence translation theory.

Those who follow a non-dispensational theological perspective will of course object to Turner's conclusions on a number of texts. Nevertheless, he should be commended for producing a fine commentary for both scholars and pastors alike. Readers will find his discussion of Matthew's use of the Hebrew Bible especially helpful (pp. 17–25), as well as his overview of the concept of "fulfillment" (pp. 19–25). The reviewer highly recommends his work.

Michael L. Bryant
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Gordon D. Fee. ***The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians***. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. xxviii + 366 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-6362-1. $44.00. Hardback.

With this volume, the recently retired G. D. Fee offers his exposition of the Thessalonian correspondence. This work is vintage Fee: careful in his exegesis, clear in his theological interpretation, and seasoned in his pastoral reflections. Fee's six-page introductions for each letter (as separate sections) cover the very basic details of authorship, date, setting, and occasion. Here he concludes that Paul wrote both letters (here he points to I. H. Marshall's argument for the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians) and that they were written during Paul's stay in Corinth. According to Fee, 1 Thessalonians was penned first to remind the church of his time among them, to encourage them in the midst of suffering, and to address issues that had come back from Timothy (cf. 4:1–5:24). Soon thereafter, Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to encourage them in what seems to be a heightened experience of suffering, to remind them of the timing of the "Day of the Lord," and to rebuke those who were "walking in unruliness" (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6–15).

As expected from the NICNT series, the commentary on 1 Thessalonians contains a careful exegesis of the text, which is accessible to the lay reader whilst relegating most of the technical details to the footnotes. Obviously, it is beyond the bounds of this brief review simply to rehash his commentary in full, but it might be nevertheless helpful by way of critical engagement at least to summarize six of the more interesting interpretative issues in these two letters: 1 Thess. 1:9; 2:7–8; 2:14–16; 4:13–5:12; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; 3:6–12.

First, on the translation of the Greek word εἴσοδον in 1 Thess. 1:9 (cf. 2:1), Fee surprisingly does not discuss the NIV translation "reception," which the TNIV attempted to improve by translating "what happened," but which the KJV nevertheless renders more accurately "what manner of entering." Here, Fee would have been well served by consulting B. W. Winter's excellent discussion of this word as a technical term denoting the manner in which an orator entered into a new city for public declamation ("The Entries and Ethics of Orators and Paul [1 Thessalonians 2:1–12]," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.1 [1993]: 55–74). Winter helpfully shows that Paul's aim was to remind the Thessalonians that, unlike the many orators of the day, Paul didn't peddle (the gospel) for profit and then take the midnight train out of Thessalonica when the going got rough. Fee's discussion, to be sure, arrives at the same general conclusions, but the technical term εἴσοδον is pivotal in understanding Paul's contrast between his *modus operandi* and those of the travelling orators so common in Paul's day.

Second, it is worth considering Fee's reading of the infamous textual/punctuation problem in 1 Thess. 2:7. The issue, of course, is whether we should read νήπιοι ("infants") or ἤπιοι ("gentle") and whether or not the second half of 2:7 begins a new sentence. Fee persuasively argues for νήπιοι ("infants") as the original reading and that the second half of 2:7 indeed marks the beginning of a new sentence. That is to say, he rightly defends the TNIV against not only the NIV, but also every major English translation of these verses. Incidentally, he refers once in passing to T. B. Sailors, whose excellent article (*JSNT*, 2000) on this issue remains the best discussion and anticipates (and influences?) the eventual TNIV rendering of 2:7–8.

Third, on 1 Thess. 2:14–16 (which came from Paul's hand), Fee concludes rather tentatively that the perplexing clause in verse 16—"the wrath of God has come upon them at last" (TNIV)—was most likely "a prophetic word on the part of the apostle" (p. 102) and not an event that had already taken place. This explanation, of course, leaves the present reviewer wondering whether Fee should also have related these verses to Romans 9–11 and to the wider debate over whether Paul was "called" or "converted" on the road to Damascus (i.e., whether he wrote verse 16 as a Jesus-believing Pharisee or as one who had left Judaism behind).

It is no surprise that on 1 Thess. 4:17, Fee correctly argues against a "secret rapture," but what is perhaps more surprising is that he does not make use of some very important recent literature in his wider discussion of 4:13–5:12. For example, on the nature of the questions raised by 4:13 and 5:1, he does not interact with the important monograph by C. Nicholl (*From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*. SNTSMS 126. CUP, 2004). Furthermore, on the various terms in 4:13–5:12 that overlap with imperial slogans (e.g., "peace and security"; "hope") and for the theological ramifications of this language in the light of the church's suffering, he does not engage with the landmark articles of J. R. Harrison ("Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki," *JSNT* 25 [2002]: 71–96) and P. Oakes ("Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians," *JSNT* 27 [2005] 301–22). These recent discussions have opened up

fresh ways of understanding these letters, and it is unfortunate that Fee did not appropriate them in his exegesis.

Fifth, on 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Fee acknowledges the uncertainties of knowing precisely the answer to the two perennial questions: (a) who was the "lawless one" and (b) who was "the restrainer" of the lawless one? Although in the end he is wisely agnostic on both questions, Fee nevertheless suggests that the "lawless one" (which he dubs "the Rebel") is identical with 1–2 John's ἀντίχριστος and that the restrainer might well be the Roman empire/emperor (here, Fee does not weigh in on the hotly debated issue of whether Paul was counter-imperial).

Finally, Fee provides a helpful exegesis of the instructions in 2 Thess. 3:6–15. Fee rightly translates ἀτάκτως as "disruptive," not "idle" (cf. the TNIV's improvement: "idle and disruptive"), and he does well to rescue this passage from the popular but anachronistic view that some in the church had quit their jobs in anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus. Perhaps more unhelpfully, however, Fee simply throws up his hands regarding why some in the church were being disruptive, refusing to engage at all with the scholarly options. Indeed, after simply listing a few of the primary explanations, he concludes without further ado that "[w]e simply do not know; and in fact getting an answer to this question would hardly affect our understanding of the text at all" (p. 325). On the contrary, the similar explanations provided by B. W. Winter and R. Russell have significant implications not only on the understanding of the text, but also on its appropriate application in a contemporary context. For a scholar perhaps most famous for emphasizing the importance of the original contexts of the New Testament letters, Fee's disinterest even in guiding his readers through the options—even if he ended up in the "uncertain" category—left the present reviewer at a loss for words.

Fee's commentary succeeds brilliantly in providing his careful reading of these two letters in their original context. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of his work, of course, is that it is not often informed by the recent flurry of scholarly literature on these letters. To be sure, his method was understandably to write the commentary first and then to consult the secondary literature (p. x), but at several turns he did not engage with some of the more significant recent literature (as he admits on p. ix), which would have elevated this volume to an indispensible gem. Nevertheless, this commentary is a welcome revision of the NICNT commentary on the Thessalonian correspondence.

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Craig G. Bartholomew. *Ecclesiastes*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. 448 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8010-2691-1. $39.99. Hardback.

Craig Bartholomew is H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

Having written his already published a valuable study on Old Testament exegesis and hermeneutical theory involving Ecclesiastes (*Reading Ecclesiastes*, Analecta Biblica 139, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998), Bartholomew has demonstrated his familiarity with the book. This commentary proves to be extremely accessible. It satisfies the demands of this commentary series whose primary audience is clergy and seminary students.

In the author's preface, he notes that Qohelet "is like an octopus – just when you think you have all the tentacles pinned down, you notice one still waving around" (p. 13). Bartholomew's Christological emphasis provides a coherent examination and interpretive framework for the book. He organizes his study of particular paragraphs with sections devoted to interpretation and theological implications. It is in the theological implications section that one will find reflections on current social issues and theological insight from Ecclesiastes.

Throughout the introduction, Bartholomew discusses the current issues of contemporary scholarship as well as the history of interpretation. He agrees that the internal evidence opens the possibility of Solomonic authorship, yet the weight of both internal and external evidence leads him to reject Solomon as the book's author. Holding to a postexilic date for the writing of the book, Bartholomew nonetheless concurs with Longman that language alone is not a certain indicator of the date of Ecclesiastes (p. 53).

Bartholomew tackles the structure of the book in favor of a frame narrative which divides Ecclesiastes into three sections: the introduction by the narrator (Eccl. 1:1–11), the main body with Qohelet speaking (Eccl. 1:12–12:7), and the epilogue by the narrator (Eccl. 12:8–14). He further concludes that the voices of the narrator and the implied author of the book are the same (p. 79).

The question of epistemology rests at the heart of Ecclesiastes, according to Bartholomew (p. 87). To understand Ecclesiastes, one must "engage with Qohelet's journey and to enter into the dialogue he evokes" (p. 93). This involves interaction with Qohelet's "autonomous epistemology," which Bartholomew identifies as the journey toward truth by means of one's perception, experience, and reason. In the end, Qohelet's journey of "autonomous epistemology" did not lead to wisdom but to Dame Folly (Eccl. 7:23–29). Bartholomew provides, in my view, the best and most profound lesson from Qohelet's journey; namely, that ontology must precede epistemology (p. 275).

The question must be raised as to whether Ecclesiastes presents primarily a positive, joyful or a pessimistic, despairing view of life. Bartholomew notes that scholars have ventured to either one or the other. He contends, however, that the either / or scenario does not consider sufficiently the journey of Qohelet. *Hebel* is used thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes and becomes the foundational ingredient to put a pessimistic brand on the book. Bartholomew rightly notes that the manner in which one translates the word influences his or her interpretive approach. He suggests that the term is used in different ways in Qohelet's journey, but he settles for "enigmatic." Bartholomew further notes that there are *carpe diem* confessions in Ecclesiastes which speak to a more optimistic view. For instance, Qohelet

declares: "For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart" (Eccl. 5:20, ESV). This *carpe diem* confession that God enables joyful living is balanced by the tension that many are unable to do so (Eccl. 5:13–17; 6:1–6). It is this tension that Qohelet seeks to unravel (p. 228). For Bartholomew, the pessimism of *hebel* is balanced by the *carpe diem* confessions of the goodness of life. Bartholomew therefore warns against reading the book as either joyful optimism or bare pessimism.

Finally, Bartholomew's discussion on theodicy (pp. 258–62) makes this commentary exceptionally valuable to pastors and students. He concludes that God gave humans free will, and sin infests every person (Eccl. 7:20). Thus, human freedom accounts for the moral evil in the world, and God is omnipotent and wholly good (Eccl. 7:29). Bartholomew ends the discussion on theodicy, noting that Eccl. 7:20 is the only verse from Ecclesiastes quoted in the NT. Paul declares in Rom. 3:23 that all have sinned, and then he proclaims that sinners are justified by God's grace through redemption in Jesus Christ. "This, indeed, is God's means for making straight what has become crooked" (p. 262).

Eric J. Thomas
Norfolk, Virginia

Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles. ***The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament***. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009. xxi + 954 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8054-4365-7. $59.99. Hardback.

In this introductory volume on the New Testament writings, the authors provide a painstakingly thorough treatment of the New Testament texts, their background, and theology. The book is aimed at undergraduate and seminary students, although its breath (and depth) may well be more appealing to the latter. The beginning of each chapter outlines learning outcomes for three types of students (basic, intermediate, and advanced) and concludes with study questions and a helpful bibliography for further reading. The volume also includes helpful charts and maps, although it is slightly disappointing that a textbook meant for classroom use is, aside from the cover, entirely monochrome.

After an important introductory section that sets out the nature and scope of the New Testament and that provides a preliminary sketch of the socio-political background of the New Testament era, the book is divided into three major sections. Naturally, the first section is devoted to Jesus and the Gospels. Here there is much to be commended, including a comprehensive chapter (at seventy-five pages!) on the historical Jesus and the "synoptic problem." The remaining four chapters in this section cover the themes of theology of each gospel (in canonical order).

In the subsequent section, "The Early Church and Paul," the authors begin with the book of Acts before turning full attention to Paul's life and letters. After a helpful introductory chapter on his life and theology, Paul's letters—and they

argue for thirteen authentic letters—are arranged in chronological order (most notably, Galatians is first) with a penultimate chapter on the four traditional prison letters (Philippians being written from Rome) and a final chapter dedicated to the so-called "pastoral letters" (now arranged in canonical order).

The final section, of course, includes the non-Pauline letters along with the Apocalypse. As expected, these documents are set out in canonical order, except that Jude naturally comes forward with 2 Peter. In the final chapter of the book, the authors provide a preliminary sketch of New Testament theology, outlining three unifying beliefs, namely, "that there is one God, that Jesus is the Messiah and the exalted Lord, and that the Christian community has been entrusted with the proclamation of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ" (p. 890).

The arrival of this volume is welcomed on several fronts. First, the authors have sifted through a tangled mass of scholarly debate and have provided a balanced and accessible introduction for classroom and reference use. They are forthright in their confessional and conservative viewpoints, but even a cursory read reveals that they have engaged seriously with the best critical scholarship and have arrived at well-reasoned and judicious conclusions. Secondly, the introductory and concluding sections succeeded in providing the book with a "coherent shape" to the New Testament by surveying its nature and scope, its historical background, and its major theological themes. Of course, one might quibble with some of their conclusions (e.g., the extent to which the New Testament authors themselves were "canon" conscious), but as a whole, these chapters are instrumental in holding the volume together.

As a Pauline specialist, the present reviewer was most interested to see how well the authors would tackle some of the hotly debated topics on the Apostle Paul, in particular the so-called "New Perspective(s) on Paul" (NPP). After a thorough and clearly set out discussion (pp. 377–86), the authors concluded "that Paul's letters do challenge Jewish exclusivism as Dunn and Wright contend, but they also clearly confront efforts to attain salvation by keeping the Law" (p. 386). Although one might have hoped to see more engagement with Wright (the critique of the NPP was aimed solely at E. P. Sanders), and although Simon Gathercole's important contribution was altogether absent (even from their bibliography), their nuanced treatment here and more generally in this chapter was refreshing to read.

Of course, it is inevitable that an introduction as massive as this one might well miss the mark in some of its details. And this volume is no exception. On the so-called "Jerusalem Council" recorded in Acts 15, for example, the authors unhelpfully collapse "Gentile" and "Christian" and mistakenly state that this Council was about "the obligation of Christians to keep Jewish law" (p. 416) when it was precisely—and this is crucial—about the obligation of *Gentile* Christians only. Indeed, that there was a Council at all assumes that Jewish believers (and not just those who were "ultra-conservative"!) were still circumcising their children and thus keeping the Law (cf. Acts 21:17–26).

Despite their general adeptness in engaging the most recent scholarly advances, at other times the authors simply rehash traditional views by default. In the chapter

on Galatians—and I certainly welcomed their conclusions on the southern destination and early date—the authors simply assume without discussion that the "agitators" (a) asserted Paul was an inferior apostle; (b) had come from outside Galatia (presumably Jerusalem), and (c) actually believed their judaizing message. Several scholars (including the present reviewer!), however, have recently challenged these long-standing assumptions.

Perhaps more significantly, in their chapter on Hebrews the authors confidently assert, without providing any evidence, that this Jewish-believing community was in danger of "reverting back to Judaism" (p. 669). That they were in danger of turning away from Jesus is without question, but the author of Hebrews nowhere states they were returning to Judaism (why should we assume they ever left Judaism?!). Scholars such as David DeSilva (whose commentary is conspicuous by its absence) and Richard Hays have recently undermined this popular assumption. One could mention a handful of other examples where conclusions seem to be a result of time-honored views rather than actual argument, but even these glitches do not detract from the positive contribution this volume makes to the vast array of New Testament introductions.

Justin K. Hardin
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Peter T. O'Brien. ***The Letter to the Hebrews***. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 629 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-3729-5. $50.00. Hardback.

Peter T. O'Brien, senior research fellow in New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney Australia is perhaps one of the finest exegetes of this generation. He has already contributed several first-rate commentaries on Colossians–Philemon (WBC), Philippians (NIGTC), and Ephesians (PNTC) that are now standard among scholars. In the most recent addition to the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, O'Brien deftly approaches Hebrews with his characteristic exegetical acumen wedded to theological profundity. This commentary, six years in the making, will doubtlessly join the ranks of other top tier commentaries on Hebrews.

O'Brien devotes forty-three pages to introductory matters that helpfully form the foundation for approaching this challenging epistle. After a brief survey of the history of Hebrew's inclusion into the canon, O'Brien judicially discusses the primary candidates for authorship including Paul, Barnabas, and Apollos by citing arguments for and against each of these candidates. His view of authorship ultimately comes down to focusing on internal traits about the author while asserting that anonymity does not hinder proper exegesis. Concerning the situation addressed, O'Brien concludes that the situation involves individuals abandoning the Christian community and returning to a reliance on the cultic structures of the old covenant. When it comes to the question of genre, O'Brien convincingly argues that Hebrews is a "word of exhortation" (13:22), a homily or sermon, that

interweaves exposition and exhortation to encourage faithful perseverance to Christ.

One test for a good commentary on Hebrews involves the interpretation of the controversial warning passages. His interpretation of 6:4–6 represents an excellent example of sound exegesis coupled with a theological reading that is faithful to what the text actually says. He views it as a real warning against apostasy. O'Brien's interpretation may best be summarized by four observations. First, he performs a brilliant grammatical analysis demonstrating the main clause ("It is impossible for those . . . to be brought back to repentance") is separated by five parallel clauses expressing different aspects of Christian initiation. Second, he argues that the warnings correspond to the story of Israel's experiences from the wilderness wanderings in which the Israelites fell away from faith although they personally witnessed the exodus. Third, he connects this warning passage to the overall purpose of encouraging believers to persevere in their faithfulness to Christ. According to O'Brien, in Hebrews, a true Christian is not one who merely has an initial conversion experience, but rather one who endures in the faith over the long haul. The final point that O'Brien drives home is that the author shifts from the first person "we" to the third person "they" when describing those who apostatize. This is significant for O'Brien because he contends that the author is not addressing any specific case of apostasy, but is providing a stern warning that if one does turn away they cannot be restored to repentance. Interestingly, he makes the same case for 10:26–39 when he remarks, "for all its severity, our author has not asserted that members of the congregation have actually committed the sin of apostasy" (p.374). The purpose of these warnings, then, is to pull some of the members back from the precipice of committing apostasy.

The strength of his interpretation is that it gives proper place to the warnings as genuine warnings and not merely hypothetical ones. What is more, his exegesis of the text is virtually flawless. The only potential problem with his interpretation is it opens some questions about the theological implications that he does not answer. For example, he does not address the question if it is even possible for a Christian to apostatize. While no one in the audience has fallen away, it is implied as a real possibility. It seems likely that he does not deal with this question because it is beyond what is immediately in the text. It would, however, be helpful to provide a little more interaction with alternative interpretations of these passages. Pastors who turn to this commentary will find it immensely useful, but it may not be as helpful for contemporary theological debates regarding the security of salvation or the possibility of losing one's salvation.

Although one would always want to leave a little wiggle room to express disagreement over minor interpretive issues, *The Letter to the Hebrews* by Peter T. O'Brien warrants full recommendation as a commentary that one reaches for first when studying this epistle. Scholars will find it stimulating with its penetrating insights, exegetical expertise, and interaction with current scholarship. Pastors will find this commentary to be accessible, faithful, and extremely quotable. In addition to exegetical excellence, this commentary represents a reservoir of biblical

theology. O'Brien manages to present the reader with a robust theology of the superiority of Christ and what that means for the Christian community.

Alan S. Bandy
Shawnee, Oklahoma

J. Nelson Kraybill. ***Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation***. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010. 224 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5874-3261-3. $21.99. Paperback.

Few books of the New Testament seem to attract such a diverse range of interpretations as does the book of Revelation, but fewer introductions accomplish such a fresh approach as J. Nelson Kraybill's *Apocalypse and Allegiance.* Kraybill manages to address all the important issues one would expect in an introduction like authorship, date, and a presentation of its message. He accomplishes this with a very clearly defined hermeneutic and perspective. Kraybill weds socio-historical imagery of the late first century and the visionary symbols of the Apocalypse to produce a reading designed to elucidate the message as it was intended for the original audience. He maintains that Revelation is not "a catalog of predictions," but rather "it is a projector that cast archetypal images of good and evil onto a cosmic screen" (p.15). These symbols pertain to the realities of the author's era and depict serve the ongoing interplay between good and evil in every generation. The pressing concern for John, according to Kraybill, was to address how Christians "should conduct themselves in a world where economic and political structures assumed that everyone would worship the emperor" (p. 15). He draws extensively from numismatic evidence, Roman historians, and knowledge of the imperial cult to demonstrate how John's vision contrasts allegiance to the Empire of Rome and the Empire of the Lamb.

The book is structured in a way that follows the flow of the book of Revelation. Since it is not a commentary it deals more broadly with certain sections of Revelation as it relates to its message of nonviolent resistance to the Roman Empire. The chapters tend to exhibit a topical focus on specific features of the life in the empire and how it is addressed in the Apocalypse. Rather than summarizing each chapter, it more helpful to flesh out some specifics of his hermeneutical approach. In the first chapter, Kraybill presents his approach to Revelation's symbols by utilizing the work of sign theory by Charles Sanders Peirce who argues that signs fall into one of three categories: (1) *icons* are signs that communicate by having recognizable similarity to the object or idea they represent; (2) *indexes* are signs that communicate because they are affected or changed by the very phenomenon they register; and (3) *symbols* are signs that communicate because of the arbitrary meaning assigned to them by a group or culture. All three, Kraybill argues, are evident in Revelation images, characters, and heavenly scenes.

In the second chapter, he uses Rev. 12:18–13:10 as a springboard to frame the call to passive resistance against the forced idolatry of the imperial cult. John uses the

images of a monstrous beast, according to Kraybill, as a symbol for the empire that has gone beyond its legitimate mandate by demanding idolatrous worship. These images, as in other apocalyptic writings, are likened to political cartoons by reducing nations, rulers, or events to a few symbols or characters. Kraybill maintains that John wanted his audience to see the spiritual drama with a cast of characters straight out of Jewish history and literature. The main point is that, for John, a beast represents an empire that rules with violence and usurps allegiance to God. The remaining chapters represent a reading of the signs in Revelation in light of imperial pretensions for allegiance.

More importantly, for Kraybill there is an important message for the church today with a vision of peace and social justice stemming for the index of worshiping the Lamb. He writes, "[a]n apparent mismatch of powers occurs today when followers of Jesus say no to popular war, resist destruction of the environment by powerful corporations, or oppose Internet pornography" (p. 95). The challenge for Christians is to reject Western consumerism, champion global interests, and minister to the marginalized and powerless. He sees this not just as resistance to an evil society, but as result of the worship of Jesus. He remarks that "[j]ust as worship in the heavenly court galvanized John for sustained witness in the face of empire, worship of the creator God gives believers spiritual and emotional resources to resist the powers of death today" (p. 95).

As with many books on Revelation, some of his interpretations seem constrained by a particular theological and political perspective that emphasizes a "this worldly" aspect of realized eschatology. While Kraybill affirms the future return of Christ to earth, he is primarily concerned with how Christians act in regard to politics, pacificism, and social justice. His insights are welcomed correctives to the brand of newspaper eschatology that reduces the imagery of Revelation to current events and modern technology. Kraybill's views, however, sometimes appear a little lopsided by the lack of interaction with other interpretations that lend more creditably to a futurist reading of the text.

Apocalypse and Allegiance stands out among introductions to the book of Revelation for a number of reasons. First, Kraybill presents a reading of Revelation that seriously attempts to interpret the message in the context of the first century, but he also seeks to demonstrate how the message of Revelation speaks to modern day Christians. He succeeds in blending scholarship and practical application by showing the points of contact between the call for sole allegiance to Christ in the Roman Empire and the world of today. Second, his most significant contribution is that he provides a wealth of knowledge concerning life in the Roman Empire and how it intersected Christian living. Third, Kraybill writes lucidly and leaves no doubt about what he believes. Even if one disagrees with his interpretations, it is insightful, informative, provocative, and it challenges readers to examine their allegiances.

Alan S. Bandy
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Dan G. McCartney. *James*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. xx + 335 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8010-2676-8. $39.99. Hardback.

Dan McCartney is the professor of New Testament interpretation at Redeemer Theological Seminary, after spending more than twenty-five years at Westminster Theological Seminary. His years of teaching and research serve him ably in this volume of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT series. In his preface to the volume, McCartney hopes that this commentary will provide a platform for the epistle of James to be "heard more clearly in the church of our day" (p. xi).

McCartney's introductory material provides the key to his interpretive framework for the letter. He concludes that James, the brother of Jesus, penned this epistle. He further contends that the letter was written quite early, prior to the separation between Judaism and Christianity (p. 30). McCartney also seeks to demonstrate that James was not written as a reaction against Paulinism. Rather, the recipients of the letter were Hellenistic Christians who were struggling to connect covenant obedience with God's provision of salvation. He contends that the letter warns against a "workless faith."

He also finds a "high degree of correspondence" with the Sermon on the Mount. That this correspondence is less than verbal suggests to McCartney that James, like Matthew, were disciples of Jesus, and that James was writing "prior to the formal solidification of the Greek tradition of Jesus's words," thus paraphrasing the ethical teachings of Jesus (pp. 51–52).

The structure of the epistle has been fertile ground of debate among scholars. McCartney notes that "it is often difficult to see the connection between the various components of the letter" (p. 58). This has led some to view the letter as a "paranesis," a series of ethical instructions with little coherent structure. The author, however, argues for a structure that contains "cyclic thematic recurrence," along the lines of "protreptic" discourse, which contains coherent arguments to persuade the recipients toward a change in lifestyle or behavior (p. 43).

The theme of the epistle, according to McCartney, is "genuine faith." Indeed, it is apparent that this is the theme that he seeks to buttress throughout the commentary. Engaging the sentiments that James contradicts and stands in stark opposition to Paul, McCartney spends much energy to dismantle such a view. For McCartney, James is an epistle of faith, while others have deemed it an epistle of works.

The author does not avoid the distinctions between James and Paul. For instance, he concedes that James and Paul "appropriated the same Jewish heritage, the same vocabulary, and the same story of Abraham," but their applications were different. This divergent application is not due to divergent theologies, but due to the different problems and concerns they are addressing.

Within the comments of Jas. 2:14–26 as well as two excursuses, McCartney diligently and thoroughly engages the letter, demonstrating that James is not contrarian to Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone (Rom. 3:28). McCartney contends that "real faith, for both Paul and James, is not just a verbalization of

belief [Rom. 2:13; Jas. 2:14; cf. Matt 7:21], nor is it performing some assignment such as keeping the Ten Commandments. . . , or going to church, or going forward at an altar call. Effective faith is, instead, a life orientation, an ongoing disposition of the heart toward faithfulness to God or loyalty to his covenant" (p. 278).

Thus, the distinction for James is between genuine faith and a false faith. False faith is hypocritical and self-deluded, whereas genuine faith saves. From the author's view, James contends throughout his letter that "the 'faith said' must correspond to the 'life led'" (p. 57). Such an extensive and thorough study of a vexing question in James is both commendable in approach and exquisitely valuable for student and pastor.

There is much to be admired in this commentary. McCartney's interaction with the original language is commensurate and not cumbersome to the reading of the volume. His consistent wrapping of the exegetical and theological concerns around the theme of genuine faith brings coherence to the interpretation of the letter, although some will disagree with his thoroughgoing connections. Finally, the contemporary applications offered throughout the commentary help McCartney's hope for the epistle to be heard more clearly in today's church.

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G. Walter Hansen. ***The Letter to the Philippians***. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 388 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-3737-0. $44.00. Hardback.

The Pillar series has developed a reputation for reliable and solid commentaries mainly aimed at theological students and pastors seeking substantive engagement with the New Testament text. Each volume demonstrates an awareness of important textual and theological issues but avoids getting bogged down in extended discussions to the point of being unhelpful. Hansen's commentary's format is straightforward. A fifteen page bibliography precedes a thirty-five page introduction. The rest of the volume contains the verse-by-verse commentary on Paul's letter, which is broken up into nine sections. Some commentary series, in an effort to meet the needs and desires of students, scholars, pastors, and textual critics, have opted for complicated formats, frustrating readers. The layout here is more traditional and far easier on the reader, making quick consultations on a passage more inviting. That Hansen's commentary on the text runs to 295 pages for Paul's four chapters means that such consultations will find a serious treatment of any passage.

Hansen labels Philippians as a letter of friendship (p. 8), noting parallels with other such letters in antiquity. Paul solidifies his partnership and friendship with them and "promotes the qualities of true friendship in their church" (p. 11). Hansen is careful to resist allowing this classification to do too much work, however. His treatment of rhetoric runs along the same lines. While acknowledging that the letter was written to be read aloud to the Philippian church, making rhetorical

categories and sensitivity important analytical tools, Hansen resists letting such analysis carry too much weight in interpreting what Paul has to say to them. This is refreshing, representing the best use of rhetorical analysis.

Hansen treats debates over the Christ-hymn in Phil. 2:5–11 at length, devoting 11 pages to the variety of discussions over its composition and pre-existence (pp. 122–33). He acknowledges the speculative character of the debate, since there is simply no evidence for the poem's pre-existence. But he does express support for Martin's suggestion that the hymn is the product of one of the early Hellenistic Jewish-Christian missionaries, perhaps Stephen (p. 133).

After an extensive discussion of *harpagmos* in Phil. 2:6, Hansen opts for reading this as "something to be selfishly exploited that is already possessed," so that Paul is speaking of the manner in which Jesus reveals the very character of God (p. 145). In contrast to the human predilection for utilizing privileges for selfish gain, Jesus "said No to the exploitation of his divine position and his unlimited power for his own selfish pursuits" (p. 146). Hansen rejects a straightforward *kenotic* view of Christ's "self-emptying," preferring to highlight the background of the "Servant of the Lord" in Isaiah 53 (p. 150). It is not that Christ emptied himself of his identity and character as God, but rather that he gave himself up to humiliation, suffering, and death (p. 151).

Because of the heat of recent debates over "perspectives" on Paul, Judaism, and the Mosaic Law, Phil. 3:1–11 has come under intense scrutiny in the last few decades. Questions about this passage abound, including the character of the "righteousness" Paul mentions in v. 9. Hansen mentions interpretations of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright, including Wright's view that when Paul speaks of a "righteousness of my own," he is referring to his own vindication within a socially constructed national standard of righteousness (pp. 238–39). Hansen prefers Kim's reading of this text over Wright's, though the reasons given will not satisfy everyone. In the end, Hansen's treatment of this extended text will likely survive the passing of a day dominated by debates over new and old perspectives.

Hansen's volume is an excellent addition to a series that has served evangelical pastors and theological students very well.

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John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xxvi + 271 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-1953-4167-6. $36.00. Hardback.

John A. D'Elia is the senior minister of the American Church in London. A native of California, he received a B.A. in English Literature from UCLA, a M.Div. and Th.M. in Church History from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in History from the University of Stirling in Scotland under David Bebbington. D'Elia is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and previously served

as the director for development at the School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The purpose of the book is to examine the personal and professional motivations behind Ladd's contribution to evangelical scholarship. While the author analyzes Ladd's theology as expressed in his major writings, his central aim is to understand and assess the driving forces that motivated Ladd's effort to rehabilitate evangelical scholarship and gain a place at the table of critical scholarship. D'Elia surveys the major aspects of Ladd's life from his early years as an adolescent in New Hampshire where he struggled with feelings of extreme shyness, a deep sense of inferiority, and an obsession with status, to his later years at Fuller Theological Seminary where he engaged dispensationalists and labored to acquire a hearing for evangelicals in the larger context of critical scholarship. According to D'Elia, it was the combination of both negative personal experiences and positive professional incidents that drove Ladd. Though failing to achieve his lifelong goal of significantly influencing the broader academic world by publishing a work respected by non-evangelicals, Ladd's efforts had a dramatic impact on evangelicalism in the latter part of the twentieth century.

In chapter 1 D'Elia examines the early life and preparation of Ladd (1911–1950). Ladd grew up in poverty under an abusive father who favored his more handsome and athletic younger brother, James. These circumstances resulted in Ladd feeling genuinely excluded and isolated. He came to regard himself as a "freakish" outsider.

In his teen years Ladd experienced a conversion to Christianity under the preaching of Cora Cash, a student at Gordon College. Shortly afterward Ladd entered the ministry and enrolled at Gordon, earning two degrees. The academy greatly appealed to Ladd, and he went on to obtain a Ph.D. under Cadbury at Harvard Divinity School with a view toward a career in academia. A particularly interesting feature of this chapter is D'Elia's discussion of Ladd's struggle to find a school that would accept him for doctoral work. The rejections experienced by Ladd during his search wounded him deeply, adding further to his sense of inferiority and inadequacy. However, his later studies under Cadbury resulted in an intellectual awakening. While never abandoning his conservative positions, Ladd learned the value of employing critical methodologies.

The author chronicles Ladd's scholarly activities from his early years at Fuller Theological Seminary (1950–1954) to his establishment as a respected evangelical scholar (1954–1959) in chapters 2 and 3. With the larger aim of rehabilitating evangelical theology, Ladd began by engaging in a public critique of dispensationalism. In lectures and writings Ladd repeatedly grounded his critique in Scripture, arguing that one could hold non-dispensational beliefs (e.g., post-tribulation rapture) yet still be an orthodox Christian, a position rejected by many in Ladd's day. For D'Elia, the significance of Ladd's efforts was that he initiated the process of freeing a generation of evangelicals from a system that hindered true scholarship. The author's presentation of the strategy employed by Ladd during this period is alone worth the price of the book.

Chapter 4 traces Ladd's shift from focusing on issues within evangelicalism to matters related to critical theology (1959–1963). Perhaps the most enlightening feature of this chapter is D'Elia's discussion of Ladd's lecture at the North American Baptist Theological Seminary, titled, "Renaissance in Evangelicalism." In this speech Ladd criticized certain elements within the evangelicalism of his day (e.g., the tendency to dismiss rather than to engage the larger world of scholarship). Ladd called for evangelicals to return to a rigorous study of theology, to affirm right doctrine rooted in sincere Christian love, and to adopt a biblical doctrine of the church as demonstrated in a shared faith rather than a separate tradition. For the most part Ladd's professional experiences during this period were positive, and they inspired him to continue his dream of publishing a major work of scholarship.

In chapter 5 the author chronicles the events that led to the most devastating episode of Ladd's academic career, the harsh review of Perrin following the publication of *Jesus and the Kingdom*. Shattered by Perrin's blunt criticisms of a work that took more than a decade to write, Ladd at times lost touch with reality, lashing out furiously at those around him. He was never able to recover from the critique and felt that he had chased a "fool's dream" in attempting to publish a writing that non-evangelical scholars would take seriously.

The author surveys the final period of Ladd's life in chapter 6 (1966–1982). During these years Ladd's personal struggles (e.g., troubled marriage and alcoholism) became more visible. Though there were positive moments, such as the publication of *A Theology of the New Testament* (1974), these were painful years. D'Elia writes with sympathy toward Ladd and his trials, at the same time recognizing his personal failures as a man.

D'Elia's work is unique in at least two ways. First, he provides the first thorough investigation of Ladd's life and personal development. Several short essays and dictionary articles give an overview of Ladd's life; however, D'Elia supplies the most full-length treatment of the scholar's life to date. Second, *A Place at the Table* is unique in that it is the first examination of Ladd's life employing, among other sources, his vast personal writings (George Ladd Papers), interviews of Ladd's family members (conducted originally by Rebecca Jane Duncan), and archival collections from both Gordon College and Harvard University.

D'Elia has produced a fair assessment of the personal and professional motivations of Ladd, one of twentieth century evangelicalism's most significant figures. Also, he provides a thoughtful historical perspective into the conflicts experienced by evangelicals in America. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, D'Elia teaches that while a Christian should demonstrate a genuine commitment to excellence in regard to his work, he must never base his contentment or sense of success on anything but the realization that he works within the will of God.

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John Sailhamer. ***The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation***. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010. 632 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8308-3867-7. $28.00. Paperback.

John Sailhamer brings his tenured years of experience in Old Testament studies, the Hebrew Bible, and in particular, the Pentateuch in this accessible but profound analysis of the Pentateuch. Not content with merely sketching a method for biblical theology, he also illustrates exegetically and theologically the fruit from his method and studies in this modern day tome.

Sailhamer attempts to trace an approach back to what he considers a classical evangelical approach to Scripture which sees only the words of Scripture themselves as special revelation. As such, it is only these words which are necessary to understand the meaning conveyed in the Bible. He contrasts this view with both those scholars on the left such as Schleiermacher and those on the right such as Hengstenberg or Keil. Sailhamer credits Schleiermacher with much of the movement away from a focus on the text as the basis for meaning. As for Hengstenberg and Keil, Sailhamer demonstrates that in an effort to defend the historicity of the OT and its coherence with the events of the New Testament, nineteenth century evangelicals unwittingly gave ground on this uniquely evangelical aspect concerning the doctrine of Scripture and along with it a hermeneutical foundation.

In part 1, Sailhamer considers both of these aspects from an evangelical viewpoint. He defines an Old Testament theology as "the study and presentation of what is revealed in the OT" (p. 63). This is especially pertinent for an evangelical approach to Scripture because an evangelical theology "focuses on the text of Scripture. . .not Israel's ancient religion as grounded in the Sinai covenant" (p. 66). In other words, "God's word is not merely in the Bible, it is the Bible" (p. 66, notes 14, 63). Thus, for Sailhamer, revelation, and therefore, theology does not derive from God's acts or events recorded in Scripture but from the words as they were intended by the author. As it relates to a hermeneutical foundation, he states that an approach with a single minded focus on the text coheres well with evangelicalism's belief that the text is the locus of revelation. It is necessary for Sailhamer to trace evangelicals' departure from a primary focus on the text and how it yields meaning to their tendency to focus elsewhere. According to Sailhamer, their focus has been on presumed socio-historical information in which the central characters of the narrative are depicted or similar types of socio-cultural information which prevails upon the presumed author whether he be a narrative character or anonymous. To do this, Sailhamer demonstrates a subtle reversal of one of the ablest exegetes and philologists of the evangelical tradition, Johann August Ernesti.

As he analyzes translations and explanations of Ernesti, Sailhamer shows that the translator's own methodology actually overshadows the plain sense of Ernesti's words. Other scholars, thinking they were following in the footsteps of Ernesti, unwittingly accepted methodological foundations that went beyond Ernesti and integrated critical scholarship's movement away from its primary focus upon the text for understanding meaning from the biblical texts. Sailhamer goes to great

lengths to uncover the path which led evangelicals from the path of textual understanding. Along the way he interacts with such figures as Augustine, Calvin, Vitringa, Coccejus, and a host of others.

Another central component of Sailhamer's method involves a compositional approach to understanding biblical authorship. For Sailhamer, this approach "does not differ significantly from the classical evangelical" approach to Scripture. Composition involves an author using "written texts that he gathered from various sources and provided them with commentary, much like a modern producer of a documentary film" (p. 207). Of course, Sailhamer recognizes modern evangelicals' unease with the notion of sources and aptly points out their use by classic evangelicals such as Jamieson, Fausset and Brown and Campegius Vitringa. Moreover, Sailhamer clarifies a compositional approach and an author's purposeful integration of sources and contrasts it with other critical methods such as the Documentary Hypothesis (DH), a theory of the Pentateuch's layered development which evangelicals have rejected.

Along the way, Sailhamer discusses Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the prophets' retrofit of that document. Using the notion of effective history, Sailhamer argues that the Prophets read the Mosaic Pentateuch and provided commentary upon it eventually yielding the final shape which we now have. For Sailhamer, this differs from the DH in two ways. First, composition involves "intentional design and purpose," not an historical evolution void of any linguistically mediated intentionality. Second, a compositional approach does not attempt to discern the existence and subsequent meaning of independent layers or sources (p. 275). A compositional approach reads the final shape and seeks to understand the arrangement of its pieces within a whole.

In part 2, Sailhamer builds on previous works in an attempt to uncover the textual strategies of the Pentateuch. He does so by analyzing importantly placed passages such as Genesis 1–11, the poetic seams (Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 33), Exodus 15 and 19, and the Pentateuch's legal material. From these passages, Sailhamer discerns an emphasis on an eschatological king, faith, and a critique of the Sinai covenant. In part 3, Sailhamer further investigates these passages as they bear upon the relationship between such Old and New Testament themes as covenant, blessing, promise, salvation, and the biblical portrayal of the "seed." Sailhamer painstakingly demonstrates verbal links between these Pentateuchal passages and other texts from the second and third sections of the Hebrew Bible, namely, Jeremiah and the Psalter. In each of the discussions, Sailhamer interacts with prominent theologians from different theological systems critiquing them in light of his own understanding of his theology of the Pentateuch. Sailhamer concludes his discussion in part 3 with a consideration of the Law as it relates to the Pentateuch, the New Testament, and the theme of salvation.

While supportive of nearly all aspects of this work, one section, in particular, raised concern. In the chapter entitled "The Nature of the Covenant and Blessing in the Pentateuch," Sailhamer attempts to delineate subtle nuances to the notion of covenant and promise. While there has been misunderstanding and theological

depreciation of the Old Testament in particular models of prophecy and fulfillment, Sailhamer seems to overreach in order to demonstrate that the Old Testament has more value than merely "fulfillment." He does this because, "The divine promise . . . is not merely a prophetic word about the future that must be fulfilled. The fulfillment of such a promise looks not toward a future event but toward an assurance of a present relationship. The fulfillment of such a promise is not a future event, but an assurance or commitment in the present" (p. 434).

Sailhamer attempts to clarify his position in the ensuing pages but leaves many questions unanswered. First, one might grant that God's covenant with Abraham has present consequences for Abraham in light of his faith. Given the content of the Abrahamic covenant, however, how can the primary focus not be on future events or a future person, namely, the seed of Abraham? To further obscure the matter, in the subsequent section, Sailhamer exegetically argues the point that God's promise to Abraham indeed concerns the seed of Abraham. Second, utilizing Sailhamer's method involving text and event, even though God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis, the meaning of that covenant is not thoroughly or explicitly exhausted until the "final act" of the author in Deuteronomy 30 and forward. It is at this point that the covenant involving circumcision is explicitly about the future, namely Deut. 30:1–15: "And it *will be*."

Finally, in adherence to Sailhamer's appeal to trace compositional strategies in order to understand the purpose of book and canon "making" (p. 434), the Prophets speak with one voice when they echo Deuteronomy 30 and *promise* a time when God will make his people by giving them his own Spirit. Only then will "you be my people and I will be your God" (cf. Jeremiah 30–33, Ezekiel 36–37, Joel 2:28, Isa. 32:15).

In addition to this minor concern, other editorial errors include the following list: p. 101 "evens" instead of "events"; p. 143 – "depris" instead of "debris"; p. 158 – "curse" instead of "course"; p. 218 – "such such"; p. 293 – "tthat hey"; p. 360 – "Nun" instead of "Num"; p. 368–68 – "see figure 5" instead of "see figure 4.1"; p. 366 – reference to Numbers 11 should be reference to Numbers 10:29–32; p. 385 – n. 54, no period before "Refer"; p. 479 – n. 28, misspelled "awckward"; p. 487 – capitalized "Is"; p. 487 – misspelled "arive"; pp. 509–10 – "stophe" instead of "strophe."

Notwithstanding these minor issues, for those who will learn from Sailhamer, this book has the potential to chart a new and invigorating course. Sailhamer himself would not say it charts a new course but rather follows a course on which evangelicals from a previous generation traveled often. For the reader of Scripture today, however, Sailhamer's proposal would return them, both student and scholar alike, to a perspective where the locus and meaning of revelation is found within the pages of Scripture only, through the compositional strategies and literary structures which were left by the author himself through which one can hear the very message of God.

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Andy Crouch. ***Culture Making: Rediscovering Our Creative Calling***. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 284 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8308-3394-8. $20.00. Hardback.

The cover and flaps sport gushing blurbs, our first hint that *Culture Making* (hereafter CM) is a delicious delight. The three part book has three tasks (pp. 10–13): the creation of new vocabulary, a new approach to culture that unfolds in (one particular) reading of the biblical story, and "a new set of questions about" CM.

Chapter 1, "The Horizons of the Possible," introduces three "beginnings" or points of origin, to orient us to begin reflection on culture. From our birth, we are "hard-wired for nothing but learning" (p. 19), constantly imitating. Humans are "radically committed to story" (p. 20), endlessly narrating our origins and destiny. Couched in history, Scripture itself is a third entity of origin. Crouch links the "image of God" to God's own creativity displayed in Gen. 1:1–26. God provides "order," boundaries within which creativity may be expressed, so that we may "make something more than we were given" (p. 23).

Culture is what "human beings make of the world" they inhabit, shape, and remake: what was unimagined and impossible becomes possible. Within this world-shaping and world-making enterprise of CM, our own contributions can be thought of as "artifacts," part of the ever-changing cultural framework, or "world." Crouch singles out omelets, chairs and interstates. In contrast to defining culture as *inter alia* politics, secular rap music, and the *Twilight* series, this approach asserts of the universality of culture: "Culture is inescapable. And that's a good thing. Culture is what we were made to do" (p. 36).

In chapter 2, "Cultural Worlds," culture and cultural impact vary widely; artifacts do not impact universally, but rather impact "specific groups of people who are affected by particular acts of making something of the world." There is no "culture" somewhere out there; rather, there are many overlapping cultural spheres (family, vocation, etc.) where we "make something of" the world. CM is never a solitary affair, and our CM is limited by the ability of our work to "ship" (impact others).

In chapter 3 Crouch attempts the difficult task of navigating between "good" and "bad" appropriations of the world we inherit. He offers "integrity" as a key factor in evaluation: "We can speak of progress when a certain arena of culture is more whole, more faithful to the world of which it is making something" (p. 54). He applies this to poetry and buildings, particularly the home in which he and his family live, where a contractor made "the most of its history and its possibilities," "minimized its limitations" (p. 54). This illustration shows the difficulties in making CM judgments: would a poor, extended-generation family of immigrants with more children make the same valuation?

Crouch closes the chapter with two typically brilliant, fundamental points: "There is an inverse relationship between a cultural layer's *speed of change* and its *longevity of impact*" (p. 56). Even apparently momentary, epoch-shaping incidents usually have a long lineage (e.g., September 11, 2001). Secondly, in part because of emphasis on "worldview," Christians have not in recent times been as good at

doing art as they have at art critique. (This is true for the arts; but the inverse may be true when it comes to business.)

In chapter 4, Crouch states that "the only way to change culture is to create more of it" (p. 67). Change comes via *doing*. Critique and analysis may influence CM, but they do not in and of themselves constitute change. And those who *do* CM well earn the right to have their criticisms heard.

Second, CM is never "from scratch," and healthy CM requires knowledge of antecedent cultural traditions that facilitates creativity. Acquisition of this knowledge requires apprenticeship, a "cultivation" of best practices, which likely includes a good deal of imitation and rote work: thus musicians practice scales, and writers learn grammar.

Chapters 4 and 5 include "Niebuhr-ish" descriptions of various approaches to culture, or "postures," which Christians sometimes strike. Crouch discusses possible "gestures" representative of these postures, ranging from condemnation to imitation. He rightly observes that Christians must engage in all these gestures at various points, avoiding excessive criticism or slavish, uncritical imitation.

In the second section, Crouch paints the biblical story as a story of culture. He leaves ample room for additional engagement (perhaps forthcoming from the present author), navigating a tricky balance between Scripture's presentation of our innate cultural embeddedness and our sinful appropriation of culture. We must anticipate and rely on God's decidedly unhuman work in eschatological restoration, while holding out hope that God can and does use our CM labors now and (somehow, relying on Richard Mouw) on into eternity.

In the third section, Crouch challenges the notion that we are likely to change the world in a radical way, and insists God may use power and powerlessness (with Jesus as the supreme model: p. 207). We should avoid "straining to change the culture" and amassing power (p. 252) focusing instead on what power we have, serving where we are. We can seldom reach many people, and should be content to reach a few deeply.

This book deserves additional interaction. In the estimation of the present reviewer, this text is a must read. Any reader of CM will wish for lengthy, thoughtful engagement with this text and its implication for many areas of Christian life and service.

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Michael C. Legaspi. ***The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies***. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. xiv + 222 pages. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-1953-9435-1. $74.00. Hardback.

What happened to the Bible in the Enlightenment? In answer Michael Legaspi argues that the traditional Bible died a kind of death in the eighteenth century, only to be brought back to life for an unexpected purpose at the university. Who

wrote the scriptural Bible's death certificate, then, and how did the project to revivify scripture as "text," as an academic Bible, first gain hold?

Legaspi's study falls into two parts. Chapters 1 to 3 set the stage for an account of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), often (and rightly, Legaspi contends) heralded as the founder of modern biblical scholarship. Accordingly, Michaelis is the focus chapters 3 to 6. A preface and conclusion frame the book's most important implications for current conceptions of the practice of biblical criticism.

First, following an important 2005 study by Jonathan Sheehan, an overview of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries considers the Reformation and its aftermath. Erasmus's demotion of the Latin Vulgate to mere translation was just the first step in a sequence of events that served to displace the role Scripture had played in a formerly catholic church. Sectarians searched the Scriptures not for unifying common ground, but to polemicize about the contested passages. The massive polyglot Bibles produced in places like Paris and London testify to the hope that establishing a new, authoritative text could resolve the violent religious disputes. It was not to be. Moving to the eighteenth century, Legaspi shows how civic-minded peacemakers developed a fresh strategy, one he characterizes as "academic ecumenism." The University of Göttingen, or Georgia Augusta, was established in the heart of Germany in 1737. Its inaugural faculty strove to embody Enlightenment ideals, and the school soon met with distinction. In the process theology was deliberately displaced from its formerly high position. But study of the Bible did not disappear at Georgia Augusta. To the contrary, it soon enjoyed special prominence in the socio-political project of *Bildung*—the shaping of moderate churchgoers, strong civil servants, nobility with good taste, and so forth. Third, before moving to Michaelis directly, Legaspi outlines the beginnings of philology and study of the classics at Georgia Augusta. Johann Gesner (d. 1761) founded the school's Philological Seminar for the purpose of training teachers. His vision of the classics was holistic, even totalizing. Teaching candidates were shown how to access antiquity—Greece in particular—to replenish the present. Christian Heyne (d. 1812), Gesner's successor, elevated the classics from something propaedeutic to a discipline with its own integrity, but he shared much of his predecessor's vision for the social utility of Greek and Latin works. Later classicists soon left this enthusiasm behind.

Gesner and Heyne are important not just because Michaelis's career falls between theirs. The links are much closer. Michaelis gave Gesner's eulogy in 1761, and even took over many of his professional responsibilities, including the Philological Seminar, until Heyne was in place. Heyne in turn eulogized Michaelis in 1791. And Michaelis, who wrote no less than four grammars of Near Eastern languages, never served on the theology faulty. His work was rather with "dead" languages—Hebrew to him had died at the close of the Old Testament period, never-mind the ongoing presence of the Jews—that could nonetheless feed life back into the present. What life, though? Legaspi astutely notes one result for Michaelis here. "To emphasize 'deadness' in this way was to deny that Hebrew was a vital linguistic medium for any living community." If the Bible could survive in

the Enlightenment order, it was at the expense of the synagogue *and* the church. Poetry, not prophecy, was the crucial means of actualization for Michaelis. In an illuminating chapter Legaspi traces how and why Michaelis curated the work of Robert Lowth, a contemporary bishop in the Church of England and professor of poetry at Oxford. Lowth is largely responsible for the distinctly modern idea of biblical poetry, and Michaelis brought that idea to Germany, heavily shaped by his commitment to comparative semitics. Curiously, one of the last in his domain to defend Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Michaelis also held Moses to be the author of Job. By these lights Moses was a rational monotheist, a prudent governor of his people, and an aesthetic genius.

On some counts, as later scholars quickly saw, Michaelis had failed to be sufficiently rigorous in his method: he did not, for example, produce a plausibly historical portrait of Moses. Michaelis did, however, pave the way for an academic Bible, which came to prominence at state universities just when the old scriptural Bible might have been discarded. Legaspi's narrative is compelling and urgent especially for the way it prompts a reconsideration of biblical criticism's value to the Jews and Christians who for millennia have found in the Bible words of life.

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Paul G. Hiebert. ***The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions.*** Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 224 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-3681-1. $21.99. Paperback.

One of the first books I read on the subject of contextualization two and a half decades ago was Paul Hiebert's *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, and I have assigned that book to many beginning mission students since. That book wrestled with the insights of cultural anthropology for communicating the gospel in various cultural contexts. It summarized a broad area with the competence that comes from the mastery of a subject. Numerous illustrations in mission practice from Hiebert's personal experience made the book come alive. Since that book many more have come treating the inter-related issues of anthropology, gospel, cultural context, epistemology, and mission with the same skill of a scholar and practitioner. This book published posthumously stands as the last in a long productive career. Hiebert served as a Mennonite missionary in India, taught at Fuller Seminary, and finally served as distinguished professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Divinity School until his death in 2007. The community of mission scholars is indebted to Hiebert for his decades of work on the subject of cultural anthropology and mission.

The book is loosely structured in three sections and gathers together a number of related essays, some already in print. Part 1 is entitled, "Theoretical Foundations." In chapter 1 Hiebert treats changing views of contextualization by advocating his now familiar, yet helpful view of critical contextualization over against

non-contextualization and uncritical contextualization. The second chapter is a shared chapter with Tite Tiénou in which mission theology is offered as a third way of doing theology parallel with and complimentary to biblical and systematic theology. Part 2 is entitled "Exegeting Humans." Hiebert believes that "missionaries, pastors, and church workers" (p. 12) need to master the skill of human exegesis, a study of the cultural and social systems that shape human life. To that end he offers the insights of cultural anthropology. There are four chapters arranged historically. In the first he traces the way Western people have viewed the other. The next two chapters offer a historical survey of anthropology over the past two centuries before turning to a systems approach in the next chapter. A final chapter in this section analyses research methods used in anthropology. This section presents a helpful overview of anthropology with sporadic applications to mission and Christian analysis. Part 3 is entitled "Mission as Intercultural Mediation" in which two chapters articulate his vision of missions and missionaries as mediators among churches in various cultural contexts. Those who live in more than one cultural setting are able to bridge different contexts providing understanding, enrichment, and correction among churches.

The goal of this book is to equip the church for its mission by offering the insights of anthropology to help wrestle with the relationship of the gospel to cultural context. Most of the time, it appears that by missions Hiebert is primarily thinking about a verbal communication of the gospel in a foreign context. Yet his insights are important for an embodiment of the gospel in life, word, and deed in all cultures including the West. Indeed the wisdom of relating gospel to culture garnered in missiology is an important resource for the whole church, but I fear this book will remain within the bounds of cross-cultural missions.

Two questions remain in my mind about Hiebert's approach—issues I have struggled with for some time that again appear in this book. First, Hiebert advocates a "metatheology" that will enable us to understand, translate, compare, and evaluate various contextual theologies. His diagrams on pages 48 and 185 highlight the problem: standing above and over various cultures is something he calls a "metacultural grid" and a "metacultural conceptual framework." While I appreciate his concern to avoid cultural relativism and to keep the gospel as a final authority over all theologies, I cannot imagine who could formulate such a grid. Much more helpful is his call for dialogue in the church within all cultures as a hermeneutical community that will enable each one to see their own blind spots and deepen their understanding of the gospel (p. 100). Second, I continue to find much more compelling theories of culture developed by missiologists who see religion as the centre and directing dynamic of culture. Hiebert seems to be somewhat uncritical of secular anthropology's bias to relegate religion to one structural component of culture rather than as an all-embracing power that arises from seeing all of human life in community as a response to God.

The book is a fitting capstone on a fruitful career. It is full of wisdom and insight, and will serve to help many struggle afresh with the urgent issue of what it means faithfully to embody the gospel in various cultural contexts. If it can

provide for a new generation of Christians what his first book provided for me it will have served its purpose well in God's kingdom. One only hopes these insights will move beyond foreign missions.

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Michael V. Fox. *Proverbs 10–31*. The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary. Volume 18B. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009. ix–xix + 728 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-300-14209-9. $60.00. Hardback.

This volume completes the two-volume commentary on Proverbs by the same author in the Anchor Yale Bible Commentary series. Fox is known for his erudition, close exegetical detail, and attention to ancient Near Eastern backgrounds where it helps to illumine the biblical text. One finds this work lives up to that reputation. This volume indeed *completes* the first volume on Proverbs 1–9 and should be read, in a sense, alongside it. For instance the pagination of the main body of text in sequence with the first volume (e.g., the first page of *Proverbs 10–31* is p. 477), and the essays that follow the commentary section pick up where the first volume left off.

The commentary opens with an introduction to chapters 10–31. It follows with exegesis proper, in which there is an introduction to each particular section, followed by analysis on individual (or small groups of) proverbs. After the exegesis section, Fox includes the essays that follow on from *Proverbs 1–9*. Subsequently extensive textual notes are given (pp. 978–1068). Then Fox's translation of Proverbs 10–31 is included. The commentary finishes with bibliography and appendices.

Fox does not believe that the body of text from chapters 10–29 displays an overall structure or organizing principle, which differs sharply from both Proverbs 1–9, and 30–31. He suggests that there may be evidence of thematic grouping in chapters 10–29. These are recognizable when there are at least two or more sayings (proverbs) that share a common theme identifiable by topic or poetic catchwords. The proverbs in these chapters are a collection of sayings that are like pearls. They can exist independently, without necessarily forcing them into a larger organizational or compositional pattern. But they can also be set on a string. And when they are related in this way, they meet the criteria of association Fox identifies: common topic or catchwords.

This is a commentary well-served by attention to literary and poetic detail. As such, the reader will discover innumerable insights that will deepen understanding on the nature and varieties of Hebrew parallelism, the use of sound patterns that impact the meaning of the poetic line, and other poetic and rhetorical devices. Fox suggests that the rich poetic quality of these proverbs is resultant from their use in oral performance. It would take us too far afield to explore these in detail, but suffice it to say here that a slow and progressive read through the

commentary yields rich rewards due to Fox's close attention to poetry in chapters 10–31.

Because of their value to the commentary, it is in place to mention the content of the four essays that continues on from *Proverbs 1–9*. These essays center upon the theme of biblical wisdom. Essay 5 assesses the growth of wisdom in the book of Proverbs that mirrors the growth of the book. Fox believes that the focus on wisdom given in Proverbs 1–9 is a rather different concept of the same given in Proverbs 10–29. By conjoining them with, the book provides a rich and complementary vision of wisdom. Essay 6 explores virtue in Socrates' thought and relates it to wisdom and virtue in Proverbs. Essay 7 explores the way that wisdom is related to revelation in Proverbs, or how *torah* (law) relates to wisdom. Finally, Essay 8 assesses knowledge in Proverbs: its acquisition or confirmation. Fox suggests that Proverbs displays an implicit epistemology that is grounded in a coherence-theory of truth rather than an empiricist epistemology. In this essay, Fox advances the discussion on wisdom in a helpful direction. It leads him to the conclusion that wisdom is acquiring sensitivity to what is fitting, good, and right in all "realms of attitude and behavior" (p. 973). Ultimately, this skill does not derive from a personal quest (so Qohelet) but rather from the creator God.

This is a significant work of scholarship and one that should be welcomed. Not all will find certain portions of Fox's thinking or analysis persuasive, especially as it relates to the concept of wisdom in Proverbs. Yet this is to be expected and should not detract serious engagement with the commentary. To my mind, this is a must-read for scholars, pastors, and those who enjoy the Old Testament.

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Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009. 256 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8054-4820-7. $19.99. Paperback.

There are many books on today's market about homiletics from a variety of perspectives both theological and methodological. They ebb and flow with respect to the contribution they make to the practice of preaching. Tony Merida's book, *Faithful Preaching*, exemplifies one of the better tomes on the subject. Merida is both pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi as well as Assistant Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned his Ph.D. Having one foot in the scholarly world and one foot in the pastorate is an effective combination that makes Merida's book a helpful, worthy read for pastors, regardless of their experience in preaching.

The book begins with a well-written foreword by Ed Stetzer. In chapter 1, the author asks three basic questions: What is a preacher? What is preaching? What is expository preaching? He gets the answer to all three questions right. His own descriptive proposal for faithful preaching is well thought out: "*faithful preaching*

is the responsible, passionate, and authentic declaration of the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Spirit, for the glory of the Triune God" (p. 6). He views preaching as "Word-centered" and "Word-driven" (p. 10), and defines expository preaching as "*the exegetical and Spirit-driven process of explaining and applying the meaning of a particular text or texts for the purpose of transforming people into the image of Christ*" (p. 10). Merida informs his readers that he believes the best way to build healthy Christians "is by moving verse by verse through books of the Bible" (p. 10). May his tribe increase.

Merida divides the book into four sections comprising fifteen chapters. Part 1 explores the Trinitarian theological background for exposition. Though not intended to present a detailed theological foundation for preaching, Merida succeeds in showing us just what kind of theology should undergird our preaching. The glory of God should be every preachers "passionate quest" and "goal" (p. 30). A high view of biblical authority is also prerequisite for solid expositional preaching. Merida treats the divine nature of Scripture under four headings: biblical inspiration, biblical authority, biblical revelation, and biblical sufficiency (pp. 32–40). Though these treatments are on target, they are somewhat out of order from a traditional theological standpoint. Better is (1) biblical revelation, (2) biblical inspiration, (3) biblical authority, and (4) biblical sufficiency. The latter is especially important in today's preaching arena as so many, even in the evangelical world, have abandoned the sufficiency of Scripture in preaching, thinking that any number of so called "culturally relevant" fat rabbits out of the sermonic hat will provide a better menu to feed the sheep than the very words of the Shepherd Himself. Merida also appeals for Christ-centered preaching from both the Old and New Testaments. Part 1 is rounded out with a chapter on the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching event. I was pleasantly surprised to see Merida affirm the necessity of a "call" to preach (p. 48).

Part 2 is comprised of five chapters which treat the subject of sermon preparation. This chapter is standard fare on the subject and one will find little new that has not already been said in standard works on expository preaching. Nevertheless, these chapters provide the preacher with a solid methodology for preparing genuine, text-driven sermons. Especially important is what Merida has to say on p. 88 concerning application involving more than mere "action steps." He says, "Sometimes application includes *believing* something different or *knowing* something important." He continues: "I believe that people experience a greater and more genuine sense of 'life change' by having a thoroughly biblical worldview. And you cannot develop someone's worldview by offering one action step per week." Well said. Merida is a fan of "dense sermons," by which he means a sermon that has a lot of of good content. He generally preaches about forty minutes. One of the encouraging things to me about younger pastors like Merida is their commitment to getting the real meat of a text to their people. Tired of "cotton-candy" preaching to meet the felt needs of people, Merida and his cadre of expositors are not afraid to preach the word and take the time necessary to do it in a worship service. They are men after my own heart.

Part 3 addresses the all-too-neglected matter of personal holiness and a genuine walk with God which should characterize all God's preachers. Merida laments the decline of godly men in America and in the pulpit. The necessity of regular practice of the spiritual disciplines such as reading the Word devotionally, prayer, self-examination, fellowship with other believers, and so on, are stressed and encouraged. Most books on preaching either speak minimally of the preacher's prayer life or bypass the subject altogether. Merida offers us an entire chapter on "Faithful Praying" that explains why prayer is vital for the preacher, what we should be praying for, and how we can go about our prayer life.

In Part 4 of the book, Merida closes out with three chapters addressing the matters of sermon style and delivery, contextualization, and a brief summarizing historical sketch of preaching in the past. The chapter on contextualization is one of the most important in the book. This issue is something of a hot potato in theological and missiological contexts today. Merida argues, following Mark Driscoll, that when it comes to culture, there are some things we should reject, some things we should redeem and some things we should receive. With respect to that which we should receive, the author states: "We must receive that which is beneficial, such as causes like environmental concern and a heart for the poor. We also receive the use of music, technology, and language. These are avenues in which we can also bring biblical truth to the needs of the day" (p. 189). Here we need to hear more from Merida about what he means by these sentences. Should Christians be concerned about the environment? Of course! But if churches spend inordinate attention on making sure everything is "green," then less attention will be focused on the heart of the gospel. Should churches care for the poor? Absolutely! But one must be careful that this biblical concern does not degenerate into the social gospel. Should we receive *all* music as *equally* valuable in the communication of the gospel? Not in my book. The problem here is not so much what Merida says as what he leaves unsaid. Even cultural causes that are beneficial should be received by the church with a discerning eye. I suspect Merida agrees with this, he just needs to tease these things out more for the reader.

The book concludes with an Epilogue, two appendices (a sermon outline sheet and a sermon evaluation form), and a selected bibliography, all of which the reader will find helpful. The name, subject, and Scripture index stand ready to orient the reader as well.

There is little to find to critique in this book. It is generally well written, clear, concise, and to the point. It covers a lot of ground without ever losing sight of the forest for the trees. There is the occasional typo (such as a missing word following the word "pornographic" in the sentence ending with footnote 8 on p. 140), the rare grammatical error (such as incorrect subject/verb agreement in the last sentence on p. 198), and at least one factual error on p. 212, where Alexander MacLaren is said to be the author of the "thirty-two volume sermons in *The Expositor's Bible*." Actually, MacLaren was the author of the multi-volume *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, while *The Expositor's Bible* was a multi-volume collection of sermons by different scholar/preachers edited by the renowned W. Robertson

Nicoll. The footnotes are stylistically clean, with some quotations cited from secondary sources.

All things considered, this is one of the better books on expository preaching out there today. Buy it. Read it. Heed it. Then preach the Word!

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