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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 1–2

Introduction to the Volume

STR Editor

It remains a regular delight to share with our readership significant works that impact the intellectual and practical life of the Church and then engage them with charity and rigor. Previous volumes of *STR* have interacted with diverse scholarship that reflects our interests in missiology, theology, apologetics, and biblical studies, among them: Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). With this background in place, it is understandable why *STR* has seen fit to interact with one of the foremost theologians of our day.

Dr. Kevin J. Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology* is the focus of the present volume. The impetus for publishing this set of essays came from our guest editor for this volume, Dr. Mark Bowald of Redeemer University College in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Bowald assembled an international team of scholars to assess and critique *Remythologizing Theology* for a recent meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. When he contacted *STR* about publishing the papers from the meeting, we were intrigued at the prospect and excited about the possibilities. Shall we engage Dr. Vanhoozer on his most recent work of theology? Of course! The work, no doubt, needed to be done and disseminated to a wider reading audience than those who attended the ETS meeting. And so it is a pleasure to publish those papers in this volume. *STR* would like to thank Dr. Bowald for his hard work in organizing the meeting in the first place, contacting the contributors, and facilitating the transformation of oral presentations into a written format that is clear and accessible. We are grateful to have these penetrating essays in the pages of our journal.

This volume, it also needs to be said, is significant for another reason. This is the last volume in which we will have on display the talents of our current Book Review Editor, Dr. Michael Travers. Michael has served *STR* very well, and we are sad to see him go. However, he cannot go silently into the night, as we expect more reviews from him! I would like to offer a note of thanks to you Michael, for your excellent work.

Still, we are pleased to announce that Dr. Ant Greenham, a South African native who is Associate Professor of Missions and Islamic Studies at Southeastern Seminary, will step in as the Book Review Editor for *STR*. All correspondence for reviews should now be directed to him at agreenham@sebts.edu. We are happy to have Dr. Greenham on board and look forward to our reviewers working with him.

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 3–9

A Generous Reformer: Kevin Vanhoozer's Place in Evangelicalism

Mark Bowald
Guest Editor for STR
Redeemer University College

Introduction

In the Spring of 1986 Kevin Vanhoozer, a young Ph.D. student at Cambridge, concluded a book review of Clark Pinnock's *The Scripture Principle* suggesting that:

> *The Scripture Principle* is not the modern counterpart to the ninety-five theses, but perhaps its not least valuable service in sorting out interpretation and inerrancy in the evangelical household is its issuing a clarion call for a similar Reformation in our own troubled times.[1]

Later that year Vanhoozer confidently entered evangelical hermeneutical debates, pursuing the questions of reform orbiting around scriptural hermeneutics that he saw engendered in Pinnock, publishing the article "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms" featured as chapter 2 of the collection *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* edited by D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge.[2]

Vanhoozer's contribution to that volume is unusually mature for someone at that stage of his career in that it already bears all the marks of his writing voice as well as concerning itself with the issues that continued to animate his research and writing. These all reach something of a watershed in his recent book which is the focus of this special edition of the present journal: *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion and Authorship*.[3]

Characteristic Features of Vanhoozer's Research in *Remythologizing Theology*

First among these characteristics is his commitment to affirm and promote that quintessential feature of evangelical theology: the unrivalled author-

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[1] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Review of *The Scripture Principle*," *WTJ* 48/1 (1986), pp. 192-198.

[2] Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms" in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), pp. 49-104.

[3] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

ity of Scripture and the appropriate and fitting practices of its reading. He concludes "Semantics" mounting the argument that speech act theory actually better serves and supports the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture better than theories which are founded on notions of propositional truth.[4] In *Remythologizing* he employs concepts drawn from speech act theory, drama theory and others, in order to reframe Scripture and its reading within the purview of the doctrines of the Trinity and theology proper. Nearly all of his work in the intervening 25 years, in some way, contributes to the development of this theological arc.

The second feature on display early on is his fearless and insatiable appetite to explore and read broadly and engage positively with diverse traditions and authors. Aside from the predictable evangelical authors, he also interacts in "Semantics" with a broad range of philosophers and hermeneuticians associated with speech act theory as well as both analytic and continental thinkers. He cites David Tracy, David Kelsey, Cleanth Brooks, Hans Frei, William Wordsworth, Augustine, Wittgenstein, Aristotle, C. S. Lewis and many others. His engagement is here, and throughout his writing has always been, broad ranging; it is in the spirit of a fearless, joyful and winsome engagement with other authors and thought worlds that Vanhoozer looks to build bridges. The joy of this process of discovery and engagement permeates all his writings.

Third, he displays a unique confidence in drawing from this great breadth of material, integrating and weaving it creatively and humorously into dialogue with evangelical thought. Anyone who reads Vanhoozer will immediately recognize the playful spirit in the word play signaled in the title of section II of "Semantics": "Propositional Paradise Lost? Some Problems with the Concept of Revelation."[5] It would be a mistake to dismiss this dimension of his writing too quickly, as only cute or entertaining. There is a confidence behind this in his writing style; a confidence rooted in his evangelical roots, and, ultimately, in the conviction that evangelicalism faithfully and uniquely serves the truth of the Gospel and her Lord, that it continues to have a vital role in the work of the Kingdom of Christ. And that, therefore, evangelicalism has equal or greater title claim to the truths found in the broader culture.

The last noteworthy feature indicated in this early piece, and indeed an aspect of Vanhoozer's work which emerges from the foundation of these first three, is his willingness to hold on loosely to method. In this he bears debt to the postliberal theologians George Lindbeck, Hans Frei and David Kelsey.[6] Thus in "Semantics" he is not so much interested in *replacing* propositional

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[4] Vanhoozer, "Semantics," pp. 101-104.

[5] Vanhoozer, "Semantics," p. 56.

[6] The title of his book *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) acknowledges something of the debt as a play on the title of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

truth categories with those of speech act theory so much as *supplementing* them. His comfort level employing theories in an *ad hoc* manner is perhaps one of the most maligned and misunderstood dimensions of his writing. There often is a tendency for Vanhoozer's readers to see with myopia and think in too monolithic terms about the relationship of method to theological articulation in his work and to judge the generous and humble way he employs methods to be symptomatic of a weakness, rather than a strength.

He has not always been his own best ally in demonstrating his ad hoc commitment to method. It is arguable, for example in the case of his book *Is There a Meaning in This Text*,[7] that the categories of speech act theory are presented in such a way that they seem to have a pride of place and permanence that supplants and orders the use of any other method. Whether or not he was intentional or conscious of this tendency, he subsequently has made it clear that he is committed to the idea that the use of speech act theory, like any method or theory, is always subject to the *ad hoc* limitations of the pursuit of knowledge in general, and the particular limits and foibles of the theologian.[8]

The features we have named above are uncommon to find in one evangelical theologian. For those who are familiar with the evangelical terrain one will recognize that, historically, it would place him in an uncomfortable moderating position. Moderating in that the *ad hoc* employment of method has allowed him to be enormously generous in his engagement with others, but uncomfortable, in large part, due to two tendencies that are particularly strong among *American* evangelicals: the expectation that theology should both assume and demonstrate a high degree of certainty, clarity, and/or resolution; also, the tendency for evangelicals to be introverted in theological engagement and style.

Evangelicals have always been better at building moats than bridges. Evangelical theology tends to be insular and centripetal; Kevin Vanhoozer's approach to theology is porous and centrifugal. He has perennially made his evangelical theologian counterparts uncomfortable in these terms. Tellingly, from the first, his aforementioned paper on "The Semantics of Biblical Literature" immediately caught the attention and concern of Carl F.H. Henry. Upon its publication, the young new professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School was called upon to visit the office of the evangelical patriarch. Vanhoozer recounts:

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[7] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

[8] He insistently and publicly acknowledged this in a question and answer session which reviewed Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.) *The Dictionary of the Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2005) at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2005 in Philadelphia, PA.

> Well, he had read my article and was worried about the role I assigned to literary genre in my understanding of biblical authority. He thought that what was most important was the propositional truth that the various forms conveyed. I was worried for my part about what literary critics termed the 'heresy of propositional paraphrase.' [In the end] he made me a grilled cheese sandwich and encouraged me to focus on propositional truth.[9]

The same methodological discomfort is on display (albeit in various ways) as a central common them in the responses to *Remythologizing Theology* included here.

The Present Volume

These papers are edited versions of presentations given at a special session of the "Method in Systematic Theology" section at the annual national meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society on November 18, 2011 in San Francisco, CA. The four respondents were selected with great intention. They represent different and significant centers of gravity in the present evangelical world: Fred Sanders is a Wesleyan teaching at Biola University; Stephen Wellum is a Baptist teaching on the faculty at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; John Franke represents the Emergent wing of evangelicalism; Oliver Crisp is a British Evangelical who teaches at Fuller Seminary.

Each of the four authors pursues different methodological and material theological concerns with *Remythologizing Theology* and with Vanhoozer's larger corpus. These responses to Vanhoozer also represent something of a microcosm representation of the present status quo within evangelicalism and provide an opportunity to reflect briefly upon it.

The evangelical methodological anxiety indicated in Henry's early response to "Semantics" is seen in similar ways in the responses from Stephen Wellum and Oliver Crisp. Wellum's response begins with an excellent overview of the main argument of *Remythologizing*. He then goes on to summarize the strengths of the book and finishes with some critical reflections. Aside from some minor quibbles about substantive doctrinal elements, the main concern that Wellum raises has to do with theological method, specifically: whether Vanhoozer has adequately established a proper foundation for Christian truth claims. Interestingly enough, Wellum raises this issue by suggesting that the problem is that Vanhoozer has left out the critical dimension of *apologetics* in the book. Wellum asks: "Is it enough to propose 'remythologizing' theology without *first* giving some justification for why we accept the

[9] Kevin Vanhoozer, Personal email correspondence with Mark Bowald, April 22, 2013.

canonical Scriptures a fully authoritative and God's own self-presentation?"[10] Wellum's comment is interesting, and telling, insofar as he prescribes the task of apologetics both as a *necessary* component to theology and as an activity which should take place *prior to* theological articulation. Both of these are contestable and may, in the end, say more about the uniquely modern character of evangelical theology than the firmness of Vanhoozer's theological ground. It is not the place in this introduction to pursue the point, but for our purposes they do helpfully begin to illustrate that tension over method we named above that Vanhoozer has perennially produced in his evangelical counterparts.

Oliver Crisp, despite coming from a very different stream of evangelicalism, a British-Fuller Seminary axis, raises similar questions about the adequacy of the methodological footings of Vanhoozer's theological structure. Indeed it is this methodological question which is the singular focus of his response. Crisp turns one of Vanhoozer's interlocutors in his book against him, building the case that Vanhoozer has not properly or adequately escaped the problem of projection which is at the heart of the Feuerbachian criticism. Crisp echoes Wellum, remarking that

> Vanhoozer's attempt to block the Problem of Projection does not appear to have the resources in order to show that his own 'story' about divine self-communication is *more* than another sort of mythologizing project, one theological myth among others, so to speak.[11]

Crisp goes on to offer some suggestions about filling this void, but concludes, more forcefully, that, whatever Vanhoozer's options might be, that

> He still needs to provide his readers with some reason, *independent of* this remedial argument, for adopting his remythologizing story about God's 'projection' of himself in the speech acts of Scriptural drama rather than that offered by the demythologizers like Bultmann or Feuerbach.[12]

Crisp, like Wellum, insists that the spadework of establishing proper foundations for Vanhoozer to make the claims he does, is woefully lacking.[13] They

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[10] Wellum response, p. 22 in this journal. Emphasis mine. Two pages later he also names how "underneath massive differences in theological method are entire worldview structures which need to be articulated and defended…[that] more needs to be said before his 'remythologizing' project will be accepted today."

[11] Crisp response, p. 33 in this journal. And concludes, more pointedly, that "He has not provided an adequate means by which we can adjudicate whether his canon-linguistic approach to doctrine, or his more recent Remythologizing approach to theology, is closer to the truth than either Bultmann or Feuerbach." P. 37 in this journal.

[12] Crisp response, p. 39 in this journal. Emphasis mine.

[13] Crisp describes this as a clinging "to the rather frail reed of the Barth-inspired appeal to revelation." P. 40 in this journal.

both see this activity as *necessary* to establish the truthful possibility of theology. Crisp does not associate this overtly with apologetics but does see the establishment of the footings as needing to be provided from reasons "independent of" the practices of theological articulation.

John Franke like Crisp, also chooses to focus with near exclusion on Vanhoozer's methodology. At first glance, Franke's concerns are nearly the opposite of those of Crisp and Wellum. Franke argues that Vanhoozer's theological method is too exclusive in the way that it posits the idea of God as a communicative agent is employed in the book; that Vanhoozer commits the well known postmodern sin of the "pretensions of either/or metaphysical assertions about God."[14] He goes on to argue at length for theological plurality which he sees mirroring more faithfully the plurality seen in Scripture itself and holds up Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God* as the example of what Vanhoozer's theology should emulate.[15]

Like Crisp and Wellum, Franke sees an inadequate theological framework in *Remythologizing Theology*. For Franke, theology needs to be overtly and intentionally plural and diverse in its articulation. Again, at first glance, this appears to be the opposite concern of the first two responses. It might, however, rather be the case that Franke's criticisms are not so much at the opposite to those of Crisp and Wellum, but rather mirror them, being rooted in similar concerns for methodological correctness and universality. For Crisp and Wellum these are indicated by singularity and clarity in theological foundations, for Franke it is measured in plurality; Vanhoozer, in choosing one, or only a few, models for articulation commits the sin of exclusion and colonization; by not representing all voices, he oppresses the voices not heard.

One might ask, however, how it is that one would ever avoid this problem in doing theology? Franke's prime example, Elizabeth Johnson, does not. There are innumerable voices and perspectives that she does not account for in *Quest for the Living God*, not least of which is evangelicalism. The standard of universally representing the fullness of plural perspectives is a quintessentially modern epistemological quest. Franke's proposal may share more in common with the foundationalist and (quintessentially modern?) methodological preoccupations of Crisp and Wellum than appears at first blush.

Finally, the fourth response, of Fred Sanders, is the only one of the four which gives significant attention to the material theological contours of *Remythologizing Theology*. Sanders is more accommodating of the intention in Vanhoozer's *ad hoc* method, the playful and joyful way he explores select themes and resources, seeing how far they can take us in understanding the character of God as the communicative agent who speaks perennially in, with and under the Word of God. He helpfully summarizes: "One could describe

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[14] Franke response, p. 42 in this journal.

[15] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum Press, 2007).

Remythologizing Theology as a 'higher evangelicalism,' in that evangelicals are only supposed to attend to what God says, but Vanhoozer attends to how God says it."[16] Sanders also helpfully points us in directions of further theological development and implication in *Remythologizing Theology*.

Conclusion

Taken together, these responses illustrate well the unique place that Vanhoozer occupies within the evangelical landscape as well as the character of that landscape presently. These responses to Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology* serve as something of a bellwether for contemporary evangelical theology. If we were to map them, we could draw a series of axes representing the various concerns of the respondents, axes along which Vanhoozer would consistently be mapped in a moderating position. Apart from Sanders, the responses to a person call for more methodological intentionality, more apologetics (Wellum), more epistemological grounding (Crisp), more universal plurality (Franke).

The impulse behind Jeffrey Stout's famous complaint that the modern preoccupation with method amounts to a continual throat clearing without actually speaking shares the chastening of method in postliberal theology and, arguably, a theology that is truly post-modern. The question bears more weight and significance today insofar as the pressures and tensions that the respondents in this volume represent are a microcosm of pressures pulling and pushing evangelicalism. Regarding method, for Kevin Vanhoozer: less is more.

Chicago is the quintessential "middle" city of the United States. Likewise, the center of American evangelical gravity falls somewhere on the I-294 in Chicago between Wheaton College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Kevin Vanhoozer, in his travels back and forth along this highway, symbolizes the consummate moderate evangelical theologian of our times. Vanhoozer's own theological interlocutions are emblematic of both the diversity present within, and the present challenges for, evangelicalism. Can the center hold? Will it? The tensions are not insignificant.

[16] Sanders response, p. 62 in this journal.

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 11–29

A Critical Appreciation of Kevin Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology*[1]

Stephen J. Wellum
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Introduction

In this ground-breaking work, Kevin J. Vanhoozer turns his attention from his self-professed preoccupation with hermeneutical theory and theological method to the application of these areas to constructive theology, specifically theology proper.[2] Vanhoozer is convinced that current discussion in the doctrine of God is weak, evidenced by the rise of the "new orthodoxy" in non-evangelical theology (what he labels "kenotic-perichoretic-relational-panentheism") and current debates within evangelical theology (e.g., open theism), and as such a "new" approach is needed. Throughout his work, Vanhoozer weaves together and unpacks two major points. First, our methodological approach to Christian theology must follow the path of "remythologization," and second, vis-à-vis theology proper, a better way of conceiving the entire God-world relation is in terms of communicative action, not causal relations.

In regard to theological method, i.e., moving from Scripture to theological conclusions, Vanhoozer labels his approach, "remythologization." He clearly defines what is meant by this provocative term by contrasting it with the "soft" and "hard" demythologizing projects of Rudolf Bultmann and Ludwig Feuerbach respectively (RT, pp. 3-5). Both Bultmann and Feuerbach viewed biblical language as "myth." Bultmann's "soft" approach was to translate biblical statements about God into existential pronouncements (RT, pp. 13-16), while Feuerbach's "hard" approach went all the way and rejected the truth status of theology by arguing that biblical language about God is merely a human projection. In the end, both projects undercut historic Christianity by turning theology into anthropology (RT, pp. 17-23). Current discussion regarding the status of our God-talk has a difficult time escaping the ghost of

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[1] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remthologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Hereinafter, cited in the body of the text as RT, followed by page reference.

[2] For example, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge,* second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009); idem., *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press, 2005), plus numerous other books, essays, and articles.

Feuerbach unless it turns from its demythologizing ways and learns anew how to "remythologize" theology.

In contrast, Vanhoozer proposes that our theology begins with God's own self-presentation, namely Scripture. For him, Scripture is God's authoritative Word; it is triune discourse, a product of divine authorship and hence a form of divine action. Scripture, instead of being viewed under the rubric of "myth," is best viewed as *mythos*, a term borrowed from Aristotle to refer to the idea of "dramatic plot: a unified course of action that includes a beginning, middle, and end" (RT, p. 5). Unlike myths, *mythos* applies to this-worldly rather than other-worldly events and the meaning and truth of *mythos* is linked to the way the action is rendered. *Mythos*, at the human level, is a mode of discourse that configures human action so as to create a form of wholeness (i.e., a unified action) out of a multiplicity of incidents. "Poetics" refers to how authors create meaningful wholes (viz., stories) that allow one to make sense of what would otherwise be a chaotic jumble of unrelated events. *Mythos*, then, in the broad sense, "therefore stands for all those forms of discourse that may be employed in the course of a story or drama to render an agent or patient, a unified action or a unified passion" (RT, p. 7). It is a form of "world-projection," a cognitive tool to project a sense of the world as an ordered whole. It renders human and divine reality by depicting persons in act and at rest, speaking and silent.

In application to theology, Vanhoozer proposes that Scripture is best viewed as *mythos*, i.e., the written form of God's self-presentation and as *mythos* it "renders intelligible the field of triune communicative praxis" (RT, p. 7). Vanhoozer refuses to reduce *mythos* merely to its narrative form. Instead all of Scripture's diverse literary forms render the divine drama and thus who God is (RT, p. 7). In this way, biblical *mythos* is one and many: *one* in that there is an overall plot, the story of God's self-presentation in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ, and *many* in that there are diverse literary forms that comprise Scripture and which render God's action in diverse ways.

What, then, is "remythologizing theology?" Three points may summarize this approach. First, methodologically it starts "from above" and not "from below." Instead of beginning with unaided human reason apart from God's own speech, which assumes that everyone has a set of shared categories that may be applied both to the world and to God (i.e., onto-theology), "remythologizing" starts with the biblical *mythos* as God's self-attesting Word, i.e., God's own true and authoritative self-projection and triune presentation. In other words, it starts with the God who speaks and acts. Its starting point is the conviction that only God can make God known. Second, it seeks to take into account the significance of the Bible's diverse literary forms, each of which is a distinct form of God's communicative action. It is a form of biblical reasoning, a way of thinking about the subject matter of Scripture along the grain of the various forms of biblical discourse that present it. Third, it seeks to move from Scripture to ontology and not the other way around. It

seeks to *think* about *who* God is on the basis of his acts, especially his communicative acts. God is as God does, and God does as God says. As Vanhoozer states: "The task of the present work is to explore the ontology of the one whose speech and acts propel the theodrama forward" (RT, p. xiv), to unpack a "communicative ontology (i.e., a set of concepts with which to speak of God-in-communicative action)" and to sketch "the contours of a theodramatic metaphysics (i.e., a biblically derived set of concepts with which to speak of the whole of created reality)" (RT, p. xv). To avoid the Feuerbachian reduction, theology must first begin with Scripture and speak about God's *being* on the basis of his own speech and action. We are not to derive our understanding of the being and attributes of God from analyzing the idea of infinite perfection; we are to do so by describing and detailing the predicates and perfections of God's communicative activity.[3]

What is the basic outline of the book? After an introductory chapter introducing "remythologizing theology," it is broken into three parts. Part 1, which consists of three chapters, is more descriptive discussing the current scene, problems, and issues in theology proper with a preliminary critique of the "new orthodoxy"—a view Vanhoozer will seek to counter in the remainder of the book. Part 2 (two chapters) and 3 (four chapters) consist of Vanhoozer's constructive proposal of "Triune communicative theism" for theology proper, which unpacks his *via media* between classical theism and the "new orthodoxy." Many important issues are discussed (e.g., Trinity, relation of immanent to economic Trinity, eternity/time relations, etc.), but specific attention is given to the God-world relation construed in terms of communicative agency and not impersonal causal action with special application to the divine sovereignty-human freedom relation, the problem of evil, and divine impassibility.

Positive Commendations

This work is very helpful on many issues; it is hard to know where to begin. Specifically, let me highlight three areas.

1. Perceptive Critique of Various Theological Positions.

One of Vanhoozer's many strengths is the ability to describe and critique well current theological positions, including their methods. I will list some of his more helpful critiques.

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[3] It is important to note that Vanhoozer uses the term "communication" in a broad sense. To communicate is not merely "to transmit information" but "to make common" or "to share." Thus God in his communicative activity communicates himself: his light (truth), life (energy), and love (relationship).

Rudolf Bultmann (RT, pp. 16-18).

Vanhoozer perceptively notes that Bultmann was unwilling to accept the "objective" speech act of God recorded in the Bible, yet he had no problem affirming that God acts on me, or speaks to me in the here and now—i.e., Bultmann's understanding of the "act of God." In this way, Bultmann is critical of *mythos* but *not* critical of his own speaking of God's acts. All this demonstrates, as Vanhoozer notes, is that Bultmann substitutes one system of projection for another without argument. "He ignores the biblical *mythos* in his haste to reach the existential *logos* and, in so doing, fails to recognize the forms of biblical discourse as themselves indispensable means for articulating and thinking the reality of God. Demythologizing consequently de-narrativizes and generally de-forms the biblical rendering of God and his acts" (RT, p. 17).

Ludwig Feuerbach (RT, pp. 18-23).

Vanhoozer effectively utilizes throughout the book the "hard" demythologizing approach of Feuerbach as a foil by which to challenge all theologies which do not begin with God's own speech, whether they can escape the charge of reducing theology merely to anthropology. Feuerbach, as Vanhoozer nicely develops, raises crucial questions—all of which are central to theological method—such as: Which system? Whose projection? Does theology begin "from below" or "from above?"

Classical theism (chapter 2).

On the one hand, Vanhoozer nicely debunks the view that classical theism was infected by Greek thought by appealing to the work of such people as Richard Muller, Paul Gavrilyuk, and Thomas Weinandy. As he rightly concludes:

> [T]he legacy of patristic, medieval, and post-Reformation Protestant theology is not as captive to Greek philosophy as the 'standard account' suggests. We should therefore feel free to draw upon what these theologians actually said—about divine personhood, the love of God, and divine suffering – as we navigate our way through current debates (RT, p. 93).

On the other hand, he shows: (1) that classical theism's dependence upon a perfect being theology, unless it is first canonically derived, is problematic since intuitions about perfection differ greatly (e.g., Anselm vs. Hartshorne vs. open theism); (2) a generic theism is not sufficiently Christian; and (3) it does not escape the Feuerbachian critique. In the end, "perfect being theology" gives too much weight to human ideas about God at the expense of Scriptural reasoning.

The "new orthodoxy" (chapters 2 and 3).

Vanhoozer's description of the "new orthodoxy," what he labels "kenotic-perichoretic-relational-panentheism" (i.e., a hybrid of process panentheism and open theism; a process-like theology which embraces *creatio ex nihilo* so that what results is a freely willed divine kenosis), is very insightful. He nicely captures the heart of this "new" view in three statements: (1) Divine persons are seen in not substantival but *relational* terms; (2) God's love for the world is seen as *perichoretic* relationality; and (3) God's suffering is seen as a necessary consequence of his *kenotic* relatedness (RT, p. 140). Furthermore, just as helpful as his description of this view is his critique.

(1) The "new orthodoxy" tends to collapse the "nature-person" distinction by making "persons" mere relations. However, how can one have relations without some notion of substance?

> Relationality alone does not exhaust what we want to say either about God's being or about God's triune personhood. It is unnecessarily reductionist to collapse God's essence or deity into his interpersonal communion or onto-relationality. If God's being is communion, then divine unity becomes conceptually indistinguishable from divine threeness, and it consequently becomes difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the full divinity of each person in himself (RT, p. 143).

It is true that one can only be a person in relation to other persons but it does not follow that persons are nothing but relations. Persons cannot be reduced to their relationships with others. Relationships do not constitute persons, rather persons have relationships. By contrast, it is best to argue that the divine *person's* distinct identities are relational and that communicative agency is the prime mode of personal existence, not that divine persons are nothing but relations (RT, p. 144). Persons are basic particulars who have the capacity to relate to other persons in various ways and as such, we need to distinguish the *what* from the *who*.

(2) We must not construe the God-world relation in terms of *perichoresis* since this ultimately surrenders God's transcendence and limits God's sovereign freedom which is inconsistent with the biblical *mythos*. Vanhoozer rightly avoids what he calls an "illegitimate Trinitarian transfer"— i.e., the application of categories that properly pertain to Christology (*kenosis*) and the Trinity (*perichoresis*) to the God-world relation. *Perichoresis* and *kenosis* are not helpful in thinking through how God relates to the world in general terms. The former is unique to the immanent Trinity, while the latter is unique to the incarnation (RT, pp. 150ff). In terms of the former, the divine persons indwell human beings in a qualitatively different way than they do one another (RT, p. 153). In regard to the latter, we must be very careful to make the incarnation become the entire pattern for the God-world relation.

(3) The "new orthodoxy" has devastating consequences for other theological doctrines. For example, sin and atonement is not our alienation from

God if "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) is conceived of ontologically; there is little place for judgment conceived of something external to God; our union with Christ is conceived of cosmically not covenantally; and eschatologically speaking, there are little grounds to think that everything will finish well (RT, p. 164). Eventually the "new orthodoxy" cannot account for the biblical *mythos*, especially the category of special divine communicative action that the Bible everywhere depicts (RT, p. 159) and, in the end, runs the risk of reducing theology to anthropology.

(4) Ultimately the "new orthodoxy" undercuts the Creator-creature distinction and as such, it cannot account for the Bible's rendering of God as Creator and covenant Lord. It wrongly views the divine-human relation as operating on the same level which is a fundamental mistake. Furthermore, the biblical categories describe the God-world relation in covenantal terms not ontological ones.

2. The Overall Methodological Approach.

Taken as a whole, Vanhoozer's "remythologizing" approach is very helpful, even though the label may create communicative problems depending upon one's context and audience. Basically, "remythologization" is a species of "faith seeking understanding," which starts with Scripture and works from the biblical text to theological formulation, something which is basic to the theological method of traditional Reformed theology.

Vanhoozer rightly acknowledges that the crucial question in theological method is "how do we move from the biblical depiction of God's speech action (and apparent passion) to theo-ontology?" (RT, p. 78). His solution is to start with the canon as God's authoritative speech and self-presentation which discloses for us the Triune God in communicative action. In this way, the biblical *mythos* has priority, which is simply the application of *sola Scriptura* to the doing of theology. Furthermore, Vanhoozer rightly notes that biblical reasoning takes place not by "simply abstracting and ordering statements about God into a cognitive-propositional system" (RT, p. 478), but by "reading Scripture *along the grain of* the text" (RT, p. 189) in order to reflect upon the "subterranean metaphysic" that is there (RT, p. 190). In our theologizing about God we begin with the biblical depictions of God as a personal agent who speaks and acts. The biblical *mythos* calls for and gives rise to theo-ontological thought (RT, p. 183) as it thinks through the diverse ways that God presents himself in Scripture. However, "the *logos* of remythologizing has only a ministerial authority that takes it marching orders from the magisterially authoritative biblical *mythos*" (RT, p. 477). In addition, Vanhoozer nicely discusses how to discern whether biblical language about God is anthropomorphic (RT, pp. 480ff). He rightly acknowledges that "behind every approach to biblical anthropomorphism there lurks a metaphysics, namely, a set of assumptions about how human-like God really is (or is not)." "To move from surface grammar to ontology one must take the long way of bibli-

cal reasoning," which he attempts to do by laying out some important criteria for reading Scripture (RT, pp. 482-86).

It may legitimately be asked whether Vanhoozer is doing anything "new" in his method. Certainly the way he describes his approach is "new" and he develops more robustly God's communicative action and the ontological entailments of the fact that "God is a speaker," even though others have said something similar (e.g., John Frame, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Michael Horton). He also wants to understand God's relation to the world *not* primarily in terms of causality—e.g., God is the First Cause or the Unmoved Mover—but in terms of communicative action, but even here I suspect that this is not entirely "new" (e.g., see Christological discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum*). Yet, his discussion of these areas is very helpful, engaging, and highly useful in the current debates in theology proper.

In addition, his "eclectic" use of diverse viewpoints is helpful as a model of how to incorporate "extratextual" data in theology without surrendering the priority of Scripture. For example, his use of Bakhtin, Balthasar, Ricoeur, theories of emotions, and so on, nicely provide conceptual elaboration and illuminate theological matters as long as these concepts do not overturn the biblical *mythos*. He states, "Theologians are free, however, to employ various concepts in an ad hoc manner insofar as those concepts serve a ministerial role" (RT, p. 408). Of course, this only works if one starts with Scripture and Scripture serves as the basis by which we evaluate whether these various concepts are helpful. But if utilized in this way, extratextual material can aid theology. Vanhoozer serves as a fine role model in this regard.

3. Specific Theological Proposals.

What is most commendable about the book is Vanhoozer's constructive theological work, especially his development of the ontological implications of God as a triune speaker and divine communicative action. His refiguring the doctrine of God in the light of God's being a communicative agent: a speaker; an author; a being-in-communicative act is very insightful. Even though previous theology has discussed this point, it certainly has not been developed to the extent he does. Three areas are most helpful.

Trinitarian Discussion.

The entire work places the doctrine of the Trinity center stage, which is where it should be. Vanhoozer rightly makes the following points.

(1) We must distinguish between the immanent and economic Trinity (RT, pp. 69-72). He rightly critiques "Rahner's Rule" and those who follow it. He acknowledges that the danger of Rahner and the "new orthodoxy," is to say that the divine economy defines God's eternal being and thus reduce God to the history of his relationship to the world thus making God's being and identity dependent on world history. "The world here becomes an integral part of God's life, resulting in a loss of the divine freedom, transcendence,

and the Creator/creation distinction itself" (RT, p. 71)—something which cannot account for the biblical *mythos*. Vanhoozer correctly argues that the economic Trinity is not the immanent Trinity thus reducing God's being to what he does in history; rather, "the economic Trinity *communicates* the immanent Trinity" (RT, p. 294).

(2) In terms of the Triune life, Vanhoozer suggests that we think of the dynamism between the persons in terms of communicative activity oriented to communion. The three persons are distinct communicative agents that share a common communicative agency and what they share is their light, life, love.

(3) The re-working of divine simplicity (RT, pp. 274-77), both preserving the doctrine and helping make sense of it in terms of communicative action.

(4) Explaining how creatures participate in the triune life in terms of communication and covenant relations insightfully illuminated the discussion of a proper meaning of "union with Christ" (RT, pp. 283-94) in contrast to those who interpret participation more ontologically.

The Divine Sovereignty-Human Freedom Relationship.

Vanhoozer's re-working of this relationship in terms of communicative action is also helpful. By employing the model of "Authorship" (RT, pp. 298-99), he is able to preserve the Creator-creature distinction (God authors the world, transcendence); God is a being-in-communicative action (God dialogues with the world, immanence); and that God authorially governs and cares for the world dialogically (triune providence). Vanhoozer's wager (RT, p. 304) throughout is that viewing the God-world relation and particularly the divine sovereignty-human responsibility relation in terms of *analogia auctoris* is an improvement upon viewing it in impersonal causal ways. He views his proposal as a re-working of Austin Farrer's "causal joint" but now in terms of communicative action. God's speech is efficacious and brings about change in the world precisely by non-coercively bringing about understandings in human hearts and minds, which has the advantage of understanding God's action *personally* not impersonally (RT, p. 297, footnote 3). Thus, as Vanhoozer contends, "fully to understand the God-world relation means coming to grips not with a generically causal but with a specifically *communicative* joint: *God's relation to the world is a function of his triune authorial action, the self-communication of God the Father through the Word in the Spirit*" (RT, p. 302). A number of helpful points follow from this discussion.

(1) It preserves a strong sense of divine Lordship. God, as the Author, is the efficient cause of the world who retains his authorial rights even as he enters into the story as a character.

(2) God authors answerable agents and our freedom is best viewed in terms of our answerability, which sounds a lot like a defense of a compatibilist view of freedom. God addresses each person and each person freely responds and, in so doing, freely realizes the voice-idea of the Author (RT, p.

335). God's plan includes a covenant commitment to every creature, to fulfill the role of that creature (RT, p. 336). God as Author is not a coercive cause pushing against our freedom that interferes with our integrity, rather he is the interlocutor who interrogates and tests our freedom, consummating our existence in the process (RT, p. 336). My capacity for self-determination has its ground not in my own monological existence but rather in the potentially infinite dialogue with the Author God who alone calls me into being and who consummates my life and gives it meaning (RT, p. 336). It is in response to the dialogical situations that comprise my life, especially my dialogical relation to God, that I exercise the freedom to realize my own voice-idea (RT, p. 336).

(3) There is, then, no contradiction between and Authorial determination of a character's "idea" and the character's own self-determination. Freedom is not the power of self-authoring. We can realize our essential nature but we cannot make ourselves into something essential different. We act according to our natures, freely pursuing what we desire, but we lack the ability to reorient ourselves that we can change our own natures and desire something different (RT, pp. 336-37). Freedom of self-determination is not genuine Christian freedom. That freedom is the freedom to say "yes" to the divine call and which corresponds with the Author's own voice-idea for humanity revealed in Christ (RT, p. 337).

(4) God's sovereign interventions are *interjections*—calls, for example—that are efficacious but not coercive. God authorially consummates his characters without manipulating them. The divine author works according to our natures, via Word and Spirit (RT, pp. 316ff). Vanhoozer's discussion is particularly helpful in regard to effectual calling and the elect (RT, pp. 363ff). The effectual call is internally persuasive, but it is not from without. God convincingly persuades people by Word and Spirit so that they freely choose on their own accord in a way that corresponds to God's will. "Triune dialogical consummation is a matter of God's acting not *on* persons but *within* and *through* them in such a way that, precisely by so acting, God brings them to their senses and makes them into the creatures they were always meant to be" (RT, p. 370). Yet, as helpful as this is for understanding God's relation to his people (elect), one wonders if it is as helpful in relation to the non-elect. Why does God fail with some and not others? I will return to this point below.

Discussion of Divine Impassibility (chapters 8-9).

Vanhoozer's discussion of divine impassibility is some of his best work. He nicely upholds God's dialogical interaction with humans while preserving the Creator-creature distinction as he wrestles with the question: "Does God suffer change as a result of his dialogical interaction with the world?" (RT, p. 388). He rightly notes that divine impassibility serves as an excellent test case for his remythologizing approach since he has to justify how he moves correctly from the biblical *mythos* to theological metaphysics via the Bible's own theodramatic system of projection rather than by projecting human values

onto God (RT, p. 388). This requires a careful discussion of biblical language which attributes repentance, grieving, and emotions to God. How should we interpret these texts and what are they saying about the nature of the God-world relation? Should we interpret these texts as the "new orthodoxy" does, namely, as an expression of divine self-limitation in order for God to maintain a genuine relation with creation (RT, p. 391), or does this interpretation fail to do justice to the biblical *mythos*? Vanhoozer, against the grain of most theology today, even evangelical theology, vigorously defends a nuanced understanding of divine impassibility in a very persuasive fashion. Here are some notable points of his discussion.

(1) He carefully describes how the Patristic era defined "passion" and why they argued for divine impassibility given that passions were viewed as passive and involuntary, while affections were viewed as active and voluntary. In this light, the church argued that God's feelings are not passions but affections (RT, p. 404), i.e., intentional affective attitudes that God eternally chooses to take towards his creatures (RT, p. 404).

(2) He also nicely discusses the term "emotions" and notes how it is too often conflated with passion/affection. As a result, he proposes a view of emotions which is consistent with the biblical *mythos*, i.e., emotions as intentional, concern-based construals that perceive an object as having a certain import. As such, emotions should not be viewed as passive passions; rather they are active affections. As applied to God, his emotions are real, covenantally concern-based theodramatic construals reflecting his covenantal affection for his people, which because he is the Creator, are known from eternity as complete and unified (RT, p. 414). They represent God's true construal of the theodramatic situation and express God's legitimate (and constant) concern to preserve an exclusive relationship—covenant set-apartness—with Israel (RT, p. 415). God's emotions/feelings are always true and his concerns constant, so it follows that God's feelings are as impassible as they are infallible: the impassible feels (RT, p. 415).

(3) His discussion of God's love, compassion, and patience is excellent. He takes on the "new orthodoxy" by questioning whether God's love and compassion is intrinsically vulnerable by his own self-limitation for the sake of interpersonal relations. He responds by picking up the *mythos* of divine promise, which stresses the reliability of God's speech act, hence effectual communicative action which assumes divine power and covenant Lordship, or what Vanhoozer coins—*kyriotic compassion* (RT, pp. 444ff). Since compassion is an emotion, it is an active affection, not a passive one; it is a demonstration of God's Lordship which must also be viewed in light of the entire theodrama (*sub specie theodramatis*). In this way, divine compassion is not a commiserating but a commanding, effectual compassion that does not share but transforms the sufferer's situation (RT, p. 446). God's compassion is his disposition to communicate his goodness (RT, p. 446) and share his own life and his patience is best viewed as his enduring love (RT, pp. 448ff). Viewed

in this way, when the biblical text says that God "responds," he is not "responding" in the sense of re-acting, much less changing, to the moment-by-moment lives of his human creature. Rather God is at every moment being fully himself as he faithfully accompanies time and his speech and action reflect the appropriate covenantal-concern based construal of the theodramatic situation (RT, pp. 454-55). Seen in this light, divine impassibility should be understood as God's covenantal steadfastness (RT, p. 457). Divine impassibility is God's capacity to endure (i.e., remain constant despite external pressure to change). God's love is best viewed as his disposition to communicate his goodness (RT, p. 457); his free self-determination to share his life (i.e., truth, goodness, and beauty) in Christ through the Spirit. Why is God love? Because he is the one who gives himself wholly to those who are wholly other (RT, p. 457).

(4) Vanhoozer then applies this entire discussion to the question of the *crucified* God. He carefully avoids two common pitfalls in contemporary theology: a Christological reductionism and the collapsing of the immanent into the economic Trinity. In regard to the former, he does not allow the person and history of Jesus to define God completely since: (a) Jesus does not reveal God *de novo* nor *ex nihilo* due to the OT Scriptures. God remains the same throughout redemptive-history; (b) If Jesus' history completely reveals and constitutes God's being then it becomes difficult to identify which properties are human and which divine (e.g. Does God sleep, eat?, etc.). (c) Scripture shows us what is revelatory of God in Jesus' life which is Jesus' being-in-communicative-act. The primary purpose of Jesus' suffering is not to reveal God's suffering, but to bring about salvation. Parallel to this discussion Vanhoozer has a very helpful discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum*. He rightly distinguishes "person" from "nature" (i.e., person is the *who* and nature is the *manner of the who's existence*). As applied to Christ's suffering, it is important to stress that it is neither the divine nature nor an abstract human nature *who* experiences suffering but the divine *person* and the manner he experiences suffering is as a man (RT, p. 423). This classic way of stating it rightly preserves: (a) the Son's identity prior to Jesus' history; and (b) Jesus' history does display the very being of the eternal Son in human form. Vanhoozer concludes his discussion by noting that if the cross is *the* paradigm of divine suffering, then it must be stated that

> God never suffers because he is overtaken by worldly events, but only because he uses them for his own authorial purposes… If God suffers, then he suffers in a divine manner, that is, his suffering is an expression of his freedom; suffering does not befall God, rather he freely allows it to touch him. He does not suffer, as creatures do, from a lack of being; he suffers out of love and by reason of his love, which is the overflow of his being (RT, p. 430).

(5) In regard to the latter, Vanhoozer does not collapse the immanent into the economic Trinity. In the biblical *mythos*, the cross is not a symptom of

God's general metaphysical relationship to the world but the climax of God's particular relationship to Israel that began with a divine promise to Abraham. Only the canonical, covenantal *mythos* can hope to make intelligible the God-world dynamics of the cross (RT, p. 461).The cross of Christ, then, does not constitute, much less change God, but rather it demonstrates who God (already and always) is:

> God is always, everywhere, and at all time fully himself. His being love—communicative action oriented to communion—is fully realized in the immanent Trinity before the economic Trinity actualizes it in history. The pouring out of the Son's life on the cross, in time, reflects the Father's outpouring of love into the Son in eternity… As the resurrection makes plain, nothing can stem the inextinguishable overflow of God's light, life, and love (RT, p. 462).

(6) Instead of discarding impassibility, Vanhoozer rightly argues that it should be embraced, if probably defined and argued. It is a truth which emphasizes the perfect fullness of the triune life and love, not a static indifference to the play of the world (RT, pp. 462-63). It is the guarantee of God's utterly reliable being-in-communicative-activity (RT, p. 463).

A Few Critical Reflections

Overall, my appreciation for Vanhoozer's work is greater than my criticism yet I offer three areas of critical reflection which hopefully will lead to further clarification and discussion.

1. The Absence of the Crucial Discussion of Apologetics.

Let me first acknowledge that this work is *not* an apologetics book; it is a constructive work in theology, specifically theology proper. Why, then, do I raise this point? For this reason: most of Vanhoozer's conversation partners do not accept the same view of Scripture and orthodoxy that he accepts and assumes. Is it enough to propose "remythologizing" theology without first giving some justification for why we accept the canonical Scriptures as fully authoritative and God's own self-presentation? Certainly this has been the historic position of the church and maybe that is reason enough to start here. Even better, as Vanhoozer acknowledges, Scripture is self-attesting and as such, "It follows that the various biblical texts are forms of divine discourse and should thus be counted as figuring among the divine repertoire of communicative action" (RT, p. 205, footnote 100). Yet, is this not what is precisely at dispute? Why do some (e.g., Bultmann) read Scripture as a *myth* instead of as *mythos*? Is it not because they do *not* believe Scripture is true, reliable, and accurate in what it communicates? How does one adjudicate this point which lies beneath one's entire approach to Scripture and theology? In other words, the reason why people disagree on the theological interpretation of Scripture, whether Scripture should be viewed as *myth* vs. *mythos*, or whether

all of the *mythos* reliably communicates who God is, is due to the larger truth question tied to entire theological/philosophical viewpoints.

Let me be clear as to what I am *not* saying. I am *not* saying that Vanhoozer should have written another book, viz., an apologetics work. However, I am saying that it is *not* enough to say that we simply need to "remythologize" theology since what is at dispute is whether such an approach to theology is even possible. Something more has to be said about the truth of the entire Christian position over against many of these conversation partners. Let me give some examples.

In the preface, Vanhoozer begins with this statement: "Some readers will no doubt regard this entire project as a retrograde development…" (RT, p. xv). He gives the example of John Robinson's *Honest to God*. But in order to respond to Robinson we must say more than that we need to "remythologize" theology; ultimately what is at stake is an entire defense of Christianity, including its view of God and Scripture as an entire package. Vanhoozer continues: "Theology is ultimately irresponsible if it fails either to attend to what God says or to think about the nature of the one who addresses us" (RT, p. xvi). I agree, but is this not the precise point at dispute with people such as Robinson, Bultmann, Feuerbach, et. al.?

Or, on p. xvii, Vanhoozer gives his wager: "My wager is that we will come to a better understanding of God's being by examining biblical accounts of God's communicative action (i.e., naming promising, declaring, etc.)." Or, in RT, p. 181, he acknowledges that contemporary critics of metaphysics are legion. However, one alternative to the myth of metaphysics is the metaphysics of *mythos*. To "remythologize" is to put our discourse of *what is* under the discipline of the biblical accounts of God's speaking and acting. In this regard, in RT, p. 8 he discusses the difference between theology "from below" vs. "from above." He claims that onto-theology fails to attend to God's own self-communication. Metaphysics has more of the fragrance of *logos* than *mythos*. This may be true, and I think it is. But why does onto-theology argue this way? Is it merely that they have failed to recover a proper understanding of metaphor and biblical language, hence to view Scripture as *mythos* instead of myth? Or is it due to their conviction that the Bible cannot be trusted in its *mythos* and that human reflection about God is a far more reliable guide in discerning the being of God? Is it not due precisely to their rejection of Vanhoozer's view of Scripture on extratextual grounds such as philosophy, science, human experience, etc.? Why not accept a "myth" view of the Bible? Is it merely a fideistic choice?

Once again, my purpose in raising these examples is *not* to chide Vanhoozer for what he has *not* written. It is simply to observe that this issue cannot be avoided. I agree with his basic approach, but underneath massive differences in theological method are entire worldview structures which need to be articulated and defended. The dividing line between those who view theology only as talk about God-talk and those who believe in the possibility

of true talk about God eventually comes back to the truth question. Obviously Vanhoozer is fully aware of this, but more needs to be said before his "remythologization" project will be accepted by many today.

2. Two Methodological Issues: Literary Forms and the Use of Scripture.

A Question about Literary Forms.

Anyone familiar with Vanhoozer's hermeneutical work, especially his emphasis on the importance of literary forms, will think it strange that I begin with this question: Are literary forms overblown? I am *not* asking this question to downplay the crucial role that literary forms play in hermeneutics, which is made abundantly clear in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* In order to grasp authorial intent, discerning the illocutions of the author is directly linked to their use of specific literary forms. However, in Vanhoozer's writings, including this one, he says much more than this.

In his writings, Vanhoozer argues that diversity of literary forms (i.e., canonical plurality) ought to lead to *theological* plurality on the level of interpretative traditions. He writes:

> The plurality on the level of the canon may call for an equivalent plurality on the level of interpretative traditions. If no single conceptual (read, confessional) system is adequate to the theological plentitude of the canon, then we need a certain amount of polyphony *outside* the canon, too, in order to do justice to it. The church would be a poorer place if there were not Mennonite or Lutheran or Greek Orthodox voices in it.[4]

In fact, in *The Drama of Doctrine*, he applied this point to the atonement arguing that penal substitution, relational restoration views, and basically most theories of the atonement "typically privilege one set of metaphors, one idea complex, one conceptual scheme" (RT, p. 385), but a *remythologizing* approach will acknowledge all the biblical metaphors and not "reduce the variety of the biblical metaphors to a single conceptual scheme" (RT, p. 385). This same point is reiterated in *Remythologizing* but now vis-à-vis theology proper. Given the many literary forms of the canon, he concludes, "The reality of God outruns any one theologian's attempt to conceptualize it, just as Scripture outruns the attempt of any one interpretative scheme to capture its meaning (RT, p. 474)." Theology "requires more than one set of concepts or a single consciousness to express it—even while professing truth to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic (RT, p. 474)."

I have tried hard to understand Vanhoozer's point but I do not see how canonical diversity leads to *theological* diversity. No doubt as we read and interpret Scripture, "Biblical reasoning, the formal principle of remythologizing, involves the conceptual elaboration of the form and content of the Bible,

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[4] Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p. 275.

itself a means of divine communicative action. This involves not merely thinking *about* but *with* and *through* the various voices and forms that constitute the Bible" (RT, p. 477), but why does this lead to *theological plurality*? Our conceptual elaboration must do justice to Scripture in all of its diversity, but does this entail that there is no single conceptual system which accurately understands the Scripture, or at least, in terms of the areas that are central to an understanding of the Gospel? Our theological formulations of the Trinity, Christology, the atonement, and so on, are formulated in light of the diverse canonical voices, but ought we not to contend that they are true if they correspond to what Scripture says, and that in spite of the canonical diversity, there is an overall way to think of God, Christ, sin, atonement, etc.? For example, in atonement theology, we must not privilege one set of metaphors, but when one puts all the canonical metaphors together and seeks to do justice to how the metaphors are worked out along the grain of the canonical text, does not Scripture itself give us a view of the cross that explains the heart of what it achieves which some interpretations simply do not get right?

Furthermore, within Scripture itself, especially thinking of the New Testament use of the Old Testament and intertextual development within the canon, is the main issue literary forms giving us a plurality of readings or how those various texts (which assumes diverse literary forms) are interpreted in light of the progressive unfolding of God's plan across redemptive history? For example, think of how the author of Hebrews appeals to the OT (quoting from the Psalter [Pss. 2, 8, 22, 45, 95, 110], the Prophets [Isa. 8:17-18; Jer. 31:31-34], the narratives [Gen. 2:1-4; Gen. 14; Exod. 25:40; Num. 12; 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13-14]) and draws his theological conclusions. The author's conclusions have less to do with how literary forms function than where those texts are placed in the unfolding plan of God (see Heb. 3:7-4:13; 7:1-28; 8:1-13).

Questions Regarding the Use of Scripture.

Related to the above discussion I have some questions regarding Vanhoozer's use of Scripture. Does he really demonstrate how different literary forms are used to draw the conclusions he draws? The only place this occurs is in his discussion of apocalyptic literature and the problem of evil (RT, pp. 346-56). However, one could similar conclusions regarding multiple levels of "powers" in other literature other than apocalyptic. Why cannot one speak of different levels of communicative action (i.e., divine, human, Satanic) from narratives or other literary forms? In the end, I do not see how his theory of literary forms is worked out in practice in this work. More examples of how literary forms allow us to think differently about God's being, character, attributes, Triune relations, providence, would help and especially help to clarify exactly how literary forms are informing his theological conclusions. This would also be instructive in seeing how "remythologization" works in practice and how it is different from other evangelical approaches which

simply appeal to the text of Scripture, acknowledging that literary forms are crucial for discerning authorial intent, but then go about the task of thinking through how the canon puts all the pieces together.

In addition, for all the emphasis on the biblical *mythos* and moving from *mythos* (i.e., Scripture) to metaphysics (i.e., systematic theology), I do not see much interaction with Scripture in the sense that the biblical *mythos* is first unpacked text after text, in light of these texts placed in the theodrama of the canonical text, and brought to canonical fulfillment in Christ. For the most part, Vanhoozer *theologically* and *conceptually* develops the implications of the biblical portrayal of God as a "speaker" (which he rightly derives from the *mythos*) but his use of Scripture in its full canonical context is fairly spotty and it is especially so in relation to biblical genres and literature. This is *not* to say that Vanhoozer does not use Scripture well throughout the book and draw correctly from the biblical storyline. In a number of places his discussion is very insightful (e.g., use of "rest" in Hebrews and linking it throughout the canon [RT, p. 462]; what "mystery" is in Scripture vs. metaphysical mysteries [RT, p. 472]; his treatment of the Father-Son relation in John 5 [RT, p. 252], and so on). Rather, it is to say that his use of Scripture is fairly sparse in the full exegetical to biblical theology sense, and it does not delve into discussions of genre, redemptive-historical context, and how entire theological conclusions are drawn from the biblical *mythos*.

If the truth be known, throughout most of the book Vanhoozer assumes a specific theological viewpoint, viz., Reformed theology (which I basically agree with), and then seeks to provide a *theological* accounting for it given his construal of God's Triune communicative agency. For example, in his discussion of the problem of evil Vanhoozer asks: "If God is the author of the "person-idea" that heroes freely (though necessarily) work out, does it not follow that God is ultimately responsible for what the evil-doing villains do as well?" (RT, p. 338). He answers: "Not according to the Westminster Confession, which states that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass in such a way that 'neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures'" (RT, pp. 338-39). But it is important to point out, in this chapter he never really substantiates this point. He takes it as a given and then gives a *theological* accounting for it given his model of God's Authorship. However, what he does not do is demonstrate from the biblical *mythos* why someone ought to accept the Westminster Confession's understanding of divine providence as the biblical given. What he should say is this: I am assuming the exegetical and biblical-theological work of Reformed theology and my task in this work is to theologize about it by employing new analogies, such as communicative agency, as I demonstrate that this theology is a better alternative to the "new orthodoxy."

3. Some Questions Regarding Specific Proposals.

The Analogy of God as Author.

The analogy of God as Author is utilized to harmonize God's transcendence, immanence, and providence (RT, pp. 298-99). Vanhoozer appeals to Bakhtin's work and employs the concept of dialogic authorship to help explain the God-world relation. The model of dialogic authorship allows Vanhoozer to affirm the Lordship of the Triune God as well as the freedom and responsibility of human characters within the theodrama. The Triune God relates to his "heroes" more in terms of "interjection" than intervention or influence (RT, p. 316) and our human freedom lies in our answerability, i.e., our ability to be in dialogue with God (RT, p. 335).

All of this is very helpful but I question whether dialogical authorship accounts for the improvisation that happens on stage when an actor embodies a role? If one takes improvisation of the human hero seriously, does this explain how God is able to maintain sovereignty (control) over characters without removing their freedom? I realize that ultimately the divine sovereignty-human freedom relation is not one that can be conceptualized easily, but I do question whether dramatic authorship can account for the sovereign rule of God over the stage of human history and the improvisation of human beings, or at least account for it better than previous attempts in the history of theology.

Divine communicative agency and the non-elect.

Vanhoozer's treatment of effectual calling is very helpful. God's communicative agency works outside, alongside, and inside us, efficaciously persuading us, not to act against our wills but to bring our wills into alignment with the will of the Author (RT, p. 494). "The divine-human dialogue is actually a divine authoring, that is, an asymmetrical communicative process by which a hero is theodramatically consummated" (RT, p. 494). In a form of "divine soteric dialogue," God guides interlocutors in a non-coercive, but internally persuasive (and hence efficacious) manner. God deploys a panoply of covenantal forms of discourse—prophetic, lyric, narrative, parabolic, etc.—in order to communicate not only his mind but his affections, namely, his covenant-concern-based theodramatic construals. He employs these forms of discourse to transform minds, wills, and imaginations. The efficacious inner persuasive discourse of word and Spirit ultimately moves the heart, but in a properly communicative rather than manipulative fashion. Regeneration changes the whole person. God uses these means to bring about certain ends in a guaranteed fashion. Furthermore, for the elect, divine communicative action is ultimately oriented to communion, a divine-human fellowship that effects sanctification: the transformation of human communicants into the image of Jesus Christ (RT, p. 495).

However, does this explanation make sense of the non-elect? Does God work in exactly the same way in them and if not, why not? If God can communicate to humans, why does he neglect to do so in situations where such communicative acts could prevent innocent suffering (RT, p. 502)? In fact, Vanhoozer raises this question but he leaves the question unanswered. He rightly admits that the existence of evil remains a mystery, but concludes that the Triune God is not indifferent or powerless (RT, p. 503). I agree with this conclusion and maybe this is all we can say this side of eternity. God has not given us an exhaustive revelation of himself and his ways, even though he has told us enough. We must learn to live with what we have received and view everything in terms of what he has actually said and done for us in Christ. Yet, if one is going to make effectual calling the paradigm or pattern which explains the entire God-world relation (which Vanhoozer seems to do), he needs to explain more why it is that God does not universally consummate all creatures in a redemptive sense, or even how communicative agency works in relation to the non-elect.

To be fair, Vanhoozer does address this question in relation to his discussion of Pharaoh (RT, pp. 339-42) and Satan and the powers (RT, pp. 342-56). Much of it is helpful but it is interesting what is left unsaid: (a) Why and how did Adam fall since he was a good creature in communion with God? (b) Why and how did Satan fall, assuming he was created good and upright? Both of these issues are not addressed. The discussion of Pharaoh basically assumes an already *fallen* hero so that the explanation for Pharaoh's hardening is that God withholds his Spirit (RT, p. 340). God's word dialogically consummates Pharaoh by effectively soliciting his free response, "No." Through God's dialogical interaction to Pharaoh through Moses, God communicates information but not the light, life, and love that God communicates to his people. God's communicative agency falls short of personal communion so that in the case of the non-elect, they are consummated by a word of judgment, a word bereft of the Spirit's work. They remain hard-hearted, disposed not to respond to God's Word, uncommunicative and unwilling to comply. But in this explanation, how do we explain the first choice of an *unfallen* hero such as Adam? Or, in regard to Satan, how do we explain his fall? Vanhoozer nicely explains how Satan helps make sense of sin's entrance into the human realm. He unpacks Satan's lies in a reworking of the privation theory. Satan's speech, as the manipulator, is defective; it does not correspond to reality. But in his entire discussion he leaves unexplained Satan's fall, let alone Adam's.

His possible response to these questions may be that the biblical *mythos* does not address the issue and this is fine up to a point. But if one wants to place the doctrine of divine providence and divine action under the rubric of effectual calling (RT, p. 371), then I think something more has to be said about these issues, especially given the fact that one of the main reasons for

the "new orthodoxy" is due to their attempt to address the problem of evil better than classical theism.[5]

Concluding Reflection

Overall, I am very appreciative of this work. It is thoroughly orthodox and evangelical and it was a delight to think through and digest. Even though I have raised some critical comments, I agree with its basic direction, including the challenge for theology to begin with God's authoritative work and rightly and faithfully to draw our theological conclusions from Scripture according to the Bible's own presentation of itself. Much work is to be done as we stand on the shoulders who have come before us, and Vanhoozer's work is a helpful step in that direction, even though it needs a more thorough exegetical grounding. We can all eagerly wait to see how Vanhoozer will continue to "remythologize" in other doctrinal areas.

[5] In a recent essay, Vanhoozer he has sought to address God's apparent "failed" communicative action. See "Ezekiel 14: "I, the Lord, Have Deceived That Prophet": Divine Deception, Inception, and Communicative Action" in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives* (ed. R. Michael Allen; London: T & T Clark, 2011), pp. 73-98.

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 31–40

Remythologizing, Projection, and Belief: A Reply to Vanhoozer

Oliver D. Crisp
Fuller Theological Seminary

Introduction

Kevin Vanhoozer believes theology is in need of *remythologizing*. In his recent tome, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*,[1] he criticizes Rudolf Bultmann for his demythologizing project which is, he thinks, just one among other "myths", that is (borrowing from Aristotle), the presentation of a drama, a dramatic rendering of the biblical material. Bultmann objects to traditional ways of conceiving the biblical drama as in need of such demythologizing without being cognizant of the fact that his own position is itself a piece of mythologizing in the Aristotelian sense. In other words, his own theological proposal is a story about how we should read the Bible, yet another interpretive framework, rather than the sober truth of the matter, which overturns all previous attempts to make sense of the text (RT, pp. 16-17).

Against Bultmann, Vanhoozer offers a different, *dramatic* account of the biblical material, which does not *de*mythologize, but *re*mythologizes it. Scripture presents us not with a series of cobbled narratives that must have the acids of criticism applied to them in order to get at some Ur-story underlying the accretions of legend and miracle. Rather, Scripture presents us with a divine drama: God speaks and seeks to draw us his creatures into the story as he relates to us. The result, as Vanhoozer puts it, is "a Trinitarian dialogical theism" which "view's God's being as a being-in-communicative-act" with the "God/world relation" being regarded "primarily in terms of a distinctive communicative causality" and "Scripture as ingredient in an economy of triune discourse, and biblical interpretation in the church as a form of participation in God's communicative acts." (RT, p. 32)

For those familiar with Vanhoozer's earlier work, much of this talk of divine communication in terms of theodrama will be familiar. This is clearly a further development of, or a stage in, his constructive project, which purports to be setting out what he has elsewhere termed a *first theology*. This is a theology that integrates biblical interpretation, systematic reflection and philosophical engagement. It is certainly stirring stuff. Not only is his laying out of different live options in the debate in the early chapters enlivening (I shall

[1] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Hereinafter, cited in the body of the text as RT, followed by page reference.

be using the second chapter on the classical doctrine of God in my Systematic Theology classes), his own alternative is intriguing and suggestive, even if one does not agree with everything he ends up saying. Vanhoozer's work is arguably the most sophisticated postmodern evangelical theology on offer today.[2] It therefore behooves us to take a careful look at what he has to say.

However, rather than simply recapitulating some of the main steps in his reasoning, I want to offer a line of criticism that draws on a theme looming in the background of much of the book as it develops. Aside from his early dismissal of Bultmann, there is another important interlocutor with whom Vanhoozer wrestles. This is Ludwig Feuerbach. I will suggest that unlike Bultmann, Feuerbach presents a much more serious demythologizing challenge to Vanhoozer's project, and one which, I worry, he has not adequately answered. I address this concern in two parts. The first focuses on what I shall call Feuerbach's Problem of Projection. I shall sketch out an argument against Feuerbach that, I think, Vanhoozer could avail himself of to strengthen his case in RT against this particular objection. But there is a second, related worry that can only be ameliorated at some cost to Vanhoozer, either in amending important epistemic commitments he has, or in providing his readers with a further argument in favor of his own remythologizing story.

The Problem of Projection

Let us begin by developing the objection. Call it, the *Problem of Projection*. It is a problem familiar in some measure to most theology undergraduates or seminarians. As Vanhoozer points out, where Bultmann is a "soft" demythologizer, who reduces theological claims to existential hopes (RT, p. 18), Feuerbach is a "hard" demythologizer. He insists that theology is really "anthropology all the way down" (RT, p. 18). Thus Vanhoozer: "[a]t the center of Feuerbach's own system of projection, then, stands the 'secret' that theology is really only anthropology, that the essence of all religion, including Christianity, is the belief in the divinity of human nature." (RT, p. 19) Belief in God, on this view, is simply the reification of certain notions we have about ourselves, the projection onto the clouds of a father-like entity that is no more real than any other figment of human imagination. Put more formally, the Problem of Projection (PP) can be expressed like this:

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[2] In his response to this paper, Professor Vanhoozer remarks that this is a backhanded compliment. I meant no offence in describing his work this way. I think Professor Vanhoozer's work is appropriately described as a postmodern theology just as, say, Radical Orthodoxy is often said to represent a postmodern theology. For his work eschews what he describes as the "hegemony of modernity" and rejects foundationalism, opting for a "postfoundationalism" instead. For discussion of these matters, see Vanhoozer's Preface to Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and D. Stephen Long's chapter on Radical Orthodoxy in the same volume, pp. 126-45.

(PP) Christian theological language about God is disguised language about the needs of human beings: such language reifies cherished human religious thought, values, beliefs.

Vanhoozer's response to this is to claim that the Problem of Projection is really nothing more than the postulation of an idol, rather than the identification of the living God with the projection of human imagination (RT, p. 20). Contemporary Trinitarian theology is not immune from this mistake. We can construct all manner of sophisticated accounts of the divine nature that are no more than projections, even if they are Trinitarian in nature (RT, pp. 22-23). What we need in order to block the various contemporary iterations of the Problem of Projection (including the apparently theologically orthodox ones) is to begin, like Barth, with the premise that first theology depends upon God's self-presentation in revelation: Scripture is the vehicle by means of which God speaks. Without this, all theology is, as Vanhoozer puts it, "smoke and mirrors", the "human projection of religious affections and special effects" (RT, p. 23).

Let us be clear: Vanhoozer is not denying that projection of a sort takes place in theology. What he is denying is that such projection is the reification of *merely human* thoughts and values. In place of this he posits the projection of the divine voice onto the stage of world history via the speech acts contained in Scripture (RT, p. 24). The Bible is, in a way, the script by means of which God enters the human drama. It is the way in which God ensures his voice is heard. But this is only ensured via the agency of human authors.

At this juncture the first part of my worry arises. For as he explicates it in RT,[3] Vanhoozer's attempt to block the Problem of Projection does not appear to have the resources in order to show that his own 'story' about divine self-communication is *more* than another sort of mythologizing project, one theological myth amongst others, so to speak. In order to see this, we will need to take a whistle-stop tour of some of the epistemology Vanhoozer has developed in his earlier work, which has a bearing upon what he has to say in RT. Thus, for example, in *The Drama of Doctrine* he tells us he is engaged in a

[3] I say this advisedly: Vanhoozer has written a lot about theological method and has touched on these matters before. See, for example, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and The Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 204-206; pp. 288-90; pp. 298-99, and *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 301-305. It might have helped his reader if he had pointed to some of this earlier work more explicitly. There is also an important question here about development of ideas. Whereas there is a strong debt to elements of early Reformed Epistemology in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* This is much less apparent in his later work and (interestingly) the references to more recent work in the field drop off (e.g. no references I can find to Plantinga's, *Warranted Christian Belief* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000]) as his own theodramatic account of Scripture takes centre-stage. I shall return to this point presently.

postfoundationalist approach to theology, which he dubs the canon-linguistic approach. Central to the project is an epistemic humility. "Knowledge on this view is neither immediate nor indubitable; it is rather mediate via interpretive frameworks. No set of data is ever foundational because the data is always framework filtered and theory-laden." Nevertheless, "thanks to aspectival realism, we may say that some filters allow true knowledge to get through."[4]

Vanhoozer offers his readers an alternative to the metaphors often used to explain the two dominant epistemological theories about the superstructure of beliefs, namely coherentism and foundationalism.[5]

According to coherentism our beliefs are part of a web. Each particular belief (that the world is round, say, or that the Earth revolves around the sun) is interconnected to the other beliefs we hold in a network. Each belief is inherently revisable in light of new evidence that may undermine, defeat, or strengthen the warrant a given belief enjoys in the larger web of beliefs. What is more, the centrality or prominence a given belief has relative to other beliefs in a person's noetic structure may change so that the belief in question becomes more peripheral (because less important, relative to other beliefs) or more central (more important relative to other beliefs). Thus, if I come to think that the existence of God is much less likely than I previously thought, my belief in God may shift from a central place in the web to a much less important place, affecting the place of other beliefs relative to it in the process, e.g. my belief in the importance of participating in regular acts of public act of worship.

According to foundationalism, my beliefs are not in a web, but arranged pyramid-like, with the more fundamental beliefs lower down the structure, "holding up" those that are further up the structure, towards the apex. At the base of the pyramid of beliefs are those that are the foundations upon which the whole superstructure is laid. Indeed, according to the foundationalist

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[4] *Drama of Doctrine,* p. 293. Hereinafter, cited as DD, followed by page reference. According to Vanhoozer, aspectival realism is not mere perspectivalism, where potentially multiple incommensurate hermeneutical frameworks provide us with nothing more than another interpretation of the matter. Aspectival realism allows that our fallible epistemic frameworks do generate knowledge (DD, p. 289). They are, we might say, aspects of truth, or approximations to the truth of the matter from a particular epistemic vantage, the vantage that we occupy. This is a refinement in his thinking from an earlier avowal of critical realism in *Is There A Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 299-303. (Hereinafter, cited as IMT, followed by page reference.)

[5] An outstanding survey of contemporary epistemology is given in Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For an accessible treatment of these themes from a religious point of view that is critical of Plantinga's moderate foundationalism, see Paul Helm, *Faith with Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a recent treatment of these issues that endorses the moderate foundationalism of Plantinga against postfoundationalists, see Randal Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

there are really only two sorts of belief, those that are inferred on the basis of other beliefs I have—like the interlocking blocks of stone that make up the pyramid as a whole—and those that are not inferred on the basis of other beliefs. These are the beliefs at the foundations of the pyramid, the ones that offer epistemological support, as it were, to the beliefs that are inferred from them and from other inferred beliefs. As epistemologists say, foundational beliefs do not derive their warrant or justification from other beliefs a person holds. They are beliefs that are said to be *basic*, non-inferred, epistemologically primitive. Perceptual beliefs are usually good candidates for basic beliefs, whereas, say, the belief that the painting I am looking at is by Picasso is inferred on the basis of other things I know, e.g. his cubist style, the fact that it is signed "Picasso", is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and so on.

In contrast to coherentism's web and foundationalism's pyramid, Vanhoozer proposes the postfoundationalist metaphor of a map.[6] We have an interpretive framework with which to work (our map; the canon-linguistic approach), but there must be some connection between the framework and the reality to which it corresponds (the topography; God) in order for the map to be of any use. As Vanhoozer remarks, "some filters allow true knowledge to get through." This is the aspectival realism component of his project. It is clear that Vanhoozer thinks of this as part-and-parcel of an epistemological fallibilism, that is, a willingness to test and refine one's hermeneutical and epistemological framework, or to correct the topographical features recorded on one's map in order to bring it into closer conformity with the data.

Vanhoozer is very much the theological magpie, picking up different philosophical ideas lying around which seem particularly useful to his own project.[7] So, in addition to these remarks about postfoundationalism, he also helps himself to aspects of Plantinga's Warrant Epistemology, even though Plantinga is a moderate foundationalist.[8] What he likes is Plantinga's notion of a design plan, with its reliabilist account of human knowledge. On this way

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[6] See: DD, pp. 294-95.

[7] Lest the reader misunderstand, this comment is not meant pejoratively. Theologians have always picked up whatever philosophical tools they find lying around, and pressed them into philosophical service. In this manner, Vanhoozer is simply carrying forward an ancient and venerable theological tradition.

[8] However, it should be noted that although Plantinga is a moderate foundationalist his collaborator in Reformed Epistemology, Nicholas Wolterstorff, does not describe himself as a foundationalist. My point here is just that Vanhoozer utilizes aspects of Plantinga's warrant project without (apparently) commitment to his moderate foundationalism. But one could be a non-foundationalist and a Reformed Epistemologist—Wolterstorff being a case in point. It might be that Wolterstorff's work would be more congenial to Vanhoozer in this respect, as it has been to other aspects of his project, e.g. the application of speech-act theory to claims about the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

of thinking, what we believe is innocent until proven guilty. Such beliefs are formed by epistemic mechanisms that function according to a design plan aimed at truth.[9] In his earlier work Vanhoozer even flirts with the Plantinga-inspired notion of properly basic beliefs.[10] These are beliefs that are (a) non-inferential, that is, not held on the basis of other beliefs from which they are inferred, and (b) justified or warranted, that is, formed in an epistemically responsible manner.[11] But this drops out of his later work because, I assume, proper basicality is embedded in a foundationalist epistemology. (We shall return to this matter at the end of this paper.)

What this indicates is that in his earlier work Vanhoozer has thought with some care about the sort of epistemological concerns RT raises. But his reader will need to be familiar with that literature in order to see the whole picture; he makes little reference to this previous material in RT. When we lay these earlier remarks about his epistemology alongside his more recent comments in RT about theological method, a composite picture emerges, which I will attempt to sketch here.

First, Vanhoozer's remythologization of theology is not merely the offering up of one theological myth amongst many. He has some reason for thinking that his story offers a better, more reliable hermeneutical framework than, say, that of Bultmann or Feuerbach. What he can say is this. Although we cannot guarantee that we have the absolute truth of the matter, we can be sure that our hermeneutical framework, that is, the framework of canon-linguistic remythologized theology, provides some purchase on the truth, sufficient for us to be confident that it provides a theological myth or story more complete and more accurate than that of Bultmann or Feuerbach. Granted there is no "view from nowhere"—not even the canonical-linguistic view—from which to survey the epistemological landscape and make judgments about it. Nevertheless, what Vanhoozer provides is both internally coherent and a good fit with the biblical material, wherein (as he puts it) we find the mighty speech acts of God. Because our cognitive and linguistic faculties work according to a design-plan aimed at truth, we can move beyond perspectivalism to aspectivalism. That is, we can have some confidence that our theologically attuned hermeneutical frameworks give us the truth of the matter, or near enough, at least some (most?) of the time. Furthermore, because we are fashioned according to a design plan we can know certain things about God because he has designed us to be receptive to him.

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[9] See, e.g., IMT, pp. 204-207; DD pp. 301-305. As Plantinga memorably puts it, "a belief has warrant if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no malfunctioning) in a cognitive environment congenial for those faculties, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth." *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. viii-ix.

[10] IMT, pp. 288-92.

[11] For discussion, See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 83-84.

With this made a little clearer, the worry with which we began comes into focus. Despite his epistemological groundwork in DD it looks like his appeal to special revelation is what moors his hermeneutical framework to the theological truth of the matter in RT. Much of the work in this most recent volume involves the spinning out of his particular peroration on the claim that Scripture is the vehicle for divine discourse. But with so much riding on this claim, it is strange that he does not do more to shore up its apparent vulnerability. For, absent the notion of properly basic beliefs, it is not clear (to this reader, at least!) how he can ground the assertion that his hermeneutical framework, and his theological myth, is more likely to be closer to the truth of the matter than the frameworks and myths of his interlocutors. He has not provided an adequate means by which we can adjudicate whether his canon-linguistic approach to doctrine, or his more recent remythologizing approach to theology, is closer to the truth than either Bultmann or Feuerbach.

Rebutting the Problem of Projection

We come to the second part of the concern, which is more constructive in nature. Recall that our Problem of Projection was this:

> (PP) Christian theological language about God is disguised language about the needs of human beings: such language reifies cherished human religious thought, values, beliefs.

Rather than concede the point to Feuerbach, why not argue that his Problem does not adequately map what we find in Scripture? Is the doctrine of the Trinity, or the Incarnation, or the Atonement what we would expect a process of reifying human religious thought, values and beliefs to yield? That seems extremely unlikely, given the way in which these central and defining doctrines of Christianity have been hotly debated down through the centuries.[12] If Feuerbach was right, we would surely expect to find in Scripture reasons to think the theology it contains is merely reified human thought, values and beliefs that express human needs for the care of some transcendent being. Only if Feuerbach can make good on this claim can his objection go through. But there is reason to think he cannot make good on this claim. For it is not at all clear that all Christian theological language about God is *merely* disguised language about human beings, or that such language *necessarily* reifies cherished human thought, values, beliefs, or is *just* the expression of human needs. As it stands, the Problem of Projection is not strong enough to make good

[12] I do not deny that one can hotly dispute fictional entities, such as the merits of Captain Ahab or the vanities of Don Quixote. But no traditional, orthodox theologian thinks of Christian doctrine as analogous to discussion about fictional entities. The disputes over doctrines are more like disputes over hotly contested political positions. The contest only makes sense if it is understood to be wrangling about which view gets closest to, or instantiates, the truth of the matter.

on the claim that *all* theological language about God is mere projection-language. In fact, it is nowhere near being able to make good on that claim. But assume that the Feuerbachian is bold enough to make this stronger assertion about theological language concerning God. If we adjust the Problem of Projection accordingly, we come up with what we might call the Revised Problem of Projection (RPP):

> (RPP) *All* Christian theological language about God is *merely* disguised language about the needs of human beings: such language *necessarily* reifies cherished human religious thought, values, beliefs.

But upon reading this it becomes immediately apparent that this revised version of the Problem is just too strong as a statement about the sorts of writings we find in Scripture. In order to motivate this stronger version of the Problem one would have to offer a story about how all sorts of Christian theological language about God in Scripture, including central and defining doctrines like the Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement are *mere* reifications of human thought, values and beliefs, and cannot be anything more than this. But such a story is likely to be extremely unconvincing. For it will have to account for the fact that many thinkers down through the centuries since the writing of the New Testament have found these doctrines to be objectionable *precisely because they do not comport with certain cherished human religious thoughts, values and beliefs*. For these doctrines make the extraordinary and counterintuitive claims that that one entity can be both one and three at one-and-the-same-time; that one person can be both fully human and fully divine; and that one innocent person can through some act of self-sacrifice blot out the guilt of a multitude of others, or at least, bring about the reconciliation of some number of alienated individuals with God. These do not look like instances of theological language that reifies certain cherished human thoughts, values and beliefs. In fact, it looks like these doctrines run against the grain of certain cherished human thoughts, values and beliefs, such as the deep-seated intuition that one entity cannot also be three, or that one person cannot subsist in two distinct natures, or even the intuition that an innocent cannot be punished in place of the guilty.

It might be thought that even if this is right, the Feuerbachian can reply that theological doctrines as counterintuitive as the Trinity, Incarnation or Atonement may still be the drivers of human needs, and that is all that is required for the Problem of Projection to go through. If human needs are expressed by these doctrines, then there appears to be some motivation for the Problem after all. But even here it is not at all clear that the Feuerbachian is right. If these doctrines are merely projections of human needs, are they what we would expect to find as expressions of such need? Perhaps humans long for a divine parent, even a divine savior. Suppose that is true. That in-and-of-itself does no work in providing an explanation of how it is that we arrive at the truly staggering claims of the Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement. A God who is not merely one but three, who becomes human without ceasing to be

divine, who is everlastingly human, and who dies a criminal death does not sound like the stuff of human longing but human nightmare—a world turned upside down. (That, I suggest, is an indication of the truth of the Gospel.)

If this is right, then it turns out that Feuerbach's Problem is an undercutting defeater[13] for orthodox Christian belief in the God who speaks in Scripture that fails to adequately account for features of at least three of the central and defining doctrines of Christian theology—doctrines implied by the very Scriptures by means of which God speaks and acts.

As far as I can see, there is nothing preventing Vanhoozer from helping himself to this line of reasoning against Feuerbach and the Problem of Projection. It would appear to fit with other things he says, and may even provide a means by which to strengthen or fill in lacunae in the presentation of his reasoning in RT. But he still needs to provide his readers with some reason, independent of this remedial argument, for adopting his remythologizing story about God's "projection" of himself in the speech acts of Scriptural drama rather than that offered by the demythologizers like Bultmann or Feuerbach. Without such explanation his account looks like it is merely one of many hermeneutical frameworks being hawked among the different stalls offering competing theological interpretations of Scripture. I have already hinted at one way in which Vanhoozer can provide this additional reason. He could reacquaint himself with Plantinga's warrant epistemology. Then he could claim that we know that Scripture is the place at which God speaks provided our belief that this is the place at which God speaks is warranted. And, as noted previously, for Plantinga a belief is warranted provided it is "produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no malfunctioning) in a cognitive environment congenial for those faculties, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth".[14] It might even be that belief that Scripture is divine revelation, or the place at which God speaks, is a properly basic belief.

This is not to deny, like Barth, that God may also speak to us in other places as he may speak to us "through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming scrub, or a dead dog." He may even speak to us through "a pagan or an atheist".[15] But there is something about the way in which he

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[13] "Defeaters" are objections to an argument that provide reasons to challenge the warrant a particular belief has. Defeaters come in several varieties. Undercutting defeaters are objections that seek to undercut the warrant a particular belief enjoys, e.g. the objection to belief in the existence of the Judeo-Christian God based on the notion that if there was a God, he would make his presence manifest to all human beings. The fact that God is "hidden", at an epistemic distance from most human beings, undercuts belief in the Judeo-Christian God who is said to desire relationship with human beings, and to reveal himself to them for that purpose.

[14] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, pp. viii-ix.

[15] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/I, Second Edition (trans. G. W. Bromiley; ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), p. 55.

speaks via Scripture that is normative. And we know this via the warranted belief we have that this is the place at which God speaks in a revelatory manner. It might be a challenge to marry such an appeal to warranted belief with postfoundationalism, especially if the belief in question is thought to be properly basic (i.e. the properly basic belief that when I read Scripture, God speaks to me or the belief that Scripture the means by which God reveals himself – assuming these are good candidates for properly basic beliefs).[16] But it is at least possible that some Christians have such beliefs that provide justification for the claim that Scripture is divine discourse, or is the place at which God speaks. And it does not seem terribly outlandish to think at least some of these people hold such beliefs basically, or non-inferentially. If they do hold such beliefs in a basic way, and if these beliefs are warranted or epistemically well formulated, they are properly basic beliefs. For those who do not come to their belief in Scripture in this manner, some other means of grounding his appeal to revelation must be sought. In which case, and aside from considerations about rebutting the Problem of Projection, the reader of RT is faced with a trilemma: cling to the rather frail reed of the Barth-inspired appeal to revelation in order to moor the remythologization of theology to some truth about the divine authorship of Scripture (despite the fact that Vanhoozer provides insufficient grounds for preferring this to any other theological myth); provide some more robust alternative, which builds upon the existing edifice of Vanhoozer's first theology (taking up his penchant for postfoundationalism); or, setting the postfoundationalism of DD to one side, ground the claim that God speaks by augmenting an appeal to Barth with one to Plantinga.[17]

[16] It might be here that Vanhoozer could look to a more Wolterstorffian account of post-(classical) foundationalism to augment his own project.

[17] I am grateful to Gavin D'Costa and Tom McCall for reading through and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Paul Helm and Jordan Wessling, whose remarks saved me from several egregious mistakes. I am also grateful to Kevin Vanhoozer for some helpful correspondence on his views and for the characteristically generous manner in which he interacted with my criticisms of his work.

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 41–51

God, Plurality, and Theological Method: A Response to Kevin Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology*

John R. Franke
Yellowstone Theological Institute

Introduction

In many ways *Remythogizing Theology* (hereafter RT) is a continuation of the methodological proposal Kevin Vanhoozer offers in *The Drama of Doctrine*. By that I mean that RT remains a work that is heavily, and from my perspective, decisively devoted to methodological considerations. To be sure, RT does offer some material constructions concerning the doctrine of God, but the focus is in many respects still on the formal theological proposal Vanhoozer has put forward. This is not necessarily a criticism, in the contemporary climate of academic theology it seems well neigh impossible to escape from the demands of method, particularly when a complex and detailed methodological proposal has been put forward and serves as the backdrop for subsequent work. RT is a richly detailed, complex, and sophisticated work in which the conclusions concerning the doctrine of God are leveraged in the service of methodological issues. This is no bad thing, since theological method ought to be determined by the subject matter of theological inquiry rather than allowing methodological considerations to control the subsequent doctrinal articulations. However, Vanhoozer's abiding interest in philosophical issues leads to a strong accent on methodological concerns throughout the book.

I mention this because in the response I offer here I will focus primarily on some general issues related to the theological method that result from Vanhoozer's doctrine of God as they are developed in RT rather than attempting a detailed engagement with the constructive details concerning the doctrine of God. I suppose the biggest question I find myself asking concerns the notion of God as a communicative agent as **the** formal and material principle of theology. It is not that I think Vanhoozer is wrong in identifying God as a communicative agent, both within God's eternal communal life as well as in God's economic relations with creation. I do not. In fact I am in thorough agreement with him on this point. God is a communicative agent. What I have concerns about is the exclusive way in which the notion of God as communicative agent seems to function in the theological method and construction of theology offered in this volume. Vanhoozer asserts: "The central wager in the present project is that both the transcendence and immanence of God are best viewed in terms of communicative agency rather than motional causality" (RT, p. 24). Emerging from this perspective is the

notion that the building blocks of theology should be interpersonal categories rather than causal. And that this way of talking about God should be seen in metaphysical terms. As Vanhoozer goes on to say: "A metaphysics of the Christian theodrama will therefore give pride of place to the speech and action of the divine *dramatis personae*. For the triune God in communicative action is the touchstone of reality according to this theodramatic vision of the whole" (RT, p. 25). While there is much to admire in the corrective this offers to well established forms of traditional theology, I still chafe at what seem to me to be the pretensions of either/or metaphysical assertions about God. The principles of divine accommodation and theological plurality ought to make us wary of such overarching assertions. In order to address this concern, I will briefly rehearse arguments I have made in greater detail in other places and ask some questions of Vanhoozer's work.[1]

Divine Accommodation

The idea of theological accommodation suggests that in revelation God does not break through language and situatedness, but rather enters into the linguistic setting and uses language in the act of revelation as a means of accommodation to the situation and situatedness of human beings. The church has long maintained the distinction between finite human knowledge and divine knowledge. Even revelation does not provide human beings with a knowledge that exactly corresponds to that of God. The infinite qualitative distinction between God and human beings suggests the accommodated character of all human knowledge of God. For John Calvin, this means that in the process of revelation God "adjusts" and "descends" to the capacities of human beings in order to reveal the infinite mysteries of divine reality, which by their very nature are beyond the capabilities of human creatures to grasp due to the limitations that arise from their finite character.[2] These observations give rise to the theological adage, *finitum non capax infiniti*, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite.

The natural limitations of human beings with respect to the knowledge of God made known in the process of revelation extend not only to the cognitive and imaginative faculties but also to the creaturely mediums by which revelation is communicated. In other words, the very means used by God in revelation, the mediums of human nature, language and speech, bear the inherent limitations of their creaturely character in spite of the use God makes of them as the bearers of revelation. In Chalcedonian Christology, the divine

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[1] See John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005) and John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2009).

[2] On Calvin's understanding of divine accommodation, see Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, third edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 3-24.

and human natures of Christ remain distinct and unimpaired even after their union in Jesus of Nazareth. Reformed theological formulations of Christology consistently maintained that one of the implications of the Chalcedonian definition was the denial of the "divinization" of the human nature of Christ in spite of its relationship to the divine nature. With respect to the revelation of God in Christ, this means that the creaturely medium of revelation, in this case the human nature of Christ, is not divinized through union with the divine nature but remains subject to the limitations and contingencies of its creaturely character. Yet in spite of these limitations, God is truly revealed through the appointed creaturely medium. One of the entailments of this position is its affirmation of the contextual character of revelation. Since the creaturely mediums God employs in revelation are not divinized, they remain subject to their historically and culturally conditioned character. It simply needs to be added that what is true of the human nature of Jesus Christ with respect to divinization is also true of the words of the prophets and apostles in canonical Scripture. The use that God makes of the creaturely medium of human language in the inspiration and witness of Scripture does not entail its divinization. Language, like the human nature of Jesus, remains subject to the historical, social, and cultural limitations and contingencies inherent in its creaturely character.

This notion of accommodation is important in that it reminds of our limitations as finite creatures with respect to our knowledge of God. Christian teaching has long maintained the distinction between what we know and what God knows, even concerning things that God has revealed to us. Thus, even revelation does not provide human beings with a knowledge that exactly corresponds to that of God. The distinction between God's knowledge and that of finite human beings suggests that all human knowledge of God, and therefore ultimate truth, is the result of God's accommodation. In other words, in the process of revelation, God makes allowances for the limits of our understanding and descends to our level much the way a parent does with a child in order to provide instruction. God uses human nature, language, and speech to instruct us about the shape of our beliefs and the conduct of our lives. Yet these means are limited by virtue of the fact that they are created and finite. That is to say, they bear inherent limitations in spite of the use God makes of them in revelation. Further, Christian teaching on creation reminds us that although we are created in the image of God, we are finite and are qualitatively different from God. Our perspectives and understandings are shaped and limited by our particular locations and social conditions. From my perspective this situation is responsible, in part, for the multitude of Christian perspectives that are part of theological discourse. One of the questions in the present volume is how Vanhoozer understands the significance of divine accommodation in the methodological and material formulation of theology.

Vanhoozer makes mention of this phenomenon, noting that "divine accommodation is a matter of God's speaking through a variety of different voice-ideas in different ways. The canon itself employs shifting perspectives, some of which highlight God's authorship, others human agency, and still others Satan's principalities and powers" (RT, p. 349). Yet in spite of this acknowledgment of the principle of accommodation, it seems to play little formal role in the development of the doctrine of God proper as presented in this project or in the theological method that underpins the material presentation. Vanhoozer is not alone in choosing not to more explore the implications of divine accommodation more fully. John Calvin provides what is perhaps the classic articulation of this idea in the Protestant tradition. Yet beyond asserting it, Calvin does not really explore its implications for the development of a systematic approach to theology in a rigorous fashion. In appropriating Calvin's notion of accommodation, Vanhoozer says that what "Calvin terms accommodation is synonymous with what the present work has referred to as divine 'systems of projection'" (RT, p. 480). He understands this to mean that "God is free to make use of creaturely forms as media of his communicative action and self-communication" (RT, p. 481). In developing this conception of accommodation he underscores the affirmation that God is free to communicate through creaturely media. However, he does not seem to attend to the potential limitations that this places on creaturely media for the construction of theology or theological systems. Note that the limitation is not on God but rather on human beings whose knowledge of God comes through particular instantiations of socially constructed media. The question is what limitations are imposed on construction of theology from the human side due to the nature of the media that are used by God in self-revelation. In light of an affirmation of divine accommodation, with an emphasis on the limitations of language for knowledge of God, is it coherent to then articulate an approach to theology and theological method that develops one particular notion, in this case that of God as communicative agent, as "the touchstone of reality." From my perspective, divine accommodation precludes the strength Vanhoozer's claim. This challenge is heightened in the face of biblical and theological plurality.

Biblical Plurality

The result of divine accommodation is reflected in the contextual and plural character of the biblical witness. Canonical Scripture is itself a diverse collection of witnesses or, put another way, a manifold witness to the revelation of divine truth. In fact, the Bible is not so much a single book as it is a collection of authorized texts written from different settings and perspectives. Each of the voices represented in the canonical collection maintains a distinct point of view that emerges from a particular time and place. In other words, the Bible is polyphonic, made up of many voices. The self-revelatory speech-

act of God is received among diverse communities over long periods of time and in a plurality of cultural settings. The human reception and response is shaped by the communal and cultural settings in which revelation occurs. Divine revelation is received in a plurality of cultural settings, and is expressed and proclaimed from these diverse contexts to others over the course of history in accordance with the sending of the church into the world as a representative of the image and mission of God.

As truth written, Scripture paradigmatically reflects this plurality and diversity. In this way Scripture is the constitutive and normative witness for the formation and proclamation of Christian community. At the same time, it is also the first in an ever expanding series of presentations of the Christian faith throughout history for which it is paradigmatic. In this multifaceted and diverse collection of writings, each offers a distinct perspective that contributes to the whole such that none of the works included can be understood properly apart from their relation to the others. The Bible contains a diversity of literary forms such as narrative, law, prophecy, wisdom, parable, epistle and others. And within each of these forms we have the expression of numerous canonical perspectives. As mentioned in the first chapter the mere presence of four different Gospel accounts offers the most straightforward and significant demonstration of plurality in the biblical canon. The inclusion of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each with its distinctive perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus alerts us to the pluriform character of the gospel. This stands as a powerful reminder that the witness of the Christian community to the gospel of Jesus Christ can never be contained in a single universal account. Instead it is always perspectival and characterized by a diversity of forms in keeping with the tradition of the biblical canon.

When we attempt to ease the difficulties of the multiple perspectives in Scripture to make matters more compact, clear, and manageable we suffer the loss of plurality and diversity that is woven into the very fabric of Scripture, and by extension, the divine design of God. If we had only one witness to the gospel in Scripture then perhaps it could be asserted that a single description of the Christian faith was adequate and sufficient for all. But the multiplicity and plurality of the biblical witness stands against such a notion. This means that true "catholic" or "universal" faith is pluralistic. "It is 'according to the whole,' not in the sense that it encompasses the whole in a single, systematic, entirely coherent unit, but rather in the sense that it allows for the openness, for the testimony of plural perspectives and experiences, which is implied in the fourfold canonical witness to the gospel."[3] The multiplicity of the canonical witness to the gospel is not incidental to the shape of the community from which it emerged under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and which it envisions for the future.

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[3] Justo L. González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 22.

Attempts to suppress the plurality of the canonical witness by means of an overarching, universalistic account lead to serious distortions of the gospel and the community that is called to bear witness to it. The plurality of forms and perspectives imbedded in the biblical witness suggests that no single voice or interpretive approach will be able to do justice to this diversity. Further, it may also be taken to imply that any of the forms and perspectives in the Bible itself will fail to bear adequate witness to the self-revelation of the Triune God if they are abstracted from the other forms and perspectives and used in a reductionistic fashion. In relating these diverse forms as the Word of God it is important to envision their plurality-in-unity and unity-in-plurality.

As such, the Bible has given rise to a variety of meanings and interpretations that are derived from the work of exegesis, theology, and the particular social and historical situations that have shaped its interpreters. In the task of seeking to read the Bible as a unity-in-plurality and plurality-in-unity, we should expect a variety of models and interpretations due to the very nature of the canonical texts themselves. Scripture itself authorizes multiple perspectives within a set of possibilities that are also appropriately circumscribed by the shape and content of the canon. Indeed, the theological and ecclesial plurality of the church is a faithful expression of the plurality contained in Scripture. Plurality is the intention and will of God as a faithful expression of truth. In the words of Lamin Sanneh: "For most of us it is difficult enough to respect those with whom we might disagree, to say nothing of those who might be different from us in culture, language, and tradition. For all of us pluralism can be a rock of stumbling, but for God it is the cornerstone of the universal design."[4]

Theological Plurality

The outworking of biblical plurality is that Scripture depicts God in a rich and vast array of descriptions that arise from various human contexts and situations that provide truthful information about God. Yet these images, pictures, and metaphors remain inadequate descriptors of the divine when compared to the reality that is God in Godself. In addition, no one of these biblical descriptions can be developed apart from the others into a systematic account of the divine being without distorting the diverse picture of God provided in the pages of Scripture. Any effort at articulating a doctrine of God must allow for diversity and plurality if it is to be faithful to the biblical witness.[5]

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[4] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 27.

[5] For an example of what this might look like, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *The Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

The diverse descriptions of God contained in the Bible give rise to second-order theological models that are shaped by Scripture, various cultural settings, and the traditions of the church. The intent of this constructive process is to envision all of life in relationship to the living God revealed in Jesus Christ by means of biblically normed, historically informed, and contextually relevant models and articulations of Christian faith that communicate the Christian story. Theological models function as heuristic conceptions that enable complex issues and questions to be opened up for reflection and critical scrutiny.

Avery Dulles defines a model as "a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated."[6] And while models are not able to fully capture all the complexities and nuances of the phenomenon under consideration, they are able to stimulate engagement and interaction with it. Models are constructions and not exact representations of particular phenomena. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity described in chapter two serves as a model of God and the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It does not provide a direct and literal picture of God but it does, based on God's self-revelation, disclose actual features of God's character and the divine life. It is a second-order linguistic construction that, while not an exact replica of God, does provide genuine comprehension concerning the nature and character of God. As Stephen Bevans puts it, models function like images and symbols and "provide ways through which one knows reality in all its richness and complexity. Models provide knowledge that is always partial and inadequate but never false or merely subjective."[7] The work of chemists in studying molecules provides a helpful analogy. Chemists study and learn about molecules and molecular structure through the construction of models, but we do not think that the pictures of these models found in science text books are simply large-scale replicas of molecules. They are analogue models with structural similarity to molecules that facilitate genuine engagement and understanding with the phenomena we refer to as molecules and molecular structure.

The results and products of the constructive work of theology function in a similar fashion. As analogue or heuristic models of God and the relationship of God to the created order they facilitate engagement and provide accurate insight and understanding without the claim that they provide an exact representation of God. God is transcendent and unique, and categorically different from anything in creation. At their best, models of God provide us with images and symbols which enable us to conceive of the richness and complexity of the divine life and action of God in the world. At the same

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[6] Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, reprint edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

[7] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, revised and expanded edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), p. 30.

time, even effective and useful models that provide genuine insight into theological questions must still be characterized as producing knowledge that is nevertheless partial, fragmentary, and provisional. The early church theologian Irenaeus noted in accordance with the Scriptures that God is light. However, while acknowledging the truthfulness of this assertion, he also observed that God is unlike any light that we know or have access to as finite creatures.[8] In other words, while biblical revelation provides us with truthful statements about God, they cannot be read too literally or exclusively. Reflecting on this assertion by Irenaeus, George Hunsinger observes that "God's cognitive availability through divine revelation allows us, Irenaeus believed, to predicate descriptions of God that are as true as we can make them, while God's irreducible ineffability nonetheless renders even our best predications profoundly inadequate."[9] This underscores the accommodated and metaphorical nature of language, particularly with respect to the infinite and transcendent God of Christian faith. Yet the revelation of God calls on us to speak of God as representatives of God and participants in the divine mission of reconciliation. Thus, we construct models of God that are in keeping with God's self-revelation and that, as such, have analogical affinity with the nature and character of God and the relationship between God and the world.

In addition, these models do not function apart from other models. That is to say they are inclusive rather than exclusive. Inclusive models suggest the importance of multiple perspectives and angles of vision in the exploration and interpretation of theological truth. Bevans comments that due to "the complexity of the reality one is trying to express in terms of models, such a variety of models might even be imperative" and goes on to suggest that "an exclusive use of one model might distort the very reality one is trying to understand."[10] In light of the finite and fallen character of human knowledge and the divine subject matter of theology, we conclude that a proper conception of God defies a unique description and requires a diversity of perspectives. From this perspective all constructions are inadequate on their own and need to be supplemented by other models. This does not preclude the possibility of the adoption of one particular model as the most helpful from a particular vantage point, but as Avery Dulles comments, even this procedure does not require one to "deny the validity of what other theologians may affirm with the help of other models. A good theological system will generally recognize the limitations of its own root metaphors and will therefore be

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[8] Saint Irenaeus, *Five Books of Saint Irenaeus Against Heresies* (trans. John Keble; Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1872): § 2.13.4, pp. 123-24.

[9] George Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 47.

[10] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 30.

open to criticism from other points of view."[11] In other words, no one model is able to account for all the diversity of the biblical witness, the diversity of perspectives on it, and the complexity in the interaction between gospel and culture that gives rise to theology.

The constructed, contextual, and fragmentary character points to the need for a plurality of models in the task of theology. No single model will be adequate to account for the plurality of the biblical witness, the diverse perspectives on it in the tradition of the church, and the complexity entailed in the interaction between the gospel and culture that gives rise to theological reflection. The distinction between finite creature and infinite creator and the diversity of human situatedness and experience affirms that a plurality of models in dialectical relation to one another is imperative in the task of bearing faithful witness to the subject of theology. From my perspective, the exclusive use of one model of theology, even one as basic and helpful as God as communicative agent, will lead to a distortion of the very reality to which the model is attempting to make better known. The divine subject matter of theology, the limitations of human finitude, and the witness of Scripture itself lead to the conclusion that a biblically faithful understanding of God defies a single unique theological description and calls forth a plurality of perspectives in in relationship to each other.

Now in one sense, this account of plurality points to one of the strengths of Vanhoozer's dramatic and performance oriented understanding of doctrine and the model of God and revelation he offers in RT. It does in fact give rise to a plurality of models. However, while this plurality is commendable it is still contained within a particular theological framework, God as communicative agent, with a particular emphasis on speech and conversation as opposed to other forms of communication. But this seems to have the effect of rendering large swaths of the Christian tradition to the margins of theological discourse. For instance, in an online review of RT, Paul Helm raises a challenge to Vanhoozer about the marginalization of creedal language in his understanding of doctrine and the conception of God that follows form it.[12] Helm suggests that a thoroughly dramatized approach to doctrine fails to take into account with sufficient seriousness what he calls the "one-liners" about God that are a staple of the biblical witness and do not require, on his account, a dramatic interpretive approach. In the tradition, an emphasis on such statements has been the foundation for a more dogmatic approach to God and theology. On the other side of the ledger is the mystical tradition, which raises a challenge to all scholastic and overly intellectualized approaches to God. Both of these conceptions have deep standing in the tradition and neither would seem to have much of a place in Vanhoozer's

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[11] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, pp. 34-35.

[12] Paul Helm, "Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology*," http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2010/05/this-is-first-of-several-posts-on-kevin.html.

model. Hence, the resulting plurality will be skewed in a particular direction that will lead to distortions in the multifaceted and polyphonic description of God contained in Scripture and the Christian tradition.

Here I think of a friend of mine, Mabiala Kenzo, a Congolese theologian who spends half of the year teaching for the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Boma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the other half at Ambrose Seminary in Calgary. Kenzo is a former student of Vanhoozer's whose work on Paul Ricoeur is a very powerful piece of scholarship that works out the significance of Ricoeur's thought from the perspective of African theology.[13] Kenzo maintains that nothing is more important for African theologians than to throw off the colonizing tendencies of Western theology and to offer distinctively African contributions to theological discourse that draw from their particular experiences, contexts, and cultures in interaction with the Bible. As a self-identified evangelical, Kenzo deems the canon of Scripture to be non-negotiable in this enterprise. But all other traditions of intellectual discourse such as epistemology and metaphysics as they have been developed in the West or the conclusions of ecumenical councils are negotiable and must be so if African theology is to flourish and make its distinctive contribution to the talk of the church catholic about God. On the one hand, I think that Vanhoozer's approach to God and theological method would be interested in this sort of activity given its openness to plurality and diversity. On the other hand I wonder if it would still seek to exercise a colonizing influence on the sort of work Kenzo describes because of its insistence on a particular way of understanding God as communicative agent. I see encouraging signs of the former in the openness to plurality and diversity that are part of Vanhoozer's approach but also worrying indicators of the later in his assertion that God as communicative agent is **the** formal and material principle of theology. To the extent that he intends his approach as a supplement to ongoing, second-order, and contextual discourse about God, doctrine, and theology I believe Vanhoozer's work makes a significant contribution to that conversation. To the extent that he intends his model to supplant and eclipse other approaches, I fear that it will have the same colonizing tendencies that have marked so much of the Christendom shaped theological traditions of the West.

Concluding Questions

In light of the above, let me pose two questions to Kevin, one more theoretical, the other more practical: First, do you accept this interpretation? Are you intending the model you are proposing to eclipse other approaches to God and doctrine or do you see it merely as a supplement to other models? It

[13] Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo, *Dialectic of Sedimentation and Innovation: Paul Ricoeur on Creativity after the Subject* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

seems to me more of the former, but I could be misreading you. If you generally intend the former (eclipse) how would you respond to the challenge that other models have support in Scripture and the Christian tradition, and if the latter (supplement) would you be open to seeing the limitations of the model you are proposing and if so, what might they be?

Second, it seems to me that good theology ought to help the church wrestle with and address the questions of the day. In my church (PCUSA) and I think yours (I believe you are, or at least were, a member of a PCUSA congregation) we have recently, as many will be aware, altered our ordination standards to allow for persons in the GLBT community to be ordained. This is, of course, highly controversial and is leading to factionalism in the denomination and in some cases separation. While many see this as simply unbiblical, others have made a vigorous argument in favor of this change based on a dynamic understanding of Scripture that is quite similar to aspects of the performance oriented or dramatic approach to God's communicative action in Scripture that you are setting forth. Let me pause here to say that I do not believe this means your model is inherently problematic or that it necessarily commits you to a particular position on the issue at hand. My question is: beyond merely asserting your particular position on the issue at hand, how might your remythologized and dramatic approach to God and doctrine help the church to think through the disputed questions of homosexuality and faithful forms of Christian life in relation to the unity of the church. Does it offer some advantages in addressing this situation that other approaches have not offered?

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Honest to God, a Voice from Heaven? Communicative Theism in Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology*

Fred Sanders
Biola University

Introduction

Kevin Vanhoozer's recent book *Remythologizing Theology* [1] begins beguilingly, with a voice coming down out of heaven. On the mountain of transfiguration, the voice of God testifies aloud to Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 17:5). "We heard this voice borne from heaven," reports the apostle Peter, "for we were with him on the holy mountain, and we have the prophetic word made more sure" (2 Pet. 1:17). There is much going on in the story of transfiguration, and in Peter's interpretation of it. "Yet what stands out," says Vanhoozer, "is the voice from heaven."

Back in the 1960s when theology could make headlines by killing off its god every now and then, John A. T. Robinson published his provocative book *Honest to God*.[2] "Our image of God must go," said Bishop Robinson, scorning the mythological idea of God as a supernatural agent who intervenes in the world; a being like us, but bigger and higher up. There is no way for rational people living a modern world to continue thinking of God as a supernatural being living "up there" somewhere, or even "out there" somewhere. Mixing a lot of Tillich with a little late Bonhoeffer, Robinson called for modern man to recognize that there was no room for God in a scientific universe, except perhaps as the ground of being itself. Fortunately, Jesus brings a kind of message from this ground of being: "It is in making himself nothing, in his utter self-surrender to others in love, that he discloses and lays bare the Ground of man's being as Love."[3] In fact, reflected Robinson, "assertions about God are in the last analysis assertions about Love."[4] That was 1963. What would the bishop say if he knew that nearly fifty years later, one of the most estimable theologians in the English-speaking world could, with a straight face and no ironic detachment, begin a major work of Christian doctrine with a voice from heaven? The God of Robinson was not even up in

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[1] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remthologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Hereinafter, cited in the body of the text as RT, followed by page reference.

[2] John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

[3] Robinson, *Honest*, p. 75.

[4] Robinson, *Honest*, p. 105.

heaven, and if he were, he certainly would not be so rude as to speak from there.

And yet here is Vanhoozer's big, interesting, intellectually serious book, with a quotation from God speaking in a voice from heaven, on the very first page. And from that opening gambit to the final sentence, "Only the communicating God can help" (RT, p. 504), the book is "all about voices –literal and metaphorical, biblical and theological, human and divine –and their ongoing interaction" (RT, p. xvii). Honest to God, this is a book about God speaking, and Christian theologians taking that voice seriously. But nothing is as simple as Bishop Robinson made it seem when he set up and knocked down his mythological straw god. The real voice of the real God from the real heaven is far more sophisticated than it seemed to some theologians at midcentury.

I would like to make three points. First, Kevin Vanhoozer has definitely moved on from method to matter with this book, and the matter is the doctrine of God. Not only is the matter the doctrine of God, but it turns out that something is the matter with the doctrine of God, and Vanhoozer writes to interrupt the flow of recent conversations. Second, this style of theology called remythologizing pays attention to Scripture in a powerful way, attending equally to what Scripture says and to how it says it. And third, none of this works without the doctrine of the Trinity, which turns out to be not just a doctrine announced by a voice from heaven, but our chance to overhear the conversation of the voices in heaven. Honest to God.

I. Method and Matter: The Doctrine of God

Vanhoozer has developed a reputation for reflecting deeply and at length on theological and hermeneutical prolegomena; perhaps too much at length. In the *Preface*, he admits that he has been "as guilty as anyone of procrastinating in the prolegomenal fields," but with this text he has succeeded in moving on from preparatory methodology to the thing itself, theology proper, the doctrine of God. More on that in a moment.

But first, let us admit that while it is good to get past prolegomena, there's no reason to rush away from methodology. Some sort of commitments about theological method are always at work underneath any presentation of doctrine, and it's better to be methodologically self-aware than oblivious. A great many pages of *Remythologizing Theology* are still devoted to methodology in a certain sense, and to defining what sort of theology this remythologizing is. Vanhoozer's style is to do something doctrinal and then to reflect on the meaning and reason and method of what he has done. He remains evangelical theology's greatest abstractor, conversationalist, and critic (if by "critic" we mean something more like a music critic or art critic than a biblical critic). He almost never operates at the "four views" level, simply surveying available options. That pedagogically useful method has a deadening effect on con-

structive doctrine. Vanhoozer's approach is to try something, redescribe it, abstract the principles from it, conceptually elaborate those, and then reapply them to the subject matter for further applications. Here in his theology of the God who communicates, for example, he describes his method in terms of listening to voices: "The primary voice I strain to hear is that of the triune God, discerned above all through the self-attestation of the living Word in the polyphonic Scriptures, aided and abetted by the antiphonal ecclesial choirs from East and West, as well as the occasional theological soloist" (RT, p. xvii). And of course there is plenty of hermeneutics here. I don't think we should ever expect Vanhoozer to stop honing his hermeneutics. But for all the ongoing interest in methodology, Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing* takes the step forward to doctrine proper, and his primary doctrine is that God communicates. It is no merely methodological point that God communicates; it puts us squarely into "first theology," "that coordinated construal of God, Scripture, and hermeneutics that distinguishes one theological approach from another" (RT, pp. 13-14). In this book, the emphasis falls on the doctrine of God, and if it is not a complete doctrine of God, at least it is "an essay in aid of the development of the doctrine of God."

To be precise, the doctrine of God has been developing in a certain direction for some time now, and Vanhoozer is staging an intervention in that development. He is plotting the overthrow of recent orthodoxy. I say "plotting" as a Vanhoozeresque pun, because "plot" is the primary meaning behind the root word "myth" in this project. "Mythos is Aristotle's term for dramatic plot: a unified course of action that includes a beginning, middle, and end" (RT, p. 5). To plot the overthrow of recent orthodoxy is to correct recent theological trends by paying more disciplined attention to the unified course of action carried out by God in the Son and the Spirit, and recorded in the pages of Scripture.

What Vanhoozer chronicles in this book is the rise of a new kind of theism, which he gives the appropriately unwieldy title of "voluntary kenotic-perichoretic relational theism" (RT, p. 175), or sometimes "voluntary kenotic-perichoretic relational panentheism" (RT, p. 297) or ontotheology. By assigning an almost comically long and awkward name to this diffuse trend in modern theology, Vanhoozer accomplishes a couple of things. First, he makes the doctrine seem like a difficult construct. This is a nice rhetorical feat. The advocates of relational panentheism usually present it as the common-sense view, suggesting that anyone who ever prayed to the living God was presupposing relational panentheism, while only a seminary student could ever read enough theology to think of God any other way. Second, he throws erudite adjectives at the thing until something sticks. If you've read anything in modern theology, one or two of those half-dozen terms will ring a bell and let you know what body of literature he's addressing. This approach works well because, after all, *Remythologizing* is high-level theological project intended for an audience that has already read a lot of theology. Vanhoozer is not writing for

beginners here, though he always writes very clearly. But in this volume he is joining the conversation in the middle, and much has already been said. He is necessarily commenting on vast quantities of other books. So calling the movement kenotic-perichoretic relational *et cetera* accomplishes much.

Stated most broadly, this new theism reaches as far back as Spinoza and is as recent as open theism and the latest transmogrifications of process theology. It is apparently what almost everybody thinks now about how God relates to the world. This trend of thought is set in intentional opposition to "classical theism," that long-standing central Christian tradition of biblical theology elaborated in critical collaboration with Greek metaphysical concepts and vocabulary. While admitting that the older tradition had some problems, Vanhoozer tends to call the older tradition at its best "biblical-theological classical theism." The rejection of classical theism in favor of voluntary kenotic-perichoretic relational theism got its start with the movement to dehellenize the simple gospel: "That the God of classical theism is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but the God of Greek metaphysics has become the 'new orthodoxy': something everywhere believed by (almost) everyone" (RT, p. 89). But as Vanhoozer argues, the widespread, deconstructive "fear of Greek-think" (RT, p. 90) throws out the baby with the bathwater. A sympathetic reading of the church fathers, medievals, and reformers shows that they were hardly captive to Hellenistic categories. Though using them, they pressed through them at crucial points and made the categories serve the new message.

> Greek philosophy affirmed 'that which is,' but church theology affirmed 'he who is' and discovered 'who he is' and 'what he is like' thanks to 'what he has done' in Israel and in Jesus Christ. The God of what we may call biblical-theological classical theism is neither indifferent nor apathetic but 'with us' and 'for us' (RT, p. 93).

In the struggle between classical theism and the intentionally counter-classical relational panentheism, Vanhoozer clearly takes sides. He describes his offering as communicative theism, but that is not so much a brand new third option as it is a kinder, gentler classical theism. Perhaps a neo-classical theism, or a communicative twist on the classical statement.

For example, in the crucial question about whether God suffers, Vanhoozer ultimately answers no, contra Moltmann, just as he had earlier insisted that God truly acts and speaks, contra Bultmann. Despite the fact that the remythologizing in the title rhymes with and counteracts the demythologizing of Rudolf Bultmann, the more prominent theological foil throughout this project is Moltmann, the most important leader of what some have called the "theopaschite revolution" of the twentieth century. In a passage quoted by Vanhoozer, Hans urs von Balthasar noted that "Today's theologians, while they are aware of the traditional axiom of God's unchangeability, and notwithstanding the danger of falling back into mythology, seem to have no qualms about speaking of the pain of God" (RT, p. vii). If

the orthodoxy of the old classical theism depicted a God who could speak but not suffer, the new orthodoxy depicts one who cannot really speak, but can't help but suffer. One of the arguments of *Remythologizing* is that it is high time we got our anthropomorphisms in order.

Though divine suffering is a key issue, and the one that Vanhoozer chooses to end the book with, it is not the only aspect of the doctrine of God that he handles. There are three major issues named in the subtitle; along with divine authorship and divine passion there is divine action, a subject much discussed lately in the context of natural science. It raises the question "Is theism necessarily mythological?" (RT, p. 2) and shows up the new relational panentheism in its various forms as a way of sidestepping the problems apparently associated with affirming divine action. If classical theism runs the risk of being mythological by depicting God as an outside agent who intervenes abruptly, relational panentheism runs the risk of suggesting that God merely influences intelligent agents. This deadlock is one of the places where Vanhoozer's communicative theism indicates a third way: God does not abruptly intervene nor merely influence. Instead, as a communicator, God interjects (RT, p. 316).

So without mobilizing an entire doctrine of God, Vanhoozer judiciously picks his battle. A voice may come down from heaven, but Vanhoozer warns that anthropomorphisms like this "are only the tips of the revelatory iceberg" (RT, p. 192). Later he notes that "There is no more challenging test of biblical reasoning competence than to identify and interpret anthropomorphisms" (RT, p. 479). That is why, beginning with a voice, this book necessarily confronts the most epochal development in the doctrine of God in modern times: the shift toward panentheism, and what that shift implies for first theology. Vanhoozer makes this set of claims we have just explored, and calls the resulting project a particular kind of theism: "communicative theism." Why describe it thus, rather than calling it "communicative theology" or "a doctrine of God which features the category of communication?" The main answer is simply, that's how theologians talk these days. In contemporary theological idiom, something like "process theism" is opposed to "classical theism;" "freewill theism" morphs into the more aggressive "open theism" and gives way to a more generalized "relational theism;" a particular collaborative project broadcasts itself as "canonical theism," or a very Trinity-focused doctrinal project may call itself "triune theism." Putting an adjective in front of the noun theism seems to suggest a certain comprehensiveness, as if to say "this is the way to believe in God." It's a package deal, a coordinated set of claims and judgments that hang together as a holistic account of God. As a result, we end up with a lot of different theisms in the marketplace of ideas, which is surely confusing to atheists if they are listening. Since this is a guild book, a book written by an academic theologian for an audience of other academic theologians (though others are welcome to overhear the discussion), Vanhoozer makes use of the guild's conventions and names his work a

theism: communicative theism. But he is also characteristically self-aware about the language he is using, and pokes a little fun at it with the ubiquitous Vanhoozeresque pun and wordplay:

> To proceed with bold and humble honesty to God is to charge with a theological light brigade: theisms to right of them, theisms to left of them, into the valley of ideological warfare, into the jaws of church historians and other academicians, ride the 144,000 (RT, p. xvi).

As it turns out, Vanhoozer's account of theism under the categories of communication is in fact a pretty comprehensive undertaking. He keeps his attention focused on the doctrine of God and the God-world relation. But he leaves himself space to develop a few crucial lines of thought, in particular in the doctrine of salvation (soteriology). "Everything comes down to the way theology conceptualizes the God-world relation (RT, p. 175)." It is no contradiction that Vanhoozer can later apply the project to the foundations of soteriology and say that "Everything depends on how one understands the way in which human creatures take part in God's communicative activity such that they actually receive God's saving light, life, and love. Everything thus depends on getting the ontology of being-in-communion with God right, and this in turn depends on rightly interpreting what it means to be 'partakers in the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4)" (RT, p. 271). Because he is operating at the level of first theology, Vanhoozer is able to make theological decisions with ramifications for vast stretches of a theological system. His adjustment to the doctrine of God has immediate implications for the doctrine of providence, for example. And he spends considerable time on its application to the field of soteriology, wherein God is said to communicate himself savingly, resulting in union with Christ.

This is just a sketch of the major course correction Vanhoozer introduces. But it is enough to show that he does not just barely cross over from prolegomena into one doctrine, but has moved into the field of constructive theology with such a full grasp of the fundamentals that he must now hold himself back from spelling out an entire systematic theology of the communication of God.

II. How God Says What He Says: "The Manner is Always More Excellent than the Thing"

English metaphysical poet Thomas Traherne (1636-1674) insisted that in spiritual matters, "the manner is always more excellent than the thing."[5] This has great implications for the idea of God as author. Vanhoozer's emphasis is never simply that God is an author, but always on what kind of author God is. Just as everything depends on exactly how we construe the God-world relationship, it is not enough to construe it as a relation of authorship. There are

[5] Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations* 3:57 (Dobell, London 1908), p. 204.

authors, and then there are authors. The task of theology is to come to understand what sort of author God is. Vanhoozer surveys a wide range of options for the specific style and strategy of the divine author. But the basic answer is that God is an author like Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Here Vanhoozer takes up a literary quarrel that has become classic in modern criticism. Both Mikhael Bakhtin and George Steiner have noted that there is a fundamental opposition between the two great Russian novelists of the twentieth century, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The critical discussion of this antinomy is vast, but the basic idea is perhaps best stated in George Steiner's first book, tellingly entitled *Tolstoy OR Dostoevsky*:

> Thus, even beyond their deaths, the two novelists stand in contrariety. Tolstoy, the foremost heir to the traditions of the epic, Dostoevsky, one of the major dramatic tempers after Shakespeare; Tolstoy, the mind intoxicated with reason and fact; Dostoevsky, the contemner of rationalism, the great lover of paradox; Tolstoy, the poet of the land, of the rural setting and the pastoral mood; Dostoevsky, the arch-citizen, the master-builder of the modern metropolis in the province of language; Tolstoy, thirsting for the truth, destroying himself and those about him in excessive pursuit of it; Dostoevsky, rather against the truth than against Christ, suspicious of total understanding and on the side of mystery;… Tolstoy, like a colossus bestriding the palpable earth, evoking the realness, the tangibility, the sensible entirety of concrete experience; Dostoevsky, always on the edge of the hallucinatory, of the spectral, always vulnerable to daemonic intrusions into what might prove, in the end, to have been merely a tissue of dreams; … Tolstoy, who saw the destinies of men historically and in the stream of time; Dostoevsky, who saw them contemporaneously and in the vibrant stasis of the dramatic moment; Tolstoy, borne to his grave in the first civil burial ever held in Russia; Dostoevsky, laid to rest in the cemetery of the Alexander Nevsky monastery in St. Petersburg amid the solemn rites of the Orthodox Church; Dostoevsky, pre-eminently the man of God; Tolstoy; one of His secret challengers.[6]

What is crucial for Vanhoozer is that their two modes of authorship suggest two different construals of the God-world relationship; even two different theisms: "Tolstoy and Dostoevsky work with competing conceptions of authorship that parallel the way in which the two types of theism we examined in Part I view the God-world relation" (RT, p. 306). Tolstoy has "consummate narrative artistry," but also monologic determination by an author with absolute control over the characters. The narrator in Tolstoy sees everything, the omnipotent speaker knows everything, the narrative voice invests every

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[6] George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 347.

detail with meaning, and, reigning from on high, draws relationships among isolated incidents which no character in the story can see or comprehend. His works are gorgeous, unsurpassably rich narrations, "large-scale verbal compositions, poetic forms that provide meaningful frames for a sequence of historical and social events" (RT, p. 306). But if you once fall out of favor with that authorial voice, if you once notice the man behind the curtain, it is a fatal fall. There is nowhere to go to flee from his presence. "Tolstoy's characters are merely mouthpieces for the author who uses them to express his own ideas, teach his own values, and display his own point of view" (RT, p. 307).

Classical theism, when it thinks of God as author, has been attracted to thinking of him on the model of Tolstoyan authorship. "Theologians, philosophers, and scientists have all made use of the analogy of authorship to explore the God-world relation though the authorship they typically have in view, for good or for ill, is the Tolstoyan variety…" (RT, p. 307). And there are benefits to thinking this way: "The strength of the Tolstoyan model is that it upholds God's authorial transcendence… A monologic God is answerable to no one: there is no other point of view from which to pose a question, no other voice to articulate it even if there were" (RT, p. 309). The major problem is not the oppressiveness of the authorial intrusion, but the way it "fails to account for the dialogical interaction of God and human beings depicted in the Bible or, for that matter, the Bible's diverse human authorial voices themselves" (RT, p. 309). Vanhoozer is not worried about an overly-sovereign God so much as he is worried that we risk having an inadequate read of what God has authored, and how he has authored it. He is not just thinking about how to read well, but is taking the relation of divine author to sacred text as a model for the God-world relation writ large.

Thus he is quite concerned to make the jump from "how to read a book" to how to use authorship as a conceptual model for the God-world relationship.

> In light of God's speaking creation, covenant, and canon into being, divine authorship is an apt aid for understanding the nature of the dramatic action outside (and inside) the world of the text, and thus a helpful heuristic for grasping divine transcendence and immanence. Still, important questions about the author's control, authority, and presence to the world of the text remain (RT, p. 305).

That triad, "control, authority, and presence," is a nod to the "theology of Lordship" developed in the last few decades by evangelical theologian John Frame. Vanhoozer's appreciative use of the CAP triad shows that, without repudiating a Frame-like theology of lordship, Vanhoozer is moving on to a theology of authorship. "Lordship as authorship" is not a bad way of understanding the trajectory of *Remythogizing Theology*, a book which happens to be dedicated to Frame (RT, p. xix).

But here is a Vanhoozer breakthrough, made possible by his critical abilities. Instead of Tolstoyan monological authorship, Vanhoozer suggests a kind

of Dostoevskyan authorship: "a new literary genre: the polyphonic novel," or as Vanhoozer glosses it, a "dialogical polyphonic authorship" (RT, p. 311). Dostoevsky peoples his novels with "characters that speak in their own voices, not merely as mouthpieces for their author." In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zosima speaks his own point of view, which may be right or wrong; Ivan Karamazov argues the devil's point of view so forcefully that the author seems helpless to silence him. The conflict between the faith of Zosima and the doubt of Ivan plays itself out in the book itself, rather than (as in Tolstoy) in the voice of the narrator. If Dostoevsky were a director of a war movie, one gets the sense he would equip the actors with live ammunition. "What Dostoevsky projects into the world of his works is not a finished plot but unfinished voice ideas" (RT, p. 330).

All of this engagement with the critical discussion of two great novelists is deeply interesting, but the doctrinally-motivated reader may begin to wonder whether it actually counts as theology. "My wager," Vanhoozer reassures us, "is that this brief detour into the dispute over the meaning of Dostoevsky's authorship will yield theological dividends for understanding God's communicative relation to the world" (RT, p. 311). Indeed it does, in two ways. First, it sharpens the meaning of divine authorship in a way that clarifies the God-world relationship. "God authors/elects creatures to be dialogical agents in covenantal relation through whom his Word sounds (and resounds)" (RT, p. 331). But secondly, it leads the theological interpreter into scripture in a way that is guaranteed to be more fruitful than monlogic models, because more appropriate to the way God has spoken. Vanhoozer pays close attention not only to what God has said (as all good evangelicals know they should), but consummately to the way God has said it. "The Bible is both a unified (one mythos) and many-voiced (i.e. polyphonic) discourse whose form is theologically significant" (RT, p. 26). Scripture does not just contain ideas embedded in genres, but also "Genre-ideas" (RT, p. 354). Again, "the Bible schematizes God's being-in-act through mythos, through the variety of canonical forms that together comprise the theo-drama, the form of forms" (RT, p. 477). And again, "each biblical form that contributes to the mythos is itself a thing God has done, a word God has made" (RT, p. 477). And in one of his fullest statements of the way the form and content of scripture interpenetrate:

> Biblical reasoning involves more than simply abstracting and ordering statements about God into a cognitive-propositional system… God speaks through the prophetic and apostolic discourse of the Bible as a playwright speaks through the various characters in a play. God speaks his mind dialogically, communicating through different voice-ideas from multiple points of view in a variety of ways (i.e. canonical schemata). All the voices, in their specific registers, are necessary in order to achieve the total communicative effect: the understanding and obedience of faith (RT, pp. 478-79).

This massive attention to the manner of Scripture also accounts for why most of chapter 1 (RT, pp. 35-57) is a series of biblical passages explored one after the other, with more exegetical insight than is strictly necessary for a work of high-level theological abstraction. Vanhoozer is not only our chief theorist of the Theological Interpretation of the Bible, but also a gifted practitioner who increasingly makes room in his books to carry out the task.

One could describe *Remythologizing Theology* as a "higher evangelicalism," in that evangelicals are only supposed to attend to what God says, but Vanhoozer attends to how God says it. He goes deeper into the word of God, listening to the voice of God. Perhaps he even goes beyond *sola scriptura* to *sola vox scriptura*; perhaps even the genres of the Bible are inerrant. At any rate, "Biblical reasoners do well to appreciate the subtlety and depth of the divine rhetoric" (RT, p. 193). God's accommodation is really to be thought of as indirect communication, which makes divine speech tricky; more like "the authorship that Kierkegaard labeled 'indirect communication' than… Hegel's 'system' of abstract theoretical truth" (RT, p. 191). Since "the watchword for indirect communication is 'show, don't tell" (RT, p. 191), divine revelation is an irreducible mixture of event and word, with implications for how the second-order labor of theology should be carried out. When theological approaches to scripture fall flat, it is because we think we can have information without personal transformation. "Theology only compounds the problem when it gives the impression that knowing God is a matter of neat theoretical packaging (i.e. systems of belief)" (RT, p. 191). In contrast, "Remythologizing theology approaches each of the various forms of biblical discourse as an important ingredient in the divine communicative strategy" (RT, p. 192). In other words, we have to do with not just a voice from heaven, but this particular voice, speaking these particular words, in a complex event of communication.

III. What the Trinity Has To Do With This

Earlier I mentioned that (contra the irresistible rhyming of remythologizing with demythologizing), the major opponent throughout this book is not Bultmann, but Moltmann. The strange cluster of ideas that make up the new orthodoxy, especially the kenotic-relational panentheism that has been drawing the doctrine of God toward itself for the past several decades, was identified long ago by Karl Barth. In a letter that he wrote to Moltmann on November 17, 1964 (the year after *Honest to God*, but responding instead to Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*,) Barth asked the younger theologian, "Would it not be wise to accept the doctrine of the immanent trinity of God?"[7] It would indeed have been wise, but this Barthian recommendation was not

[7] Karl Barth, *Letters 1961–1968* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 174-76.

quite the path that Moltmann's theology ever took.[8] It is, however, a chief element of the course correction offered by Vanhoozer's remythologized theology and the communicative theism it advocates. The doctrine of the immanent Trinity of God makes all the difference in Vanhoozer's doctrine of God.

Vanhoozer is definitely on the bandwagon with the rest of modern theology in being excited about the Trinity.

> To recover the doctrine of the Trinity is to recover the God of the gospel: The personal and compassionate love of the Father made known in Christ through the Spirit… And it is to understand that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not simply the way God appears to be but rather the way God truly is (RT, p. 105).

But as his radically consistent trinitarianism becomes more explicit, it becomes evident that Vanhoozer is often standing against much of the recent recovery of Trinitarian theology, or at least against the sort that turns toward the wildly relational and economically reductionistic. His criticisms are sharp and to the point: "While something important has indeed been recovered, something equally important has also been lost" (RT, p. 111). "What the 'second coming ' of Trinitarian theology has lost, in short, appears to be the fatherhood of God… the thrust of the new orthodoxy is to inflate the economic Trinity precisely in order to call into question the aseity and impassibility of God" (RT, p. 112). The dangers of this inflation are evident: "Unless we resist collapsing the Father into the work of his two hands, Son and Spirit, it will be difficult to resist what Calvin thought to be the persistent temptation in religion, namely, to blur—or collapse altogether—the distinction between God and the world" (RT, p. 112).

Much of *Remythologizing Theology* is devoted to shooting down trouble that Moltmann started in the doctrine of God. Vanhoozer warns that without the kind of absolute transcendence secured by the immanent Trinity, the identity of God is jeopardized: "Instead of being "I am who I am," God becomes the 'I am the one you make me to be.'" And while Moltmann never said anything that drastic, he did make use of the gloss, "In the beginning was relation," a quotation of Martin Buber that Moltmann deployed on p. 11 of *God in Creation*, the book in which he finally explicitly drew the panentheistic conclusions of his version of Trinitarian theology. "At the end of the twentieth century," as Vanhoozer tells the story, "theologians awoke (with a groan?) to find their world, and ontology, relational" (RT, p. 117). He is right to track all of the confusion over divine suffering back to Moltmann's fundamental loss of the immanent Trinity. "The way in which one relates the economic to the imma-

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[8] The complexity and compromises of Moltmann's account of the immanent Trinity is something I have chronicled in *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

nent Trinity has everything to do, as Moltmann rightly notes, with 'the question about God's capacity or incapacity for suffering'" (RT, p. 391).

How does Vanhoozer intervene to fix the modern Trinitarian problem? Not only does he have the relationship between the economic and immanent Trinity sorted out well in advance ("The economic Trinity is, or rather communicates, the immanent Trinity," [RT, p. 294]), but he also understands the kind of descriptive dogmatic work necessary to continue upholding the priority of the immanent Trinity. In one of the richest sections of the book, he dares to describe the inner life of God, on the basis of the revelation in the economy. "We begin, then, with a brief description of the inner life of the triune God—the eternal doings of Father, Son, and Spirit—to the extent that it can be discerned from the communicative patterns that comprise the economy" (RT, p. 243). We

> come closest to understanding God's inner life by attending to the intra-Trinitarian communicative action in the economy, particularly the dialogical interaction between the Father and Son that is on conspicuous display in the Fourth Gospel. There are three main topics in these Father-Son dialogues: mutual glorification; the giving of life; the sharing of love (RT, p. 261).

A series of sections on the divine light, life, and love are an exploration of how the life of God is a rich and full thing, an inner plenitude which far outstrips our experience. And this is where Vanhoozer makes it clear that his remythologizing project aims at understanding the story of Scripture as a real revelation of who God is:

> Because the way God is in the economy of corresponds to the way God is in himself, we may conclude that the Father, Son, and Spirit are merely continuing in history a communicative activity that characterizes their perfect life together…Hence this triune dialogue in history fully corresponds to the conversation God is in himself (RT, p. 251).

This leads Vanhoozer to describe the Trinity in terms of his root metaphor, communication: "God is the communicator, communication, and communicatedness. The triune God is the agent, act, and effect of his own self-communication" (RT, p. 261).

Time would fail us before we could explore the treatise on the divine emotions that concludes the book (a remarkable performance). But suffice it to say that Vanhoozer's leisurely account of the eternal life, light, and love of God helps anchor the reader in a notion of God's inner immanent-trinitarian plenitude, so that when Vanhoozer offers a somewhat deflationary account of the recent theopaschite orthodoxy, nothing seems to have been lost. We have already glimpsed the fullness of the immanent Trinity. We are encouraged to take God's words to us more seriously because we have been reminded that the conversation he has with us is in perfect correspondence to, and in real participation with, the conversation that makes up the divine life

itself. In other words, as the book works out its logic, we no longer have simply a voice from heaven to account for, but a voice in heaven; an eternal communication about life, love, and light, which breaks through and makes itself heard on the mount of transfiguration in a moment of revealed life, light, and love. If Bishop Robinson was worried about mythology, things are far worse than he imagined, because as far as biblical commitments go, everything is much better than we imagined. Vanhoozer fights mostly not with Robinson, but with Feuerbach. And he turns the tables: "Projection is first and foremost a divine communicative activity. Jesus Christ is the God-projected word and image of God into the created order" (RT, p. 271). Communicative theism is "triune authorial theism" (RT, p. 26), and

> 'authoring' covers what God does as creator, reconciler, redeemer, and perfecter, and so serves as a metaphor for the economic Trinity as well: The Father 'authors' in Christ through the Spirit.' Triune authorship… enables us better to conceive (1) the absolute distinction between Creator and creation; (2) the triune God whose being is a being-in-communicative action; and (3) God's relation to the world, and to Scripture, in terms of an 'economy of communication' (RT, p. 26).

Ronald Reagan was nicknamed "the Great Communicator," but with the advent of communicative theism, we might need to recognize that as an idolatrous title. On the other hand, communicating may be one of God's communicable attributes. Just as the mealtime prayer of classical theism taught us to pray "God is great, God is good," the insight of communicative theism is that God is the Great Communicator, God is the Good Communicator. Let us thank him for every word that proceeds out of his mouth.

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 67–82

Vanhoozer responds to the four horsemen of an apocalyptic panel discussion on *Remythologizing Theology*

Kevin J. Vanhoozer
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Introduction

There is no higher academic compliment than sustained critical attention, so I must begin by thanking my four interlocutors, not only for their willingness to persevere to the end (of my book, that is), but also for the way in which they have engaged its argument. I am also pleased by the evangelical diversity of the panel: from Trinitarian and analytic to Southern Baptist and emerging theologians. The lot of a respondent is not always a happy one. One can either summarize the argument, and risk boring those who have read the book (no danger of that here, I think!), set out systematically to expose the nakedness of the author (and risk losing a friend), or simply use the opportunity to talk about something else in which one is more interested. All four panelists have avoided these common pitfalls. Even more remarkable: I do not feel the need to spend most of my time correcting misrepresentations of my position. This is an encouraging sign. For years I have taught my students first, to interpret people as charitably as they can, and only then to interpret them as critically as they see fit. The panelists have largely succeeded in doing just that, which means that I can give most of my attention to their important substantive questions.

This conversation is all about bearing faithful witness: to what I have written, yes, but more importantly to what I have written about: "the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim. 1:17). I therefore refer to my conversation partners as the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" (c.f., Rev. 6:1-8) not because they are harbingers of the Last Battle, but because what is ultimately at stake in this discussion is God's self-revelation. To speak well of God is the theologian's most important mandate, and also the most difficult. I have therefore prayed over this book more than any other. Even so, I do not for a moment think that I have mastered the territory. On the contrary: "I came, I saw, I stammered..."

Fortunately for me, this is not a court session. I am not officially on trial (as far as I know). At the same time, one who seeks to give faithful witness in word and deed to the living God is, in one sense, *always* on trial, for it is the theologian's vocation to give sound and discerning testimony to God's works of love and words of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Fred Sanders

And so to the first paper. Reading Fred Sanders's beautifully written response was like going to the dentist. This analogy works only if you know something about my dentist. He is extremely competent, yet his probing is the gentlest imaginable. He sees what he needs to see without inflicting any discomfort – and he typically tells me that everything is fine. In other words, I very much enjoyed my time in Dr. Sanders's dentist chair. There are many wonderful lines I could cite, but perhaps my favorite contrasts what I say about the God who can speak but not suffer (i.e., the God of communicative theism), which I commend, with "the one who cannot really speak, but can't help but suffer" (i.e., the God of kenotic relational panentheism), which I criticize.

Paul Ricoeur, the subject of my doctoral work, typically had two standard ways of responding to people who commented on his work. The polite, non-committal response, was "Thank you. You have contributed to my self-understanding." Sanders's piece does this for me, especially in the paragraphs where he unpacks the method in my remythologizing madness. To hear Ricoeur tell it, his thought developed haphazardly, through a series of detours where each new book would take up a problem leftover from the previous one. (I can relate). Ricoeur therefore reserved his second response for those select few essays that were able to display the coherence of his thought better than he could himself. Sanders's paper does this for me.

I like the way Sanders contextualizes my project. It's true: John Robinson would be horrified to see a Cambridge University Press academic theology book waxing enthusiastic about a voice from heaven. Perhaps this is an appropriate occasion to recount the story of my one encounter with the Bishop of Woolwich. It was in 1978. I was a religious studies major as an undergraduate at Westmont College, and he had been invited to speak on campus. I won the student lottery to pick him up at LAX and drive him back to Santa Barbara. In preparation for the eighty-mile ride, I read his *Honest to God*, and much else besides. I was fully prepared to show him the error of his Tillichian ways, and I had ninety minutes in which to do it. We met at the airport without incident, but his request to sit in the backseat as we arrived at the parking lot did not bode well. Apparently the good Bishop was not entirely confident that the Ground of our Being could ensure his safety on the California freeway system. Not to worry: he could not escape from my clutches so easily. I was resourceful; I had a rear-view mirror. So, once we entered the freeway I settled into the slow lane, cleared my throat, and asked my first question. I cannot now recall exactly what it was about, but his answer is seared in my memory: "I'm sorry, I need to save my voice for the lecture." And that was that. True story—honest to God!

In truth, I suspect Robinson was being less than totally honest. To the extent that his book was successful, it depended on borrowed theological capi-

tal. Indeed, a great deal of what contemporary theologians have to say about God is insufficiently grounded insofar as they deny that God communicates in actual words. I do not understand how contemporary theologians find it possible to speak of a forgiving God unless they can also affirm a speaking God. How else could we know that God is a forgiving God unless God first says, "I forgive you"? All this to say that Fred's framing of my book is exactly right.

And I think, or at least I hope, that he is right in his three main points: that I have (finally!) moved beyond method to matter; that I pay attention to what Scripture says and how it says it; that none of this makes sense without the Trinity (though the better book to read on this latter subject is surely Fred's *The Deep Things of God*).

Fred identifies my "primary doctrine": *that God communicates*. Yes, this is my first theology, and a clear example of how one's theological method is shaped by one's concrete material theological convictions. Note: "communicating" means "making common." In my book I argue that God shares not only his thought (i.e., in revelation), but also his very life (i.e., in redemption). If I focus on communicating, it is because this is what God does with words, including the words of Scripture, and supremely by means of his living Word: God makes common or shares his light, life, and love with those who are not God. *That God communicates* was the key concept that justified the use of the theatrical imagery in *The Drama of Doctrine*, the explicit focus of *First Theology*, and the implicit assumption of *Is there a Meaning in this Text? Remythologizing Theology*, however, pauses to interrogate the premise itself: what must God *be* in order to do what the Bible depicts him as doing (i.e., communicating)? I agree with Sanders's spin on my project: It is a communicative variation on a classical theistic theme. He is also right to observe that one of my main motivations was to confront the "new orthodoxy"—that is, the emerging coalition of kenotic relational open and panentheistic theologians—just as the main motivation for writing *Is there a Meaning* was to take on the more virulent strains of postmodern hermeneutics. Theology is always occasional, situated in particular contexts, even when it has systematic ambitions.

Finally, Sanders correctly sees that a focus on God's communicative action—which I also treat under the rubric of "authorship"—means attending not only to what God says but how God says it. I am grateful for the extended quote from George Steiner, which bears out my preference of the theist Dostoevsky, buried in a Christian graveyard, over the Moral Therapeutic Deism of Tolstoy, who was "borne to his grave in the first civil burial ever held in Russia." Fred is also right to highlight how much my unpacking of the logic of divine authorship owes to John Frame (to whom I dedicated the book) and his theology of Lordship.

John Franke

I turn now to John Franke's paper. Franke and Sanders agree about the centrality of the notion of divine communicative action. Yet Franke is less comfortable with the notion that God's communicative agency is *the* formal and material principle of theology. More on that in a moment. Let me begin with Franke's claim that *Remythologizing Theology* "is decisively devoted to methodological considerations." Decisively. Devoted. This makes it sound as if I worship at the shrine of methodology. I am therefore disappointed that Franke does not see the decisive, devoted turn to the subject matter of theology that Fred has identified. John is calling my "conversion" into question! In my own personal narrative, I view *Remythologizing Theology* as a kind of prequel to *Drama of Doctrine* that sets forth the doctrine of God on which my proposal about the nature of doctrine depends. Of course, this does not affect, or soften, the force of his substantive question: am I really intending the model I am proposing to eclipse other approaches to God? Before answering, I need to unpack the question. Franke is rubbed raw by what seem to him to be "the pretension of either/or metaphysical assertions about God." He suggests that if I were more attuned to Scripture, I would realize that the principle of accommodation ought to make us wary of such overarching assertions. John here raises some of the most fundamental challenges every theologian has to face: how to move from the first order biblical discourse (i.e., *mythos*) to second order theological discourse (i.e., *logos*), and whether or not to construe this second order discourse as metaphysical. Unlike Franke, I do not see accommodation as a threat to speaking truly (and even ontologically) of God but rather its enabling condition. We would be in real trouble as theologians charged with speaking of God if God himself had *not* stooped to speak into our situation via ordinary human language! But he has, and seeking understanding of what God has said is intrinsic to the theology's task.

It is one thing to say that human beings lack the capacity to know God. Our native intellectual and moral resources are finite, and can take us only so far. It is quite another thing to suggest that language itself somehow blocks the way to the knowledge of God because of its inherent creaturely limitations. Yes, human users of language are fallen; need it follow that language *per se* is so corrupt as to be unable to signify God? I do not see why it has to. Franke himself admits that God truly reveals himself despite the creaturely nature of the appointed communicative medium, whether human language or Jesus' humanity. Yet he concludes that the glass is half-empty—language is subject to "inherent limitations"—whereas I see it as half-full, that is, able analogically to refer to the way God is.

It's all in the book of Hebrews, which explains that it is precisely in his humanity that the Son is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint [*character*] of his nature" (Heb. 1:3). Hebrews 1 also tells us that the Son is the final definitive word in a series of earlier words. And we know from

John 1 that the Son is the Word of God that was with God and was God from the beginning (John 1:1-2). This Word made flesh, who in turn speaks words to others, is himself the embodied personal communicative activity of God; there is nothing here to suggest that Jesus' humanity or human language limit his ability truly to reveal and mediate God. Indeed, I would argue that the sufficiency of language is implied by the sufficiency of Scripture.[1]

To be fair, Franke does not question God's ability to reveal truth as much as our ability to receive it in unadulterated fashion. Must the quest for understanding be a quest for a single model, he wonders? Do I intend the model of God that I propose in *Remythologizing Theology*—what I variously term *communicative theism* or *Trinitarian dialogical theism*—to be the *only* right way of thinking about God, to the exclusion of all other models and, if so, how do I handle the patent *contextuality* and *plurality* that characterize both the biblical text and theological tradition? These are entirely proper, and extremely challenging questions, and Franke poses them pointedly. Here I stand; I cannot shirk them.

On the one hand, it does not initially sound right, to my ears at least, to say that there can be many ontologies of God. God is one. Is that simply one model among others? God is love. Is that simply one perspective among others? Relatedly: does God suffer change as a result of what happens in the world? There are only so many ways that one can think God's reality in relationship to the world: pantheism, Deism, theism, and panentheism. Does Franke think that more than one of these models can be true at the same time, or is he basically a theist who wants me to allow him some pluralistic breathing room within this one model? (I suspect the latter.) Is God triune (three persons in one nature) and, if so, must God's triunity be part of every Christian's confession? It seems to me that there can be only one right answer to such questions.

On the other hand, as Aristotle famously commented, "Being may be said in many ways."[2] That is, we can speak of being in terms of several different kinds of categories (e.g., substance, quantity, quality, relation, etc.). Something similar pertains to God: God is one, yet there are many things we can, and must, say (e.g., that God is love, merciful, just, etc.). Some formulations of divine simplicity (the doctrine that each of God's attributes is essential to

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[1] On the sufficiency of Scripture, see Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[2] This, at least, is how many philosophers refer to his statement. The actual wording is "That which is may be so called in several ways." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, *Books Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon* [trans. Christopher Kirwan; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], p. 1).

God's being) maintain that each divine attribute is a perspective on the whole of God's being.[3]

Back to Franke's concern: do I believe that my book sets forth the one true description of God's being? Do I want my model of God's being-in-communicative-act to eclipse all other models? Or, am I open to other ways of thinking about God's being and God's relationship to the world? The short answer is that I view my proposal as a retooling, not a displacement, of classical theism, and that I think that *Christian theism may be said (i.e., expounded) in many ways*.

In speaking of "retooling" Christian theism I mean to call attention to the new concepts (e.g., authorship; communicative action) I suggest for doing the work of thinking about God and the God-world relationship. Indeed, they are not wholly new, though the way I deploy them may be. To use John Frame's term: I am offering communicative act as a "perspective" on God's being.[4] Like the divine attributes, it is one way of regarding the whole of God's being. To speak of perspectives is to acknowledge what I think Franke wants me to acknowledge, namely, that I am a finite creature who sees in part. I cannot see everything at once, as God does. At the same time (and here Franke may disagree), I want to claim that what I see through my perspective is true not only for me, but also for everyone, inasmuch as my perspective discloses an aspect of God's reality. It is the truth, and nothing but the truth, though not the *whole* truth.

The whole truth, or what God saw fit to reveal of it, is inscribed in the order of things and the *ordo salutis*, as described in the Scriptures. What God knows—God's perspective, as it were—is the white light of absolute truth. What we have in Scripture, a plurality of human perspectives, is the divinely inspired refraction of this light—a canonical coat of many colors. Each of these canonical perspectives gives us access to a particular aspect of God's truth and reality. Franke will shout "Huzzah!" when I say that it takes a plurality of canonical perspectives fully to render theological truth.[5] This is my working assumption: that systematic theologians need to attend to the variety of authorial voices, forms of biblical discourse, and theological perspectives in Scripture.

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[3] So John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), pp. 225-30.

[4] For the genesis of Frame's understanding of perspective, see his "Backgrounds to my Thought," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame* (ed. John J. Hughes; Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), pp. 12-13. See also Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism" (2008), available at http://www.frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/.

[5] For Franke's own position, see his *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Faith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2009).

I do not concede the point that the exegete is more biblical than the systematic theologian simply because the latter works with abstract constructions. On the contrary: theologians too clarify the grammar of the text, though on a deeper level. Wittgenstein once wrote: "*Essence* is expressed by grammar. Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)."[6] Implied in what we say about things is what we think these things *are*. *I believe that our grammatical analysis of biblical discourse is theologically incomplete until we have spelled out its ontological implications*. Hence the project of remythologizing theology, which is nothing more or less than spelling out the ontological implications of God's almighty loving communicative acts.

The canon is a manifold witness to a *unified*, and *ordered*, reality. Ontology is about discerning this deeper order of reality, the *grammar* of things. I do not claim that the notion of being as communicative act exhausts what can be said about this grammar, but I do think I am parsing things correctly. I therefore wonder whether Franke inadvertently short-circuits the move from exegesis to theology, and hence faith's search for understanding, by exaggerating the inadequacy of second-order theological discourse to its subject matter.

I agree with Franke about the pretension of metaphysics if by "metaphysics" we mean a ready-made set of categories that we impose on Scripture. There are numerous examples of theologians doing this. It is all too tempting to ride the categorical coattails of whatever metaphysic happens to be the most fashionable. The aim of remythologizing, however, is the countercultural way of deep exegesis and theo-ontology. The task is to mine the Bible's own categories, or categories strongly suggested by the Bible, in order to unpack the ontological implications of what Scripture says about God.

Does Franke get me right? Not if he thinks that my abiding interest is in philosophical issues and prolegomena. On the contrary: I think the matter of theology must determine its method. Faith seeks understanding by conceptually elaborating the ontology implicit in biblical discourse. Am I proposing my approach as the only way to speak well of God? No, because though I believe that God's being and knowledge are absolute, I also believe that God's being may be said in many ways, that there are a variety of canonical perspectives that highlight this or that aspect of God's being. At the same time, I do think that the communicative variation on classical theism that I propound perceives something truth about God's being, and consequently that versions of kenotic relational theism and panentheism are wrong. Mine is a perspective that is open to other canonical perspectives, but not indefinitely so.

Theologians must avoid absolutizing any one canonical or categorical perspective. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge legitimate conceptual gains and theological insights. I am therefore troubled at the thought that African theologians (or anyone else!) might ignore the Nicene insight that the

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[6] *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 116

Son is *homoousios* with the Father. Yes, the term is Greek, and it reeks of ontology (it means "of the same substance"). Nevertheless, it is a true perspective on the nature of the Godhead and the identity of Jesus Christ. We should no more despise or relativize *homoousios* just because it is culturally situated than we should relativize Newton's Second Law of Motion—$F = ma$ (force = mass x acceleration)—just because he was a seventeenth-century Englishman. Truth is truth, whether it concerns physics or metaphysics, regardless of its point of origin.

Scripture shows God to be a communicative agent. I therefore believe that what I say about divine ontology is true. That God is a communicative agent is not the only thing one can say about God, however, just as there are other things to say about force than what Newton says in his Second Law. As Newton's Second Law holds good for people in twenty-first century Guatemela and Tibet as, so what I say about God's communicative agency, to the extent that it gets the ontological grammar of Scripture right, is true for everyone, everywhere, and at all times. Again: it is the truth, but not the whole truth of the matter of God's being.

As to Franke's second issue, concerning the pastoral function of a remythologized theology, I have time for a brief response only. He raises a legitimate concern, though the specific issue of homosexuality may not be the best illustration. As far as I am aware, there is nothing about my view of Scripture that lends itself to be co-opted by the GLBT community. I have written essays on homosexuality and transsexuality elsewhere.[7] In general, I argue that the purpose of doctrine is to minister reality and direct the church in the ways of fitting participation in this reality. The reality in question, of course, is the new creation the Father is bringing into being in the Son through the Spirit. Because I view Scripture as divine discourse, I give pride of place to Scripture's renderings of reality. So, when the Bible says that God created humanity men and women, I take this as normative for the created order. Doctrine thus directs men and women to participate fittingly in the biological sex to which they have been cast as actors.

Steven Wellum

It is a special delight to be able to respond to Steve Wellum's paper. Steve was a student of mine in the 1980s, and I recognize the same inquisitive, careful, and sustained probing in today's response that I saw in his earlier work. I am particularly pleased to see that Wellum has mellowed in his middle-age: my writing no longer frustrates, but only annoys him. The good news is that he declares my book "thoroughly orthodox and evangelical." Phew! But seri-

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[7] See, for example, my "Always performing? Playing new scenes with creative fidelity: the drama-of-redemption approach," in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* (ed. Gary Meadors; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), pp. 151-99.

ously: Wellum here shows himself to be the model reader, one who works hard to get things right before he points out things he thinks are wrong.

Wellum raises two interconnected methodological issues concerning the place of Scripture's literary forms in my theology and my general use of Scripture. First, he wonders whether I exaggerate the significance of literary genre. Like me, he is happy to admit that we need to pay attention to literary form for the sake of interpretation and determining the author's illocutionary intent. But he is not at all sure that they have any other significance than as a means to an interpretive (and propositional?) end. For my own part, I think that the forms of biblical discourse do more than provide packaging for theological content. The challenge is to specify what this "more" involves, a point to which I shall return below.

Wellum objects in particular to my claim that canonical diversity leads to and legitimates theological diversity. Where Franke does not see enough plurality, Wellum sees too much. We need here to proceed cautiously: too much what, exactly? The first thing to be said is that I am careful to locate diversity on the level of vocabulary (e.g., metaphors) and concepts, not the more fundamental judgments that underlie them (e.g., ontological judgments). A second preliminary observation: diversity is not the same thing as indeterminacy or contradiction. To be sure, there is a certain tension in saying that the same basic theological judgment may be rendered in more than one set of concepts, some of which catch certain nuances better than others. But we need only think of the various metaphors to describe the saving significance of Jesus' cross to see how canonical perspectives generate theological perspectives. It appears that Franke is reacting to the boldness of my speech about God (he's making ontological claims—how dare he!), and Wellum to its humility (he's not claiming absoluteness for his claims—so why bother?).

I concede Wellum's point: Scripture itself does not often call attention to its literary forms. For example, when Matthew uses Exodus, he does not seem to be concerned about the poetics of biblical narrative. On the other hand, when Jesus in Luke 4:12 cites Deuteronomy 6:16 "You shall not put the Lord you God to the test" to rebut Satan's use of Scripture (Ps. 91:11-12 "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you"), he is doing more than using one revealed proposition to trump another. He is tacitly inserting these texts into a larger (canonical) form, the narrative or drama of redemption. The real issue is not whose proposition is truer (they're both canonical), but their place and function in the broader story (about Jesus' messianic mission). Even the devil uses revealed propositions—and dissembles (c.f., Jas. 2:19). It is not, therefore, that Satan says what is patently false, but rather that his discourse lacks fittingness. Satan's discourse displays bad form. And this is the salient point: to speak well of God we must attend both to form and content, for form is a leading indicator of fittingness.

Form is also an ingredient in "rightly handling [*orthotomeo*] the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). It is through the various literary forms of Scripture, including stories and histories, that the divine authorial imagination shapes our view of God, the world, and ourselves, thus forming us to be those who can make right judgments concerning fittingness. The patterns of communicative action in canon rule the disciple's judgments about rightness (*ortho*), in all its forms: right deliberating about truth (the orthodoxy of the head); right doing of the good (the orthopraxis of the hand); right desiring of beauty (the orthopathos of the heart). In all three cases, Scripture is useful, and authoritative, for training in covenantal fittingness. I agree with Abraham Kuyper: the reason we have so many kinds of genres in the Bible is so that God's word can strike all the chords of the human soul, not just the intellectual.

I have not worked out a full-fledged theology of literary forms. My fullest discussion these issues to date is "Love's Wisdom: the authority of Scripture's form and content for faith's understanding and theological judgment."[8] Paul Ricoeur has gestured towards what Steve is asking for in his essays "Biblical Time," "Naming God," and "Interpretive Narrative."[9] One of Ricoeur's line in particular continues to intrigue me: "Not just any theology can be wed to the narrative form." How much more is this the case with a theology wed to history, apocalyptic, wisdom, prophecy, law, and gospel!

Wellum also has some material questions—simple underhand pitches such as: how and why did Adam fall? how and why did Satan fall? Why not ask me to fix the economic downturn while you're at it? Joking aside: when Steve asks such questions, which ultimately concern divine communicative agency and the non-elect, he aims at what may seem the Achilles heel of my entire proposal. In speaking of a "dialogical" or "communicative" theism, am I not putting God into the position of helplessly having to wait for humans to respond to his overtures? Does God "fail" in his communicative action if and when his addressees choose not to respond in faith and obedience? Is God really all that he is in his communicative action in this case as well? Wellum acknowledges that I gesture towards this issue in relation to the hardening of Pharoah's heart (pp. 339-41), which is mentioned ten times in the book of Exodus alone, but in general he thinks my use of Scripture is "fairly sparse." If so, it is only because exegesis is so demanding and involved, and because I did not want to make a long book even longer. (For the record, a quick glance at the Scripture index to *Remythologizing Theology* shows that I refer to Scripture some 600 times and cite fifty different books of the Bible).

As to the issue itself, the argument of the book makes it clear that I affirm divine sovereignty in a way that I hope Calvin would endorse. And, though I employ the idea of dialogue (because Scripture so often depicts God

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[8] *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011), pp. 247-75.

[9] All three essays may be found in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

relating to human creatures in this way), I am careful to insist that the conversation is asymmetrical. God is in control of the conversation from first to last, and works his will effectually according to our communicative natures. As to the exegetical issue, I have dealt with Wellum's question about God's apparent "failed" communicative action and his charge about sparse exegesis in a recent essay "Divine Deception, Inception, and Communicative Action" on Ezek. 14:9, "I the Lord have deceived that prophet."[10] The challenge I set myself there was to explain the verse in light of what I argue in *Remythologizing* about God being all that he is in all that he does, and says. How are we to think about God's apparent communication of something false? I wrestled mightily for thirty-four pages with this passage, not least because it is a kind of exegetical stress fracture in the hip of Reformed theology. The stakes were high: divine trustworthiness—and the argument of my book! In one section, I explicitly address a communicative variation of the problem of evil: "the argument from communicative neglect." In a nutshell: if God's being is communicative activity and if God is true (both premises to which I say "Amen"), then is God not obligated to speak truth to everyone everywhere at all times? And if people deny the truth, does it follow that God's communicative action has misfired? The bulk of the article is exegesis. I look at divine deception in its immediate and then canonical context, and then examine six explanations of what God is doing in deceiving (e.g., God deceived only those who deserve it). I then present my own interpretation, the long and short of which is that God speaks truth, though hard-hearted sinners (and false prophets) distort that truth and so deceive themselves. God "causes" the false prophet to be deceived, then, by speaking truth to one whose heart and mind are unable rightly to receive it. In the process, God demonstrates his communicative righteousness. God is never truer, or more trustworthy, than in sovereignly proving a false person false.

I had no room in *Remythologizing Theology* to spend thirty-four pages exegeting a single text. By necessity I had to take certain things for granted. Wellum thinks that I ought to come clean: "What he should say is this: 'I am assuming the exegetical and biblical-theological work of Reformed theology and my task is to make sense of it and to theologize about it by employing new analogies.'" I now thus publicly declare: "I am assuming the exegetical and biblical-theological work of Reformed theology and my task is to make sense of it and to theologize about it by employing new analogies." There: now I feel much better...

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[10] In Michael Allen (ed.), *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), pp. 73-98.

Oliver Crisp

Wellum's concern about the conspicuous absence of apologetics in *Remythologizing Theology* is best discussed in conjunction with Oliver Crisp's paper, which makes a similar criticism. If Wellum was aiming at my Achilles' heel, Crisp targets my Achilles' spine: the alleged absence of epistemological backbone. Wellum worries that I do not give enough—or any?—reasons why my readers should (a) accept the canonical Scriptures as fully reliable and (b) accept Christianity as true. Crisp shares the same concern, cleverly suggesting that I am hoisted by my own anti-Feuerbachian petard. I see the speck of projectionism in my opponent's eye, but I do not see its beam in my own. Stated pointedly: what prevents my book's claims from being purely fideist, a mere declaration of what I happen to believe about God? What, if anything, do I need to do in order to convince others that my own account of divine self-communication is more than a clumsily devised myth? It's a good question.

Before I answer it, however, let me make a few preliminary points. First, Crisp claims that my work "is arguably the most sophisticated postmodern evangelical theology on offer today." This is a rather backhanded compliment, coming as it does from an analytic theologian. Can anything epistemologically good come out of postmodern Paris? The Anglo-American analytic industrial complex tends to think not. However, I want to know why Crisp thinks I'm postmodern. What exactly is it about my work that merits the qualifier "postmodern"? At the risk of being impertinent, I venture to suggest that Crisp could here do with greater clarity and analytic precision, though to be fair, I think I know what he has in mind, and this brings me to my second point.

Crisp has to ask if I am still a "five-point Alvinist," because Alvin Plantinga is an epistemological foundationalist while I appear to hold to some kind of postfoundationalism. The problem here is semantic, and can be fairly easily cleared up (I take full responsibility for any misunderstanding). The simple explanation is that I accepted Plantinga's objections to classical foundationalism, and his proposed positive alternative. Plantinga argues that it is rationally acceptable (warranted) to believe in the existence of God without evidence, proof, or even argument (because belief in God is "properly basic"). Initially, this seemed to be a kind of Calvinist postfoundationalism. In retrospect, however, I acknowledge that Plantinga prefers to describe his Reformed epistemology as a version of foundationalism. Understood in Plantinga's way, then, I too am happy to call myself a "modest" or "chastened" foundationalist. And I am therefore delighted to accept Crisp's proposal that belief in Scripture as normative is a properly basic belief (I say as much in *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*), especially if this lets me escape, Houdini-like, from the Problem of Projection. But does it?

I certainly do not want to be heard as arguing on Feuerbach's behalf. I wonder, however, if we can exorcise his spirit as easily as Crisp wants to. It is an attractive argument: Feuerbach cannot be right because, in fact, the actual doctrines of the New Testament (Crisp mentions the Incarnation) are not what we would expect in light of our cherished human values. In other words, the doctrines of the New Testament, especially Incarnation and atonement, do not resemble or have the feel of projected ideals. Feuerbach's story, Crisp summarily concludes, is thus "likely to be extremely unconvincing." But to whom? I know students at the University of Edinburgh who rejected their faith after reading Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. And, interestingly enough, Feuerbach does provide a rather provocative account of the Incarnation, which for him is all about the supreme value of self-giving love. I do not find his interpretation convincing, but others do. The salient point is that the project of "proving" or "grounding" Christianity proves to be a hostage to fortune: there will never be enough evidence to convince those who insist on suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Arguments may persuade heads, but not hearts. They certainly cannot produce faith, which is not ours to achieve, but the Lord's to give.

Don't get me wrong. Apologetics was my first undergraduate love, and perhaps the reason I initially chose to double-major in religious studies and philosophy. I studied all the approaches—evidentialist, rationalist, presuppositionalist. As a missionary in France after college, I met a German philosopher studying at the Sorbonne. For months, I would spend every Friday evening in his apartment where we would argue about Christianity into the wee hours of the morning. I would then return home and stay up another hour or so transcribing what I could recall of the evening's dialogue. Apologetics was a great romantic adventure: I was a knight of faith, laying siege to the modern Teutonic mind. After several months, we ran out of topics. My friend acknowledged that I had given decent responses to his many defeaters, and that he had no further objections. I was ecstatic: "So you're a believer now?" I asked. "No," he said. "Even though I cannot give you a reason, I still cannot believe."

I view my theological vocation first and foremost as one of edifying the church by helping people of faith to seek, and find, understanding. What method I have follows from my subject matter: God's triune communicative action. I begin by trying to make sense of the testimony of the prophets and apostles: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1 John 1:1).

Canonical-linguistic theology begins with what most Christian theologians down through the ages have taken as givens: that God communicates not only truth but life; that the biblical texts are what they by and large claim to be, namely, set-apart human writings arising from a divine commission that, in God's grace, are ingredients in the economies of revelation and redemp-

tion; that the purpose of God's self-communication is to bring about communion in Christ Jesus. This is simply historic Christian faith. I begin with it; I do not argue to it. Does this make me irrational? By no means! Rationality on my view involves four things: first, believing what I am told. Testimony is a reliable belief-forming mechanism unless there is good reason to think otherwise. Can I prove that there was indeed a voice from heaven? Probably not. Am I warranted in believing it nevertheless? Yes, because 2 Pet. 1:16-17 tells me that the first Christians did not follow cleverly devised myths but were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty, for, says Peter, "we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." Second, I am willing to subject my beliefs to critical testing. Third, I try to practice the intellectual virtues. Finally, I use transcendental arguments that show why theological presuppositions are necessary. Indeed, *Remythologizing Theology* is in one sense an extended transcendental argument: unless we presuppose the reliable testimony of Scripture to God's communicative action, we will be unable to speak well of God.

Conclusion

Both Crisp and Wellum refer to the apparent vulnerability of my appeal to divine discourse. What is the grounding, where is the defense? Let me say two things by way of a final response.

First, theologians should never back down when either reality or rationality is the issue. What is in dispute is how best to speak and think about reality. I am not averse to giving evidences as part of an overall strategy, but theological argumentation ultimately requires more. What more? In personal correspondence Crisp mentioned that he had, like Captain Ahab, traversed the seven seas in search of the great White Whale of my epistemology, but all he could find were a few minnows here and there. Well, he missed two good fishing ponds. One, an article on "Theology and Apologetics," is out in the open (in the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*[11]). The other, "The Trials of Truth: mission, martyrdom, and the epistemology of the cross", is a bit harder to find.[12]

Both essays make clear that my key apologetic categories are less epistemological than *martyrological*: staking knowledge and truth claims is ultimately a matter of bearing faithful witness, of enduring any and all critical tests, epistemological and existential alike. The operative concept, I believe, is *faithful witness*, and the paradigmatic faithful witness is Jesus Christ, God's personal

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[11] *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (ed. Campbell Campbell-Jack and Gavin J. McGrath; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006) pp. 35-43.

[12] In Andrew Kirk and Kevin Vanhoozer (eds.), *To Stake a Claim: Christian Mission in Epistemological Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999) pp. 120-56 (and subsequently republished as ch. 12 in my *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002]).

truth claim made flesh. Like Jesus, we bear faithful witness when we speak the truth in love and act out love in truth. When we formulate and live out Christian truth claims, and accord them epistemic primacy, all other truths will fall into their proper place. The canonical Scriptures provide the fiduciary framework for making one wise unto salvation and for forming godliness.

What I am after in theology and apologetics alike is sapience: holy wisdom. A sapiential apologetics is a defense of the whole Christian way, truth, and life that we undertake, as individual disciples and corporately as church, by bearing faithfulness witness in word and deed, at particular places and at particular times, to the truth and character of God. What apologists need to defend is not simply the existence of God but the *wisdom* of God displayed on the cross. This involves a willingness to endure all kinds of critical testing: physical, spiritual, historical, as well as philosophical. Bearing faithful witness involves a willingness to adopt a cruciform pattern of life. Arguments alone are not enough: the church needs to live out the truth of Jesus Christ and participate, in the power of the Spirit, in the drama of redemption. It is hard to argue against a loving community. Apologetics is a species of martyrdom, and ultimately a matter of (you guessed it) communicative action.

Why begin with divine discourse? The second thing I want to say by way of response is that Scripture itself repeatedly starts here, with a call to the people of God to hear, hearken to, and heed God's word. God calls Adam, Abraham, Moses and the prophets, and finally the apostles. In every case the mandate is to listen to, understand, and do what God says. And with this thought we return as well to my opening comments about the convergence of my theological method with the subject matter of theology.

While there are surely other ways of starting the subject matter of Christian theology, one particularly fruitful way is to speak of God in communicative action. Yes, God has spoken in various ways and at diverse times and climactically by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2), but all these ways are species of God's communicative action.[13] Even revelation is not as large a category as communicative action. Note, too, that redemption as well is a kind of communication, whereby God shares with finite creatures, in Christ through the Spirit, his own eternal life. The concept of communicative action is all-embracing, and reminds us that the triune God shares (i.e., communicates) his light, life, and love in many ways. Communicative action also embraces Scripture itself inasmuch as it not only transmits information but also serves as a rich medium by which God interpersonally relates via his promises, commands, warns,

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[13] "The Word of God which we hear in the Holy Scriptures derives from and reposes on the inner Being of the One God; and that is its objective ground, deep in the eternal Being of God, upon which our knowledge of God rests. In his own eternal Essence God is not mute or dumb, but Word communicating or speaking himself" (T. F. Torrance, "Knowledge of God and Speech about him according to John Calvin," in his *Theology in Reconstruction* [London: SCM, 1965], p. 88).

consoles, etc. All of the things God does in Scripture are types of communicative action intended to establish and govern right covenantal relations for the sake of communion.

Why begin with divine discourse? Because "in the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1), and because the word of God is the singular enabling condition of theology. Of course, remythologizing theology—the attempt to think God and God's thoughts after God's self-presentation in Scripture—is only the first step in the broader project of *recontextualizing* the knowledge of God. The goal of Christian theology is eminently practical and pastoral: to equip and edify the people so that they can speak well of God, and live well towards God and one another. In the final analysis, theology exists to help the church demonstrate the wisdom and truth of Jesus Christ in its corporate life. Theology directs the church faithfully and fittingly to live out, in a variety of cultural contexts, the truth and character of God communicated in Christ and the canonical Scriptures that attest him.

STR 4/1 (Summer 2013) 83–112

Book Reviews

Rodney Stark. *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*. New York: HarperOne, 2011. 506 pp. Hardback. ISBN 9780062007681. $27.99 Hardback.

Rodney Stark serves as Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University. He is the author of several books on Christian history and the impact of Christianity on civilization, including *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1996), *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (Random House, 2005) and *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (HarperOne, 2009). This work is a continuation of *Rise of Christianity*. Stark seeks to broaden the scope of his earlier work beginning with the religio-political context of the early first century CE through the present status of Christianity as a global faith. The issue the work addresses is how Christianity grew to become the world's largest faith system. While Stark treats this issue broadly, his work also serves as a defense of Christianity as an indispensable element in the progress of human civilization.

The book is divided into six parts and twenty-two chapters. It is not a work of theology, but an historical/sociological work examining Christianity's growth and impact on human cultures spanning the past 2000 years. Stark makes numerous assertions about the essence, growth, character, and value system of the faith and of its followers. In the first three centuries of its existence, the faith spread over the Mediterranean world less as a result of powerful preaching or climactic events, but more because of ordinary Christians winning over those in their social circles with the power of the gospel. Contrary to the belief that conversions were predominately among Gentiles, Stark points out that the first successes of Christianity were within the Jewish community. As late as the fifth century, the churches and synagogues were closely connected.

Stark argues that Christians fulfilled Christ's calling to be salt and light within the culture in the Roman world. He wrote, "In the midst of squalor, misery, illness, and anonymity of ancient cities, Christianity provided an island of mercy and security" (112). By being obedient to Christ's teachings, early Christians transformed the ancient world where life was short and cheap. They laid the foundations for the idea that human life is precious and ought to be preserved. Still, Stark acknowledges that Constantine's conversion in the early fourth century, and the legalization and later institutionalization of Christianity in subsequent years was a mixed blessing. The church in the late Roman Empire would grow to be intolerant. Stark wrote, "Far better that [Constantine] would have remained a pagan who opposed religious persecution, while allowing Christian diversity to flourish" (181).

There is a serious element of "mythbusting" throughout Stark's work. Figuring prominently are the notions that the medieval period was, in the words of Will Durant, an "age of faith"; that the centuries after 1500 represented a "renaissance," an "age of reason," an "Enlightenment"; or that there was a rise of science following a period of superstition and intellectual darkness. Rather than there being a measurable intellectual break between the medieval and modern periods, Stark asserts that the progress seen from the sixteenth century forward was a continuation of a pattern of progress coming after the fall of the Roman West in 476.

Stark also emphatically disputes the notion that the Crusades were the earliest expressions of an offensive and exploitative European colonialism. Instead, he argues that the Crusades were justified because they were defensive campaigns against expansionist Islam, which had already conquered much of the Christian east and North Africa by the ninth century. This chapter on the Crusades follows the argument he made in his book *Case for the Crusades.*

Stark also engages the argument commonly made by new atheists such as Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitches, and Richard Dawkins, that religion is antithetical to human flourishing and that it will ultimately disappear as collective human knowledge increases. On the contrary, science and technology flourished within a Christian intellectual and cultural framework. Religious pluralism in America encouraged the growth of Christianity and enhanced its vitality, rather than undermining it. The secularization thesis of the new atheists is simply wrong, according to Stark. His overall argument in the book is that Christianity has had an enormous impact on the progress of humanity due to its message, cultural flexibility, emphasis on human value, pursuit of knowledge, and globalization. Forty percent of the world's population is Christian today, and it is the fastest growing faith system in the world.

Stark makes an important contribution in his historical/sociological study of the progress of Christianity and its contributions to human flourishing. Particularly valuable are the arguments Stark makes against many prevailing beliefs about Christians and Christianity that are overly critical and negative. His contributions lay important groundwork for future studies on the powerful impact that Christians have had on human civilization not only in the West, but in the world.

John D. Wilsey
Houston, Texas

J. Patout Burns (translator and editor). *Romans: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators.* The Church's Bible. Grand Rapids, Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2012. Xxvii + 428 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-2575-9. $46.00 Hardback.

This volume is part of an upsurge in interest in patristic theology and exegesis over the past two decades. It has led to countless monographs (for pa-

tristic exegesis in particular see M. Fiedrowicz, *Theologie der Kirchenväter: Grundlagen frühchristlicher Glaubensreflexion*; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2007, 97–187), several series of editions of patristic texts in different languages (see for example the *Fontes Christiani*), a number of reference tools and several anthologies of patristic texts of some kind. Among the latter is *The Church's Bible*, which aims to present for each biblical book texts from the first thousand years of Christianity.

The present volume starts with the series preface (xf) by Robert L. Wilken, who serves as the series editor of *The Church's Bible*. He states the scope of the series (see p. ix):

> The volumes in The Church's Bible are designed to present the Holy Scriptures as understood and interpreted during the first millennium of Christian history. The Christian Church has a long tradition of commentary on the Bible. In the early Church all discussion of theological topics, of moral issues, and of Christian practice took the biblical text as the starting point. The recitation of the psalms and meditation on books of the Bible, particularly in the context of the liturgy or of private prayer, nurtured the spiritual life. For most of the Church's history theology and scriptural interpretation were one. Theology was called *sacra pagina* (the sacred page), and the task of interpreting the Bible was a spiritual enterprise.
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> During the first two centuries interpretation of the Bible took the form of exposition of select passages on particular issues. For example, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, dismissed many passages from the Old and New Testaments in his defense of the apostolic faith against the Gnostics. By the beginning of the third century Christian bishops and scholars had begun to preach regular series of sermons that followed the biblical books verse by verse. Some wrote more scholarly commentaries that examined in greater detail grammatical, literary, and historical questions as well as theological ideas and spiritual teachings found in the texts. From Origen of Alexandria, the first great biblical commentator in the Church's history, we have, among others, a large verse-by-verse commentary on the Gospel of John, a series of homilies on Genesis and Exodus, and a large part of his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. In the course of the first eight hundred years of Christian history Christian teachers produced a library of biblical commentaries and homilies on the Bible. ...
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> The distinctive mark of The Church's Bible is that it draws extensively on the ancient commentaries, not only on random comments drawn from theological treatises, sermons, or devotional works. Its volumes will, in the main, offer fairly lengthy excerpts from the ancient commentaries and from series of sermons on specific books. ... Some passages will be as brief as a paragraph, but many will be several pages in

> length, and some longer. We believe that only through a deeper immersion in the ancient sources can contemporary readers enter into the inexhaustible spiritual and theological world of the early Church and hence of the Bible.

This is followed by R. L. Wilken's brief survey of "Interpreting the New Testament" in the patristic period (pp. xi–xxii). In the introduction to Romans (pp. xxiii–xxvii), J. Patout Burns sets out with a brief survey of the plan and structure of Romans and the early Christian interpretations of Romans. They were faced with religious questions somewhat different from those Paul had addressed. The patristic commentators "did not hesitate to adapt Paul's teaching to this new and different context" (p. xxiv):

> The plan of divine governance which had integrated the Jewish response to Christ into the process of salvation of the nations could be understood as a paradigm for the interaction of divine initiative and human response in the election and calling of Christians from among many peoples. Most of the commentators followed Origen's lead in upholding human autonomy and free choice—though carefully limited—because they considered this essential for safeguarding the human moral responsibility essential to their understanding of God's justice in condemning sinners and rewarding the faithful. Augustine, and occasionally others, emphasised the sinfulness of humanity and the absolute gratuity of all God's operations which led chosen individuals to that salvation provided in Christ. In a similar way, the various parts and roles of the divine law—natural, Mosaic, and Christian—had to be distinguished and related. Some Christians used allegorical techniques to direct the entire law to the guidance of conduct; others treated the ritual provisions as foreshadowing the work of Christ.

Patout Burns also discusses the text of the Pauline letters which was used in patristic exegesis. He further explains the two criteria employed in his selection of passages from the ancient commentaries:

> First, interpretations that have relevance for current living and understanding of Christian life have been preferred to observations and explanations of the text which have only historical value for understanding the ancient Christian church. Second, interpretations representing different perspectives and thereby illustrating the range of ancient Christian understandings of the Letter to the Romans have been included. Sometimes an interpretation was advanced by a single author, but in many instances understandings were shared among several commentators. Thus Chrysostom and Theodoret often agree, while Augustine diverges from a widely held view (p. xxvi).

The editor also lists the available English translations of commentaries on Romans from the patristic era.

The body of this commentary consists of selected readings from the early and late ancient church on the preface on Romans and on all chapters of the letter. For the preface and each chapter of the letter to the Romans, the editor provides succinct summaries of the concern and focus of patristic commentators. The texts have been selected from Ambrosiaster, Apollinaris, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Gennadius of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, Origen of Alexandria, Pelagius and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (brief biographies on pp. 394f); for these interpreters see H. Graf Reventlow, *Epochen der Bibelauslegung I: Vom Alten Testament bis Origenes* (München: C. H. Beck, 1990) and *Epochen der Bibelauslegung II: Von der Spätantike bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters* (1994); D. K. McKim (ed.), *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 1998) and the forthcoming volume one, *From the Beginnings to 600*, of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* (eds. J. C. Paget, J. Schaper).

In his explanation of the selection of patristic readings of Romans, Patout Burns notes some of the shifts in interest in patristic exegesis which has led to "strongly negative statements about Jews which are contrary to what now appears as Paul's intention" (p. xxvii). He traces this development as follows:

> Paul devotes extended attention to the status of the Jews and of the promises which were made to Israel. He argues that those promises were fulfilled in Christ and that the Jews will share in that gift of God. The ancient commentators in some instances no longer found the original Pauline message plausible; it was contradicted by their experienced separation and antagonism between Christians and Jews. In many instances, therefore, they developed interpretations of the Pauline text which adapted its meaning to their own times and culture.

He writes that "For the most part, these negative judgements have not been selected for inclusion because they do not contribute to the objectives and goals of this series, which is to make the resources of an earlier and foundational period of Christian life available for the contemporary edification of the church" (p. xxvii). While edification may be a legitimate goal, one wonders whether a problematic aspect of patristic exegesis and theology (with at times deplorable practical consequences for Jews!) can and should be brushed aside that easily.

The volume closes with appendices of authors of works excerpted and of sources of texts translated and with indices of names, subjects and Scripture references. Unfortunately the volume does not contain a summary and critical analysis of the patristic engagement with Romans.

Other volumes in this new series are R. A. Norris on the Song of Songs, R. L. Wilken on Isaiah (see my review in *Religion & Theology 16, 2009, 118–120*) and J. L. Kovacs on 1 Corinthians.

A similar English series is the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (now twenty-nine volumes in print, eds. G. Bray, T. C. Oden, Downers Grove: IVP; on this series see www.ivpress.com/accs). In that series the commentary

on Romans was compiled by Gerald Bray (volume 6 of the series, 2. ed., 2005; xxviii + 406 pp.). That series also contains an excellent supplement volume: C. A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* published in 1998.

In German language a similar series, the *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* has recently started to appear. So far two volumes have been published: M. Meiser, *Galater*, NTP 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007f) and A. Merkt, *1. Petrus*, NTP 21 (2011).

Christoph Stenschke
Bergneustadt, Germany
Pretoria, South Africa

Allen P. Ross. *A Commentary on the Psalms*. Vol 1 (1-41). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011. 992 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978 0 8254 2562 2. $59.99 Hardback.

This commentary on the first Book of the Psalter opens with chapters covering standard topics such as titles and headings, poetry, literary forms, and history of interpretation. The ensuing exposition of each psalm consists of translation and text-critical analysis, composition and context, exegetical analysis, commentary in expository form, and finally message and application. The approach is basically form critical as the catalogue of "literary forms" reveals and so each psalm is labeled according to this approach.

A brief summary of the Psalter's arrangement, which is seen as having achieved its present shape gradually consists of the Davidic monarchy in Books I and II, failure of it in III, and restoration of the Lord as king in IV and V (p. 54). Psalms were thus placed in specific sections because they applied to specific periods in Israel's history (p. 54), and the flow takes one from Davidic experiences to the universal reign of Yahweh (p. 63). Psalms 1 and 2 form the introduction to the whole work, introducing the themes of law and kingship respectively (p. 54). However, while the present overall arrangement is apparently intentional, Ross expresses skepticism regarding "connections and patterns that may not be there, or if they are there, are only slight" (p. 62). So the place in the Psalter of a given psalm may not have a direct bearing on its exposition. Accordingly, he places greater emphasis on awareness "of how the psalms have been applied in different situations in Israel's history" for contemporary application (pp. 62-3).

Hebrew students will find useful discussions of grammar and structure in the expository section, but beyond this level of analysis there are major difficulties with the commentary's approach. The palpable subjectivity inherent in historical reconstruction or identification of literary forms is in contrast to the established and stable Psalter sequence, 11QPs^{a} notwithstanding. From the very outset the Psalter's redactor did not follow form critical criteria. A wisdom psalm (Ps 1) is followed by one royal (Ps 2), and an individual lament (Ps 3). Numerous substantial and unique literary connectors that elucidate its

purpose characterize the canonical sequence generally and these first psalms as well, but reference to them are absent in the commentary.

Overt anachronisms in the Psalter's arrangement such as David fleeing Absalom in Ps 3 and hiding in the cave in Ps 144 exclude the chronological history of Israel interpretation. Likewise the Mosaic Ps 90 follows complaints about the loss of the monarchy (Ps 89) and Davidic psalms in Books I and II. Psalms 78 and 105 rehearse history (Egypt to David, Abraham to the conquest), but their location (Books III, IV) does not follow the chronological grid imposed by the commentary.

For Ross, the original purpose of the Psalter was to be the "hymn book of the temple" (p. 25), and thus, "like our hymn books" (p. 63). This widespread view overlooks the fact that the very first piece of this "hymnbook" is apparently "practical wisdom" (p. 141). How would one sing a broken acrostic such as Pss 9-10? Further undermining the analogy is the fact that for the ancient writers music was not distinguished from prophecy, as II Chron 25:1-5 indicate (cf. also II Kgs 3:15ff). The very Levitical singers named in Psalms were appointed by David to *prophesy* with instruments. He likewise is characterized as a prophet in II Sam 23:1.

It is not surprising given the approach taken that Ross finds the "Psalms do not have much direct prophecy, it is a little more difficult to explain the New Testament usage…there are times when they use passages in ways that do not seem to be in the understanding of the psalmists" (p. 165). "Royal psalms" should especially be studied because of their importance for biblical theology (p. 165), but were applicable to Israelite kings and are only indirectly "messianic" (p. 157). Accordingly, Psalm 2 is a "royal psalm" and "would have applied to every Davidic king" (p. 200). Actually, the case of Pss 1 and 2 and their thorough integration at all levels points to the identification of an impeccable, celestial, priestly and absolutely monarch, *excluding* any historical figure in Israel's history. Numerous connectors at various levels confirm that this king is found in both psalms, as are his opposites, the wicked and rebellious rulers. The surprising coherence between such apparently disparate pairs at the outset is present throughout the Psalter, in spite of Ross's negative judgment (cf. Pss. 22-23). As an approach for understanding the canonical Psalter, *Gattungsforschung* has been tried and found wanting. A serious grappling with the book's arrangement and shape at all levels is the key to unlocking its secrets.

Robert Cole
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Kelly James Clark and Raymond J. VanArragon. *Evidence and Religious Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. vii + 214 pp. Hardback. ISBN 9780199603718. $65.00 Hardback.

This is a collection of essays examining whether religious beliefs must be based on evidence to be rational. Overall, the essays are well-written. One of the book's unique strengths is that it probes this topic from the angle of epistemology and the standpoint of metaphysics. Some chapters explore epistemological issues such as evidentialism, the view that beliefs need evidence to be justified, while others explore metaphysical issues, such as whether there is evidence for theism.

The book is divided into three sections. Part one focuses on whether religious beliefs need evidence to be rational. James Ross, Linda Zagzebski, C. Stephen Evans, and Chris Tucker contribute chapters. Some of these chapters attack evidentialism. For instance, Ross argues that it cannot meet its own standard. The evidentialist contends that all beliefs need evidence to be justified, but it's not clear what evidence there is for this view. For example, given ordinary things we have evidence for, such as the fact that grass is green, it's hard to see how to derive the bold conclusion that *all* beliefs need evidence. Other chapters take a conciliatory tone. Evans, for instance, points out that experience provides evidence for beliefs. For example, if I experience the grass as green, this provides evidence in favor of my belief that it is green. In turn, Evans argues theists can meet the evidentialist's demand. The key is to realize that experience of one thing can be mediated by another thing. For instance, someone might hear the voice of her son through a cell phone. In the same way, Evans argues people can have a mediated experience of God through His creation. For example, by looking at a beautiful sunset, someone might experience God and thereby have evidence for His existence.

Part two explores the extent to which a person's evidence for or against religious belief depends on other factors, including a person's character and other beliefs. William Wainwright, E.J. Coffman, Jeff Cervantez, and Thomas Crisp contribute chapters. Some of these chapters offer suggestions as to why theists and atheists disagree over the evidence for God's existence. For instance, Wainwright claims that it might be due to sin. Other chapters argue that, given other beliefs atheists hold, they cannot launch certain arguments against theism. For example, Crisp considers the atheist that accepts the theory of evolution. He argues such an atheist has no reason to think that she can reason reliably about abstruse philosophical matters. Evolution provides reason to think that humans will be able to do things well that are useful to their survival, such as reproducing, but it provides no reason to think that humans can do things well that are not useful to their survival, such as reasoning about abstract philosophy. In turn, if there is no reason for atheists to think they can reason reliably about abstract philosophy, there is no reason for them to think that certain abstruse philosophical premises are true that compose various arguments they make against God's existence. For instance,

atheists routinely argue against theism by claiming there are no reasons that would justify God in allowing horrendous evils like the Holocaust. However, given the theory of evolution, Crisp thinks atheists cannot know this is true.

Part three of the book looks at actual evidence for and against theism. Thomas Kelly, Kelly James Clark, Andrew Samuel, William Rowe, William Hasker, and John Hick contribute chapters. In favor of theism, Kelly explores the viability of the *consensus gentium* argument, the idea that there is evidence in favor of God's existence given the fact that there is widespread belief in Him. At first, the idea that widespread acceptance of a belief might provide evidence in favor of its truths seems odd. Nonetheless, Kelly argues that it is not so strange, since we routinely reason this way. For instance, if someone learns that all of the neighbors on her block think that their recycling will be picked up on Wednesday, then she has reason to think that this is true. Against theism, Rowe argues that theists cannot claim that God is the greatest possible being. He starts by observing that our current universe could have been better than it is. For instance, it would have been better if it contained more life-supporting planets like Earth. However, if our universe could have been better than it is, then God Himself would have been a better being if He had created a better universe than what He did in fact create. In turn, if God could have been better, then, contrary to the theists, He is not the greatest possible being.

The editors have done an excellent job bringing together a first-rate group of philosophers. Scholars and serious students will want to use this book as the starting point for thinking further about the issues it addresses.

Allen Gehring
Owensboro, Kentucky

C.E. Hill. *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 295. Hardback. ISBN 9780199551231. $27.95 Hardback.

It seems like nearly every year a new "Gospel" is being unearthed by archaeologists, each of whom claims the document offers us a new perspective on the historical Jesus and the movement he inspired. This trend coincides with a scholarly community that emphasizes early Christian diversity over unity, privileges heresy over orthodoxy, and offers political readings of early Christian historical theology. And, of course, novelists such as Dan Brown have provided us with bestselling fictional works that assume the heresy-before-orthodoxy, competing Christianities paradigm.

Charles Hill, who teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, has little patience for the scholarly status quo. In *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*, Hill offers a critique of scholars such as Bart Ehrman, Elaine Pagels, and Lee McDonald, each of whom argues that ecclesiastical power politics rather than theological considerations resulted in

the church's embracing of the four canonical Gospels. *Who Chose the Gospels?* demolishes the questionable historical work of such scholars, which is helpful. As an added bonus, Hill writes in a playful, even punchy way that plays off of the popular idea that the Bible is the product of a vast Catholic conspiracy.

Hill chips away at the conspiracy thesis bit by bit. He demonstrates that many scholars play fast and loose with statistics in an effort to prove that the Gospels were less popular than other writings now deemed heretical. Hill defends Irenaeus against scholarly attempts to paint him as a heresy-hunting power-monger. He shows that writers such as the Apostolic Fathers and Justin Martyr had the same regard for the four canonical Gospels as Irenaeus. He shows how Gospel summaries and harmonies actually prove the greater acceptance of the four Gospels rather than apocryphal documents. Hill tentatively suggests that the Apostle John, who was the same person as John the Elder, played a key role in promoting the four-fold Gospel. The author's cautious proposal stands in welcome contrast to the sweeping claims made by the scholars whom he is critiquing.

In his conclusion, the author argues that no one person or council "chose" the Gospels, but rather Christian leaders increasingly recognized an apostolic quality about the canonical Gospels that was lacking in other writings of the era. This recognition was based upon a combination of key relationships , minor differences among the Gospels, and doctrinal considerations. In short, early Christian valued the insights and recommendations of their forebears, appreciated the way the four Gospels offered different, but complementary portrayals of Jesus, and, differences notwithstanding, recognized a common doctrinal core among Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. To Christians of the second and third centuries, the Gospels had a "self-attesting authority" that was lacking in other would-be Gospels (244).

Who Chose the Gospels? is a great resource for traditionalist Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox scholars and clergy. For professors, Hill pushes back against the reigning scholarly paradigm that assumes the absence of any sort of normative orthodoxy. For pastors, Hill provides a helpful apologetic resource for answering questions raised by anxious church members who have been confused by documentaries on The History Channel or articles in *National Geographic.* Unfortunately, Hill will likely not convince many scholars on the other side; worldview considerations factor into this discussion at least as much as scholarly evidence. Nevertheless, he will help to persuade many students and pastors not to abandon traditional interpretations of the canonization process and the formulation of orthodoxy. *Who Chose the Gospels?* should be on every pastor's bookshelf. It would also make a fine supplemental textbook for courses in early church history or New Testament text criticism.

Nathan A. Finn
Wake Forest, NC

Robert Kolb. *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. vii + 188 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-3891-4. $21.99 Paperback.

Luther and the Stories of God takes the reader on a carefully crafted tour of Martin Luther's basic insights into the gospel and its hermeneutical significance when attending to the narratives of Scripture. Readers could not hope for a better tour guide than Robert Kolb. The maturity of his long handling of Luther yields a confident sense of the whole as the reader moves through large swaths of Luther's preaching and lectures on Biblical narratives. Kolb brings these practices of Luther into conversation with current "narrative" approaches. The result, in the account of this reviewer, is a helpful point of entrance for those trying to navigate the difficult terrain of preaching, teaching and understanding Biblical narratives as a living Word. Luther understands himself to inhabit the same divine economy as the biblical narratives. This location within the divine economy allows Luther's preaching and lecturing to have a sense of immediacy and urgency when reading Biblical narratives in light of the gospel and for the present community of faith.

Luther was a master story-teller, so Kolb states in his first chapter. Luther's chief aim both in his preaching and university lectures was to shape his hearers in light of the paradigmatic narrative of Holy Scripture: the primary location where God reveals himself and forges human identity. From this introductory chapter, Kolb then presents what he deems Luther's "metanarrative." This metanarrative, or over-arching narratival framework, was shaped by Luther's conviction that God acts in history, and, moreover, our understanding of God is never abstracted from God's *ad extra* move towards humanity. The jolt of God's revelation of himself in human history as witnessed to in Holy Scripture is God's hiding of himself from human reason. Again and again God defies our expectations about what it means for God to be God. The presentation of human history in Holy Scripture—a presentation Genesis 1-11 reifies in the narrative move through apostasy, repentance, and obedience—assumes God's interaction with humanity within the divine economy of God's redemption of sinners.

For Luther, as for most within the grand-stream of pre-modern biblical commentators, the divine economy witnessed to in Holy Scripture is the self-same divine economy inhabited by Luther. He and his hearers breathed the same air. The narratives of Scripture aid the Christian in what Luther understood as the ultimate purpose of engaging God's word: cultivating the Christian life as a *life of repentance* (p. 18). Three nodal points provide the hermeneutical framework for Luther's preaching and teaching of biblical narratives: one, law and gospel; two, two kinds of righteousness (passive and active); and three, two kingdoms or two realms. It goes beyond the purview of this brief review to engage critically Luther's guiding hermeneutic. Suffice it to say, Kolb is nuanced enough in his presentation of Luther's teaching—or we should say Luther is sufficiently nuanced—to anticipate and clarify the typical

challenges directed at these interpretive instincts: e.g., the gospel is neutered of its imperatival force, the "legal fiction" of *justitia aliena*, and the two kingdoms lets Christians off the hook of cultural engagement.

"Luther's sermons were conceived in the study and born in the pulpit" (p. 30). Thus is Kolb's point of entry into chapter two where Luther's particular use of story or narrative is engaged. Kolb presents Luther as one who valued the positive force story played in preaching and teaching. Of special interest in this chapter is the interlocution between Luther and modern practitioners of so-called narrative hermeneutics/theology. Luther is much more in line with Kevin Vanhoozer's "canonical-linguistic" approach over against Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" understanding of Biblical language: an understanding of biblical language as hemmed in by community use. Nevertheless, Luther makes for an interesting conversation partner with Sternberg, Frei, Lindbeck and others. Luther believed story deployed in imaginative ways was rhetorically effective in shaping the hearer. His preference in preaching was biblical narratives, though he allowed himself liberty to use narratives or illustrations from outside the Biblical canon.

The remaining chapters of Kolb's volume then take the reader into the world of Luther's actual preaching and teaching. Kolb shows how Luther allowed Biblical narratives to shape his hearers in the following areas of the Christian life of repentance: fearing, loving, and trusting God; the life of *Anfechtung* (suffering); the call to praise and prayer; loving one's neighbor; and the *ars moriendi* (the art of dying). These chapters are chock-full of insights that preachers, teachers, and readers of God's word can turn to when engaging these different *topoi* of the Christian life. Luther's teaching ministry is certainly influenced by his place in time, but it is not bound by such. Though there are aspects of Kolb's (and Luther's) presentation worthy of critical query, readers are indebted to both for the gems presented in this volume.

Mark S. Gignilliat
Birmingham, Alabama

Timothy S. Goeglein. *The Man in the Middle: An Inside Account of Faith and Politics in the George W. Bush Era.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2011. xvi + 241 pp. Hardback. 978-14336-7288-0. $19.99 Hardback.

George W. Bush's reputation as president leaves much to be desired. Public opinion polls and scholarly rankings generally categorize Bush as one of America's worst presidents. Few people have raised their voices in defense of the 43rd President and his record. Timothy Goeglein is one of those individuals. As one of the longest serving White House aides to President Bush, Goeglein knows Bush and his record and seeks to salvage the President's reputation. The author readily admits that he was not part of the Bush inner-circle, but demonstrates that his position as Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the Office of Public Liaison from 2000 to 2008 al-

lowed him to witness what few are ever privileged to see: the inner-workings of a presidential administration and the true character of a President.

Goeglein's White House memoir is written from the perspective of a politically-engaged Christian conservative. Raised in a traditional mid-western family that transitioned from the Lutheran Church in America to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as the former drifted away from orthodoxy, Goeglein followed his parent's lead in devouring the writings of political and Christian conservatives, ancient and modern. After graduating from Indiana University's School of Journalism, he worked for leading figures of the Religious Right in the state: Dan Quayle and Dan Coats. After serving as the communications director for Gary Bauer's unsuccessful campaign for the 2000 Republican nomination, Goeglein became the Director of Media Coalitions in the Bush-Cheney campaign. After Bush's close victory in 2000, Karl Rove asked Goeglein to work in the Bush White House serving as the "middle man" between the President and his base–fiscal conservatives and conservative Christians.

Goeglein's seven years of funneling ideas and opinions between the White House and organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the Family Research Council serves as the basis from which he evaluates the Bush presidency. Goeglein concludes that Christian conservatives should appreciate Bush because "no president in the contemporary era did more to advance life, marriage, and religious liberty than George W. Bush" (137). He recounts Bush's efforts to defund embryonic stem cell research, establish his office of faith-based initiatives, and defend traditional marriage. While these reminiscences may help conservatives remember what they liked about George W. Bush, they will likely do little to sway his most ardent critics. For instance, little effort is made to justify Bush's decision to invade Iraq or to defend other controversial aspects of Bush's presidency.

Goeglein ultimately wants his readers to see that Bush was a committed Christian and wise servant leader who genuinely cared for people and the country as a whole. This characterization comes across most powerfully at the beginning of the book where Goeglein describes his own downfall. In February 2008, a newspaper reporter discovered that Goeglein had plagiarized nearly two-dozen columns published in his hometown newspaper. The first chapter of the book recounts this painful experience, which ended with Goeglein's resignation from the White House. He makes no excuses for his actions and emphasizes that President Bush and others in the administration comforted and prayed for him, rather than ostracize him as one would expect. This, he says, shows the real measure of the man he worked for and of those surrounding him.

Readers of this journal will appreciate the author's frank confession of his sins and his testimony of receiving unmerited grace and forgiveness from God and others in the aftermath of his scandal. They will also be intrigued by his stories of working in the White House and in the conservative movement

of the last few decades. Rather than the popular caricature of that movement, readers will find conservative activists who were intelligent, cultured thinkers who read widely and cherished the exchange of ideas. Readers will also appreciate the author's opinion on politics. Though a political activist himself, Goeglein repeatedly argues that conservative Christians should view public policy as secondary to shaping the culture. Getting the "right" people into political office will be of little benefit in an increasingly secular and hedonistic culture. His prescription for cultural reform, however, is disappointingly vague, consisting primarily in a call for "a refreshed and renewed Judeo-Christian consensus in America" (213).

While this book is not the last word on the Bush presidency or on the role of faith in politics, it is a well-written, moving, and at times entertaining tale of an important chapter in the life of our nation. It offers an invaluable glimpse inside the workings of the Religious Right, particularly when it had a prominent seat at the table of national political power. It is also an important corrective to the Bush record, a corrective that, when joined by contributions yet to come, should eventually revive the reputation of the imperfect, yet remarkable, 43rd President of the United States of America.

Brent J. Aucoin
Wake Forest, North Carolina

John Goldingay. *Key Questions about the Christian Faith: Old Testament Answers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. xiii + 345pp. Paperback. ISBN 9780801039546. $24.99 Paperback.

In this apologetically oriented book, well-known OT scholar John Goldingay addresses 25 questions about the Christian faith. Each chapter answers one question and does so primarily from the author's "First Testament" perspective. In using this phrase, Goldingay connects the OT to the NT and contends that the former should be read "not as something old and legalistic but as something pristine and creative" (xi). The questions addressed in this book range from the classic (e.g., "How do God's Love and God's Wrath relate to each other?," "Is Election Fair?"), to topics treated in systematic theology (e.g., "Who is God?," "What is Sin?"), to more detailed theological questions (e.g., "What is a Covenant?," "Was the Holy Spirit Active in First Testament Times?"), to Christian living (e.g., "Should I Tithe Net or Gross?," "How Does Prayer Work?"), and to contemporary issues in society (e.g., "Is God in the City?," "Does God Care about Animals?").

Since so many topics are addressed in this book, this review will focus on some of its notable points rather than attempting a comprehensive summary. Parts of Goldingay's work that were particularly insightful include his response, based on Ecclesiastes and Job, to the problems of death and suffering (pp. 56-66). Likewise, the chapter entitled "What Does it Mean to be Human?" has a helpful emphasis on the disabled based on Goldingay's expe-

riences of living with a disabled spouse (p. 42). He also clearly debunks the idea that the God of the OT is a God of wrath and the God of the NT is a God of love (p. 12). Other parts of his work were thought-provoking, such as his view that there is an asymmetrical relationship between God's love and God's wrath, with the former being his "dominant side" (p. 23). Insights like these are frequent throughout the book as Goldingay draws upon his vast knowledge of the OT. This work is also to be commended for addressing some questions that are not usually addressed in other books like it.

On the other hand, there are also parts that readers more theologically conservative than Goldingay will find edgy, or worse. For example, he occasionally uses questionable anthropomorphisms, such as "God [was] out for a stroll in the cool of the evening" (p. 1), God's "tough, angry, negative side" (p. 12), and "Yahweh is often a pushover when urged not to act in punishment" (p. 18). Yet there are even more troubling statements scattered throughout the work. Although proposing a "different framework" (p. 25) for the open theism debate ("Does God Have Surprises?"), Goldingay nevertheless affirms, "Sometimes God does not know how the future will turn out" (p. 34). Elsewhere he refers to Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Job as "fictional stories" (p. 61) and associates them with Jesus' parables. Also, on the basis of his assertion that "the First Testament does not link sacrifice with legal categories" (p. 148), he claims that their use in understanding the atonement "looks unscriptural as well as unlikely to aid the proper preaching of the gospel" (p. 148)—an implicit rejection of the penal substitution theory of atonement. More examples could be cited, and such troubling statements are serious enough to warrant caution.

There is no doubt that this book contains many insights from an accomplished OT scholar, but its troublesome parts make it difficult to recommend to its apparent target audience—"seekers" or inquisitive Christians. Such readers may not be able to sift through the varied material adequately. Those who are able and willing to do this will benefit from its insights and gain a survey of Goldingay's thought on a variety of issues.

Kevin Chen
Jackson, TN

Ronald J. Sider, ed. *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012. 216 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9780801036309. $27.99 Paperback.

Ronald J. Sider is president of Evangelicals for Social Action and professor of theology, holistic ministry, and public policy at Palmer Theological Seminary. As a bestselling author who has worked, taught, and written on topics related to killing for more than three decades, Sider is well qualified to produce a text on the early church and killing.

As its subtitle implies, *The Early Church on Killing* is a compilation of primary source writings from the early church on the act of killing in various contexts. Sider plainly writes, "In this book I have sought to provide in English translation all extant data directly relevant to the witness of the early church on killing" (p. 14). The reader should note that in using the term "early church" Sider is referring to the roughly 300-year period from Jesus' death until the reign of Constantine.

Structurally, *The Early Church on Killing* consists of a brief introduction, wide-ranging primary source material organized into four parts, and an afterword. The four parts into which Sider organizes his primary sources are: Christian Writers before Constantine, Church Orders and Synods, Miscellaneous Items, and Other Evidence of Christian Soldiers before Constantine. Some of the early writers and sources included in this compendium include: *Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, First Clement, Second Clement, Apocalypse of Peter*, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, *Didascalia apostolorum*, Julius Africanus, Origen, St. Cyprian, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius of Alexandria, Archelaus, Adamantius, *Dialogue on the True Faith*, Arnobius of Sicca, Lactantius, *Apostolic Tradition*, Three Later Church Orders, *Synod of Arles, The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, Paul of Samosata, and *The Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena*.

In this work Sider has done the researcher a tremendous service in assembling into one place all of the extant works from the early church on the act of killing. Moreover, Sider is to be commended for the brief introduction he gives for each writer or work included, as well as for the helpful explanatory notes that sporadically appear throughout the four sections. These notes give helpful information about the background or context of a particular included source. The modernized English translations, as well as the four extensive indices make this volume very user-friendly and certainly well within the reach of scholars and lay-people alike. Additionally, Sider succeeds in not allowing his personal, Anabaptist, pacifist bias show through in his assemblage and presentation of primary sources.

The above accolades notwithstanding, there are a few drawbacks to *The Early Church on Killing* of which the prospective reader should be aware. While Sider does present primary sources in a dispassionate manner, a reading of his introduction, and especially his afterword, indicate that his agenda in producing this text was not neutral. Specifically, it is clear that Sider wants to argue the writings of the early church support a pacifist view of killing, which he believes to be the Christian position. This idea is flawed, however, by Sider's presupposition that "Christians much closer to the time of Jesus . . . would be more likely to understand Jesus's teaching on loving enemies than those who lived centuries later" (p. 13). The problem here is that Christians are to base their view of the ethics of killing (and the related topics of war, abortion, and capital punishment) not solely upon the writings of others, but upon the teachings of Scripture itself.

There is no reason to assume, as Sider apparently does, the Holy Spirit's ability to guide in truth is somehow culturally conditioned or chronologically superior in the early church. Indeed, if this assumption is unsound, then even if it could be proven the early church was pacifistic (a debatable conclusion in light of Scripture and the assembled material), Sider's position could not necessarily be proven. Moreover, most scholars would agree that the methodology of appealing to the aggregate historical view on killing within the Christian tradition would lead one to a non-pacifist position.

One additional shortcoming of *The Early Church on Killing* is that the subtitle might lead the prospective reader to believe this book contains organized, specific material about war, abortion, capital punishment, and the like. While there is much material on these issues scattered throughout this volume, it should be notes that this book is arranged chronologically, not topically. Therefore, there is no specific section of historical material on capital punishment, for example. Additionally, it seems that in this text Sider is more interested in warfare than other topics related to killing, for he devotes 27 of his 32 page afterword to war and military service.

In conclusion, *The Early Church on Killing* is a good sourcebook that ought to find its way onto the bookshelf of students, pastors, and lay-people. Given Sider's pacifist bias, however, regardless of one's own view of the morality of killing, I would suggest skipping the introduction and afterword of this book and just utilizing the assembled primary source material.

David W. Jones
Wake Forest, North Carolina

R. Reed Lessing. *Concordia Commentary: Isaiah 40-55*. St Louis: Concordia, 2011. lii + 737 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-0758602688. $49.99 Hardback.

R. Reed Lessing is an Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology and the Director of the Graduate School at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Isaiah 40-55 represents his third contribution to the *Concordia Commentary Series*, having already penned commentaries on Amos and Jonah respectively. As with all commentaries, the editorial aims of the *Concordia Commentary Series* shape the direction and scope of this book. While many commentaries fail to highlight the modern relevance of ancient biblical texts, the main purpose of the *Concordia Series* is to "assist pastors, missionaries, and teachers of the Scriptures to convey God's Word with greater clarity, understanding, and faithfulness to the divine intent of the text" (p. x). However, it is the editorial commitment to the belief that every word of the biblical text is the "inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God" (p. x) that controls the commentary's final direction, most importantly the belief that Isaiah 40-55 was authored by the 8th century BCE Isaiah ben Amoz. Such a presupposition places Lessing's work in conflict with the majority of modern critical scholarship on Isaiah.

While the aim of the commentary series is practical application, it is also well researched as the pages contain multiple citations, extended footnote discussions, and a 30 page bibliography. The commentary itself is extensive, offering 671 pages of text, including a 100 page introduction that covers all the wide-ranging issues related to Isaiah studies, such as authorship, historical setting, a brief history of research, outline/structure, genre, and themes – all written at the level of the intended audience. The commentary itself follows the general pattern of offering a translation of the text, in-depth textual notes, and verse by verse commentary, before concluding with a shorter "Reflections" section. Application and New Testament connections are intermixed heavily throughout the sections. The scholarly strength of the commentary is found in the textual notes where Lessing's grasp of Hebrew syntax and word study is evident. While not overly complex, the intended audience of teacher/preacher/missionary may have some difficulty with these sections unless they've recently refreshed their Hebrew.

Whether or not one finds this commentary helpful will largely depend on the reader's presuppositions regarding Isaianic authorship. Those comfortable with a one-Isaiah authorship will probably find Lessing's work a refreshing change from the rest of the modern critical commentaries. However, those who hold to different views of Isaianic authorship may find that many of the discussions and explanations seemed stretched to support that presupposition. At the heart of the issue is Lessing's understanding of biblical prophecy. He argues, "A theory of two or three or four authors for Isaiah (or gradual authorship by disciples or redactors) does not rest on any textual or scholarly proof, but on the unproven opinion that a prophet's vision could not extend into the future" (p. 20). While this may be partially correct, a prophet's ability to foretell the future has not been the main issue for many recent evangelical scholars, but rather the need for prophecy to make sense to those to whom it was originally given. This issue seems overlooked as Lessing applies Isaiah 40-55 directly to the Babylonian Exile, with little mention of how that message would have been received by an "original" 8th century audience.

One of the most glaring examples is that Lessing at least seems open to the possibility that Isaiah 40-55 contains polemic against the Babylonian *Akûtu* Festival (pp. 40-41). However, what is the likelihood that an 8th century Judahite would be familiar with this Babylon-specific ceremony? Likewise, Lessing argues that "In terms of international relations, in the eighth century, there was little difference between Babylon as currently ruled by the Assyrian king and later Babylon, which would be ruled by a Chaldean king" (p. 16-17). Such differences were surely clear to the residents of Lachish who were deported by Sennacherib in 701. Additionally, the commentary can read as hostile towards those who do not share similar authorship views. These scholars are in "error" because "If Isaiah did not write the book attributed to him, the NT would be a false witness" (p. 19), and "the documentary hypothesis runs

counter to the Bible's witness and is an assault against evangelical doctrine" (p. 54). Lastly, there is a very strong New Testament focus that runs throughout the commentary, most plainly seen in Lessing's interpretation that the Servant of 49-55 is "Jesus, and Jesus alone" (p. 83).

This is not to say that most will not find the commentary helpful. Lessing's grasp of the text and secondary literature, as well as knowledge of the New Testament is evident. While many even within the target audience may have some difficulties with the commentary, those looking for an accessible and applicable commentary may find it valuable.

Jason T. LeCureux
Brisbane, Australia

Stephen J. Chester, Grant R. Osborne, Mark A. Seifrid, and Chad O. Brand. *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: Three Views of Romans 7*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011. x + 213 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9780805447910. $24.99 Paperback.

Romans chapter seven is a notoriously difficult Pauline text. Why does Paul switch from the third- to the first-person in this section of Romans? Whom does the "I" represent? Why does Paul shift from the aorist to the present tense in verse fourteen? Is Paul describing humanity in general, his own life autobiographically, or the ongoing struggle with sin that all Christians face?

This book is laudable for offering in one place the litany of questions surrounding this controverted text, and for presenting a detailed justification of three common but very different interpretations. It is also one of the few "perspectives" books on scriptural text, offering instructive exemplary exegesis. Contributors display charity despite disagreement, and pastoral applications flowing from each different understanding of the text are offered. Helpful responses to each essay from the other contributors highlight new details, as well as reinforce key points in favor of the different interpretations.

Grant R. Osborne proffers that Paul here describes what believers experience in their struggle with sin even after regeneration and conversion. Situating the passage in the broader context of Romans, Osborne elucidates numerous pivotal questions about the text and their various possible answers. He includes answers he disagrees with and answers not represented by the other contributors. With close attention to grammar and vocabulary, he argues that in the first half Paul: (1) presents an apologetic for the Law but condemns sin in the face of his critics; (2) employs first-person "speech in character" to use his own experience as an example of every person; (3) echoes Adam and Eve's confrontation with commandment and sin; (4) and refers to but does not showcase Israel's experience under the Law. He then

contends that the second half depicts, in Pauline flesh–Spirit dualism, believers' conflicts with sin due to the "flesh" juxtaposed with the possibility of victory in the Spirit. Strengths of Osborne's essay include his detailed coverage of the reasons for positions other than his own, as well as the use of ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish parallels.

Stephen J. Chester presents the case for the "retrospective view," or that Paul recounts his pre-Christian life under the Law from his new perspective as a Christian. Chester first explains the historically influential interpretations of Augustine and Wesley. He then argues with detailed exegesis that Paul here engages in what sociologists call "biographical reconstruction" of his former pre-Christian life, and explains why he believes that other interpretations fail. Chester's essay is commendable for appropriating watersheds in modern Pauline scholarship. These include Kümmel's highlighting of how Paul elsewhere recounts his pre-Christian view of his relationship to the Law in exclusively positive language, and Stendahl's elucidation of Paul's intentions when discussing the Law in the context of questions about Gentile admission into early Christian communities.

In his contribution, Mark A. Seifrid argues that Paul here depicts all of humanity confronted by the Law. After a thorough treatment of the broader context of Romans, Seifrid proceeds to draws on: parallels of the lament genre in Qumran and the Pseudepigrapha, echoes of the Septuagint, the apocalyptic theology underlying much of Paul's theology, and close and careful exegesis to argue that Romans seven is about neither the believer's ongoing struggle with sin nor Paul's own prior pre-Christian life. Rather, urges Seifrid, it is about the universal human problem of sin going back to Adam and humanity's damning encounter with the Law. This encounter precipitates both a despairing lament and shout of thanksgiving to God through Jesus Christ. Seifrid's essay is particularly admirable for its comprehensive treatment of Romans as a whole, including the concepts of "Law" and "Spirit" throughout the rest of the epistle.

While each contributor offers practical theological implications resulting from his exegesis, Chad O. Brand does an excellent job of indicating specific pastoral and ministerial applications that flow from the different understandings of Romans seven presented in the book. Brand does so without prejudicing his discussions by his own position, which he does provide, along with some of his reasons for embracing it.

Regarding the volume as a whole, the contributors might have interacted with and employed more of the vast body of contemporary Pauline scholarship. At times one suspects that systematic theological concerns override *a posteriori* exegetical conclusions. Despite this, in a superlative way this book exemplifies informed, detailed, and careful exegesis of a text ridden with exegetical questions and difficulties, as well as the art of moving from exegesis to practical theology. Because it is rigorous enough for scholars and easily acces-

sible to non-specialists, scholars, pastors, ministers and laypersons alike will learn much from this eminently helpful volume.

Marc A. Pugliese
Richmond, Virginia

James K. A. Smith. *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000. 228 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0830815746.

In fewer than two hundred pages, James K.A. Smith accomplishes several important goals in *The Fall of Interpretation*. In the context of his careful, sustained, and original argument regarding the creational goodness of interpretation, he brings together the worlds of contemporary and traditional Christian theology with those of contemporary and traditional philosophy of religion. As a result, this already influential work can be recommended to a variety of readers.

This text will be helpful for intellectually-curious Christians outside of the academy who are interested in (and/or concerned about) how recent discussions of hermeneutics and post-modern thinking are impacting the interpretation of scripture. Smith's arguments are clear and they often have in mind the theologically-educated layperson. For philosophers of religion who are interested in the so-called "theological turn" in Continental philosophy, this work provides a nice point of entry into how such thinkers as Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida have been impacting religious thinking during the past few decades. Smith's work will likewise prove instructive for academic theologians who are interested in the recently articulated connections between Augustine's thought and contemporary conversations in the philosophy of religion.

The many accomplishments of this very readable and approachable text are made possible by the fact that Smith dwells within and is fluent in the respective languages of several different theological and philosophical communities. He is conversant with contemporary evangelical communities and can speak to the rootedness of these communities in orthodox Christian thinking. He is a philosopher who makes theological contributions. While immersed in the "Continental" tradition, he is just as comfortable speaking the language of analytic philosophers of religion.

Such intellectual multiculturalism makes Smith an ideal guide for the discussion of creation and hermeneutics found in *The Fall of Interpretation*. Avoiding schematics without losing the reader in dense details, Smith crafts his account of the goodness of interpretation by showing how two very different groups of thinkers get interpretation wrong. On the one hand, thinkers like Koivisto and Lints promote the view that interpretation is an activity which is only necessary following the Fall. As this account sees it, prior to human sin individuals had a direct, unmediated knowledge of God's will; there was no

need for hermeneutics. After the Fall, interpretation was needed to mediate the gap created by disobedience. Thus, as this story goes, interpretation is necessary for fallen individuals but not part of God's intended plan for creation.

The work of a second group of thinkers goes a long way toward dispelling the notion that our status as interpreters could somehow be separated from our status as humans (whether before or after a "Fall"). Secular philosophers such as Heidegger and Derrida have argued compellingly that the dream of unmediated knowledge of the world, one which avoids hermeneutics, is merely an illusion. However, such thinkers also argue that, by its very nature, interpretation is "fallen" and "violent." Thus, on this account, interpretation is necessary, but also necessarily problematic. What both the evangelical Christian accounts and secular philosophical accounts of interpretation have in common then, is their denial that interpretation is an inherently good aspect of our humanity which was given to us by God.

Enter James K.A. Smith. Against the backdrop of these prominent accounts, Smith offers his own view, namely that interpretation is part and parcel of what it means to be a created human but that this feature of humanity should be understood as a point of *goodness* in creation rather than as a trauma resulting from the Fall. To establish his position, Smith turns to a particular reading of Augustine, one which requires a good deal of theological scholarship since it means sorting through passages of Augustine which could potentially undermine Smith's argument. In the end, he skillfully leverages the hermeneutics of charity which lies at the heart of Augustine's thought to argue that his own position in *The Fall on Interpretation* is most true to Augustine and most true to the Christian tradition.

His account is compelling, cogent, insightful and original. More as point of full-disclosure than as a critique: potential readers should anticipate that, because it quickly covers a great deal of ground and is written with several audiences in mind, they may at times be disappointed that Smith doesn't take time to either more carefully illustrate his points for the beginner or provide further details for the seasoned scholar. This is simply the nature of a text which does many things at once and which is written with more than one reader in mind. Smith provides a wonderful foundation here for further study and reflection by beginners and old-hands, philosophers and theologians alike.

Ian Rottenberg
Saint Leo, Florida

J. Stevenson and W.H.C. Frend. *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD 337-461*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. v + 479 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-3970-6. $45.00 Paperback.

The history of early Christianity is thoroughly rooted in the ancient sources of antiquity. Therefore, in order to more fully understand the development of the Christian church and its emerging theology during the Patristic Period, immersion into the very writings that shaped the faith is absolutely paramount. This is the basic underlying supposition that serves to highlight the creation of the widely successful *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies*.

Now in a revised edition aimed primarily at a North American audience, Stevenson and Frend's excellent primary source reader opens up a window to the formative years of the Christian faith. Here *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* continues to maintain its standing as the companion volume to the editors' similarly successful *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD337*, the point of demarcation between these two valuable works being the death of the first "Christian" Emperor, Constantine. Thus, the source documents included in *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* begin chronologically just after the polarizing Emperor's death and stretch up through the life of the famous missionary Patrick of Ireland.

What lies between is the real treasure of Stevenson and Frend's work – a fascinating look not only at those writings that became the bedrock of Christian belief, but also at some of those heretical ideas that forced the church to reassess and formulate positions that subsequently became orthodoxy. The selections contained therein enable the reader to walk alongside the apostolic and early church fathers as these Patristic figures literally establish the bounds of Christian doctrine and church practice. The sampling of source material includes critical discussions relating to the Trinity, Christology, Christian expansion, monasticism, and much more. Thus, readers of these important historical documents can more fully understand the appeal of monasticism against the backdrop of a territorial Christian church, experience firsthand the Cappadocian Fathers' theological consideration of the unique God-man, Jesus Christ, or stand alongside Augustine in his battle with the Donatists and Pelagius.

The only real shortcomings of this reader rest in two areas and are admittedly minor if not altogether understandable. The first relates to the dominance of "orthodox" works as opposed to those deemed heretical by the church. Some of the latter are included and offer tremendously valuable insight into the arguments and ideas that helped shape the views of orthodoxy; yet *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* is definitively more concerned, according to the sampling of writings chosen, with those accepted as a part of Christian orthodoxy. Secondly, at times a brief introduction to each work would be helpful. For the scholar well acquainted with this period introductions to each of the selections may not be required. However, for students and lay church

members otherwise unfamiliar with the period a brief word relating to the historical context and legacy of each would be a welcome addition.

The most significant revision to *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* from its first publication in 1966 may be found in the division of these primary documents along more personal and thematic lines. A chronology relating to each document is still maintained, but with more useful subdivisions that allow the reader to more easily engage readings related to a specific topic of interest. Moreover, the inclusion of certain documents not found in the 1966 edition helps both to bolster the development of certain doctrinal convictions and to bridge gaps in the advancement of ideas otherwise present.

As a presentation of the writings that helped to direct and orient the early church, *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* is perfectly suited for undergraduate and seminary students in the classroom, and yet it retains significant use for the lay church member who may want to better understand the beliefs they hold as a follower of Jesus Christ. Therefore, *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* is perfectly suited to be read as a stand-alone reader or it may serve as a valuable supplement to a good survey of church history. However it is employed, Stevenson and Frend's work is a valuable resource that affords its reader a much better understanding of the development of Christian thought in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Stephen Brett Eccher
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Kevin Hector. *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language and the Spirit of Recognition*. Current Issues in Theology. 8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. x + 301 pp. Paperback. ISBN. 978-1-107-01028-4. $30.99 Paperback.

There are two distinct projects at work in this book. In the first Hector offers an incisive discussion of how the problem of a perceived gap between God and human language underwrites contemporary modes of metaphysical thinking (in both essentialism and what he calls "correspondantism") as well as responses and rejections of metaphysics in the apophatic postmodern projects. (represented by Jean-Luc Marion and John Caputo)

The analysis of the shared problematic here is helpful, accessible, and clear, no small feat given how challenging it can be to read analytic and continental thinkers together. Hector's first goal is to offer a "therapeutic" response to the malady of God's distance. The therapy offered is an "overcoming" of metaphysics, a "stripping" of its presuppositions and "releasing us from its grip" (p. i).

The other project in the book is offering an alternative theological method which avoids these problems by way of Schleiermacher and "recognition pragmatism" (p. 40 fn. 76). This way beyond the problems of metaphysics uses "ordinary practice and experience as its explanatory primitive" (p. 45)

explaining how speech about God arises and travels *within* ordinary human practices and experience[1] inhabited by the action of the Spirit.

The reach of Hector's theological exposition within the frames of this ontology produces slightly odd ways of articulating biblical and doctrinal themes. For one, the doctrine of revelation is located within the imminent processes and developments of human cultural linguistic traditions. Hector suggests that there are two pivotal moments in the history of the practices of Christian God-talk; these are what he calls the "canonical gestures" (pp. 137, 175) of Abraham and Jesus. Abraham begins this process by making an "anaphoric gesture" (pp. 171ff.) when, out of the available and at hand cultural notions of gods, he identifies the God who is calling him to be identical with the God who had made a covenant with him (p. 172). The process of handing this anaphoric reference off within the tradition continues and culminates with Jesus, who identifies this God with his own identity and makes the second "canonical picking-out" (p. 175).

Hector is rigidly working out the revelatory process by way of the natural and imminent process of human linguistic traditions in order to counter absolutely any notion of a "gap" between humans and God. Theologically, the emphasis is placed exclusively on the natural ability of human persons to pick out God. There is a conflation, a leveling, here between the traditional distinction between natural and special revelation. There is also a "high" anthropology at work in that it fails to adequately account for the very thing which underwrites the need for revelation: human sin.

When, in the Bible, God is pictured metaphorically as standing at some remove, it is not a problem of the natural function of language; nor is it a literal problem of divine geography; it is a byproduct of humanity's regular and consistent moral failing. The practices of sin manifest false God-talk, idolatry. The Pentateuch, Wisdom literature, Psalms, The Histories, and the Prophets, all employ distance imagery. Are the biblical writers guilty of bad metaphysics? The "problem" of distanciation as well as the more common biblical themes of religious blindness, or deafness, all originate from our sinful condition not from a heavy handed Enlightenment philosophy. This is the point where Hector does not go far enough in his prescription.

Predictably, another byproduct of Hector's urge to keep the various facets and functions of theological language immanent and accessible is that it only requires a low Christology. The function of Jesus Christ in his model is exemplarist: Jesus is the one sent by God, who, from the possible practices and references to God which he had at hand, perfectly picks out and gestures at those which are true. Jesus trains others to pick out faithful gestures and so forth. But that is all that we would need from Jesus, on this model, to be faithful practices of god-talk.

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[1] Summaries of his argument are helpfully sprinkled throughout the book. One of the clearest and most extensive is unpacked on pages 37-42.

The lack of any sustained discussion of Scripture, especially its norming role, in a book dedicated to the question of the relationship of God and human language is perhaps the largest and most stunning lacuna.[2] We normally associate this function with Scripture as the Holy Canon, but the language of canonicity has been relocated to the anaphoric gesturing of Abraham and Jesus. Other troubling signs of this are his suggestion that the *norms* for the practices of god-talk are "implicit within recognitive practices" (pp. 48, 53, 60ff).[3] Norms are carried exclusively within linguistic traditions? What would be the norming role of Scripture in this model?

This book is entirely silent on these important issues. Hector raises key questions, both explicitly and implicitly. I suspect that most readers will benefit from their raising even as many may be frustrated by the lack of their resolution.

Mark Bowald
Ancaster, Ontario, Canada

Dave Earley. *Pastoral Leadership Is… How to Shepherd God's People with Passion and Confidence.* Nashville: B&H, 2012. 310 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-4336-7384-9. $16.97 Paperback.

Dave Earley's *Pastoral Leadership Is…* serves as a helpful resource for pastors and teachers of pastors. Earley, who is the Lead Pastor of Grace City Church in Las Vegas and an Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Leadership at Liberty Seminary, writes in an accessible, pastoral style. As a whole, *Pastoral Leadership Is…* appears to be the collection of Earley's notes, arranged in an organized, easy-to-read/use manner.

The author first examines three biblical examples to understand the role of the shepherd: Moses, Jesus, and Paul (chapter 1). Earley emphasizes three particular responsibilities for every pastor in light of these examples: (1) Prayer, (2) Teaching the word, and (3) Equipping/leading others.

Following this introductory chapter, Earley spends six chapters in each of the five parts of the book. The five parts include: (1) Being a Man of God; (2)

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[2] Let alone the revelatory character of Christ, which is another lacuna which time and space will not permit proper exploration here.

[3] Also "The normative criterion by which candidate expressions are to be judged is itself the product of a trajectory implicit in expressions recognized as precedential, since one judges a candidate expression of the prevailing piety by determining whether it goes on in the same way as other expressions one recognizes as such. It also follows that the criterion changes, in only slightly, each time a new expression is recognized, since, on the one hand, the relevant norm is itself a product of the normative trajectory implicit in a series of precedents, and on the other, the recognition of a further precedent contributes to the shape of that trajectory" (p. 85).

Praying with Power; (3) Teaching the Word of God; (4) Equipping and Leading Others; and (5) Shepherding God's Flock.

Part 1: Being a Man of God. The issues of calling, integrity, purity, being a faithful servant, engaging in spiritual warfare, and training oneself for godliness are addressed in this section. Regarding *calling*, Earley summarizes various biblical passages on the different callings of individuals. He first notes nine marks of a genuine call according to the Bible. Then he lists five evidences of a true calling. Regarding *integrity,* he summarizes Paul's list of qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. After briefly noting these qualifications, he provides a personal checklist of eight exhortations that he has developed for building a life of integrity. Regarding *purity*, he focuses mainly on the need to pursue financial faithfulness. On being a *faithful servant,* he explains this pastoral expression by using four biblical concepts. Next, he discusses *spiritual warfare*, explaining the "wiles of the devil." Regarding *training for godliness*, Earley discusses the need for discipline, and then provides a sample personal growth plan that includes Bible, prayer, journaling, exercise, mentoring, fasting, and reading.

Part 2: Praying with Power. The next six chapters relate prayer. Earley talks about the need to prioritize prayer, intercede for others, follow Paul's example, fast and pray, make prayer your church's top priority, and to build a house of prayer. Notable features in this section include a helpful chart of Paul's prayers for the churches, and a practical list of suggestions for preparing for a fast, and examples of movements of prayer.

Part 3: Teaching the Word of God. Here, Earley highlights different aspects of the pastors' role in expounding the biblical text. In six chapters, he discusses *preaching*, *communication*, *feeding the sheep*, *studying the Bible*, *preparing the message*, and *living and giving the message*. Earley has a high view of Scripture and this leads him describe the need for biblical proclamation. He explains and applies 2 Timothy 4:1-2, providing a foundation for the task. Then he highlights the important of having one dominate idea in a sermon. Next, he notes three primary elements of feeding the sheep. He follows these exhortations with some practical notes on planning one's preaching. Studying the Bible is the focus of the next chapter. Earley has a three-part study process: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. He offers his eight-step plan for preparing the actual sermon in chapter 18. Finally, he exhorts the reader on how to live and give the message.

Part 4: Equipping and Leading Others. Earley describes the importance of equipping others to do ministry in this section. He describes the biblical foundation for equipping the saints in chapter 20, and then provides some practical suggestions in chapter 21. Next, he discusses the nature of mentoring like Jesus, and then provides some practical ways to do 2 Timothy 2:2 mentoring in chapter 23. Chapters 24 and 25 focus more on leadership than equipping. In chapter 24, he discusses the nature of a leader's vision, his need to have proper priorities, and the need for purposeful planning. Next, Earley

talks about how to inspire others as a leader. He includes a helpful chart on page 239 on how to honor others, and how to avoid dishonoring them.

Part 5: Shepherding the Flock. Using biblical expositions, personal testimony, and practical counsel, Earley talks about the following subjects in part 5: (1) Shepherding through Undershepherds; (2) Counseling the Flock; (3) Resolving Conflict; (4) Celebrating the Ordinances; (5) Doing Premarital Counseling and Weddings; and (6) Conducting Funerals.

Young pastors and aspiring pastors will benefit from this book. It is a helpful primer for the pastorate. Looking back on my journey, I would have benefited tremendously from it when I first began doing pastoral work. I appreciate the readability, biblical focus, and seasoned wisdom. Perhaps, others will want a little more on issues like sermon preparation and the role of elders in shepherding. Some time was devoted to sermon preparation, but more could be said about different issues, such as how to practically ensure a Christ-centered focus in each sermon. Elders were mentioned in the book also, but for those who wish to build their shepherding ministry around the plurality of pastors-elders, they will need to find some additional resources on the subject.

Tony Merida
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Victor P. Hamilton. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. xxix + 721 pp. Hardback. ISBN 9780801031800. $54.99 Hardback.

Within the larger context of study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament within the church, Hamilton's commentary on Exodus makes an interesting contribution. Whereas many commentaries are expending effort on placing the teaching of OT books within the context of the church's theology, Hamilton's work has reverted in many ways to a traditionally exegetical treatment of the text. After a short introduction to the book as a whole, the commentary divides the text of Exodus into smaller portion, each of which has three sections: (1) an original translation prepared by Hamilton, (2) grammatical and lexical notes that provide information ranging from Hamilton's translation rationale to comparative philology to how phrases are used in other parts of the text, and (3) a running commentary about the text. This review will analyze briefly the contribution of the introduction as well as each of these sections of the commentary.

While granting the fact that commenting in detail on the translation and interpretation of forty chapters of Hebrew text demands much space, the introduction Hamilton provides seems somewhat lacking. He certainly hits some of the highpoints of structure and theological contributions; yet, a section of methodology would have been helpful. For the reader leaves wondering, among other things, about how his methodology relates to the modern

interpretive grid of OT studies, how he came to his theological conclusions, how he came to make applications to the Christian, etc. The introduction has not really answered the question this reviewer wanted to know: What distinguishes this commentary from others in such a way as to make a contribution? I certainly appreciate that Hamilton did not drone on about traditional critical scholarship, but at the same time, setting his comments within the larger veins of the discipline would be helpful, especially given that he quotes from such scholars as Brevard Childs.

When approaching each section of the text, Hamilton provides his own translation, which contributes greatly to the value of the commentary. The author's skill in the Hebrew language (as well as its cognates) is unquestioned. Although one may prefer some type of reference to the name of God (e.g. Yhwh) instead of the customary LORD, the translation is readable, helpful, and reliable, and the author is to be commended. Furthermore, the grammatical and lexical notes reveal an author that is highly skilled in all elements of Hebrew grammar and philology. He successfully interacts with the ancient translations and demonstrates his broad knowledge of the Hebrew Bible as a whole.

Hamilton also contributes much in his running commentary on the text. Not only does he show proficiency in those areas that are expected of tradition exegetical commentaries (such as interaction with historical, geographical, and Ancient Near Eastern matters), but he also shows that he has thought well about the poetics of biblical narrative, which is a more modern field of study. For example, on the former, he goes to great lengths to show the (dis)connections of the Covenant Code with other law codes of the ANE (pp. 359ff.). On the latter, multiple times he shows that the narrative is arranged in a chiastic pattern, as for example in Exodus 19–24 (pp. 298ff.). He also shows his knowledge and implementation of inner-biblical exegesis, as seen in his comments on Isaiah 19 and Exodus 3 (p. 57).

Yet, the commentary also has some weaknesses. First, there seem to be some keen observations that are left without explanation. Examples might include a description of a chiasm with the names of the sons of Jacob (p.4), after which the reader might be left asking about the purpose (cf. also p. 36 and the explanation of the verb "quickly" and p. 130 with the connection of "teeming" with Genesis 1 and 6–8). Second, and most significantly, little help is provided in how Exodus can (or should) be taught and preached as Christian Scripture. The author obviously speaks of the text from a Christian perspective, but the preacher who needs assistance in properly preaching law texts to a congregation will be left wondering. The simple question of how the believer should relate to the law is left unanswered. Although there seems to be a latent understanding of how this should be done within Hamilton's traditions, his thoughts about how the church should read Exodus as well as the subsequent theological contribution of the book would be most welcome. In this light, the value for the modern preacher or teacher will be in the valu-

able exegesis of the details of the text and not the theological appropriation of Exodus to the church.

Randall L. McKinion
Holly Springs, North Carolina

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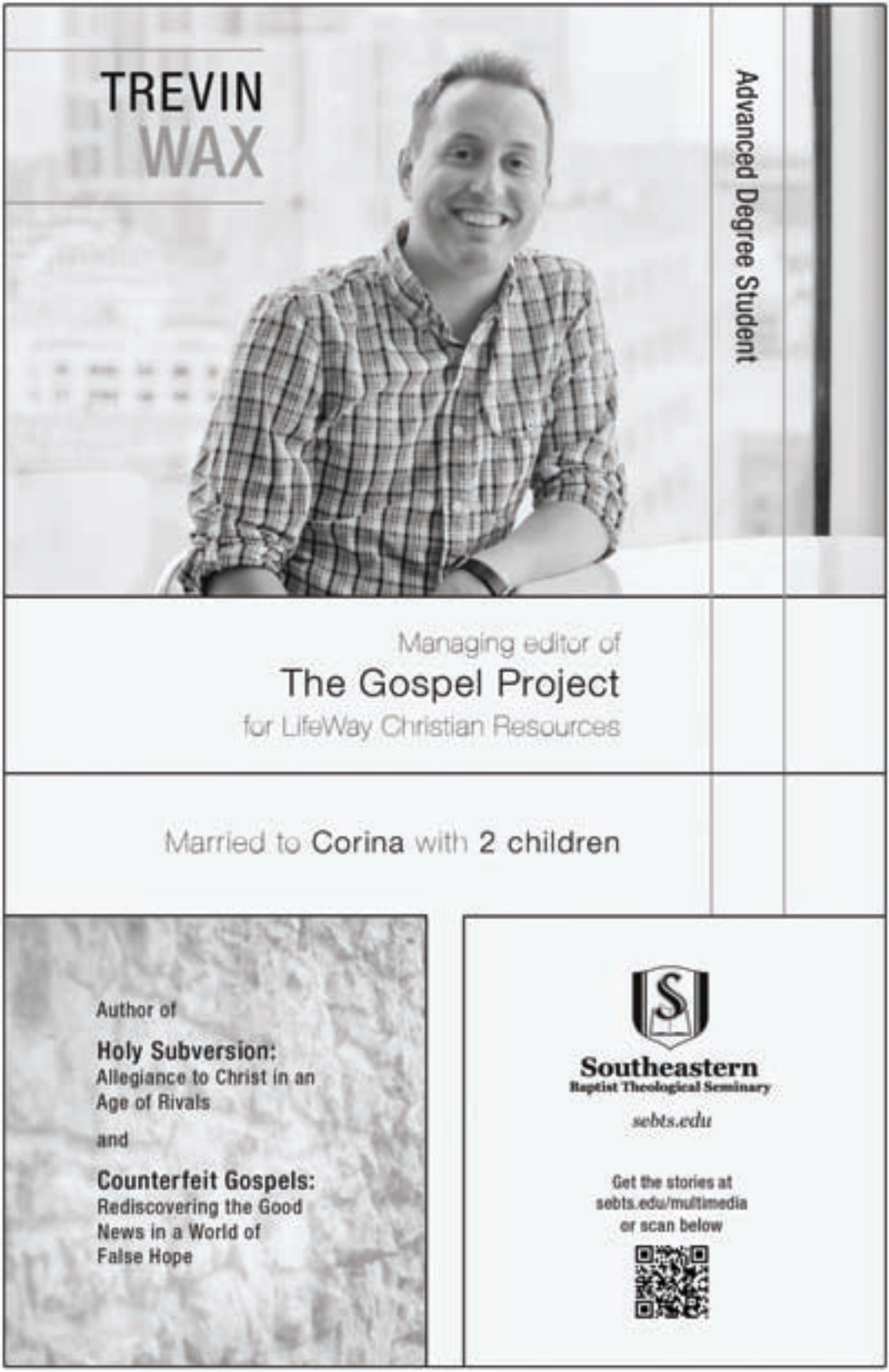
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