SOUTHEASTERN

THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

Vol. 6, No. 2 Winter 2015

Southeastern Theological Review
Is published biannually for the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary seeks to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by equipping students to serve the church and fulfill the Great Commission."

"The mission of Southeastern Theological Review is to equip the Church to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and fulfill the Great Commission through rigorous scholarly engagement in the disciplines of mission, biblical studies, theology, philosophical theology, historical theology, and practical theology."

Southeastern Theological Review is produced biannually (Winter and Summer), and may be themed or un-themed. *Southeastern Theological Review* aims to serve the Church and help her think rigorously so that it may serve the Lord Christ faithfully.

Unsolicited article submissions to the journal are welcomed and should be directed to the editor. All submitted articles to *Southeastern Theological Review* are evaluated by double-blind peer review. All articles that are submitted to *STR* should present original work in their field. Manuscripts should conform to the *SBL Handbook of Style*.

This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database® (ATLA RDB®), a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, USA. Email: atla@atla.com, www: http://www.atla.com.

This periodical is also indexed with Old Testament Abstracts®, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064, USA. Email: cua-ota@cua.edu . This periodical is typeset and indexed electronically by Galaxie Software®: http://galaxie.com .

Annual Subscription Rates: **$30 (regular) $20 (student)**
(both for ebook and hardcopy)

For more information visit: **www.southeasterntheologicalreview.com**
Direct correspondence to: **Attn: Editor, *Southeastern Theological Review***
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
PO BOX 1889, Wake Forest, NC 27588-1889 (USA)

Note: *The views expressed in the following articles are not necessarily those of the STR editorial board, the faculty, or the administration of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Individual authors are responsible for the research and content presented in their essays.*

ISSN 2156-9401

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 149–50

Introduction to the Volume

STR Editor

This edition of *Southeastern Theological Review* (*STR*) arises from interaction with Michael Bird's *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013) and Curtis Freeman's *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). Both volumes are significant contributions to ecclesial conversation about God, his purposes in the world, and the identity and mission of the church.

On the one hand, the essays that engage Bird's *Evangelical Theology* originated from a review panel in the "Reformed Theology" section at the 66th annual Evangelical Theological Society national meeting in San Diego, California on 19 November 2014. The contributors to this edition of *STR* at that panel session were: Michael Bird, Kelly Kapic, Michael Horton, Amy Peeler, and Marc Cortez. The impetus for inclusion of that discussion in this volume of *STR* comes from the gracious offer of Dr. Mark Bowald, who convened the group and chaired the session.

Nathan Finn's engagement with Curtis Freeman's *Contesting Catholicity* arises, at least in part, from a Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Ph.D. Colloquium with Steven Harmon (Gardner-Webb University), Curtis Freeman (Duke Divinity School, Duke University), and Nathan Finn (Union University). In the colloquium, Dr. Harmon gave a lecture to Ph.D. students, faculty and friends entitled "A Free-Church Magisterium?" on 12 March 2015. Drs. Freeman and Finn responded and then the discussion turned broadly to the themes that Dr. Finn addresses in the current review in this volume. That was a lively and constructive engagement and is available online to those interested in the discussion.[1] Dr. Finn has thought long about the Bapto-Catholic movement in Baptist life, and it was a pleasure to have him as a contributor to that conversation with Dr. Harmon then, and it is a pleasure to have him as a charitable interlocutor to Dr. Freeman in the context of this edition of *STR*.

---

[1] One can view the discussion online at https://vimeo.com/123000688.

The essays in this volume are followed, in normal order, by an international team of reviewers. It is our hope that the essays and reviews will be of benefit and enrichment to our readers. Our readers should also be aware that this will be the final volume of the current editor and *STR* 7/1 (2016) will find Dr. Benjamin L. Merkle, Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary installed as the new editor of *STR*. I am thrilled that he has agreed to take this post, and I know that the journal will thrive under his capable leadership. It has been a pleasure to serve as the editor for this esteemed journal for the past five years, and I look forward to reading future volumes with anticipation and great hope.

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 151–70

Contesting *Contesting Catholicity*: Some Conservative Reflections On Curtis Freeman's Theology For "Other Baptists"

Nathan A. Finn
Union University

Introduction

Longtime Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary church historian William Estep once argued "the Southern Baptist historical experience can best be understood as a search for identity."[1] Many scholars would agree with Estep's assessment. Southern Baptists seem perennially interested in defining, debating, and defending their respective identities. This remains true of Baptists in other locales as well. In fact, Baptist scholars all over the English-speaking world seem interested in matters of Baptist identity, as evidenced in the number of books and essays devoted to this topic over the past quarter century.[2] Southern Baptists and self-

[1] W. R. Estep, "Southern Baptists in Search of an Identity," in *The Lord's Free People in a Free Land: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of Robert A. Baker*, ed. William R. Estep (Fort Worth, TX: Evans Press, 1976), p. 145.

[2] A general sampling of such titles would include Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993); Charles W. DeWeese, ed., *Defining Baptist Convictions: Guidelines for the Twenty-First Century* (Nashville, TN: Providence House, 1996); R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2001); Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003); R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2005); Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2006); Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008); David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009); Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, eds., *Upon This Rock: The Baptist Understanding of the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010); Bill J. Leonard, *The Challenging of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past* (Waco, TX: Baylor Uni-

proclaimed "moderate" Baptists affiliated with groups like Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists seem especially concerned with matters of Baptist identity. This is in part a result of the way their differing visions of Baptist identity have shaped denominational controversies within the Southern Baptist Convention during the latter half of the twentieth century.[3]

Since the mid-1990s, Southern Baptist identity debates have normally boiled down to four recurring, sometimes overlapping issues: 1) the resurgence of Calvinistic soteriology among Southern Baptists; 2) evolving ecclesiological practices, especially those related to church polity and leadership; 3) the difficulties in affirming a full-throated denominationalism in an increasingly post-denominational and even post-Christian era; and 4) shifting paradigms for both mission work itself and interchurch cooperation for the sake of mission. During this same period, moderate Baptists have also wrestled with many of the newer trends related to church polity, denominationalism, and mission. Moderates have also debated some issues that are less applicable among conservative Southern Baptists, including the place of women in pastoral leadership and the integration of practicing homosexuals into the life of the church. However, the moderate identity debate that has probably inspired the most written material during the past two decades has been the question of Baptist catholicity—what is often called

---

versity Press, 2010); Brian C. Brewer, ed., *Distinctively Baptist: Proclaiming Identity in a New Generation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011); Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, Doing Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2012). This list does not include individual articles, contributed chapters, symposia, surveys of Baptist theology or theologians, or the introductions to various histories of the Baptists, all of which are venues wherein Baptist identity has been defined and debated.

It should be noted that white Baptists have published nearly all of the recent writings related to Baptist identity in the English-speaking world. North American and European Baptists of African, Hispanic, or Asian ethnicities have been less interested in debating Baptist identity, at least in print. This is a topic worthy of further consideration.

[3] I reflect on the debates over identity in the "post-Controversy" Baptist South in a forthcoming essay. See Nathan A. Finn, "Debating Baptist Identities: Description and Prescription in the American South," in *Mirrors and Microscopes: Historical Perceptions of Baptists*, ed. C. Douglas Weaver (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, forthcoming).

the "Bapto-Catholic" movement.[4] This latter debate provides the focus of the present essay.

In this review essay, I engage with the most important book yet written in defense of Bapto-Catholic identity: Curtis Freeman's *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*.[5] Freeman serves as Research Professor of Theology and directs the Baptist House of Studies at Duke University Divinity School. He is also one of the longest-running participants in the Bapto-Catholic conversation. My engagement with Freeman is intended to be appreciative, though critical—at times, perhaps pointedly so. I hope that it will also be constructive, suggesting some alternatives to Freeman's proposal from a more conservative fellow traveller who shares many of his concerns about contemporary Baptist identity in the (mostly) American South. I will contest *Contesting Catholicity* because, like Freeman, I too hold out hope for a more catholic future for Baptist Christians, albeit one that differs in some important ways from Freeman's "Other Baptist" identity.

I. The Bapto-Catholic Movement[6]

Before engaging with Freeman more directly, it might be helpful to provide a brief overview of the Bapto-Catholic movement. At its core, Bapto-Catholicity is an attempt to offer a *via media* between Southern Baptist conservatives and the majority of post-SBC

---

[4] The Bapto-Catholic movement has also been called the "catholic Baptist" perspective by some of its proponents. However, I agree with Cameron Jorgenson's contention that "Bapto-Catholic" is the right term to capture the movement's ethos. He argues, "Not only is the compound word grammatically flexible, but its awkwardness captures the unusual nature of the project, constructing a Baptist identity that is influenced by the whole of the Christian tradition by way of the ancient creeds, liturgical practices (e.g., the church calendar), and theological concepts (e.g., the sacraments)." See Cameron H. Jorgenson, "Bapto-Catholicism: Recovering Tradition and Reconsidering the Baptist Identity" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2008), p. 3. To date, Jorgenson's dissertation is the best scholarly overview of the Bapto-Catholic movement.

[5] Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[6] For an extensive survey of Bapto-Catholic thought, see Jorgenson, "Bapto-Catholicism," pp. 75–148. See also William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought: With Special Reference to Baptists in Britain and North America* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), pp. 59–61.

moderates. Bapto-Catholic moderates are animated by at least two major concerns. First, they believe that both conservative and mainstream moderate understandings of Baptist identity are overly informed by Enlightenment modernism, an intellectual center that Bapto-Catholics believe no longer holds in the postmodern West. They are particularly critical of E. Y. Mullins, whose doctrine of "soul competency" they blame for the excessive individualism among Baptist conservatives and mainstream moderates.[7] Bapto-Catholics draw upon the insights of Yale University postliberal theologians George Lindbeck and Hans Frei and Scottish virtue ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre in mounting their critique of modern Baptist theology in both its conservative and moderate varieties. In addition, Duke University moral theologian Stanley Hauerwas, whose thought weds postliberalism and virtue ethics, has cast a particularly long shadow over the Bapto-Catholic movement.[8] Other influences include Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, and Radical Orthodoxy.[9] Within the Baptist tradition, the late postliber-

---

[7] The classic introduction to Mullins's view of Baptist identity, including his doctrine of soul competency, is E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith*, ed. C. Douglas Weaver (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010). The book was first published in 1908. Mullins's views have remained a source of debate among post-Controversy Baptists. For conservative reflections, see the thematic issue "E. Y. Mullins in Retrospect," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3/4 (Winter 1999). Moderates have dedicated two thematic issues of journals to advancing their interpretation of Mullins. See "The Mullins Legacy," *Review and Expositor* 96/1 (Winter 1999) and "E. Y. Mullins and *The Axioms of Religion*," *Baptist History and Heritage* 43/1 (Winter 2008). For a mostly descriptive introduction to Mullins's life and thought, see Fisher Humphreys, "Edgar Young Mullins," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, eds. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2001), pp. 181–201.

[8] See the thematic issue "Hauerwas among the Baptists," *Review & Expositor* 112/1 (February 2015). Contributors include Bapto-Catholics Mark Medley, Mikael Broadway, Ralph Wood, Elizabeth Newman, Barry Harvey, and Curtis Freeman, among other contributors.

[9] For an example of how Radical Orthodoxy informs some versions of Bapto-Catholic thought, see Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008).

al theologian James William McClendon (1924–2000) might be considered the intellectual godfather of Bapto-Catholic theology.

The second major concern of the Bapto-Catholics, as evidenced in their frequent usage of terms such as *catholic*, *catholicity*, and *ecumenism*, is to promote (they would say recover) a robust sense of Christian unity among Baptists. Bapto-Catholics are troubled by the pervasive sectarianism they believe has characterized much of the Baptist tradition, especially in America. While Landmarkism might be the most noteworthy example of Baptist sectarianism, Bapto-Catholics are concerned that even non-Landmark Baptists have adopted what I would term a "Bapto-centric" vision of Baptist identity that overemphasizes Baptist distinctiveness to the detriment of Christian unity. In their efforts to overcome perceived Baptist sectarianism, they engage widely with other Christian traditions, especially the ecumenical creedal tradition of the first five centuries of Christian history, modern ecumenical documents, and post-Vatican II Catholic proponents of *ressourcement*. Within the Baptist tradition, they look to the deeper sense of catholicity among seventeenth-century General and Particular Baptists, as well as the insights from postwar and contemporary British Baptist sacramentalists. Several of the Bapto-Catholics have contributed to the Baptist sacramentalism discussion, including Philip Thompson, who co-edited two collections of essays devoted to Baptist sacramentalism.[10]

The roots of the Bapto-Catholic movement are evident in the writings of McClendon, especially his three-volume systematic the-

---

[10] See Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, *Baptist Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), and Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, *Baptist Sacramentalism 2*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008). For a historical overview of the Baptist sacramentalism movement among British Baptists, see Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2002), pp. 1–155. Malcolm Yarnell correctly argues that the Bapto-Catholics and Baptist sacramentalists are "transcontinental partners [who] share a concern for ecumenism and a revisitation of sacramentalism." See Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), p. 72.

ology.[11] However, the Bapto-Catholic vision became a matter of public discussion following the 1997 publication of a statement titled "Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America."[12] This document, often referred to as the *Baptist Manifesto*, provoked several responses over the next decade, most of which were written by moderate Baptists who were either critiquing or defending the statement.[13] Following the publication of ecumenical theologian Steve Harmon's 2006 book *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, the neologism "Bapto-Catholic" began to

---

[11] See James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986–2000). Baylor University Press republished these volumes in 2012 with a new introduction by Curtis Freeman. See idem, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012). Volumes 1 and 2, published in 1986 and 1994, pre-dated the formal beginnings of the Bapto-Catholic movement.

[12] Mikael N. Broadway, Curtis W. Freeman, Barry Harvey, James Wm. McClendon Jr., Elizabeth Newman, and Philip E. Thompson,"Re-Envisioning the Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24/3 (Fall, 1997): pp. 303–10.

[13] Moderate critics include Bruce Prescott, 'Reaffirming Baptist Identity', Baptists Today (June 25, 1997), available online at http://www.mainstreambaptists.org/mob4/re-affirming_identity.htm (accessed 7 May 2015); Walter B. Shurden, "The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25/4 (Winter 1998): pp. 321–40; Robert P. Jones, "Revisioning Baptist Identity from a Theocentric Perspective," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26/1 (Spring 1999): pp. 35–57; Doug Weaver's editor's introduction to Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, pp. 24–26; Scott E. Bryant, "An Early English Baptist Response to the Baptist Manifesto," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 38/3 (Fall 2011): pp. 237–48. Defenders, excepting Freeman (who will be discussed later), include Philip E. Thompson, "A New Question in Baptist History: Seeking A Catholic Spirit Among Early Baptists" *Pro Ecclesia* 8/1 (Winter 1999): pp. 51–72; Philip E. Thompson, "Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: Historical, Theological, and Liturgical Analysis, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27/3 (Fall 2000): pp. 287–302; Mark S. Medley, "Catholics, Baptists, and the Normativity of Tradition: A Review Essay," Perspectives in Religious Studies 28/2 (Summer 2001): pp. 119–29; Elizabeth Newman, "The Priesthood of all Believers and the Necessity of the Church," in *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, eds. Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 50–66.

gain greater currency as the best descriptor of those postmodern moderates who were sympathetic to the *Baptist Manifesto's* vision of Baptist identity.[14] Mainstream moderates continued to reject the Bapto-Catholic proposal as insufficiently baptistic and, at least potentially, a dangerous step toward "creedalism," a derogatory term many moderates employ to refer to the more prescriptive use of confessional statements common among Southern Baptists and other more theologically conservative Baptist traditions.[15]

Curtis Freeman has emerged as the most vocal proponent of the Bapto-Catholic vision. Freeman embraced postliberalism while a graduate student at Baylor University, during which time he became familiar with both Hauerwas and McClendon.[16] Like McClendon, Freeman published works that anticipated the *Baptist Manifesto* and, along with McClendon, Freeman was among the original drafters of the *Baptist Manifesto.*[17] Freeman has been arguably the most consistent defender of the *Baptist Manifesto* in print and,

---

[14] Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006). Towards Baptists Catholicity compiles a number of Harmon's previously published essays, many of which positively reference the *Baptist Manifesto.* Harmon's forthcoming book will further expand upon his particular vision of Baptist catholicity. See idem, *The Baptist Vision and the Ecumenical Future: Radically Biblical, Radically Catholic, Relentlessly Pilgrim* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, forthcoming).

[15] For a mainstream criticism of Bapto-Catholicism which includes several links to like-minded bloggers, see Bruce Gourley, 'Bapto-Catholics Move Into the Spotlight in North Carolina', A Baptist Perspective (September 10, 2010), available online at http://baptistperspective.brucegourley.com/2010/09/bapto-catholics-move-into-spotlight-in.html (accessed May 7, 2015).

[16] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 32. See also idem, "A Theology for Brethren, Radical Believers, and Other Baptists," *Brethren Life and Thought* 51/1-2 (Winter-Spring 2006): p. 115.

[17] Curtis W. Freeman, "The 'Eclipse' of Spiritual Exegesis: Biblical Interpretation from the Reformation to Modernity," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 35/3 (Summer 1993): pp. 21–28; idem, "A Confession for Catholic Baptists," in *Ties That Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision*, eds. Gary Furr and Curtis W. Freeman (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 1994), pp. 83–96; idem, "Toward a *Sensus Fidelium* for an Evangelical Church: Postconservatives & Postliberals on Reading Scripture," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, eds. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), pp. 162–79.

in turn, perhaps the most vocal progressive critic of mainstream moderate Baptist identity in the years since McClendon's death in 2000.[18] Freeman has consistently maintained that he is an "Other Baptist" who is uninterested in either returning to the more rightwing Southern Baptist Convention, or, like many mainstream moderates, simply casting himself as a center-to-left recovering Southern Baptist or Southern Baptist in exile.[19] *Contesting Catholicity* combines and expands upon many of the themes he has written on over the past quarter century.

II. Freeman's "Other Baptist" Proposal

Freeman begins *Contesting Catholicity* with a short preface. Like other Bapto-Catholics, he confesses that he is striving for a third way in the aftermath of the Inerrancy Controversy that rocked the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike the conservatives and moderates who engaged in that imbroglio, both of whom were captive to modernist assumptions, Freeman is an Other Baptist who is recovering from a background in liberalism

---

[18] Curtis W. Freeman, "Can Baptist Theology be Revisioned?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24/3 (Fall 1997): pp. 273–310; idem, "E.Y. Mullins and the Siren Songs of Modernity," *Review & Expositor* 96/1 (Winter 1999): pp. 23–42; idem, "A New Perspective on Baptist Identity," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26/1 (Spring 1999): pp. 59–65; idem, "The 'Coming of Age' of Baptist Theology in Generation Twenty-Something," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27/1 (Spring 2000): pp. 21–38; idem, "Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Communion Ecclesiology in the Free Church," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31/3 (Fall 2004): pp. 259–72; idem, "God in Three Persons: Baptist Unitarianism and the Trinity," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33/3 (Fall 2006): pp. 323–44; idem, "Roger Williams, American Democracy, and the Baptists," Perspectives in Religious Studies 34/3 (Fall 2007): pp. 267–86; idem, "Alterity and Its Cure," *Cross Currents* 59/4 (December 2009): pp. 404–41.

[19] See Jonathan Goldstein, "A Third Way: Curtis Freeman's Journey as an 'Other Baptist,'" *Divinity* (Spring 2006): pp. 12–15, available online at https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/faculty-freeman/Thirdway-freeman.pdf (accessed June 10, 2015). This article, written for Duke Divinity School's alumni magazine, focuses on the role that Duke ethicist Stanley Hauerwas played in Freeman's theological journey.

by way of a baptistic version of postliberalism.[20] Freeman then moves into his introduction, which frames the rest of the book. Freeman believes most Baptists in America have become too sectarian and individualistic, a departure from the earliest Baptists who were "a movement of radical protest intent on reforming the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."[21] In response to this individualist sectarianism, whether of the conservative or progressive variety, *Contesting Catholicity* provides a more churchly account of the Baptist story as a renewal movement within the church catholic. According to Freeman, "the aim is to provide a theologically constructive narrative of a contesting catholicity based on retrieval of sources from the Baptist heritage and in conversation with the wider church."[22] His intention is not to defend "the Baptist way," but to offer his thoughts on a "better Baptist way" amidst the numerous "Baptist ways" that are currently being practiced among post-Controversy Baptists in America.[23]

Freeman's first true chapter is organized around the concept of *alterity*, or otherness—the sort of otherness that defines Bapto-Catholics and presumably other contemporary Baptists who do not wish to be defined by the conservative-moderate debates of the late-twentieth century. He introduces many of his key conversation partners in constructing an Other Baptist identity. Freeman hearkens back to the "Dixieland liberals" whom he interprets as the Other Baptists of the pre-Controversy era of Southern Baptist life, including Carlyle Marney, Blake Smith, and James William McClendon (W. T. Conner and Warren Carr emerge in later chapters). Freeman looks to McClendon in particular, as well as John Howard Yoder, for assistance in rooting Other Baptist identity in both the church catholic and the Free Church tradition. Roger Williams's version of colonial baptistic alterity provides a historical role model for contemporary Other Baptists. Freeman is clear that

---

[20] Freeman uses the phrase "Other Baptist" to describe his version of Bapto-Catholic identity. Because Other Baptist identity is a species of Bapto-Catholicism, I will use both terms when referring to Freeman's vision.

[21] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 9.

[22] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 18.

[23] The language of various Baptist ways is drawn from Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2003), and Norman, *The Baptist Way*.

Other Baptist identity should not be equated as simplistically progressive or even postliberal. Rather, "being an Other Baptist involves confessing the ancient apostolic faith, not in a premodern or uncritical way, but in a postmodern and postcritical way."[24]

Chapter two attempts to define Bapto-Catholic identity as an alternative that transcends fundamentalism and liberalism. Freeman argues that the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the early twentieth century were a product, in part, of Constantinianism. Unlike the earliest English Baptists, who understood Christian freedom within the context of an overarching commitment to Christ's rule, American Baptists since the days of Isaac Backus and John Leland had emphasized personal autonomy, private judgment, and voluntary religion. This individualistic reading of freedom reached its apex among Baptists in E. Y. Mullins and his doctrine of soul competency. Drawing on the insights of postliberalism, Freeman contends that post-Enlightenment Baptist individualists, regardless of where they shake out on the trajectory between fundamentalists and modernists, were beholden to foundationalism—they were "siblings under the skin."[25] Like Karl Barth, W. T. Conner, and McClendon, Bapto-Catholics reject "fundamentalist overbelief and liberal underbelief" in an effort to retrieve a postmodern, postcritical Baptist orthodoxy.

Freeman's third chapter draws upon the Dixieland Liberals (and especially McClendon) to commend a "generous liberal orthodoxy as expressed in the ancient ecumenical creeds."[26] Unlike many mainstream moderates, Freeman is comfortable with ascribing a ministerial authority to the catholic creedal consensus and at least appreciates confessional statements drawn up by Baptists and other traditions. He strongly rejects the anti-creedalism that has mistakenly been attributed to the Baptist movement, especially by moderates. However, he remains suspicious of more prescriptive uses of creedal statements by conservatives, lest they become coercive and bind one's conscience. Freeman prefers that creeds provide "regulative guidance" by describing the center of consensus rather than

---

[24] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 34.

[25] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 86.

[26] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 96. This chapter echoes and complements many of the same concerns raised by Freeman's fellow Bapto-Catholic Steve Harmon. See Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*.

providing tight boundaries for Baptists.[27] The more Baptists echo creedal orthodoxy, especially its emphasis on the Trinity and the identity of Christ, the better they will win over liberals who at times stray to far in their creativity and evangelicals who at times are too narrow and minimalist in their orthodoxy. Freeman's vision of Baptist confessionalism also attempts to cut through a-historical accounts of Baptist history by emphasizing greater continuity with catholic Christianity, again closely drawing upon McClendon's "mystical and immediate" solidarity with the primitive church coupled with his commitment to a broader catholicity.[28] This will lead to a greater sense of ecumenical responsibility among Baptists as well as healthier balance between Scripture and tradition in Baptist life.

In chapter four, Freeman addresses the crucial topic of Trinitarian thought.[29] He argues that periodically throughout history the Baptist penchant for biblicism coupled with an emphasis on liberty of conscience has at times led to sub-Christian articulations of the Trinity. The Matthew Caffyn and Salter's Hall controversies in England loom large in this chapter, along with periodic outbursts of Unitarian thought among various English-speaking Baptists. However, Freeman's larger concern is what he calls "an incipient unitarianism of the Second Person" of the Trinity, especially among Baptists in America.[30] For Baptists (and other evangelicals), classical Trinitarian has often been an afterthought, far less important for doctrine, piety, and liturgy than the person of Jesus Christ. Freeman suggests that when the Trinity has been discussed, it has often been as an abstract, propositional doctrine to be affirmed rather than an explanation of the nature of the living God; this interpretation reflects his postliberal assumptions about the nature of doctrine. For Freeman, many Baptists are at least potentially "unitarians that simply have not gotten around to denying the Trinity."[31] Freeman points to McClendon and evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz as Other Baptists who rightly valued Trinitarian-

---

[27] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, pp. 106–07.

[28] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 128.

[29] Much of this chapter is an expansion of Freeman's earlier article "God in Three Persons: Baptist Unitarianism and the Trinity." See note 18 above.

[30] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 175.

[31] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 181.

ism. However, he strongly criticizes conservative Baptist theologians who affirm the eternal subordination of the Son as a buttress for their complementarian view of gender roles. Whether or not eternal subordination is biblical or not is debated even among complementarians. However, Freeman's accusation that the position represents "a new version of the old tritheism" seems strained at best.[32]

Chapter five focuses upon the doctrine of the royal priesthood or the priesthood of all believers, a position historically championed by Baptists and one that has proven controversial in recent years.[33] Freeman challenges the stridently individualistic reading of soul competency, attributed to E. Y. Mullins, that has colored the mainstream moderate interpretation of the priesthood of all believers. Following Marney and John Bunyan, Freeman draws upon earlier Reformation and Baptist accounts of the royal priesthood, which were concerned more with congregational confession of sin and the doctrine of vocation. He argues, "For Other Baptist pilgrims, the journey is about practices, not just principles; convictions, not merely concepts; communion, not individualism."[34] He also presents a Christo-centric account of the believer's priesthood, arguing Christians "are priests to one another by participating as ministers in the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant."[35] Freeman's critique of Baptist individualism, whether conservative or progressive, lies near the center of the Bapto-Catholic vision. It shows great promise as a key point of intersection between Bapto-Catholics and more conservative Bap-

---

[32] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 188.

[33] In 1987, moderate church historian Walter Shurden argued for a more individualist account of the royal priesthood in his book *The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1987). The following year, Southern Baptists, now led by conservatives, adopted a resolution that argued the priesthood of the believer, rightly understood, is neither a license for theological heterodoxy nor does it contradict pastoral authority. See "Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer," available online at http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/872/resolution-on-the-priesthood-of-the-believer (accessed June 10, 2015). Timothy George offers a more scholarly defense of the conservative position in his article "The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity," *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): pp. 283–94.

[34] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 209.

[35] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 223.

tists who are likewise concerned with certain forms of individualism.

The following chapter addresses the covenantal nature of church membership, a theme that has been championed in recent years by Baptists across the theological spectrum.[36] Drawing deeply from the English Separatist and subsequent Baptist traditions, and using his own church, Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, NC as a recurring example, Freeman argues, "a church is a community of disciples gathered in a common confession of faith in Jesus Christ."[37] Though he affirms a believer's church and congregational freedom, Freeman does not argue for an isolationist or protectionist view of local church autonomy. Rather, he argues "the early Baptist vision [was] a movement of radical renewal within the church catholic rather than purely a faction of dissent and separation."[38] Drawing upon earlier Baptists and the Free Church theologian Miroslav Volf, Freeman contends local churches are contextual embodiments of the one universal church called into existence by the Triune God: "To put it simply … the local church is wholly church but not the whole church."[39] He pushes back against several Catholic understandings of the local-universal question on the one hand, while also rejecting Baptist anti-Catholic sectarianism on the other hand. Freeman draws upon the insights of McClendon and Yoder to suggest that Baptist congregations are true churches, albeit dissenting churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Other Baptists strive for church unity, even while recognizing full unity is an eschatological reality. For Freeman and other Bapto-Catholics, a distinctively Baptist vision of catholicity admittedly remains a work in progress.

The seventh chapter focuses upon the Baptist understanding of the Bible, making much of the theme of "new light" from the Biblical revelation. For Freeman, "What distinguishes Baptists is not so

---

[36] For example, see Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1990); Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 13 (Wipf and Stock, 2006), pp. 21–47; John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2005), pp. 114–29.

[37] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 231.

[38] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 241.

[39] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 242–43.

much a doctrine of Scripture, much less a theory of inspiration, but rather a standpoint and a conviction that the church now is the apostolic community and the commands of Jesus are addressed to *us*."[40] This quote evidences Freeman's preference for McClendon's bibliology over more evangelical Baptist approaches to Scripture. Freeman and Other Baptists are more concerned with a doctrine of Scripture reading than they are the doctrine of Scripture itself. Freeman argues that Baptists historically valued communal Scripture interpretation far more than individual interpretations of Scripture. Freeman is nervous about the plain sense reading of the Bible, assumed by Baptists, but allegedly based on a misunderstanding of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture's perspicuity. Following postliberal theologians Lindbeck and Frei, Freeman argues Other Baptists affirm a post-critical, communal approach to Biblical interpretation as a balanced middle between liberal hyper-critical readings and conservative hermeneutical naïveté, both of which are grounded in modern individualism. For Freeman, "The church meeting thus becomes a liminal space where participants in the conversation of discernment are invited to journey from old ways of thinking toward new hermeneutical horizons of understanding."[41] Though he does not use the language, Freeman is really commending his own progressive Baptist approach to the "theological interpretation of Scripture," an ecumenical movement that transcends ecclesial and even theological commitments.[42] As a case study, Freeman makes a biblical case for an egalitarian understanding of women's ordination, a minority view among Baptists but one that, to Freeman, represents new light from Scripture.

In chapter eight, Freeman discusses the aforementioned topic of Baptist sacramentalism. He begins by arguing for a more sacramental account of the Lord's Supper over against more recent ultra-Zwinglian interpretations of the Eurcharist. He argues the earliest British Baptists affirmed a sacramental view of the Lord's Supper that echoed in various ways the *Book of Common Prayer* and Calvin's understanding of spiritual presence. However, despite early

---

[40] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 274.

[41] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 282.

[42] For an accessible introduction to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

Eucharistic sacramentalism, Freeman suggests "sacramentalism has rarely been a live option among subsequent generations" of Baptists.[43] Nineteenth-century Baptists focused on the "remembrance" aspect of the Lord's Supper and focused on obediently (and intermittently) celebrating the Eucharist more than articulating a coherent doctrine of God's activity during communion. Employing the clever term "real absence," Freeman suggests Baptists diminished their own doctrine of Christ's omnipresence in a quixotic attempt to avoid all sacramental language.[44] With a nod to the majority Reformed tradition, Freeman argues that Other Baptists affirm an evangelical sacramentalism wherein the Lord's Supper is not understood to confer grace *ex opera operato*, but rather is seen as a sign that confirms God's prior grace through faithful participation in the sacrament.

In his final full chapter, Freeman focuses on the doctrine of baptism. He again engages the history of Watts Street Baptist Church (among others) to argue for an open membership policy as the practice that best preserves a Baptist approach to catholicity. He concedes that a closed membership requiring believer's baptism, normally by immersion alone, is the dominant practice in Baptist history, albeit one periodically challenged by a noteworthy open membership minority. He also critiques approaches to open membership, such as that of Bunyan, that make baptism a matter of private conscience rather than a churchly sacrament and/or rejects, in principle, the validity of all infant baptisms. However, Freeman saves some of his strongest criticisms for Landmarkism, which rejected all non-Baptist baptisms (even credobaptisms) and often influenced mainstream Southern Baptist baptismal theology. He suggests that the "large majority" of Southern Baptist churches still reject so-called alien immersions and practice "re-baptism," a sweeping claim he fails to document.[45] He also criticizes the dominant Southern Baptist practice of requiring member candidates who were sprinkled as babies to submit to believer's baptism. For Freeman, Southern Baptist baptismal theology is incompatible with a serious commitment to ecumenism. He raises concerns about the rebaptism rate among Southern Baptists and argues, as with the Lord's Supper, for a more sacramental view of believer's baptism

---

[43] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 319.

[44] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 331.

[45] Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p. 363.

as a grace-confirming sign of God's saving action that is closely connected with the sealing the Holy Spirit. In a surprising turn for a Baptist, Freeman argues that Other Baptists should accept infant baptism, not out of a sense of Christian charity, but as a valid baptism, arguing that conversion and initiation can be embodied through a variety of practices in an ecumenical age. In a brief conclusion, Freeman revisits his major arguments and gives a final commendation for his Other Baptist vision of a contested catholicity.

III. Contesting Freeman's *Contested Catholicity*

I am grateful that Freeman has written *Contested Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*. Though we identify with different ecclesial traditions in the post-Controversy Baptist South, I am sympathetic to many elements of his version of Bapto-Catholicism. For example, I agree with Freeman that many Baptists, especially in the American South, have often embraced a Bapto-centric sectarianism as a result of an unhelpful understanding of individualism that "baptizes" (pun intended) American expressions of liberty and democracy far more than it reflects the more catholic spirit of the earlier Baptist tradition. I, too, long to see contemporary Baptists recover a healthy sense of Christian unity. I also resonate with Freeman's appreciate for the ecumenical creedal tradition, a more robust Trinitarianism among Baptists, and a deeper sense of liturgy. In fact, I would argue that these are not unique concerns among Bapto-Catholics. Many younger Southern Baptist pastors and theologians also desire to see Baptists recover a more robust sense of catholicity.

Second, when it comes to the Scriptures, Freeman rightly pushes back against an over-emphasis on the private interpretation of Scripture and helpfully calls for a rediscovery of communal Bible reading among Baptist churches. This is a needed word for Baptists of every stripe. Freeman also correctly sees more theological readings of the Scriptures as a helpful form of *ressourcement* from the Christian past and a path forward through the hermeneutical ruins left in the wake of the Enlightenment modernism. Again, I think many conservative Southern Baptists and other baptistic evangelicals would argue similarly to Freeman. The fact that numerous Southern Baptists scholars are involved in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement, champion canonical hermeneutics, or identify with redemptive-historical biblical interpretation

demonstrates that conservative Baptists and Bapto-Catholics have similar, if not identical, concerns about the best ways to read the Scriptures as faithful new covenant followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, certain aspects of Freeman's ecclesiological concerns resonate with me and with many other conservative Southern Baptists I know. As mentioned above, Freeman's call for a more covenantal understanding of local churches as communities of disciples closely intersects with the desires of a growing number of Southern Baptists. If anything, Freeman's championing of this perspective makes him far more like European Baptists or—dare I say—conservative Southern Baptists than he is like most of his fellow moderates in this regard. On a closely related theme, a growing number of Southern Baptists would also share Freeman's concerns about the culture of "rebaptism" in Baptist life, at least in respects to those who have been previously immersed. I would challenge Freeman's assertion that most Southern Baptists continue to reject "alien immersions" from other traditions; the evidence on this is mixed at best and the momentum seems to clearly be in the direction of those who would be more flexible than less flexible in this regard.[46] Many Southern Baptists, myself included, would also appreciate Freeman's critique of what might be called a "mere memorialism" view of the Lord's Supper. However, it is difficult to know how many Southern Baptists are open to a more (Reformed) sacramental understanding of communion similar to that of most earlier generations of Baptists.

These sympathies notwithstanding, I do not believe that Freeman's Other Baptist identity offers the way forward for conservative Southern Baptists who share many of his concerns. I would suggest this is a classic case of having the (mostly) right diagnosis while offering the (often) wrong prescription. Freeman's postliberalism is still too progressive for Southern Baptists who never wandered into the woods of modernism and later progressive developments in the first place. This is especially true in our doctrine of

---

[46] For example, the Southern Baptist International Mission Board recently voted to rescind its controversial policy rejecting most alien immersions. See David Roach, "IMB to Align Missionary Requirements with BF&M," Baptist Press (May 15, 2015), available online at http://www.bpnews.net/44772/imb-to-align-missionary-requirements-with-bfm (accessed June 11, 2015).

Scripture. Simply put, conservatives can embrace theological interpretation, communal interpretation, and sensitivity to contextualization, while also believing that inerrancy is a valid contextual articulation of the doctrine of biblical truthfulness and holding to the analogy of Scripture as a check against interpretations that contradict divine revelation. Bapto-Catholics are building on a shaky foundation because of their refusal to embrace a fully trustworthy Bible that provides within itself the only fully authoritative boundaries for faithful hermeneutics and theological formulation.

Because of our differing understandings of Scripture, conservative Baptists will also reject several of Freeman's interpretations. Southern Baptists have spoken clearly through our confessional tradition and rejected an egalitarian understanding of gender roles, an open membership accommodation of pedobaptism, and a sacramental view of believer's baptism. While all three perspectives have some historical roots in the Baptist tradition, most conservatives would argue that none of these perspectives ought to be embraced because to do so would entail either rejecting clear biblical texts or requiring some form of "hermeneutical gymnastics" that would ignore the analogy of Scripture and make some texts say something different than they seem to say. Contra moderates of all varieties, whether Bapto-Catholic or mainstream, this does not represent a coercive use of creeds and confessions, but rather is simply recognition that such standards have a ministerial authority insofar as they accurately summarize the biblical witness. Freeman comes close to arguing for this sort of authority for the Patristic creeds, but like other moderates he bristles at the idea that denominational confessions actually articulate prescriptive boundaries rather than merely speaking to consensus.

Freeman's Other Baptist identity remains too progressive in that it attempts catholic unity while simultaneously rejecting apostolic doctrine. Jesus's prayer for the church to be one (John 17:21) presumes affirming a truthful word from the Lord (17:17). Fortunately, Southern Baptists and other evangelical Baptists need not embrace postliberalism and advocate progressive doctrines in our own journey toward a more catholic identity. Instead, I would argue the way forward includes articulating a view of Baptist identity that adequately accounts for the various theological sources that have contributed to our ecclesial DNA. As third-generation Protestants, Baptists have inherited the wider catholic tradition's view of core Christian beliefs such as the Trinity, Christology, crea-

tion, and new creation, along with the Magisterial Reformers' basic understanding of Scripture and soteriology. As Free Church Protestants in particular, we have inherited an anti-Constantinian ecclesiology that privileges a regenerate church membership, credobaptism, and congregational freedom. As evangelicals, we have inherited a spirituality that is Bible-driven, cross-centered, and mission-minded. We Baptists are at our best when we understand ourselves to be simultaneously catholic, reformational, radical, and evangelical. When one of these components is left out, the result is a malformed Baptist identity. Freeman rightly points out that the catholic component has often been lacking, and that is a serious problem. Unfortunately, Freeman's Other Baptist paradigm presents us with its own problems.

Freeman and other Bapto-Catholics have the right instincts, but they also suffer from a malformed Baptist identity. Rather than fully embracing the evangelical renewal that influenced almost all Baptists in the eighteenth century, the Bapto-Catholics, like other progressives, have inherited theological traditions that moved on from evangelicalism into modernism, then Neo-Orthodoxy, and finally to movements like postliberalism or Radical Orthodoxy. These latter movements are valuable insofar as they offer trenchant critiques of modernist unbelief, but they reject evangelicalism, are rarely influenced by Free Church views, and redefined core Protestant and even catholic ideas. The result is that progressive accounts of catholicity such as the mainline ecumenical movement are insufficiently evangelical and aberrantly Protestant. The Bapto-Catholic vision suffers from a similar, more explicitly Baptist version of this progressive malady. Bapto-Catholics must embrace more consistently evangelical views if they are to ever be more than simply fellow travelers and occasional dialog partners for conservative Baptists who desire a greater sense of catholicity. Simply put, Southern Baptists and other evangelical Baptists have a better pathway toward a biblically faithful catholicity than Bapto-Catholics; the latter have introduced too many unhealthy mutations into their ecclesial DNA.

Conclusion

Contesting Catholicity makes a significant constructive contribution to Baptist theology, an important addition to recent discussions of Baptist identity, and represents the most sophisticated articulation of the Bapto-Catholic vision that has yet been published.

Curtis Freeman is a creative theologian who always asks good questions, even when his answers are worth contesting. Mainstream moderates will likely continue to debate the merit of Freeman's challenge to the progressive account of soul competency, as well as his positive assessment of historic creeds. These emphases in Freeman's thought (and Bapto-Catholicism in general) represent a direct challenge to moderate Baptist hyper-individualism.

Though Freeman also challenges conservative Baptists, we should respond differently. On the one hand, many of his critiques of Baptist sectarianism and individualism should be received. On the other hand, Freeman's progressive theological positions should be rejected. Freeman offers us a helpful example of how to think about catholicity from a creative perspective that is distinctively Baptist. Our response as conservatives should be to wrestle with the same questions, but from a perspective that is sufficiently evangelical and more faithful to the best of the classical Protestant and Free Church traditions. My hope is that a rising generation of Southern Baptist theologians will engage these vital issues from a better starting place than Freeman and his Bapto-Catholic colleagues.[47]

[47] A model for this sort of engagement, written from a confessionally Reformed perspective, can be found in Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015). Convictional Baptists committed to catholicity would do well to consider the proposals of Allen and Swain as we attempt to articulate an evangelical Baptist catholicity.

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 171–83

The Insanity of Systematic Theology: A Review of Michael Bird's *Evangelical Theology*

Marc Cortez
Wheaton College

Introduction

A student once asked if I would ever write my own one-volume systematic theology. Unfortunately I was eating, so I nearly killed myself when the shock of such an absurd proposal caused me to inhale a barely chewed chunk of burrito. There is just too much to say, too many complex issues to grasp, too many debates to resolve. Even if you manage to address everything you want, your book must still face an array of theological experts, each frustrated that you didn't say more or present with more nuance the issues on which they are most concerned. Give me the thirteen volumes of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, the entirety of Augustine's theological corpus, or even the paltry 2–3 volumes allocated to many modern theologians. But one? What sane person would accept such a challenge?

I can't comment on Michael Bird's sanity, though I'd be willing to offer a few speculations after the session. But I can say that, unlike me, he was willing to take up the challenge, and has created a unique resource: a systematic theology that demonstrates an exemplary commitment to clear and engaging communication, while also striving to ground itself in the gospel, biblical theology, and the real needs of everyday Christians. For that we should all be grateful.

I could comment at length on the many things that Bird's *Evangelical Theology* does well.[1] Following the long-standing tradition of focusing a review on more constructive and critical observations, however, I will guide my reflections in that direction. To that end, we will consider two major issues. First, we will look at Bird's claim

[1] Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), hereafter referred to as *ET*.

to have offered a systematic theology that is more thoroughly determined by the gospel than earlier evangelical efforts. Second, we will assess the content of *ET* by looking specifically at his doctrine of humanity as a case study for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the volume as a whole.

Part 1: Thoroughly Determined by the Gospel

Bird clearly states at the beginning that one of the primary motivations for producing this book is the lack of "a genuinely evangelical theology textbook…that has its content, structure, and substance singularly determined by the evangel,"[2] thus identifying several *desiderata* for a truly gospel-centered theology. Since I am unclear on this distinction between "content" and "substance," I will treat those two as synonymous. We thus have two criteria to use as our starting point:

(A) The gospel must singularly determine the *structure* of the theology.

(B) The gospel must singularly determine the *content* of the theology.

Later in the chapter, Bird offers as a third criterion that a systematic theology determined by the gospel will not focus solely on the various loci of theology, but will also "be applied to the sphere of daily Christian life and the offices of Christian leaders."[3] Thus a third criterion:

(C) The gospel must connect the content of theology to daily Christian life and ministry.

Bird may have more in mind than this. But these three criteria should be enough for us to assess Bird's claim regarding the adequacy of earlier evangelical theologies and the success of his own endeavor.

A. The Structure of Evangelical Theology

Applying these criteria, however, proves rather difficult. What precisely does it mean for the gospel to "singularly determine" the structure or content of a systematic theology? Although Bird does not address this question explicitly, we might be able to tease out an answer by considering his decision to deal with eschatology rela-

---

[2] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 11.

[3] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 21.

tively early in the volume. Based on the centrality of the Kingdom in biblical theology as a whole and the teachings of Jesus in particular, Bird concludes that eschatology "provides the framework for Christian theology" and that it is "the essential nucleus of the Christian gospel."[4] Eschatology is thus presented as sufficiently important for understanding the gospel that it must be addressed far earlier than traditional theological structures allow.

For Bird, then, allowing the gospel to determine the structure of theology seems to mean something like arranging the theological loci in the way most conducive for understanding the gospel. But this can be taken in two different ways. First, it could mean that certain theological topics actually are more or less central to the gospel. Thus, we must deal with eschatology early in the process because it is essential for understanding the gospel in a way that other theological loci are not. This, however, would be a difficult claim to sustain given that Bird places eschatology before such vital topics as Jesus, salvation, and the Spirit. The second option, then, is that a gospel-determined theological structure does not mean that certain topics actually are more central to the gospel, but only that we should order the theological loci in the way most conducive to understanding the gospel. But this raises its own questions. For example, in another surprising move, Bird chooses to deal with the doctrines of humanity and sin toward the end of the volume. If used as a textbook in class, then, we would find ourselves in the interesting position of having to discuss the gospel and salvation before having talked about *who* is being saved and *what* they are being saved from. That seems problematic for any number of reasons, not least of which is why exactly such a structure is more singularly determined by the gospel than another approach.

One final point before leaving the question of structure. I wonder if Bird has fully appreciated the logic of the traditional order of theological topics, which seems to be thoroughly shaped by the gospel narrative. Beginning with the God who is Lord and Creator of all, they then talk about God's purposes for creation in general and humanity in particular. That sets the stage for appreciating the tragedy of the Fall and the amazing goodness of God's grace in Christ, the transformation of his people through the Spirit, and the

[4] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 236.

final culmination of God's creative purposes in the eschaton.[5] Say what you will about this structure, it is hard to see why this would not qualify as a theological framework singularly determined by the gospel.

Now it is entirely possible that all of this is beside the point. Maybe Bird does not mean to suggest that earlier theologies failed to have gospel-determined structures *in fact*, only that they generally fail to make explicit the gospel-logic driving the structure of their theologies. And here he would largely be correct. Indeed, one of my favorite aspects of Bird's book was his clear desire to help his readers see how the various loci relate to the gospel. But claiming that earlier theologies failed to be sufficiently *explicit* about their gospel-centeredness is a far cry from implying that they were not so *in fact*.

B. The Content of Evangelical Theology

Moving on to the second criterion, is it the case that earlier theologies failed to have their content determined by the gospel in a way that Bird substantially improves upon? Here we can be somewhat briefer since I would largely be repeating the previous argument. If earlier theologians implicitly structured their systematic theologies around the logic of the gospel in the way suggested above, then it should come as no surprise that the content of that structure does the same. Indeed, the reader is left wondering here what it would mean for an evangelical theology *not* to have its content determined by the gospel. Presumably Bird does not think that earlier attempts actually undermined the gospel since he refers to the many "good" evangelical theologies already available.[6] Does he then think that the content of earlier theologies focused on issues irrelevant to the gospel? If so, it would be interesting to hear what those might be. Or again is the concern a failure to make explicit how the content of each theological issue relates to the gospel? If so, Bird identifies a legitimate concern, but one that is far different

---

[5] For a representative sample of evangelical theologies that follow this basic gospel narrative, see Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998); Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

[6] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 11.

from suggesting that the content of those earlier theologies is not actually determined by the gospel.

C. The Practice of Evangelical Theology

Bird's third criterion involves the integration of theological reflection with Christian life and ministry. So this provides a third way in which earlier theologies might have a significant lack that Bird will seek to address.

Here I find myself agreeing with Bird's frustration regarding earlier theologies. Although some excel at developing this connection, most demonstrate a consistent weakness in relating systematic theology to life and ministry, preferring instead to relegate such reflection to works on Christian ethics and/or practical theology.[7]

Despite this agreement, however, I wonder if Bird has in fact improved upon earlier attempts in this area. Though he does evidence a desire to connect theology to life and ministry in places, for example when discussing the doctrine of the Trinity,[8] nonetheless that section stands out as relatively unique since few other chapters offer any sustained practical reflection. This lack becomes particularly problematic in those sections where pressing issues demand further reflection. The section on creation offers no discussion of ecological or environmental issues. In Pneumatology, Bird addresses spiritual gifts but not the continuation of "miraculous" gifts or the practical issues that surround the use of gifts in ministry.[9] Further he discusses the Spirit's revelatory work, but not the questions concerning whether the Spirit provides new revelation today, whether the Spirit is at work in other religions, or what it might mean for the Spirit to lead believers today. Most surprisingly, Bird's chapter on humanity remains completely silent on pressing issues like sexuality, gender roles in ministry, race, vocation, end of life issues, and more. Once again we must acknowledge that there is only so much you can accomplish in a single volume. Given Bird's

---

[7] I do think we should exercise some caution here, however. By emphasizing the need for theology to be practical, we may inadvertently contribute to popular notions of what constitutes the "practical," which end up limiting the scope and significance of theology to those issues with purely pragmatic value.

[8] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 122–24.

[9] E.g., whether we should try to identify our spiritual gifts, the relationship between "spiritual" and "natural" gifts, whether spiritual gifts can be developed over time.

own claim that a gospel-centered theology should connect theology to everyday life and ministry, though, such critiques seem legitimate while raising questions about Bird's claim to have offered a more adequately gospel-centered theology

In sum, then, *ET* offers an excellent example of a work that seeks to make explicit the relationship between the gospel and systematic theology. For that it should be commended. Whether it has succeeded in being *more* determined by the gospel than earlier evangelical theologies, however, is an entirely different question. And here I think we have good grounds for questioning whether that is in fact the case.

Part 2: The Devil Is in the Details

Next we turn our attention to Bird's discussion of theological anthropology.[10] And we can begin rather superficially by noticing its length and structure: 16 pages on the doctrine of humanity and 30 pages on the doctrine of sin. It is thus comparable in length to Bird's treatment of pneumatology, both of which are substantially smaller than the other sections. Indeed, Bird's treatment of the *imago Dei* is roughly comparable to his excursus on the various *lapsarian* positions, and the 16 pages he devotes to the doctrine of humanity is the same as that dedicated to both the millennium and the intermediate state.[11]

You should not, of course, assess a theological treatment's adequacy based on page count alone. I only raise the issue at this point because some of my comments below directly relate to the limited space allocated to this topic. Some might be inclined to dismiss my concerns as criticizing the book for not being even longer than it

---

[10] I need to be careful here since it is inherently dangerous to assess a one-volume systematic theology based on the adequacy with which it addresses an area of particular interest to you. Nonetheless, it is also advantageous to draw upon an area of particular strength to assess the overall adequacy of a theologian's approach to the systematic task. So I will focus here on identifying some areas that can and, in my opinion, should have been addressed with greater rigor, even in a volume with this length and focus.

[11] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 274–300, pp. 309–25. Indeed, if you combine those two issues with Bird's discussion of the various positions on the tribulation, you would have a mere subsection of eschatology that is almost three times the length of *ET*'s entire doctrine of humanity.

already is. So my point here is not simply that the section in humanity is short, but that it is notably short *relative to the other sections*. Thus, Bird has clearly made decisions about where to invest his pages. And I think his treatment of humanity raises questions about whether it would have been wise to invest further in this section, especially given that Bird framed this project around the gospel, which, as he himself recognizes, includes "a significant amount of anthropocentrism."[12]

A. Made in the Image of God

Moving into the specific content of this section, we should consider what Bird has to say about the image of God. Here Bird's background in biblical studies shines as he introduces readers to the "royal view" of the image of God as the one with the greatest support among biblical scholars.[13] He quickly walks readers through the Ancient Near Eastern context of the phrase, how it relates to divine sovereignty and presence, and how it finds its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. So there is much to appreciate about Bird's discussion of the *imago Dei*.

Nonetheless, this relatively brief section prompts questions of its own. First, some confusions arise in Bird's description of alternate interpretations. For example, in summarizing the substantive view, Bird states that "the Cappadocian Fathers identified the image with Adam's freedom from death and decay," and therefore concluded that the image was entirely lost at the Fall.[14] This, however, is not the case. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, identifies the *imago Dei* with human freedom in general (i.e. not just freedom from decay) and primarily with the virtues.[15] Thus he viewed the image as tarnished rather than completely lost at the Fall.[16] A similar mistake occurs when Bird associates Luther with the substantive view of the *imago*. Luther instead emphasized the person's right relationship to God as central to the *imago*, rejecting any attempt to ground the image in human capacities.[17] Finally, Bird's explanation

---

[12] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 653.

[13] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 659–61.

[14] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 658.

[15] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, p. 5.

[16] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, p. 16.

[17] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther's Works 1 (St. Louis: Concordia House, 1958), pp. 55–65.

of the relational view itself seems confused. There he describes the relational view as addressing "a human capacity for relationship,"[18] apparently unaware that this is a better definition of a substantive view of the image. Properly understood, the relational view of the *imago* has nothing to do with particular capacities or faculties of the human person.[19] The human person is not an image bearer in virtue of any particular *capacities* but solely because of the *relationships* in which the human persons stands.

In addition to this occasional lack of interpretive clarity, Bird's defense of a functional view of the *imago* raises its own questions.[20] Most importantly, many argue that human dominion should be seen as the *purpose* of the image rather than its *definition*.[21] Although Bird recognizes in a footnote that such an objection exists, he provides no response, leaving the reader to wonder if he has simply dismissed contrary data.[22]

At multiple points, then, Bird's summary of contrary perspectives manifests significant difficulties. Some might object that these are relatively small errors in the overall presentation and that they do not necessarily detract from the broader argument Bird wants to make. But statements like these raise questions about the extent to

---

[18] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 659.

[19] To be fair, this is a relatively common confusion in discussions about the relational view of the *imago*.

[20] One problem that is relatively minor but points to the extent to which Bird has clearly explained the differences between the various positions involves an apparent category mistake. When explaining his preference for a functional interpretation, Bird asserts, "Part of the meaning of salvation is that our *eikōnic* faculties are gradually restored to their Edenic state" (Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 661). Bird thus relies on substantival language (i.e. restoration of "faculties") to describe his position despite the fact that he has already affirmed the functional *over against* the substantival view of the *imago*.

[21] In other words, when God states that he will make humans in his image and immediately follows that with a declaration that they will having dominion over other living creatures, does he intend the latter statement to explicate the content of the image (i.e. image *means* dominion), or does he intend to say that dominion is the purpose for having been made in his image? For any functional interpretation of the *imago*, this seems an important question to answer.

[22] I am not saying that this is what Bird has in fact done, only the way the information is presented could lead the reader to this conclusion.

which Bird has adequately interpreted and explained the theological landscape, raising similar questions about the cogency of his proposed solution. In the end, he may be correct that the royal view of the *imago* is the most satisfying. But it is not clear that the reader has received all of the data necessary for adequately assessing that claim.

B. How Many Pieces Am I?

Some of these same difficulties arise in the rest of Bird's discussion of human constitution, mostly relating to Bird's description of "Christian monism" as a perspective on what comprises the human person.[23] First, although Bird offers this in the context of various Christian views on the human person, he refers to this position as the "materialistic/atheistic" position.[24] It is not entirely clear what Bird intends by associating Christian monists with an "atheistic" position like this, but the unfortunate association biases the discussion.

Second, Bird describes the monist position as believing that all talk about the soul is "metaphorical."[25] If he simply means to say that monists do not think of the soul as a substantial reality separable from the body, he is clearly correct. But Christian monists retain a high view of the very real capacities of the human person that we typically associate with the soul.[26] To call all of this language "metaphorical" misleads the reader into thinking that the Christian monist views these as somehow less than fully real.

Third, and most surprisingly, Bird's engagement with the biblical data in this section leaves much to be desired.[27] He declares early in his presentation that "Dichotomism…is the most biblical

---

[23] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 663.

[24] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 663.

[25] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 663.

[26] See, for example, Warren S. Brown, Nancey C. Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul?: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

[27] Interestingly, the only biblical scholar Bird cites in this discussion is Joel Green who argues that the biblical data is at least consistent with anthropological monism (e.g., Joel Green, "Three Exegetical Forays into the Body-Soul Discussion," *Criswell Theological Review* 7/2 (2010): pp. 3–18).

position,"[28] supporting this by claiming that the biblical data affirms that "both the spirit and soul can survive death."[29] However, Bird fails to engage or even reference the substantial body of literature contending that "spirit" and "soul" in the kinds of texts that he cites refer either to the principle of "life" (i.e. that which animates living beings) or to those aspects of the human person that cannot be viewed by other human persons (i.e. the "inner" life of the person).[30] Many biblical scholars argue that the Bible's anthropological terminology emphasizes the unity of the human person far more than any substantial dualism.[31] Bird is certainly free to disagree and offer his own perspective, but it is unfortunate that he remains entirely silent here on contrary interpretations of the biblical data.[32]

Finally, alongside the weaknesses in his portrayal of contrary perspectives, we also see some limitations in the presentation of his preferred position. Bird offers no extended discussion of any of the significant biblical, theological, and scientific objections raised

---

[28] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 662. Such a statement raises its own questions about whether such a claim truncates meaningful engagement with contrary perspectives. It is perfectly legitimate, of course, for Bird to declare his understanding of an issue. It is, after all, his book. When summarizing various perspectives, though, I wonder how helpful it is simply to declare that one position is the "biblical" one.

[29] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 663.

[30] For classic studies on this, see esp. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Man in the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1963); Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); and Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974).

[31] This does not necessarily mean that the biblical data require some kind of Christian materialism since it is entirely possible to read the biblical terminology as emphasizing unity within a broader duality. Here I am simply pointing out that Bird's presentation oversimplifies the relevant biblical data.

[32] The argument is similarly skewed when Bird concludes his presentation by saying that "monism flounders…if we believe that Scripture clearly teaches a postmortem, disembodied intermediate state" (Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 664). The intermediate state is indeed a key issue in the debate, but Bird's presentation makes no reference to the fact that Christian materialists are fully aware of the issue and have offered substantive responses. We may not be convinced by those responses, but Bird's presentation makes it sound as though they have simply ignored this decisive refutation of their position.

against substance dualism. That does not mean that Bird's conclusion is incorrect, only that he has not given his readers the data necessary for them to understand and wrestle through this difficult.

C. Shades of Sin

Finally, we can follow similar trajectories into Bird's discussion of sin. For example, Bird summarizes Augustine's debate with Pelagius, and then claims, "Pelagianism did not win the day, though Semi-Pelagianism did,"[33] going on to define Semipelagianism as "the view that the human will *cooperates* with divine grace and thus produces salvation in tandem."[34] Such a definition is problematic for two reasons. First, it is historically incorrect. Although the label was invented during the Reformation to refer to any synergistic approach to salvation, its historical referent was a controversy in the fifth and sixth centuries that focused on whether the human person could *initiate* the process of salvation and was ultimately condemned as a heresy at the Synod of Orange (529). Thus, regardless of what we might think about the continued influence of Semipelagiansim in the Middle Ages, it simply is not correct to state that it won in the theological debate with Augustinianism. The impression that it did so comes from the second mistake: conflating Semipelagianism with synergism. But these two positions are importantly different.[35] By failing to distinguish them, Bird not only makes his discussion of sin unclear, but he also associates all synergistic soteriologies with a condemned heresy, which raises important, though unaddressed, questions about how Bird views Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Weslesyan soteriologies, among others.

This raises another concern. Unlike our earlier critiques where we raised questions about the adequacy of how *ET* summarizes contrary perspectives, here *ET* routinely fails to identify contrary perspectives entirely. Bird may be able to explain the lack of en-

---

[33] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 676.

[34] Ibid.

[35] If we take semi-Pelagianism as any system in which the human person initiates the process of salvation apart from any grace other than common grace, and if we take synergism to mean any system that affirms some kind of cooperative interaction between the divine and the human in salvation, then we must conclude that these are importantly different concepts in that one can be a synergist (cooperative interaction) without being semi-Pelagian (salvation begins with human effort).

gagement with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy based on his decision to focus on evangelical perspectives, but we also receive no extended treatment of Wesleyan/Arminian perspectives either. There is no discussion of the Wesleyan understanding of sin, original sin, or prevenient grace. Given the importance of Wesleyan theology for shaping evangelicalism as a whole, this is a notable lack, and one that reduces the value of *ET* for those coming from this side of evangelicalism.

And finally, here as well we can ask whether Bird has adequately engaged relevant criticisms of his preferred interpretations. For example, Bird defines sin as "a despising of God and an attempt to dethrone God."[36] And that may be a fine definition but Bird makes no reference to the important critiques that many have offered to definitions of sin that seem to privilege the kinds of sins that those in positions of power and preference struggle with. They rightly ask whether such definitions adequately capture the full reality of sin as experienced by oppressed people who are less likely to be tempted by self-enthronement than by self-denigration.[37]

Conclusion

In the end, we have seen several ways in which *ET* could be strengthened. I would have liked to see a clearer explanation of what it means to claim that *ET* is more determined by the gospel, one that more generously recognizes the ways in which earlier evangelical theologies were determined by a similar vision of the theological task. And if our case study on the doctrine of humanity is any indication, three additional issues warrant further consideration: (1) greater clarity and accuracy when summarizing contrary theological perspectives, (2) more nuanced engagement with a broader range of evangelical perspectives, and (3) increased engagement with possible criticisms Bird's preferred conclusions.

I would like to conclude, however, by reaffirming my introductory comment about the value of *ET*. Michael Bird has given us a helpful resource with a number of unique features, most significant of which is the attempt to make explicit the relationship between

---

[36] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 669.

[37] E.g. Susan L. Nelson, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings* 65/3 (1982): 316–27.

the various theological loci and God's redemptive work in Christ. That alone makes *ET* worth reading.

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 185–94

Theological Aesthetics: Some Reflections on Michael Bird's *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*

Kelly M. Kapic
Covenant College

Introduction

How should we go about the task of constructing a Christian Theology that is both biblical and systematic? Answering this question may be far more difficult than many realize. Often we imagine that only the content of what is said is important, but in truth that is an incomplete picture. What matters is not only *what* you say, but *how* and *when* you say it. In this way, constructing a Systematic theology involves cultivating a theological aesthetic. Having gone through Michael Bird's fresh volume, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Theology*, I have decided to use my limited time to focus on what might roughly come under the heading of aesthetics. Accordingly, I will concentrate here on the "how" and "when" rather than the "what," since aesthetics does matter in theological discourse.

How

As is well known, Karl Barth memorably wrote, "The theologian who has no joy in his work is not a theologian at all. Sulky faces, morose thoughts and boring ways of speaking are intolerable in this science."[1] As theologians, we love this quote. But this reminds me a bit of something Steve Brown—the wonderfully funny and yet raw pastor—was once told by a listener: "lots of preachers say they are sinners, but you are the first one I really believe." Lots of us theologians say we shouldn't be boring or sulky in our theology, but Bird is one of the few that readers will think actually is joyful, free, and engaging. If we are honest, how often is our writing genuinely riveting, drawing readers in rather than speaking with uninspired tones that lull our students to sleep and subtly communicate

[1] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 2:1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), p. 656.

that these matters are merely abstractions with little practical significance? Are we so fearful of making missteps that we weaken our message by dulling our words, stifling our imaginations, and in the process lose the awe and joy of the task before us? Such a charge most certainly cannot be levied against Michael Bird, which is amazing given that we are discussing an 800-page tome. Whatever one thinks of Bird's content, let us give him credit; he writes an introductory theology that clearly communicates that he is full of joy about his task and his Lord. That is no small accomplishment.

This book, for the most part, is quick paced, readable, accessible, and clever. Most notable (and probably controversial) is Bird's humor, which I suspect would almost be impossible for him to hide—it would certainly be a different volume if his wit were to be left out. His humor is part of the aesthetic of his theology. Many, especially college students, will likely be thankful for these small cups of water offered along this long pilgrimage. A random sampling of some of his humor may help:

- "During my time at university one chap wrote his thesis on 'Gay Spirituality,' which is a fair enough and valid PhD topic. However, while he was there, he also published a book attempting to prove Jesus was gay, using astrology. Another guy wrote his thesis on the religious significance of vampire myths. Then there was the option of taking a class on religion and body art. It was a top university, but filled with more nuts than Brazil."[2]
- "historical Jesus research remains a great place to go and try to get your theological parking historically validated."[3]
- Addressing the doctrine of the tribulation: "the posttrib view is eminently preferable to the pretrib view because the latter did not appear on the scene of church history until J. N. Darby in the 1830s (perhaps inspired by a spiritual enthusiastic teenage girl from Glasgow [all the more harrowing for me since I know some Scottish teenage girls from Glasgow])."[4]
- "whereas Schleiermacher made the Trinity an appendix to his book on *Christian Faith* because it was irrelevant to reli-

---

[2] Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), p. 191, footnote 194.

[3] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 349.

[4] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 300.

gious experience, Barth made the Trinity first and foremost in his *Church Dogmatics*, which was Barth's way of saying, 'suck on that one, Schleiermacher!'"[5]

- Discussing those who claim penal substitutionary theories advocate a form of "divine child abuse," Bird gives an extensive quote from one such popular source. Then he responds: "Dem dere be fightin words! The problem is that this argument is filled with so much straw that you could literally take that argument, put a costume on it, and audition it for the role of the scarecrow in a new Broadway production of the *Wizard of Oz*."[6]

We laugh, because Bird has the ability to be wonderfully clever. But let's be honest, using wit in academic writing is both difficult and risky, which is partly why so few people do it. And most of us are not as funny as Bird. Bird is far more successful at this then I ever could be, no matter how hard I tried.

However, the challenge is that it is hard to employ comedy consistently without undermining or trivializing the important matters you are discussing. When working well such quips actually make a profound point, reinforcing an argument rather than distracting from one. For a classic example of this kind of humor perfectly employed, Robert Jenson memorably wrote this devastating line: "Hegel's only real fault was that he confused himself with the last judge; but that is quite a fault."[7] We laugh here, but actually, in that brief joke, Jenson is also making a serious critique of Hegel that takes one right to the heart of the problem in Hegel's approach.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always seem that Bird's jokes add to his arguments, and sometimes potentially do distract or risk trivializing them. A qualification may prove helpful here: I do believe these kind of witticisms often work well in our classrooms, since we have a relationship and rapport with our students. However, to translate classroom wit into a widely distributed textbook can create some unexpected problems.

For example, when discussing Covenant Theology Bird spends time considering if there is a "covenant of works." He then offhandedly writes: "No matter how much I try, I cannot find a 'cov-

---

[5] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 191–92.

[6] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 411.

[7] Robert W. Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For: The Sense of Theological Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 233.

enant of works' in my ESV concordance!"[8] This could be humor working to further his real concern (i.e., he doesn't think this doctrine is taught in scripture). However, for many conservative evangelical college students using this book, it may be the kind of humor that hurts rather than helps Bird's purposes. In the student newspaper where I teach, an undergraduate recently described how in one of her classes, as the professor was just about to elaborate on reasons for affirming the belief that Jesus is God, another student frustratingly interjected: "I know why I do," and then simply explained, "because the Bible says so…" Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't exactly *say* 'so,' which is why a student like that has his world shaken later when he sees an ABC Easter special where scholars interviewed claim Jesus never explicitly affirms his divinity.[9] They turn to their concordance to answer this objection, only to find out there may be at least something in what this 'liberal' scholar has said. The cliché has failed them. Such students need to be drawn into what might be called biblical reasoning: faithful ways of making sense of the explicit and implicit, of holding together the whole narrative of scripture, including story and proposition, etc. Without that, they are vulnerable.

Bird is sensitive to the need for a nuanced theological methodology that avoids naïve Biblicism (see his prolegomena[10]), and in context he provides substantive points of concern about a covenant between God and Adam.[11] But a simple passing joke like the one noted above, I fear, unintentionally makes the thoughtful objections he goes on to outline become peripheral, rather than central. That may be maddening to us as scholars, since we think the students should focus on the arguments rather than the joke. But when the options are 1) to learn a pithy short response ('it is not in the bible') or 2) work through carefully constructed reasons for

---

[8] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 223.

[9] Bird is well aware of these kinds of problems and misleading representations, which is why he and a few others have written a helpful response to Bart Ehrman's problematic but popular volume. See *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature--a Response to Bart Ehrman* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014).

[10] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 29–86.

[11] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 233–34.

raising concerns about this doctrine, students often quickly settle for the funny aside. The quip will be repeated, but the arguments too often forgotten. We must remember that many young evangelical students start their theological studies from a posture of naïve Biblicist intuitions, which is partly why conservative evangelicals have not always been great at appreciating and contributing to the discipline of theology. I recognize that this example from Bird was just a parenthetical amusing comment, so I don't want to make too much of it. Yet it is an example of the kind of concern many will have who read this volume. Again, there appears to be a difference here between how one would present material in a classroom, and how one carries that task out in print.

One final sample of the "how" might prove helpful here, for this is not merely a matter of the humor one uses, but also the kinds of vocabulary employed. Discussing the Holy Spirit, Bird writes: "the Holy Spirit is a maverick," by which he explains: "he crosses the floor on many issues, breaks ranks in division, and won't be owned by any party."[12] In the immediate context Bird appears to have his sights here on denominational disputes and territorialism. He goes on: the Spirit "is impossible to predict or predetermine…" I believe I know what Bird is trying to get at here, as he rightly raises concerns about some denominational tendencies to neglect or subtly imagine we can control the Spirit. But this is an example of rather clumsy and even potentially misleading vocabulary.

Part of the problem for American audiences is that "maverick" language in recent history is strongly associated with the politicians John McCain and Sarah Palin, so that when Bird goes on to talk about "breaking the ranks" and "won't be owned by a party," the general narrative of these two candidates vaguely hovers in the back of our minds. They loudly and triumphantly used the language of "maverick" as a badge of honor, though it drove others who tried to work with them crazy. Such language tends to conjure up imagery of brash individualism rather than the ecclesial unity that Bird is actually arguing for (and the divisions he is warning against).

Furthermore, one might begin to wonder how the Spirit can ever be called a "maverick," since he is none other than the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ. There can be no "maverick" in the Trinity, or in the Triune God's work in this world (*Opera Trinitis ad extra*

[12] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 611.

sunt indivisa). Put differently, is it true that the Spirit is "impossible to predict" when it comes to the promises of God, such as his assurance to be present with us, to comfort his people, to work in certain ways? Now, clearly Bird is not claiming the Spirit is advocating autonomy among the divine persons (that would move us into tritheism), but this loaded language of maverick—maybe unintentionally—creates more problems than it helps, and thus should be avoided. Here is just an example of where a more slowly developed theological aesthetic may have proved advantageous.

When

Let us turn from considering *how* one presents the material to *when* one discusses particular doctrines. One of the most promising aspects of a New Testament scholar offering to write a systematic theology was the chance for a fresh perspective in terms of arrangement. In other words, he would not merely offer particular insights on individual doctrines, but maybe more importantly offer us another way to approach the systematic task in the first place. Bird purposefully seeks to do just that, aiming to provide an *evangelical* theology that is distinctly arranged around the "gospel."[13] Here is a chance for real creative arrangement. In many ways I both like what Bird proposes here, and yet I believe he falls short of his own goal, and that the volume would prove richer if he were even more consistent in carrying out the task he gave himself in the first place.

Bird's proposal is to let the good news of Jesus drive the heart of the story, which then means that from this epicenter the rest of theology unfolds. However, sometimes when it would prove most interesting to see this thoroughly applied and worked out, it is only vaguely practiced. For example, with Bird's treatment of the attributes of God: how Christologically informed is his unpacking of each attribute? Some mention is made at times, but a thorough and careful discussion of each attribute viewed particularly through the lens of the story of Jesus would prove far more interesting and innovative, since it is rarely done (for some good and some not so good reasons). Given this book's distinctive goals, this very well could have been an area where Bird might have demonstrated constructive theological insights drawn from exegetical engagement, since so often the divine attributes are supported merely by a smat-

[13] See Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 19–26, esp. pp. 47–54, pp. 80–83.

tering of proof texts. Here was a chance to consider, in a sustained way, how the Son of God's becoming man now informs and transforms our view of the divine attributes. Later, when talking about "Christological revelation," Bird does point back to this idea, recognizing that "the incarnation is a further revelation of the divine attributes, especially the faithfulness of God."[14] Could this not inform our conception of the attributes beyond merely divine faithfulness? How might this be done in a distinctly "gospel" oriented way. Given how this volume is intentionally organized, I believe a fuller treatment could have been both appropriate and enlightening.

Let's turn to Bird's discussion of biblical eschatology for another area where arrangement proves both promising and yet, in my opinion, is still wanting. Here is an example where we see a New Testament scholar bringing his wisdom and training to the table, offering us a fresh arrangement. Most notably, Bird reminds us that eschatology is not merely something that happens at the "end": consequently, we should not leave these discussions for the final chapters in a systematic theology. No, we need to let our theological presentation become shaped much earlier by an exposition of the "Now and Not Yet." This is a great instinct. However, I am not sure Bird has really advanced us as far along as he may have wished. Let me briefly explain.

Bird rightly frames eschatology in terms of the Kingdom: this is good and right. Such crucial background is helpful as he prepares his readers for reflections on the coming of the King, that is, his discussion of Christology. Here I am sympathetic with his broadly redemptive historical instincts.[15] However, what ended up happening in this volume is that Bird decided to still basically allow old paradigms to govern him here, just offering slight modifications. So, he simply takes the *entire* section on eschatology and moves it forward. Therefore, after his reflections on the kingdom, he spends an abundant amount of time discussing millennial positions, different views of the rapture, God's judgment, and a longish discussion on the intermediate state. Next comes his entire section on "The Final State: Heaven, Hell, and New Creation." Only after all of that is

---

[14] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 210.

[15] Cf., Kelly M. Kapic, "Trajectories of a Trinitarian Eschatology," in *Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology*, ed. Paul Louis Metzger (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), pp. 189–202.

examined does Bird turn his attention to *starting* his section on Christology!

This is problematic. Bird is right to allow some of his eschatological discussion to arise much earlier than is often the norm, but wrong to then try and shove every eschatological debate into that early material. He reverts back into an old paradigm that he himself has raised serious questions about. It creates an oddness that should be avoided (e.g., talking about the problem of death and how it is overcome before you have talked about the person of Christ or the atonement). Why not split up the eschatological discussion, so that material on the Kingdom that more naturally anticipates and helps frame Christology comes early, but then discussions about the millennial, death, intermediate state, and reflections on heaven and hell all would come later (post-Christology). How can one rightly speak of the new heavens and the new earth without first dealing with the "firstborn from the dead," an idea that is again dependent on earlier discussions of incarnation and resurrection? Bird senses this, and thus he does spend time in his eschatological chapters pointing to the Christ events; but that means trying to really unpack them before they have even been properly introduced.

Or, maybe most clearly a problem, the book has a chapter on the "Return of Christ" before it has even really discussed the doctrine of the ascension. Here it seems to me, we end up in the very position Bird was trying to avoid: classical systematic ordering (all eschatological matters must be dealt with together) rather than allowing a "gospel" telling to drive his organization and sensitivities. Again, the only way he could have kept his 'gospel' ordering, however, would be to become far more radical in his structure than he allows himself in this volume. But why not delay the "return of Jesus Christ" so that it follows his chapter on the Ascension and session of Jesus? But as it stands, the "return" is discussed almost 200 pages *before* Jesus' ascension is. It is not necessarily that he says anything 'wrong,' but rather, the debate is over how and when he says it, for that does affect one's reception of these doctrines. Could his theological aesthetic be better refined?

In sum, I suspect that part three, "The Gospel of the Kingdom: The Now and the Not Yet," really needs to be divided up and spread throughout the entire volume, rather than lumped together. This would more faithfully make the very point Bird and Molt-

mann[16] try to highlight, that eschatology is not merely something to discover at the end, but actually informs the whole.[17] Consequently, eschatology is not merely one chapter, but a framework for better understanding the various doctrines, from creation to salvation, from Christology to Pneumatology. Therefore, why lump it all together in this way? Why not have the Christology section begin with the treatment of the Gospel and the Kingdom, working through the Now and Not Yet material? Then leave the discussions on the final judgment and intermediate state to follow later soteriological material on the scope and security of the salvation achieved by Christ. One could even imagine that if Bird went in this way, he could retool his discussions of the Millennium and Tribulation to fit well under section eight on the "Community of the Gospelized," since in many ways that discussion is about how the Church should be the Church in the midst of the now and not yet. Further modifying his structure could free him up in other ways as well. He could give attention not merely to NT Kingdom discussions, but provide an even larger eschatological vision. For instance, Geerhardus Vos (not merely Moltmann) argued for a view in which the entire biblical story can be read with eschatology, rather than soteriology, holding the position of primacy.[18] This may, however, be farther than Bird wants to go.

I fully understand I have just blown up his entire section (Part 3), and maybe his most innovative contribution in terms of organi-

---

[16] Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

[17] Such a move would be similar to how theologians sometimes (at their best) approach the Trinity: the truth that God is triune is not simply one chapter among many in a systematics theology, but rather becomes the truth that informs all of the other doctrines. Yet, a section is normally devoted to the Trinity, and then pulled on throughout the chapters that follow. Bird is, in my opinion, exactly right when he puts the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his theology. But in this way, eschatology seems somewhat different, in that to fully unpack this historically structured truth so early, and in full, appears to work differently than the doctrine of the Trinity does, and so some modification of approach is necessary.

[18] Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2001).

zation. But I am actually trying to encourage Bird to be *more* rather than less bold with his "gospel" ordering. Bird is able to resist the temptation to reduce eschatology to a concluding chapter in the book, but then he keeps all the doctrines classically discussed together under this *locus*, thus potentially distorting the very message he hopes to lay out for us. Again, it is not that Bird necessarily says erroneous things at these points, but I am here encouraging him to finish the task, to follow his own instincts more fully than he actually does here.

Conclusion

There is much to commend in Michael Bird's *Evangelical Theology*. It is filled with little exegetical nuggets, fresh ways of approaching issues, and a real attempt to provide fair-minded presentations of opposing viewpoints. He is willing to spend time on areas often neglected (e.g., the ministry of Jesus[19] and the centrality of Israel to the Gospel story), and this enriches the volume. The design of the book is extremely student friendly, including everything from the various insert boxes to clear summary sections, from bullet points to bibliographical helps, from charts to healthy attention devoted to practical or pastoral matters. He is also brave in this volume, willing to take a position on everything from divine impassability[20] to Rob Bell.[21]

We can be thankful that a biblical scholar has graciously sought to offer a systematic theology, just as theologians are now trying to offer commentaries. Let us hope that if Bird has the chance to revise this volume, he will attempt to more thoroughly carry out the very task he gave himself by ordering his theology around the gospel, letting the *euangélion* shape his presentation and more thoroughly inform his unpacking of each and every doctrine.

---

[19] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 375–84.

[20] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, pp. 130–31.

[21] Another example of his humor here: when referencing Rob Bell, he calls attention to his "humorous little book" (Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 337).

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 195–205

The Power of the Gospel

Amy L. B. Peeler
Wheaton College

Michael Bird had me at hello (almost). On page 23 (and that is pretty early in a 900 page book), he states, "I would describe myself as an ex-Baptist post-Presbyterian Anglican." My heart felt strangely warmed for I have traveled the same journey: brought to faith in the Baptist church, trained in a Presbyterian seminary, and recently confirmed in the Anglican Communion. How inspiring will it be to think about the breadth of the Christian faith with a kindred soul, not only denominationally, but vocationally as well: a New Testament scholar deeply interested in the project of theology. And it was. At many turns I found myself informed, inspired, and in full support of Bird's key claims. "The God we are confronted with in the Gospel is the Triune God" (p. 92). He demonstrates how creed crystalizes the truth of God's being as revealed in Scripture. "Jesus' life is in organic unity with Israel's story" (p. 507). He captures the continuity of God's new action in Christ. "Penal substitution and *Christus Victor* do not compete with one another but are part of a bigger picture" (p. 418) is an honest assessment of the richness of the Scriptural account. "Jesus' resurrection points to a cosmic transformation" (p. 441). Salvation is not solely about the individual: "An approach to biblical interpretation that places Scripture and tradition in a continuous spiral of listening to the text and listening to our forefathers in the faith" (p. 70). Absolutely! And then he so frequently and thoroughly listens to the theologians of the patristic and reformation eras. "Ecclesiology needs to come to the forefront of our thinking" (p. 811), "Baptism is more than a symbol" (p. 774), "The Eucharist is the gospel in sight, smell, and taste" (p. 802). With the zeal of a convert, I delighted to see advocacy for the church and sacraments.

Alas, one detail in my own story prevents me from being Dr. Bird's doppelganger. In my first teaching position, I worked at a Wesleyan school. For two years, I lived with them, thought with them, grew with them. And so because they fit the definition of

evangelical as Bird himself defines it,[1] I found myself wondering if their voice was adequately represented in this Evangelical theology. Does the sanctifying work of the Spirit warrant more than a paragraph (p. 631)? Would not Wesley have some insight on the question of who can and should come to the Eucharist (p. 798)?[2]

I guess, of course, there is one other little factor that differentiates Dr. Bird and I. Which made me wonder: are the voices of women adequately represented here? For instance, his discussion of the arguments about divine child abuse includes no feminist theologians (pp. 411–12).[3] This critique would have been more robust had he done so. More substantively, I kept waiting for a scripturally informed, fair, and gracious discussion of gender in the church as he had presented so many other pertinent topics. Then not my own, but the situation of others prompts another question. While Bird ends with a call for attention to the global church (p. 811), I found myself wondering if he consistently listens to their voices throughout his text?[4]

---

[1] "Faith communities who hold to the catholic and orthodox faith and who possess a singular religious affection for the Triune God, combined with a zealous fervor to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth," Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), p. 11.

[2] "Am I to wait for the grace of God which bringeth salvation, by using these means, or by laying them aside? … According to this, according to the decision of holy writ all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained; in using, not in laying them aside… . It should be particularly observed here, that the persons directed to ask had not then received the Holy Spirit: Nevertheless our Lord directs them to use this means, and promises that it should be effectual" *The Means of Grace* II.7; III.1, 2 (*John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler, [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991], pp. 161, 162).

[3] Evangelicals very well may not embrace the arguments of those like Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), or Joanne Brown and Carol Bohn, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), but an evangelical theology should acknowledge the voices and arguments of those with whom we disagree.

[4] To catch the vision of the importance and power of global voices, see Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green, eds., *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

Chiding an author for what he did not do is the easiest and least helpful form of critique, but I raise this issue because it leads to a more substantive one: Who is an Evangelical? Bird claims that his book has its "content, structure, and substance singularly determined by the evangel," and that it is for "gospel people, the evangelical churches" (p. 11). Yet I found myself wondering if, at the end of the day, his presentation of evangelical theology was broad enough to include all evangelicals. Although claiming to offer a theology of the gospel for evangelicals, does Bird really only provide a theology for first-thirds world male Reformed evangelicals?

I voice that hard and unlovely question because ultimately I think the answer is no. His work, I believe, is for all. In order to tease this conclusion out, however, I'll need to employ a test case. What better way to attend to this issue of inclusion than to explore the concept of hell, or maybe less salaciously worded, the scope of eternal salvation? Bird offers thorough, lucid, and compelling accounts of these exceedingly complex issues. He deals with the question of who is saved and who is not; and even more difficult, he offers an explanation for why some are saved and others are not. Not only do such issues wrestle with the reality of who is in and out forever, but before the final assize these questions have been and continue to be some of the most pressing and divisive in the evangelical sections of the body of Christ. Bird's text with its clarity and comprehensiveness has allowed me to better understand these issues and the bold yet gracious articulation of his arguments has given me the encouragement to proffer a soteriological model of my own and, inspired by this text, deeply dependent upon the power of the gospel.

I begin with the recent interest in and sometimes affinity for universalism in some evangelical circles. Bird himself recognizes the appeal. There is, he states, something magnetic about it (p. 590). Those who have lost loved ones who are not believers, "Biblical images of God tormenting people," questions about the fairness of God make compelling arguments for the case that ultimately all things will be reconciled to Christ (Col. 1:18–20). Of course, Bird notes texts that say just that. He acknowledges those Scriptures that say God desires the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and the universal statements found in Paul's Adamic Christology and his struggle over Jew/Gentile issues in Romans and Corinthians (Rom. 5:18; 11:32; 1 Cor. 15:22, 28). He concludes, however, that "hell is the necessary implication of God's love, holiness, and

goodness. Hell emerges because of God's purpose to unite himself to creation. The earth must be purified of evil by his justice before it can be renewed with glory by his love" (p. 591). Some evangelicals question (as does a book published earlier this year entitled *Rethinking Hell*[5]) why this purification needs to be forever. Bird responds that the many texts that speak of eternal judgment are not metaphor but instead "fabric." This is the result "for those who reject the worship of the true God and the way of humanness that follows from it" (p. 336). If texts exist that imply the reconciliation of all things to Christ, and texts are present that talk about eternal punishment,[6] how can they be brought together?

The sticking point, as Bird articulates, is the necessity of faith in Christ: "Universalists unfortunately define grace in such a way as to obviate the necessity for faith" (p. 588). "The Gospel needs a subjective appropriation" (589). "Unless humans are nothing more than puppets, there is always going to be the objective work of God countenanced with the subjective response of humanity to the divine work" (588).

I stand in agreement with these statements and their sober implications. Bird's clear and thorough examination of these matters shows in my opinion, decisively, that Scripture simply does not support the option of universalism, despite its magnetic appeal. It is assumed in Scripture and evident in daily life that some reject God's salvation. As much as we might wish it not so, there are clear texts that assume this rejection of God, and its consequences, will last forever.

God desires to save all, but not all have faith in Jesus Christ. But *Why*? As evangelicals, this is a question we cannot ignore. Students ask this of professors, laypeople of the pastor, and those pastors and professors often ask it themselves. It is a question that

---

[5] Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, eds.,*Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

[6] About texts that speak of eternal damnation, Matthew Levering states, "If these teachings concealed a deeper truth that all rational creatures are to be saved, then these teachings would be misleading indeed—so misleading as to be not merely esoteric, but profoundly distortive of the truth about God and humans, the very truth that Christ comes to reveal," Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 194.

comes up again and again in the lived theology of evangelicals of all types and traditions. Simply put: why do some people have faith while others don't?

This is where I stand in disagreement with Dr. Bird. His answer to the question of why "salvation becomes actual for some and not for others" is this: "it is because of God's election of persons for salvation" (p. 529). Although it may be unadvisable to question the doctrine of election in a section called "Reformed Theology," two large questions remain for me in this model, namely, does Scripture *unequivocally* support a general and special election, and is it *necessarily* the case that this special election is irresistibly and irrevocably efficacious?

To deal with these questions, I turn to Bird's specific development of these issues in his book. Utilizing the work of Moyse Amyraut and D. B. Knox, Bird affirms a "universal dimension to the atonement," but he also wants to maintain a commitment to "the sovereignty of God's predestination of the elect" (p. 432). To hold both claims together, he suggests that "God's decree to designate a Savior logically precedes God's decision to save the elect" (432). He then argues that "Jesus' death is purposed for the salvation of the elect yet it creates the possibility of the salvation of everyone" (434). So, according to Bird, God's purpose in Jesus' death is that Christ would become the *possible* savior of all but the *actual* savior of only some. Logically, I find this model quite troubling. Does it really make sense to say that God loves and is willing to receive all—and that God acts to create the *possibility* of salvation for everyone—if God actually acts only to save *some*? I imagine God saying to a person bound in chains: "I want you to be released, and I'm willing to receive you, if you can get free."

That does not seem right. But, of course, my own logic and my perception of what sounds right are not ultimately authoritative for me. I will submit my logic to God's wisdom as revealed in Scripture. In this case, that means my becoming convinced that Scripture teaches a model of general and special election along the lines of the proposal that Bird offers. However, after reading and consider his case, it was not self-evident that Bird's proposal is the only or the best way to reconcile universal and particularist texts.

Maybe then my qualms lie with more basic issues. While recognizing that the Reformed tradition is not a monolithic thing (as

Oliver Crisp so thoroughly displays in his recent work[7]), it seems fair to say that the Reformed tradition that Bird represents generally assumes that God only elects only a certain number of people.[8] The logic here is that, since God is sovereign and only a certain number accept Christ, then he must have elected only those specific individuals, and his election of them must be effective. In the words of Bird, "God sets forth Christ to save, not simply to offer salvation" (p. 432). I am not convinced that "the sovereignty of God's predestination of the elect" (p. 432)—as framed by Bird and much of the Reformed tradition—is a Charybdis we must navigate around. Is it really the case that God's predestination of the elect is absolutely sovereign in this *precise* sense? In other words, to raise an old question, might it be possible for God's sovereign grace to be rejected by his rebellious human creatures?

As I considered this question, I examined some of the key biblical arguments made within the Reformed tradition on these issues. At Bird's recommendation, I turned to Robert Peterson and Michael Williams "Why I am Not an Arminian" for the analysis of the scriptural terrain and found this winsome articulation about the elect: "When God touches their lives with his sovereign grace he free them from bondage. As a result they willingly trust Christ. God doesn't force sinners to believe against their will; he liberates their will by his Spirit. He doesn't violate their personalities; he sets them free to be the people whom he intended."[9] With this it seems to me the Scriptural narrative fully agrees. No one can come unless drawn by the Father (John 6:44, 65). For many of the Scriptures they note, however, that truth seems to be expressed with the clarity of hindsight. If someone presently has faith, keeps God's word, then it is clear that they were drawn by the Father (John 17:6). If they become believers, then it is correct to say that God destined them for eternal life (Acts 13:48). And what of the "golden chain" of Romans 8:29–30? It remains powerful and imminently preachable, but I would argue that ultimately it must be put into conversa-

---

[7] Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 35. See also his *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[8] Crisp, *God Incarnate*, p. 47; Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), pp. 42–66.

[9] Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, p. 185.

tion with Rom 11:20–23, where branches are broken off and reattached. Is not Paul warning the very same readers that they can break the chain through unbelief?

It is John 6:37 that presents the most difficult text for my hesitance to accept irresistible grace as unequivocally taught in scripture. For here every thing (it is a neuter not a masculine which does raise some question about if this is applicable to individual people) given by the Father to the Son will come to him. But immediately, especially as a student of Hebrews, I wonder if they come, does that mean that they stay forever (Heb 2:1; 3:6, 14; 6:4–8; 10:26–31; 12:15–17)? Or can they, as tragically unbelievable as it may be, turn away?

At this juncture I have walked into a rut, the well worn debates among undergrads and demons, as John Milton would say,[10] which is why I tell my students, this debate has not been settled because there are texts that can be utilized to support both sides. To say as much is not a statement of laziness, a casual and cozy shrug to mystery,[11] but I hope a statement in the spirit of Paul who praises the incomprehensibility of God's ways after he has wrested seriously with all the exegetical and experiential realities.[12]

One of my teachers always said, if you are stuck in a debate, don't answer the same question, ask a different one.[13] It would be silly to think I could make any headway on centuries-old soteriological debates in a short paper like this, so instead I want to honor the work of Dr. Bird by demonstrating how his book elicited new thoughts on this issue, thoughts endeavoring to take into account the power of the gospel in the way he does but also avoiding the problems that I see within his view.

---

[10] The demons talk of "providence, foreknowledge, will and fate, Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, And found no end, in wondering mazes lost" *Paradise Lost* (ed. Alistair Fowler; 2nd ed.; New York: Longman, 1998), Book II, lines 557–61, p. 137.

[11] About a similar proposal by Catherine of Siena, Levering states, "This theological modesty is salutary with respect to predestination" (Levering, *Predestination*, p. 9).

[12] Levering concludes, "God's all encompassing love for each and every rational creature must be affirmed together with God's transcendent providence and permission of permanent rebellion. Until the eschaton, the two affirmations cannot be resolved into one" (Levering, *Predestination*, p. 178).

[13] Credit here is due to Dr. Beverly Gaventa.

I begin with Romans 10, which demonstrates his main theme, namely, the gospel's great power. Having wrestled with his kin's far-from-complete response to the gospel, Paul turns his focus from God's choices to the human response of either faith or works (I will not engage the debate of how to define works here). The point he seems to be making is that believing in Christ is not difficult. One need not scale the heights and depths of reality. Instead, the resources lie close at hand. They are even located within oneself: trust and call, heart and mouth are all that is needed. But how can it be so easy, so accessible, so internal? Paul is not, I'm confident, preaching some kind of Gospel of Thomas, the-truth-lies-inside-of-you Gnosticism.[14] Instead, I'd like to suggest, the resources for righteousness lie inside because they have been planted there by the proclamation of the gospel.

To help us make sense of this, may I suggest that we consider Romans 10:14–15 as another "golden chain," one which Paul assembles with his series of rhetorical questions? The difference is that, in this passage, he starts at the end of the line. Those who are saved (10:13) call on the Lord because they have believed. They believe because they have heard. They heard because someone has preached to them. Those preachers proclaim because they were sent. Again in v. 17 he lays out a similar series: faith arises out of hearing; and hearing comes through the word of Christ. What Paul seems to be saying is this: that when word of Christ—the word of faith which Paul preaches (Rom. 10:8) is preached—God sovereignly plants within the people who hear it the seed of faith. What if the proclamation of the gospel makes it audience not neutral, capable of deciding for or against it, the Arminian position as Bird describes,[15] but instead plants a seed that can either be nurtured (believed and confessed) or rejected?

---

[14] Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty." *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (trans. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperCollins, 1992), Saying 3.

[15] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 522.

This seems to make sense of Paul's assertion that faith is not a work. It is something you do; nonetheless it is not a work. The ones who believe do so by grace and not by works (Rom. 11:5–6). What if the gospel is so powerful that it claims those who hear it? To be privy to its proclamation is to be introduced into the process of faith. What if, when one hears the gospel, he does not have to opt in, but he can opt out. Indeed, he could, as some of Israel had done in Paul's day, not heed the gospel (Rom. 10:16); but if that option is not taken—that is, if the hearer does not actively reject the gospel—then the proclamation of the gospel effects faith. The hearer of the gospel either acquiesces to what the proclamation has begun or has to choose to reject it and establish his righteousness in some other ultimately ineffective way.[16]

I find a similar description of gospel power at work in 2 Corinthians where Paul proclaims that the God who reconciles sinners has given to his followers the ministry of that same reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20). The vehicle for that reconciliation is the *word*, the proclamation. Several scribes made the same association I am arguing for when the specified that the word of reconciliation is the

---

[16] Other theologians—ancient and modern—have reached a similar conclusion. Aquinas states, "This is in the power of the free will: to impede the reception of grace or not to impede it… God is prepared to give grace to everyone … But the only people deprived of grace are the ones who provide in themselves an obstacle to grace." Eleanor Stump in analyzing Aquinas puts his words this way: "although the will of faith is brought about entirely by God with operating grace, nonetheless a human person is herself still ultimately in control of the state of her own will. That is because it is up to her either to refuse grace or to fail to refuse grace. Although her options are just to refuse grace or to be quiescent with regard to grace, it is still only her own intellect and will that determine which of these positions her will is in, and God's giving of grace depends on the position of her will… . A post-Fall human being who cannot form a good act of will apart from grace can nonetheless control whether or not his will refuses grace. In ceasing to refuse grace, he brings himself into a quiescent condition to which God responds by giving him the grace that produces in him the good will of justifying faith." Eleanor Stump, *Aquinas* (Arguments of the Philosophers; New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 402. I would argue, based on the exegesis above, that the proclamation of the gospel removes the rejective state and allows someone to embrace the state of quiescence.

euaggelion itself.[17] This word of reconciliation, this means of encouragement comes through the evangelists. How beautiful indeed are the feet of those who bring good news; for they bring God's reconciliation and salvation to sinners. That being said, while God uses humanity, he does not depend upon them. God himself is a gospel proclaimer, as he said to Israel: "All day long I have stretched out my hands" (Rom. 10:21/Isa. 65:2 LXX). As we know from current stories in the Islamic world,[18] Jesus can go and preach himself, but typically God asks his people to serve as Christ's ambassadors.

In short, my alternative suggestion is this: in soteriological economy the gospel indeed is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). It works for all who hear. At times it saves, at times it reconciles, at times it plants a seed.

Of course not all who hear become believers. Has the word of God—has the gospel—failed? μὴ γένοιτο! God's word does not return void (Isa. 55:11). If the hearer does not become a follower of Christ, then, in my opinion, she has rejected the seed. Or maybe as some of you would say, this is evidence of the fact that God did not choose her. The Scriptural terrain, in my opinion, prevents a firm answer. What we can know, and agree upon however, this: the Gospel comes in power, and God has bequeathed that powerful word to his followers. Maybe I'm not quite an ex-Baptist after all, for I end as any good Baptist would: We have been entrusted with the good news. We must go and tell.

This way of accounting for the relevant biblical texts offers a very practical theory of soteriology that may sidestep or even transcend questions of the universality or particularity of God's electing grace. The question we need to consider may not be, "Who has been chosen?" or "Who chooses?" but "Who has heard?" By raising this question in conversation with Bird's own argument, I hope I have demonstrated what Dr. Bird's text will achieve in classrooms and churches where it is used. By revisiting concepts they have forgotten or discovering the story and details of new ideas, his readers will learn to think theologically. His students will be challenged by the voices of the text and its interpretations. His readers will be inspired to articulate where they believe Scripture urges them to

---

[17] Following the manuscript tradition of $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$, D*, F, G, (a).

[18] Nabeel Qureshi, "Called Off the Minaret: Would Jesus Really Ask Me to Forsake My Muslim Family," *Christianity Today* 58/1(2014), p. 96.

locate themselves among the thinkers of the church. Perhaps most importantly, I can't help but conclude that they will be inspired to go out and be gospelizers themselves, just as I have been. His text, I believe, is for us all, certainly for those who might agree with his conclusions, but even for those evangelicals who might not. Because not only does he recognize other valid interpretations, more importantly, he invites his fellow proclaimers standing across the various aisle to meet his boldly articulated and well-supported interpretations with their own, and after they have done so to get about the business of spreading the gospel.

So, as a good Anglican, I close with the words of a prayer with which I think Dr. Bird would approve and agree:

> Lord Jesus Christ, who didst stretch out thine arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of thy saving embrace: So clothe us in thy Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know thee to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of thy Name.[19]

Thank you, Dr. Bird, for giving us an inviting and inclusive evangelical theology—gospel powered and gospel empowering.

---

[19] "Prayer for Mission, Morning Prayer Rite 1," *Book of Common Prayer 1979* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 58.

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 207–15

Review of Michael Bird, Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction

Michael S. Horton
Westminster Seminary, California

Introduction

It is a credit to systematic theology that a biblical scholar of Michael Bird's rank would take dogmatics as seriously as he has with this volume. It may be sufficient cause to have his credentials at SBL checked at the door. Nevertheless, it represents a healthy and hopefully growing conversation between these fields. In what follows, I will present brief bullet points of engagement, which will be followed by two larger areas for further discussion.

- I'm not a fan of "central dogmas" and I don't see the gospel as "the canon within the canon," but rather as the central announcement from Genesis to Revelation. One danger of this sort of method is that it often leads to distortion more than integration. The search for chief divine attributes threatens divine simplicity. On the atonement, he goes so far as to say that Christus Victor "is the crucial integrative hub of the atonement because it provides the canopy under which the other modes of the atonement gain their currency" (p. 414). Yet don't the seminal Christus Victor passages (e.g., Col. 2:13–15 and 1 Cor. 15:56–57) treat Christ's victory over Satan, death, and hell as the result of his "having cancelled out the certificate of debt" and removing the sting of death by taking away the curse of the law? And why must we choose between a participatory view of salvation (union with Christ) and the Christ's work of meriting our salvation, imputing his righteousness to us?
- A further concern I have with Bird's method has to do with his assumptions and assertions regarding Protestant scholasticism. On one hand, he can be quite generous to Karl Barth, whom he describes "decidedly orthodox and Reformed in his basic stance…" (p. 191). On the other hand, he reduces traditional Reformed theology to caricature in a number of places throughout this volume, as early

as the line he draws from the Reformation (especially the Protestant scholastics) to Enlightenment rationalism—and, of course, to Charles Hodge (p. 34, p. 37, p. 61) .

- I appreciated the author's warning against a "naïve biblicicism" in many evangelical theologies: "Theological Sausage Maker 3000" (p. 77), "a theology derived from a concordance" (p. 78). In that vein, I appreciated his integration of the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*, although I did wonder if, like Scott McKnight, he tends to exclude the "pro nos" (for us) aspects from Christ's death and resurrection. Hence, "salvation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit," including redemption, forgiveness, justification, and adoption are not treated under the gospel itself, but under "effects of the gospel"—"images of salvation" (p. 52).
- Bird provides a terrific exegetical defense for the Trinity and the importance of our worship being shaped by it. I loved his line, "Only a triune God can do what is done in the gospel" (p. 89).
- Many of his reflections on the attributes of God through a gospel lens were helpful, although it seemed at one point as if he was collapsing the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit into the acts of creation and redemption (p. 152).
- Bird's expertise is especially evident in his discussion of Christ's person and work. His exegetical handling of the preexistence of the Son I found very helpful (pp. 468–75), although I had some questions about his account of the Reformed *non capax* (p. 485) and his defense of an Amyraldian view of the atonement's extent was clouded, I thought, by a misunderstanding of the Reformed view.
- His reflection on the Holy Spirit as both divine and a distinct person was illuminating, although there were still some formulations that made me wonder if he is conceived as a person as much as a thing ("the artistic side of God," p. 662 and "the effect of revelation," pp. 631–32).
- While affirming "dichotomy" (p. 664), he navigates deftly between the Cartesian Scylla and monist Charybdis, affirming the soul's separate existence in the intermediate state while pointing to the resurrection of the body as the ultimate hope (pp. 309–25).

- Some earlier statements on the sacraments struck me as "Zwinglian" (viz., pp. 444, 740).[1] However, in his focused discussion on the subject he offered a rich exegetical defense of a more robust view of baptism (including the baptism of covenant children) and the Supper (esp. pp. 775 ff.). This is why I was surprised at his conclusion that baptism is "a second order doctrine" (p. 770) and his recommendation of "dual baptism" (768–76). "If we base our doctrine of baptism not only the doctrine of the church (credobaptism) or on the doctrine of the covenant (paedobaptism), but on the doctrine of the gospel, then perhaps we can reach a point of 'equivalent alternatives' regarding baptism" (p. 776). Here again, I think that the author pioneers a "middle way" merely by trivializing the reasons that credobaptists and paedobaptists offer for their convictions.
- On the millennium, I wish that Professor Bird had, "in the end," fallen out on the amillennial side of things (p. 280), but appreciated the respectful way in which he described the other views on their own terms. I thought he was at his best in drawing attention to the ultimate hope of a renewed rather than replaced cosmos.

Larger Areas for Further Discussion

There were a few controversial sections that I'd like to point up for further conversation. On *Scripture*, I was confused as to what Bird was affirming and rejecting concerning verbal inspiration. It seemed that he was driving a dangerous wedge between the Spirit and Scripture. He is wary of identifying Scripture with "revelation itself" (pp. 199, 646). "Scripture is not authoritative in and of itself,

---

[1] "Baptism is a sign of grace and the pledge of fidelity to God" (p. 444). "The grace of baptism and Eucharist is sanctifying and edifying, not salvific." These sacraments "symbolize the gospel" (p. 740). I also have a quibble with this statement: "The problem with providing the 'Reformed view' of the Lord's Supper is that there was a wide diversity of opinion among the Reformers. Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, and Calvin all held different views, not always unrelated, but different all the same" (p. 784). However, the Reformed view is set forth in our confessions and catechisms, not the writings of the Reformers—however illustrious. And those standards clearly affirm the consensus that Calvin summarized well.

as if its pages have some kind of magical theological quality" (p. 646). "Our authority is not the propositions of Scripture. Our authority is the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture as a testimony to the living Lord" (p. 201). Nevertheless, he says, "Rightly understood, there is no reason to engage in a Barthian retreat from identifying God with his inscripturated Word" (p. 203). Other points on the topic left me confused, but perhaps he can clear them up for me in our discussion.[2]

The presentation of the traditional Reformed view of *covenant theology* is clouded by some caricatures—or at least misunderstandings. I know of no Reformed theologian who has ever said that "the Mosaic covenant contains a similar scheme of obedience for

---

[2] (1) What is meant by the church "canonizing" Scripture, rather than speaking of the canon as recognized and received by the church? For example, "the church did create the biblical canon in the sense of being charged with the task of putting the inscripturated Word of God into its canonical form…Furthermore, the Apostles' Creed precedes the existence of a biblical canon" (p. 66). Aside from the fact that the Apostles' Creed dates from the seventh century, the gist of the point is unclear to me. Is it that tradition grounds Scripture or vice versa? I had similar questions about experience as a source of theology. There is no distinction drawn between the experience of the prophets and apostles and that of us today. The footnote to Bultmann hardly cleared this one up for me. (2) What are the implications of holding that not only the texts, but the persons of the prophets and apostles were inspired? According to the traditional view of verbal inspiration, the texts are inspired. However, Bird argues that the persons were inspired. He says that 2 Pet. 1:20–21 suggests that "God inspires persons, not pages" (p. 640). I don't see his point about 2 Pet. 1:20–21. On the contrary, what is inspired is "the prophetic word" (v. 19) rather than the prophet. Twice he says that "no prophecy of Scripture" originated with the prophet. The prophets "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (v. 21), but it is the prophecy itself that is inspired. In fact, Bird says and that inspiration encompasses even the preservation of the texts and the final recognition of the canon (p. 638 note 49). (3) And what are the implications of saying that they were inspired even at the level of their worldview (p. 642)? Does this not undermine the humanity of Scripture more than verbal inspiration would? And does this mean that their cosmological assumptions were inspired? Furthermore, Bird extended inspiration to include the church's "canonizing" of Scripture. Wouldn't the traditional distinction between inspiration and illumination be more appropriate and helpful? Ironically, as inspiration broadens, it weakens.

salvation" (p. 222). Adam did not need to be saved, but to fulfill the probation and win for himself and his posterity the right to eat from the Tree of Life. Further, the Mosaic covenant doesn't contain a scheme for *salvation* at all, but for remaining in God's holy land as his holy nation—typological of the messianic kingdom. Everlasting life came, for Israelites as well as for us, through faith in the promise. A second caricature follows upon the first. Traditional covenant theology "is essentially Pelagian," he says. "Jesus becomes our vicarious Pelagian, who keeps the law for us and imputes his obedience to us" (p. 224).

Third, Bird caricatures the Reformed view of the relation between the church and Israel. By teaching that "the church had effectively replaced Israel as God's people," he asserts, Reformed theology helped contribute to the Holocaust (p. 719). On the contrary, covenant theology affirms the expansion of Israel, in fulfillment of the pledge to Abraham of a worldwide family in Christ. In fact, there is nothing in Bird's description of his own view that is not affirmed in traditional Reformed accounts (p. 726).

Now to substance. Bird sees "several major drawbacks" to the traditional Reformed scheme of covenant theology. First, he faults the traditional scheme for a "*multiplication* of covenants" that obscures God's "*one* purpose in salvation" and yet immediately adds, "What is more, the penchant for *unity* between the covenants is often *overplayed*…" (p. 223, emphasis added). Is the problem too many covenants or not enough? Too much diversity between them or too much? Second, he jokes (I think it's a joke) that he has tried in vain to "find a 'covenant of works' in my ESV concordance!)." "While there is some 'deal' between God and Adam, it is not described in terms of a covenant, nor is there any law etched out beyond the commands that Adam is given." Nobody argues that there is any law etched out beyond the commands that Adam is given. As for the concordance, I fear that Professor Bird has used the Theological Sausage Grinder at this point: "theology by concordance." The elements of a covenant are clearly present in Genesis 1 and 2 and even more clearly when the covenant curse is executed in chapter 3. As with the Davidic covenant, more than the absence of the word *berith* is required to dismiss the notion of an Adamic covenant. (Besides, if I were petty, I might say, "no matter how much I try, I cannot find an "Adamic Administration" in my ESV concordance!")

Bird grants "that Israel in a sense recapitulates the role of Adam," but he holds that "the Mosaic law cannot be a republication of a covenant of works, since there is grace under the Mosaic covenant (see Deut. 9:1–19; 26:1–10; Ezek. 16:1–63; John 1:16)" (p. 223). However, this misunderstands the classic federal view, for many reasons.[3] For example, after the fall, *all* of God's covenantal relations are in some sense gracious. Furthermore, the promise of descendants and land was part of the Abrahamic covenant and God fulfilled this gracious pledge when he delivered Abraham's descendants from Egypt, drove out the idolatrous nations, and allotted the inheritance to the twelve tribes. The Mosaic covenant established the legal basis for *remaining* in the land as God's elect nation, not for the inheritance of the whole earth through the faithfulness of his one elect seed, namely, Christ (Gal. 3:16). That Paul calls them "two covenants"—one of law and the other of promise—underscores the point (chapters 3 and 4, esp. 4:24). Yet Bird characterizes his position as a middle way: "a modified covenant theology" (p. 224), but this simply means that "'covenant' is a biblical way of describing the formal and material unity of redemptive history" (p. 225).

It becomes clear that the driving force behind Bird's concerns is what I regard as a false choice between a participatory paradigm and a legal one; between a relationship that needs to be restored and the fulfillment of the law (pp. 224, 226). He affirms many points that he shares in common with Reformed theology: the "'Two Adams" scheme of Romans 5, for example. He allows that God made a "deal" with Adam, based on Adam's "obedience to the law" during his "probation," upon the fulfillment of which he would "attain immortality." But then what he says later seems to contradict all of this: "Adam's failure was not the failure to keep an eternal law; it was the breaking of his relationship with God through his desire for autonomy from God. Salvation will henceforth mean restoring the relationship between Creator and humanity as opposed to accruing the meritorious law-keeping that Adam failed to achieve" (pp. 226–27; cf. p. 497, note 7). The main concern is the false choice between relationship and the word "merit," even though he seems to affirm what "merit" implies, but without a covenantal basis for it.

---

[3] The group discussed this point at the original meeting ETS where these papers were given.

Although Bird criticizes Reformed theology for over-emphasizing the unity of the covenant of grace, his own view is that "each new covenant presupposes and renews what preceded it" (p. 228; cf. p. 508) and "the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants are essentially renewed and transformed into the new covenant, where God's people are united with Jesus the Messiah" (p. 509). Of course, no one doubts that the old covenant foreshadowed the new, but how does Bird's construal make sense of the contrast between the covenant of law (Sinai) and the covenant of promise (Abrahamic/New), especially in Romans 4 and Galatians 3–4? Or the way in which the writer to the Hebrews refers to the new covenant not as a renewal of Sinai but as the Reality whose advent makes "the first one obsolete" (Heb. 8:13)? In any case, I cannot see from the relevant Old Testament texts, much less their New Testament interpretation, any suggestion that "the Sinai covenant is a restatement and expansion of the Abrahamic promises" (pp. 502–503). On the contrary, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of a worldwide family in Christ, the new covenant is "not like" the Sinai covenant (Jer. 31:32) and it is far more expansive than a geopolitical plot of land.[4]

Bird's "modified covenantal theology" underlies a modified view of *justification*.[5] Much of the traditional Reformed doctrine is present here, but crucial revisions are proposed. Once again engagement begins with a caricature of the traditional doctrine. He repeats N.T. Wright's notorious blooper, comparing the notion of Christ's imputed righteousness to a gas passed from the judge to the defendant in the courtroom. Bird adds his own comparison: Jesus logging "frequent flyer miles." He packs a lot of these carica-

---

[4] On further point could be added. The classic covenantal scheme of Reformed theology affirms that Christ as the new Adam not only restores us to "the original image of its Creator." It is not merely that "[w]hen we are seated with Christ, we are returned to our proper human state" (p. 661). It is much more than a return to Eden. Rather, it is the consummation and confirmation in righteousness and immorality that Adam fell short of entering.

[5] Professor Bird will not be surprised to hear me repeat my "retrograde-dead-orthodox-Reformed-view" that I presented in a volume of essays with his "Progressive Reformed View." Actually, my title in that volume is titled "Traditional Reformed View" in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds, *Justification: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

tures into one sentence, in fact: "Jesus is the exemplary Pelagian who earns salvation when we cannot, not by fulfilling a covenant of works that required meritorious fulfillment, not by way of righteousness molecules floating through the air to us; rather, we become 'righteous' in Christ when by faith we participate in the vicarious death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (pp. 563–64).

Again, I think that an unwarranted dichotomy between imputation and participation, law and relationship, drives what Bird thinks is wrong with the Reformation doctrine of justification. "In the Reformed tradition it is common to define justification as the forgiveness of sins supplemented by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer (e.g., Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11–2)…That is certainly logical, but it is not biblical" (p. 552).[6] Instead, Bird argues, "We are justified because we participate in the justification of the Messiah" (p. 443; cf. p. 561).[7] "Upon closer inspection," he adds, "one notices that the emphasis falls squarely on *union with Christ*….Rather than *imputation,* a better description of the biblical material is *incorporation* into the righteousness of Christ" (p. 563). "The problem is a broken relationship. What is needed is not merit, but reconciliation" (p. 562).

Yet after these rather sweeping critiques, Bird allows for imputation "under this aegis of union [with Christ]" (p. 564).[8] Since he

---

[6] "What is more, the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Lutherans and Catholics moved the ecumenical conversation forward in a positive way and broke down some of the misconceptions and caricatures that Catholics and Protestants have had of each other's positions" (p. 561). He allows that it tends to collapse justification into sanctification and *simil iustus et peccator* "appears to be irreconcilable with the Catholic scheme" (p. 561). However, I disagree more sharply with the Joint Declaration's alleged success.

[7] He adds, "On the Reformed side, it is important to remember that there was a lot of diversity among the Reformers about justification itself" (p. 562). However, even the substantiating footnote to James R. Payton does not support that claim: "But these differences were variant modulations within the Reformers' concerto. The Protestant Reformers agreed in emphasizing justification *sola fide*" (p. 562, note 149).

[8] Now imputation is a legitimate concept under this aegis of union and is inferred from the gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9), emphasis on Jesus' obedience and faithfulness (Rom. 5:17–19; Phil. 2:5–11; Heb. 3:1–6; Rev. 1:5), the representative role of Adam and Jesus (Rom 5:12–21), the language of reckoning and forgiveness (Rom 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:21),

has argued that the Reformed view of imputation is unbiblical and is rendered superfluous by union with Christ, I'm not quite sure what this means. The section ends with another search for "the unifying image" of salvation. "To begin with, we can disqualify justification and theosis as the primary structures for a salvation framework… If God's plan is to unite himself to creation through the Logos with the Spirit, perhaps we could proffer the suggestion that the center of salvation consists of *communion with God*, *union with Christ*, and *life in the Spirit*" (pp. 578–79).

The section on regeneration and the perseverance of the saints also provoked some big questions. His questioning of monergism—even in regeneration—I found somewhat surprising and, once again, his description of the Calvinist view was a bit off-putting (pp. 588–89). On the perseverance of the saints, he says that he opts for "the Reformed position" (and cites me approvingly on the point). Nevertheless, the view that he actually defends is rather different: Those who fall away (Hebrews 6) are "phenomenally speaking, saved"' and have faith and therefore "do in a sense 'lose' their salvation," but they are not regenerated or fully converted (pp. 602–604).

Conclusion

Focusing as it has on areas of difference and further need for clarification, this review hardly does justice to the many helpful insights, suggestive interpretations, and careful exegesis that I discovered at many points in this work. Like all human attempts to summarize the greatest story ever told, Bird's tome does not pretend to be the last word. However, if generating conversations about the gospel is any indication, then it will doubtless prove to be an important word along our pilgrim way.

---

and the forensic nature of righteousness (Rom. 5:16; 8:1; 2 Cor. 3:9). It is true, then, as N. T. Wright says, that one of the 'great truths of the gospel' is that 'the accomplishments of Jesus Christ are *reckoned* to all those who are 'in him.' Yet the accomplishment is the fulfillment of a role, not the acquisition of merit (p. 564).

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 217–28

In Defense of Theology as Gospelizing: Michael Bird's Responses

Michael F. Bird
Ridley College, Australia

Introduction

I want to begin by thanking the steering committee of the Reformed Theology group for hosting a review session on my *Evangelical Theology* (henceforth EvTh) and for the organization that has gone into it. Let me say that I am also deeply appreciative of the efforts of the four speakers for taking the time to read and constructively interact with EvTh, particularly because I know that they have expertise in many of these areas that far exceeds my own. I can honestly say that I've learned a lot by listening to them and my mind is churning over with ideas and corrections for a second edition should it ever happen. Before I make my response to the various evaluation of EvTh, let me first explain why I wrote it. People might wonder what would possess a New Testament scholar to make a foray into Systematic Theology. I mean, you don't wake up one day and decide to write a book about neurobiology. I want to say that this project was not dreamed up off the cuff, done ad hoc, on the QT, or pursued on the basis a passing thought bubble.

First, I have been consumed with the question of how to believe, think, and live as an evangelical since my seminary days. It was my theology professor, Jim Gibson, who imparted to me the idea of theology as gospelizing, the consistent application of the gospel to all areas of doctrine and discipleship. Over ten years ago Jim and I co-authored an essay on constructing an evangelical prolegomena to theology and since then my mind has been abuzz with the question of how to construct such a consistent evangelical theology.[1] EvTh is my preliminary effort at completing this task. Yes,

---

[1] Michael Bird and James Gibson, "Quest for an Authentically Evangelical Prolegomena to Theology," in *Proclaiming Truth, Pastoring Hearts: Essays in Honour of Deane J. Woods*, eds. R. Todd Stanton and Leslie Crawford (Adelaide: ACM Press, 2004), pp. 95–106.

there are some good theology books out there by evangelical theologians whose evangelical convictions infuse their work. But in many cases, the gospel is nowhere defined and nowhere does it become programmatic for the organization and texture of their volume. Such a lacuna is something that has always baffled me because I had been under the impression that at the core of evangelicalism was the evangel, so the evangel should be at the forefront of any theological project. Therefore, in constructing a theology where the evangel would be the beginning, center, and boundary for theology, my goal was to make programmatic what others had erstwhile assumed. Lest I sound like a lone and deranged prophet crying out in the wilderness, "Make evangelical theology more evangelical," I'd like to point out that a similar perspective has been argued in recent article by Jeremy Treat where—quite independently of EvTh—he exposits the interface between gospel, doctrine, and the church along the same lines that I have been suggesting.[2] Treat concludes that, "[T]he task of theology is not to go beyond the gospel, but deeper into its riches. Doctrine, theology's product, promotes the gospel by defending and defining it, in order that the church may understand and respond to what God has done in Christ. Sound doctrine is rooted in the gospel, bears fruit in the church, and serves the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God."[3] I could not put it better myself! To sum up, at the end of the day, I'm simply trying to do the kind of theology that John Owen spoke about when he said: "[A]ll true theology is, in a sense, gospel theology, for, in whatever stage it existed, its object and prime mover was God the Son."[4] Let the record show that I'm simply trying to flesh out this type of project.

Second, I was driven to this project by my own philosophy of research and teaching which requires me to be a generalist rather than a specialist. Yes, I know that in light of the behemoth size of secondary literature and at the urging of tenure committees that one should stick to a single area of study in order to develop a reputation for excellence in that sphere, whether that is Pentateuch, Paul, or Pope Pius X. However, the compartmentalization of bibli-

---

[2] Jeremy R. Treat, "Gospel and Doctrine in the Life of the Church," *SBET* 32/2 (2014): pp. 180–94.

[3] Treat, "Gospel and Doctrine," p. 94.

[4] John Owen, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), p. 593.

cal and theological studies is a relatively new phenomenon. Some of the greatest theological work has been done by scholars who traversed such a divide. Besides the Church Fathers and Reformers, I only have to mention names like B.B. Warfield, Adolf Schlatter, and Leon Morris to tell you about persons trained primarily as NT specialists but who went on to work in Systematic Theology. That is why in my own research I've cast the net wide and worked in areas as diverse as Septuagint, historical Jesus, Paul's letters, Apostolic Fathers, and early patristics. I've worked as a generalist specifically so as to form a general knowledge base that will equip me in the particular task of developing a consistently evangelical theology.[5]

Anyway, that explains where I'm coming from and what I was trying to achieve by writing EvTh. The real business of course is how I've faired in that enterprise and now I must turn to the affirmations and criticisms of my learned colleagues.

Marc Cortez

Marc opens with a question as to my sanity. In response, all I can do is quote Sheldon Cooper from The Big Bang Theory: "I'm not crazy, my mother had me tested."

I think Marc raises some good questions and pushes me on areas that I deservedly need to be pushed on. Marc wonders if I have really developed a structure that is more determined by the gospel than other theologians and if I have perhaps failed to appreciate the gospel-centeredness of other theological volumes. Accordingly he asks what I think it means to have theological content and framework determined by the gospel. Well, on the one hand, I do think that some loci are more clearly connected to the gospel than others—quite obviously the person and work of Christ—but that does not therefore mean that other loci (like the doctrine of creation or anthropology) are disconnected from the gospel. The task of theology is to lay out Christian doctrine while at the same time expounding the interrelatedness between the doctrines. It is on the matter of the interrelatedness of the doctrines that I think the gospel should be or even must be part of the material unity mapped out between the various doctrinal loci. For that reason, I much pre-

[5] Michael Bird and Craig Keener, "Jack of All Trades and Master of None: The Case for "Generalist" Scholars in Biblical Scholarship," *SBL Forum* (May 2009).

fer a stratification of loci that makes that material unity explicit and also maximize one's understanding of the gospel.

Marc then wonders if I "fully appreciated the logic of the traditional order of theological topics, which seems to be thoroughly shaped by the gospel narrative. Beginning with the God who is Lord and Creator of all, they then talk about God's purposes for creation in general and humanity in particular. That sets the stage for appreciating the tragedy of the Fall and the amazing goodness of God's grace in Christ, the transformation of his people through the Spirit, and the final culmination of God's creative purposes in the eschaton."

A few problems I see here:

First, this "traditional order" is certainly not unanimous in the history of dogmatics. The sequence which Marc espouses resonates with Aquinas, the Scots Confession, and the Augsburg Confession among others. But if we take the Apostles' Creed as an example, the oldest syllabus there is for teaching doctrine, ecclesiology appears before soteriology! Neither is such a sequence reflected in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* or *The City of God*. Origen's *Principles* zigzags anthropology all over the place. Irenaeus' *Regula Fidei* and Barth's *Church Dogmatics* could move from the doctrine of God to the doctrine to reconciliation without feeling the need to place the doctrine of humanity and the fall in between. Books 1 and 2 of Calvin's *Institutes* is really a blend of epistemology, theology, bibliology, anthropology, and christology, then in Book 3 you get a broad *ordo salutis*, and then in Book 4 a manual on how to run a Protestant city. My point is that the tradition is far from unanimous of how one should structure a theology. More often than not it is apologetic reasons and intellectual currents that determine the structure.

Second, Marc then footnotes Grudem, Erickson, Horton and Frame as examples of theologians who follow this basic gospel narrative consisting of God, humanity, grace, Spirit, consummation. The problem is that that is simply not how they structure their theology for the most part. Grudem, Erickson, Horton, and Frame all begin with Bibliology, the doctrine of Scripture. This is not a function of the gospel narrative, but is indicative of the Protestant fixation with epistemology and authority and that is what is shaping the construction of their theological project at least in its opening movements. By beginning in such terms they appear more bibliocentric than theocentric. I can grant that whether one should

commence theology with divine ontology or else commence with the economy of revelation is something that has been debated since the Reformation. However, in my mind, we do better if we front load theology proper into our system in order to make theology rather than epistemology the first major movement of the theological project. A proposal which receives support from D.A. Carson and Tim Keller who state:

> We also thought it was important to begin our confession with God rather than with Scripture. This is significant. The Enlightenment was overconfident about human rationality. Some strands of it assumed it was possible to build systems of thought on unassailable foundations that could be absolutely certain to unaided human reason. Despite their frequent vilification of the Enlightenment, many conservative evangelicals have nevertheless been shaped by it. This can be seen in how many evangelical statements of faith start with the Scripture, not with God. They proceed from Scripture to doctrine through rigorous exegesis in order to build (what they consider) an absolutely sure, guaranteed-true-to-Scripture theology. The problem is that this is essentially a foundationalist approach to knowledge. It ignores the degree to which our cultural location affects our interpretation of the Bible, and it assumes a very rigid subject-object distinction. It ignores historical theology, philosophy, and cultural reflection. Starting with the Scripture leads readers to the overconfidence that their exegesis of biblical texts has produced a system of perfect doctrinal truth. This can create pride and rigidity because it may not sufficiently acknowledge the fallenness of human reason. We believe it is best to start with God, to declare (with John Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1) that without knowledge of God we cannot know ourselves, our world, or anything else. If there is no God, we would have no reason to trust our reason.[6]

Third, there is biblical precedent for my approach. Paul's letter to the Romans, though not a systematic theology, is considered by many to be a theological treatise and even a template for theology.[7]

---

[6] D.A. Carson and Tim Keller, *Gospel-Centered Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), p. 6.

[7] Cf. J. Chrisitaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 77; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 25–26.

In this epistle-essay, Paul offers a preface on the gospel in Rom 1:3–4 before delving into the plight of Gentile and Jew and expositing salvation in Christ in Romans 1–4. The same pattern is rehearsed in Romans 5–8 with Rom 5:1–11 expounding the gospel and then Rom 5:12–21 narrating the consequences of Adam's fall and the triumph of God's grace, followed up with ethics and union with Christ in Romans 6, a defense of the Torah in redemptive-history in Romans 7, and finishing off with ethics, election, and eschatology in Romans 8. Paul is a model for using the gospel as a theological preface prior to any rigorous theological exposition.

Fourth, while I can appreciate the theologic of volumes that follow a loose sequence of God, creation, humanity, and salvation—such a structure is not bad or misleading—as Marc rightly suspects of me, I think that they still could imbibe more gospel-logic in their construction, especially in their prologomena. Furthermore, as I argued in EvTh, I think there are some discernible advantages in beginning with an evangelical preface and moving eschatology up in the theological order, that is because all Christian theology is an eschatology in the process of realization. On the place of the doctrine of humanity in a Systematic Theology, rather than put it later as I did after the doctrine of salvation, I could be persuaded to budge on this and move it forward. My hesitation is because I believe that it is in light of Christ and the gospel that the plight and solution of humanity is best understood and one can more properly deal with the big issue of theodicy only after one is equipped with a fully orbed doctrine of God, creation, kingdom, and atonement. In fact, this has been largely the position taken in the Greek fathers who, as George Kalantzis has described, think, "[I]t is not possible to tell the Christian story of salvation without touching upon the doctrine of the human being, and it is not possible to explore the doctrine of the human being without engaging the person of Christ."[8] In which case, for the Antiochenes at least, christology drives anthropology rather than vice-versa. In my view, it is heremenutically and heuristically helpful to go solution to plight to solution rather than just plight to solution.

---

[8] George Kalantzis, "'The Voice So dear to Me' Themes from Romans in Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret," in *Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox Interpretations of Romans,* ed. Daniel Patte and Vasile Mihoc (RTHCS; London: T & T Clark, 2013), p. 85.

Marc raises the issue of application, noting my few attempts to connect the two, but opining I could have done more. I know I didn't get around to saying a lot about this, however, I hope I have been like Paul and encouraged readers to "live worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27) and like John Wesley who would encourage people with the words: "I hope our preachers preach and live the gospel."[9]

On anthropology, at this one point, I think the wise thing to do is for me to fold like a card table and say, "revoco," I recant. I say with the benefit of hindsight that anthropology is one of the weaker sections of EvTh in terms of length and depth. In a future edition I hope to expand it and make it far thicker as well. I'm grateful to Marc for several suggestions on matters that I need to engage and wrestle with. That said, I remain convinced of the "royal view" of the *imago dei* where it denotes the royal status of humanity in God's eyes and I still have reservations about a monist anthropology, though I can hopefully tackle those subjects in a more concerted way next time up.

Kelly Kapic

Kelly Kapic, author the charming volume *A Little Book For New Theologians*, engages me on the topics of the *how* and *when* of theology.

In regards to *how*, Kelly offers adulations for the aesthetics of my humorous approach finding it witty and clever. He worries, though, if such humor can lead to a trivializing of the task and be a distraction to students. In response, as a theologian I know I'm supposed to be "sensible, logical, responsible, practical" to quote the 70s rock band Supertramp. Now I can do the scholarly business, I think I've made my bones on that one. However, last year was my 40th birthday, and I have to say that I've reached the point in my life that rather than appear scholarly and stoic as I'm supposed to be, I've decided I'm going be myself. Life is too short to do otherwise. So who am I? Well, if you watch any of my YouTube videos, it'd be fair to say that I'm something of a cross between Leon Morris and Conan O'Brian. Some theologians ask what has Athens to do with Jerusalem, I'm interested in what Jerusalem has

[9] John Wesley, "To George Merryweather," 20 Dec 1766, accessible at the Wesley Center Online: http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-letters-of-john-wesley/wesleys-letters-1766b/.

to do with Saturday Night Live. I want to stand for the truth and do some stand-up comedy at the same time. Some will find that refreshing and engaging, others will find it juvenile and inappropriate. You can please some people some of the time and the rest are probably cranky Presbyterians. Kelly wonders if maybe the humor should be left in the classroom. I say, no, because I write the exact same way that I teach. Mike Bird the author and Mike Bird the teacher are not *homoiousios* they are *homoousios*. I think this personal touch adds authenticity if we embed our own didactic style into our didactic texts. So I am proud that my magnum opus EvTh is part of my self-expression. That said, it would not hurt if I had perhaps more self-restraint. But, as Charles Spurgeon said when he was criticized for his use of humor, "If only you knew how much I hold back you would commend me."

In relation to *when* one discusses the various doctrines, Kelly wonders if I've been truly consistent with my own aims and goals in structuring theology around the gospel. For case in point, he thinks I'm right to allow some of the eschatological discussion to arise much earlier than is often the norm, but wrong to then try and shove every eschatological debate into that early material. He suggests that I split up the eschatological discussion, so that material on the Kingdom appears early and naturally anticipates and helps frame Christology, while the discussions about the millennium, the intermediate state, and the future state are postponed until later as part of the work of Christ. I think there are merits to this proposal. On the one hand, pedagogically, it is better to group the eschatology materials to together. But methodologically, Kelly's suggestion certainly makes sense for what I'm trying to do to infuse eschatology throughout the work. I simply need to reflect on how to achieve both more properly. Let me finish with the observation that I am no longer the only theologian urging that eschatology be moved up the theological structure since Amos Yong similarly places eschatology immediately after his introduction to theology.[10]

Amy Peeler

I feel like I'm getting a mixed reception from Wheaton. After being figuratively kicked in my anthropods by Marc Cortez, I was

---

[10] Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

very grateful to get an Anglican greeting of peace from Amy Peeler. I share with Amy a similar ecclesiological trajectory of shifting from Baptist to Presbyterian to Anglican. I was pleased to see Amy warming to the trajectory and goal that I was articulating for EvTh. She offers an appreciative reflection on several aspects of the book. So I'm very encouraged. Obviously she was not without places to prod.

Amy notes several deficiencies. Yes, I could have had more from the Wesleyan tradition. In fact, I've been reading through John Wesley's letters in recent months with a view to mining what he said about gospel. I'd like to spend more time with Methodist theologians like Thomas Oden as well. More than I did before. More from women, yes, I tried a bit on this, but I certainly could pursue more. More from the global church, yes, I've tried in several places to highlight global voices. There are some great works about the global church and global theology at the moment by Simon Chan and Amos Young and I'm devouring those books with a view to engaging with them.

Amy is in disagreement with my stance on a reformed view of election. She rightfully notes the tension in passages like Rom 8:29–30 and 11:20–23. She proffers a reading of Romans 10 that tries to balance divine initiative and human response. I can agree with her that when Paul says that faith comes by hearing, it certainly means "the resources for righteousness lie inside because they've been planted there by the proclamation of the gospel." But I would differ because I think that resource is called regeneration. I don't think the Spirit working through the gospel brings us to a point where we can be nurtured into faith. Rather, the Spirit brings us into new life. Paul's emphasis is on the gospel's power unto salvation, not merely the possibility of salvation. That said, I think Amy and I can agree that our job is to preach the word and to entrust our evangelistic efforts to God's providence and mercy.

Finally, I remain very thankful for Amy's conclusion, because among all of the reviewers I think she captures best of all EvTh's *raison de'tre*, which is that readers would be "inspired to go out and be gospelizers" which is precisely what I'm aiming for.

Michael Horton

I'm indebted in many ways to Michael Horton. I've benefitted immensely from his various works, especially his series on covenant theology that had a deep impact on me and were formative

for own move from Baptist to Reformed, and I continue to get my graduate students to read his excellent volume *The Christian Faith*.

So I was naturally elated to receive Michael's affirmation on several areas on trying to integrate an *ordo salutis* with a *historia salutis* as well an appreciation on my exposition of the Trinity among other things. But as always it is the differences that tend to stand out.

Horton is expectedly critical of my critique of traditional covenant theology. Let me say that I find myself drawn to covenant theology because its federal nature bears the weight of biblical testimony and covenant is the primary means by which God relates to his creatures. That said, I'm often just baffled by some of the things that covenant theologians say and I engaged in a broad critique of their position. I do make some generalizations as I'm painting with a thick brush on a big canvass and in many places this may appear to be unfairly dismissive. So it might not come off well if you're a covenant theologian.

Michael takes issue with my claim that some covenant theologians postulate a works-righteousness scheme in the Old Testament and they are even Pelagian by insisting that salvation is achieved by merit. Horton claims that this is not a recognizably Reformed view. To which I say: have ye not heard what R.C. Sproul said?

> Man's relationship to God in creation was based on works. What Adam failed to achieve, Christ, the second Adam, succeeded in achieving. Ultimately the only way one can be justified is by works.[11]

Sproul is a popular author and this view of a covenant of works has been endemic in many of the branches of the reformed church that I've come across. This is what I'm intensely dissatisfied with in popular notions of covenant theology.

I also find alarming the rather aggravated insistence that is often made by some Reformed theologians that unless one holds to a covenant of works then we are bound to end up in heterodoxy. A claim that is palpably and demonstrably false. Further to that, what I find incredibly odd is in Reformed circles is that one of the worst accusations you can make against someone is to call them a monocovenantalist. I did a search on Google Books and the following people are accused of holding to monocovenantalism: John Murray,

---

[11] R. C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), p. 160.

N.T. Wright, Sinclair Ferguson, and ever Peter Lillback.[12] As far as I can tell, monocovenantalism is a pejorative label used to describe people who do not subscribe to the covenant theology of Meredith Kline. And herein I think we find the problem. I was nurtured on Australian biblical theology tradition of William Dumbrell and Graham Goldsworthy. Dumbrell held to an Edenic covenant, but he did not identify it with the Mosaic covenant nor set it over and against the covenant of grace. Graham Goldsworthy is more like John Murray is identifying a probationary period in Eden, rather than a covenant per se, yet for Goldsworthy covenant is tied to redemption and begins with Noah. But in all cases, the narration of redemptive-history does not follow the bi-covenantal pattern of Kline, instead there is a more convincing description of God's one plan to bring salvation to one people through one underlying divine purposes that is played out in the various covenantal economies. The Australian biblical theology tradition has been popularized in the UK and USA especially through the series *New Studies in Biblical Theology* and *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* published by InterVarsity Press.[13] In moments of curiosity I wonder what it would be like to get representatives from the schools of thought associated with Meredith Kline, John Murray, N.T. Wright, and Graham Goldsworthy to discuss a Reformed view of covenants and covenant theology. I think some good conversations could come out of an exchange like that. Anyone want to read a book on *Four Views of Biblical Covenants*?

---

[12] Cf. Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), pp. 83–84; Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology and Justification by Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), p. 21.

[13] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 1991), pp. 112–19; idem, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981); William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), pp. 44–46; idem, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), pp. 25–26; see esp. Paul R. Williamson, "Covenant," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. D. Alexander, Brian Rosner, D. A Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds. (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), pp. 419–29 for a critique of covenant theology.

Conclusion

Let me end by saying that I'm immensely grateful to all the reviewers for their observations and interaction. I feel encouraged, stimulated, challenged, and even corrected where I need to be. These are certainly things I'll take on board with me for the future and will no doubt shape a future edition of EvTh. It is my hope that EvTh has at least encouraged readers and reviewers to consider how any theology that calls itself evangelical can be more explicit and deliberate about the place of the evangel in their respective theologies.

STR 6/2 (Winter 2015) 229–63

Book Reviews[1]

Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds. *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. xii + 339 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0801039928. $26.99 (Paperback).

Every so often one comes across a wide-ranging and probing inter-disciplinary collection of essays that sheds thoughtful theological light across scripture and the tradition. This is not such a volume. With one striking exception, this is a collection of essays that set their sights doggedly on the far shore of urging a historical Adam as a non-negotiable element of a historical fall without which all Christian things fall apart, and the biblical-theological center cannot hold. There is much excellent material along the way, but it is wrapped in this gloomily unpromising framework to such an inextricable degree that time and again the basic hermeneutical issues are obscured.

Perhaps I should confess that I am a British reviewer, though also a theologian and a church-minister for whom the doctrine of original sin is indeed a fundamental pillar of both my theological understanding and my ministry. I found myself quite startled by what seems at times to be a window into a peculiarly American world where people lose their jobs because of their hermeneutical approach to Genesis, or where Barth can be called a liberal (as indeed is Pannenberg, of all people), or where C.S. Lewis (that quintessential Oxbridge professor) can be quoted as if he were affirming a belief in an historical purpose to the Genesis 2–3 story. I frequently had to put my cup of tea back on its china saucer and proclaim "I say old chap, that's just not how we do things here." In the interests of providing some illumination to the reader of this review, I will attempt to intersperse some hermeneutical ruminations into an outline of the details of the book.

---

[1] *Book Review Editor's Note:* It is trusted that the following selection will interest and benefit *STR* readers. However, one must appreciate that reviewers are responsible for their own content. Editorial endorsement of any position taken by a reviewer is thus not automatically implied.

There are fifteen essays in four sections, framed by an editorial introduction and postscript that are worth studying first. They reveal a surprising homogeneity of purpose to the various contributions: they are all (or so the editors aver) demonstrating that "a historical Adam and original sin are essential, irremovable, relevant, and credible elements of the Christian faith." (p. 323) The three essays of Part 1 explore "Adam in the Bible and Science:" an OT exploration, a NT piece, and a view from a paleontologist, who apparently had to write under a pseudonym because of the explosive nature of his comments. I fear that the explosion would strike those in my British context as rather tame. The OT piece (by C. John Collins) is entirely an exercise in "slippery slope" argument, even avowedly so: if Adam is not historical then neither is anything else in Genesis 1–11ff., which as a seamless garment would then propel us to seeing it all as unhistorical. The role of "mistaken reader who must be opposed" is played by Peter Enns. In fact, Enns gets to play this role so often that I wonder if he should receive royalties?

Part 2 offers five essays on "Original Sin in History," which are careful and helpful readings in theological traditions. I think more could have been made of the point, often noted quickly in getting underway, that the writers in question simply assumed a historical Adam. Whether we can then draw any conclusions from them about a historical Adam seems rather less obvious. An oddity in this section is Carl Trueman's reading of "Modern Theology," in which we find the linking of "liberal" with Barth and Pannenberg. This must be a use of "liberal" with which British and German theologians are unfamiliar.

Part 3 is "Original Sin in Theology," with four essays including the best and worst of the collection. The positive accolade goes to Daniel Doriani's piece on "Original Sin in Pastoral Theology." I would like all my students to read this, for he is right that this doctrine is most needful in Christian ministry if we are to operate with realistic hope. But I wonder whether the editors noticed that this chapter makes no claims at all on what does or does not need to be historical in Genesis. I will not name the worst contribution, but suffice it to say that it concludes with a chunky citation of Erich Auerbach on the absolute claim to historical truth of biblical narratives, in a manner that makes it obvious that the writer has either not read or not understood Auerbach. For Auerbach provides precisely the hermeneutical resources this book lacks for distinguishing

between what is true and real (mimetic, in Auerbach's words) and what is historically referential in the text. None of the contributors seem aware of this, and without it this is a debate hamstrung by hermeneutical conceptualities that equate "literal" to "factual" and eclipse the possibilities of "literal" being simply "what the text says (i.e. 'literarily,' without reference to what did or did not happen)." Admit that possibility, of course, and one can affirm the supreme significance of this doctrine (as I would) without ending anywhere near the perspective of this book.

Part 4 offers three essays on "Adam and the Fall in Dispute." They include an attentive reading of Romans 5 by Thomas Schreiner, who is vexed by Henri Blocher's approach, and two pieces that are very clear on what they think but will not persuade anyone who does not already think it.

So there you have it. I wonder whether the subtitle might more accurately have referred to a (single) perspective. It is good to have that view propounded at length in one place, and kudos to Baker Academic for publishing it, where it may appear on bookshelves and conference tables alongside their 2012 title *The Evolution of Adam* by Peter Enns. Read them both and draw your own conclusions. Despite the rhetoric of the book under review, I doubt the (theological) world will fall apart while you ponder the issues. Though if it does, you could always move to the UK.

Richard S. Briggs
Durham, United Kingdom

Robert L. Plummer and Matthew D. Haste. *Held in Honor: Wisdom for Your Marriage from Voices of the Past*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2015. 132 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1781916438. $14.99 (Paperback).

Robert L. Plummer serves as Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* is one of his more well-known and widely used texts. Matthew D. Haste completed a Ph.D. in Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary studying under Michael A. G. Haykin. Haste's dissertation is entitled "Marriage in the Life and Theology of John Gill, Samuel Stennett and Andrew Fuller."

Held in Honor: Wisdom for Your Marriage from Voices of the Past is a collection of fifty writings on marriage from selected Christian the-

ologians, pastors and authors, followed by Plummer and Haste's devotional reflections on key themes from those writings. The devotional reflections themselves may be described as God-centred, biblical, realistic, penetrating and practical. Following a brief conclusion the work contains an appendix with Scriptures on marriage for memorization and meditation.

As the title suggests, Plummer and Haste's primary aim is to provide wisdom from the past on marriage to believers in the present. The book is based on three fundamental convictions: marriage is an experience common to all people throughout history, God has provided wisdom for his church in teachers, and God created marriage and thus he alone (in his Word) serves as the final authority on the institution (p. 12). Plummer and Haste's use of sources demonstrates a concern to affirm and pass along only those ideas that accord with Scripture's teaching. For instance, they reject Ambrosiaster's exaltation of celibacy over marriage (p. 34) and Hugh of St. Victor's support for Mary's perpetual virginity (p. 42). The authors thus recognize that not everything in the works they examine should serve as wisdom to be applied to one's marriage today.

Dividing church history into five major periods (Patristic, Celtic and Medieval, Reformation and Puritan, Evangelical, and Modern), the authors review marriage-related writings from some of the more well-known figures (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Spurgeon, Barth), lesser known individuals (e.g., Paulinus of Nola, Venn), women (e.g., Goodhue, Bradstreet, Elliot) and writings whose author is unclear (e.g., *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Clementine Homilies*). Recurring themes found in the writings include the need for a husband to be gentle and loving toward his wife and for a wife to respect her husband, as well as the joys and difficulties that accompany marriage. Readers will find Plummer and Haste's attention to the common experiences of those who marry (regardless of when and where they lived) fascinating. In addition, the authors' balanced, Christ-centred perspective will also be appreciated. One excerpt that illustrates their outlook comes from their devotional reflections: "People who enter marriage with unrealistic expectations often live in disillusionment and regret. Married persons must embrace this truth: All marriages have challenges and sorrows. But if such challenges are met with faith in God and a commitment to one's spouse, a beautiful picture of Christ's unwavering love for the church becomes visible (Eph. 5:22–33)" (p. 99) The authors do not

gloss over the challenges of marriage. They are realistic. At the same time, they point readers to Christ.

Held in Honor: Wisdom for Your Marriage from Voices of the Past is a delight to read. Those who value church history will appreciate the profound reflections on marriage from some of the most well-known and also lesser-known Christian minds from the past. Those who seek to understand Scripture's teaching on marriage will be rewarded in their reading of Plummer and Haste's devotional reflections. Finally, those who wish to be challenged to show greater love and devotion toward God and their spouses will find many practical insights.

This is a helpful book for pastors and theologically-minded laypeople. Husbands and wives will also benefit from reading it together. I highly recommend this book to those who desire to honor the Lord in their marriage.

Michael L. Bryant
Charleston, South Carolina

Mikeal C. Parsons. *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014. xxii + 257 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1481300681. $34.95 (Paperback).

This collection of previously published essays is organized around the three rubrics of Luke as Greco-Roman storyteller, interpreter of tradition, and evangelist to Gentiles. Yet, the three together show a deeper unity in the coalescence of message and medium.

To begin, an introductory chapter addresses authorship, treating traditional and contemporary views in tandem. While there is much agreement on a common author for Luke and Acts, Parsons summarizes questions about the "we" passages, Luke as Gentile and physician, and what the prologue reveals about its author.

Moving to the first part, on Luke as storyteller, Parsons argues that Luke employs the *progymnasmata*, preliminary rhetorical techniques in handbooks for students who have mastered grammar. Narrative criticism anachronistically imposes later literary conventions on first-century texts but the *progymnasmata* are part of Luke-Acts' historical context. Some techniques identified include *chreia* ("a brief assertion or action revealing shrewdness") (p. 20), "fable," and "narrative" (*diēgēsis*). Good *diēgēsis* is persuasive due to concision, clarity, and plausibility. For example, Luke's preface (Luke

1:1–4) viewed diagetically evidences identification with earlier evangelists but also the judgment that they were not "complete" and "well-ordered" narratives.

The second part begins by showing how Luke interprets Greco-Roman customs and values, specifically friendship and physiognomy. More than any New Testament author Luke uses the classical value of friendship. He depicts God as displaying loyalty and reciprocity, and thus impresses upon his audience their social and moral obligations to one another and society. For instance, Luke's audience would have viewed the "Parable of the Friend at Midnight" (Luke 11:1–13) through the "enthymemic network" (p. 58) of God as friend, God as patron, and patron as friend. Also, as physiognomy associated outer characteristics with inner qualities, Peter's healing of the lame man (Acts 3:1–4:22) simultaneously uses physiognomy to draw readers in and to challenge this "physiognomic consciousness." The lame man's healing manifests his moral transformation, which is paradigmatic of Israel's restoration (p. 72).

Luke likewise reinterprets Jewish traditions. Rather than depict Jerusalem as center of the world, Luke locates Jerusalem at the end of Jesus' story and the beginning of the Church's story. Here Parsons rejects both Conzelmann's thesis that Jerusalem forms the geographical center of Luke's narrative and Davies' opposite view that Luke marginalizes Jerusalem. Then, using Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) as an example, Parsons investigates Luke's use of the "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah 53. Engaging Morna Hooker's analysis of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, Parsons contends, contra Hooker and others, that Luke did not merely use Isaiah 53:7–8 as a proof-text and intentionally omit references to vicarious atonement. Instead, Luke uses the passage for a theological exposition of the necessity of Christ's suffering.

Further, Parsons treats Luke's appropriation of incipient Christian traditions. In the uniquely Lucan parables, Luke modified an existing parable collection to meet his authorial agenda, emphasizing themes like journeying, great "reversals," "insiders becoming outsiders" and "outsiders becoming insiders." Parsons addresses the differences between "Luke's Paul" and Paul in the undisputed epistles by maintaining that Luke's audience would have heard an expansion and condensing of the Paul of the letters.

In the final part, "Luke the Evangelist," Parsons examines Luke as a "proclaimer of the good news" in the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18). In a detailed section-by-section exegesis

he argues that Luke presents the Abrahamic covenant as the scriptural basis for the inclusion of Gentiles in the reconstituted people of God. Not only Cornelius is converted. Peter is converted too, to seeing that salvation has no human boundaries and that "God shows no partiality." The conversion of Cornelius' household thus symbolizes the shift from Temple to household worship. Warning against anachronistically viewing "Judaism" and "Christianity" as separate "religions" in Acts, Parsons urges that Luke tried to present the Christian movement as one viable Jewish sect among others.

This book has many strengths. It provides an abundance of insights into details of Luke-Acts and numerous illuminating facts about Luke's Greco-Roman and Second Temple Jewish contexts. Some of these will be new to any reader. One walks away with an even greater sense of Luke-Acts' literary richness and theological complexity. Luke wastes no words, every detail matters, and nothing is superfluous. Additionally, Parsons's rehearsals of commonplaces in the scholarship will be informative to new students and refreshers for experts.

To be sure, Parsons does not always concur with the scholarly consensus but he substantiates his demurrals well. The scholarly rigor is exemplary. Parsons avoids tendentious crafting of justifications for already foregone conclusions. Confluences of evidence and cogent lines of reasoning may very well lead some to reconsider majority positions. Parsons's command of the scholarship can be breathtaking at times.

It is difficult to fault Parsons's work. He does take debatable assertions by other scholars at face value in places, and some arguments may seem a bit stretched. Sometimes one wishes Parsons would have raised and addressed more objections to his own position. These instances are few, however.

Although certainly advanced, the book's frequent summaries of propaedeutics afford accessibility to advanced undergraduates and educated laypersons as well as academics, graduate students, and theologically-trained pastors.

Marc A. Pugliese
Richmond, Virginia

Michael B. Shepherd. *The Text in the Middle*. Studies in Biblical Literature 162. New York: Peter Lang, 2014. 193 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433128325. $82.95 (Hardback).

For several years, Michael Shepherd has been publishing works that highlight the compositional features of biblical literature. In *The Twelve Prophets in the New Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), he argued that the New Testament writers used and understood the twelve Minor Prophets within the literary context of the Book of the Twelve. In *The Textual World of the Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), he examined the way biblical authors summarize and interpret previous narratives as they recount the history of redemption and compose their own texts. In *The Text in the Middle*, Shepherd furthers this broader project by examining a network of inter-textual connections that span the biblical canon.

Shepherd begins with the assumption that "the Hebrew Bible is a text composed of other texts" and that "those 'other texts' are within the Bible itself" (p. 1). He argues that those who helped shape the Hebrew Bible into a coherent collection gave the texts a specific perspective by their compiling and editorial work. The Hebrew Bible "was thus built to interpret itself" and later biblical readers including the authors of the New Testament "understood this phenomenon and were greatly influenced by it" (p. 1).

In this study of inner-biblical exegesis, Shepherd focuses on what he terms "bridge texts" or "texts in the middle" (p. 2). Shepherd explains, "This is where a citation of a text occurs, but the way in which the text is cited has already been anticipated in a previous citation of the original text, thus involving at least three texts (primary, secondary, and tertiary)" (p. 2). Recognizing the difficulty of identifying the "direction of dependence" in cases of inner-biblical exegesis, Shepherd looks for "clues as to how those who gave these texts their final shape wanted readers to understand inter-textual links" (p. 3).

The book itself consists of a long series of case studies that involve multiple texts (approx. 90 groupings!). The four chapters cover citations from the Pentateuch (chapters 1–2), the Prophets (chapter 3), and the Writings (chapter 4). Each chapter consists of main headings that list the passages that the following subsection will examine. This organization gives the volume a technical feel, but it also means that the groupings unfold organically and that a specific textual example is relatively easy to locate.

Shepherd's analysis shines when he examines a genuine "bridge" text. In these cases, the explanatory power of his approach is evident. For instance, Shepherd shows how the writer of Hebrews draws on Psalm 8 in order to illustrate the incarnation of Jesus (pp. 7–9). This particular psalm, though, is *already* an interpretive reflection on the creation narratives of Gen 1–2. Further, the "exegetical warrant" for connecting the general comments about mankind in Psalm 8 to Jesus is the connection that already exists in the Psalter between this psalm and Psalm 110 which speaks of a messianic priest-king. In fact, these texts appear in close proximity in the opening argument of Hebrews (i.e., Heb 1:3, 13). Accordingly, Shepherd argues, "the writer's exegesis of Psalm 8 is based upon a holistic reading of the book of Psalms" (p. 9). Similarly, Shepherd shows that when Hebrews speaks of entering God's rest in Heb 4:1–11, the writer not only draws on the conclusion to the creation narrative in Gen 1–2, but also on the notion of Sabbath rest in Ex 20:11 and the promise of entering the land in Josh 13:1 and Judg 1:27–33 (pp. 11–13).

This type of study broadens the scope of investigation to include not only the way that the New Testament authors draw on the Old Testament, but also the inter-textual activity already at work within the Hebrew Bible. For instance, Shepherd notes that "theologians sometimes cite Rom 9:13 in support of the view that Paul is talking about corporate election rather than individual election" (p. 45). This seems to be the case when Paul quotes Mal 1:2–3, which speaks of the nations of Israel and Edom rather than individuals like Jacob and Esau. However, Paul also quotes Gen 25:23, "a text that announces both the birth of two individuals and the birth of two nations" (p. 45). In this case, "the Malachi text is an exegesis of the Genesis text" and "Paul's text is thus an exegesis of an exegesis" (p. 45). Because the Malachi text connects the "story of two sons" with the "history of two nations," Paul can "move fairly freely between the election of individual and that of corporate entities" (p. 45). For Shepherd, recognizing that the author of Malachi is interpreting the Genesis narrative is critical when interpreting Paul's understanding of the Malachi text.

Though there are many "text in the middle" examples, perhaps a more accurate general description of the nature of most of the textual case studies comes much later in the volume: "the phenomenon of inner-biblical exegesis involving three or more texts" (p. 108). In most groupings, Shepherd coordinates and considers a

"constellation of texts" (p. 43). For instance, Shepherd discusses the various ways that subsequent biblical authors understand and utilize the account of the Lord's covenant with David in 2 Sam 7:1–17 (pp. 122–29). Prophetic texts like Zech 6:12–13 and poetic texts like Psalm 89 and 132 allude to different features of the Davidic covenant in their messages of future deliverance. The author of Chronicles and the New Testament writers also understand Jesus' messianic role through the lens of the Davidic covenant (1 Chron 17:1–15; Luke 1:32–33; Acts 2:30; Heb 1:5). Though in many cases like this one there is no true bridge text *in the middle* (as he defines it), through these examples Shepherd clearly demonstrates how frequently inter-textual connections appear in all parts of the biblical canon.

This fuller inter-textual awareness will enhance the study of all of the texts under review and enable readers to appreciate the inter-textual nature of biblical literature. Some of Shepherd's treatments are strikingly brief and would require further development to persuade most readers (sometimes only a few sentences for a large number of texts; the final chapter on the Writings is also only six pages). Shepherd's discussion of methodological issues is also surprisingly condensed (pp. 1–4, 107–09). Because his work covers so many texts, a little more reflection on the method he uses to make exegetical decisions would benefit the reader trying to keep track. Nevertheless, virtually every page brims with grammatical, syntactical, and text-critical insight. Because of Shepherd's deep grasp of the Hebrew Scriptures and the biblical languages, his work here is an important supplement to similar works from the field of New Testament studies.

A critical reader of this volume could rightly conclude that in many cases Shepherd *makes* but does not *demonstrate* and/or explain the connection between two or more texts. While generally acknowledging this conclusion, a sympathetic reader will also recognize that Shepherd has located hundreds of inter-textual goldmines and provided guidance for how they might be gainfully excavated by students, scholars, and pastors. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this work, then, is that it forces the reader to consider the textual logic of a large swath of biblical literature and offers a compelling model of close reading.

Ched Spellman
Cedarville, Ohio

Courtney Reissig. *The Accidental Feminist: Restoring Our Delight in God's Good Design*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 161 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433545481. $14.99 (Paperback).

The Accidental Feminist is Courtney Reissig's personal testimony of her walk through the ambient feminist ideas of modern American culture in an attempt to reconcile those ideas with her view of biblical womanhood. By addressing women who think that "feminism and Christianity aren't mutually exclusive" and promising that "this is not your grandmother's feminism," Reissig implies that there might be a common ground between feminism and biblical womanhood. However, apart from a handful of political gains, such as voting and property ownership, Reissig sees no common ground between modern feminist ideas and her view of biblical womanhood.

Reissig's discussion of the failings of feminism compared to biblical womanhood spans seven chapters. Each chapter ends with an application for the single woman and the married woman followed by a set of study questions. Reissig begins with God's good design in creating men and women with equal value but different functions. She examines the problems with feminist ideas that see gender equality as sameness on every level, focusing specifically on God's design for marriage, female beauty and modesty, the importance of hospitality, and the appropriate roles for women in the church. Reissig closes with a chapter that exhorts women to understand their position in relation to the redemptive work of Christ and to understand that their identity must not be wrapped up in human relationships, like wife or mother, or in professional status, like executive. Instead a woman's identity should be built on her relationship with God.

Whether readers agree with all of Reissig's claims or not, this book offers some noteworthy insights. For example, Reissig argues against the extreme views that womanhood can be reduced to a set of tasks. The feminist cannot require a woman to be a wife, mother, and CEO any more than the church can require a woman to check off all of the attributes of the Proverbs 31 wife. Instead a woman should seek to understand her Creator and how He guides her to live. Reissig encourages women to seek God, not their own timetable or society's timetable, for life decisions about work, marriage, and children. A married woman should follow Jesus's example of submission to God in order to submit to her husband. She needs

to understand that submission does not mean becoming a doormat, and it does not indicate unequal worth. Jesus was able to submit to God the Father because he fully trusted God's sovereignty and love; a woman who submits to her husband demonstrates her own faith and trust in the sovereign God. Jesus is also exalted as the role model for grace. As Reissig explains that men are imperfect sinners who will hurt and disappoint the women in their lives, she urges women to react to men with grace. She reminds women that when they mess up, all they get from Jesus is grace, not the silent treatment or a hateful outburst. As image-bearers women must demonstrate God's grace to others.

While this book brings up some insightful points about women as image-bearers, it also falls short in a few areas. For example, Reissig's discussion of feminism is limited to the history of feminism in America. She states that feminist Christian women do not like the writings of the apostle Paul, but she does not unpack this statement or discuss issues of feminism or misogyny in the cultures discussed in the early church of the New Testament. When discussing the roles of women in the church, Reissig presents scripture references that limit the role of pastors and elders to men, and she stands against feminist movements within the church. However, she does not discuss any of the women who were active in the early church as role models for today's women. Although she defines feminism as "equality equals sameness," there is a need for repeating this definition and explaining nuanced meanings of feminism throughout the book. For example, when Reissig states that "the seeds of feminism are actually an affront to the gospel," it would be helpful to explain that she is referring to the seeds of first wave feminism in America and not to more general seeds of feminism that include not treating women as second-class citizens.

Because of these shortcomings, *The Accidental Feminist* is best suited for Christian complementarians who believe that God created men and women equal but with differences that complement one another. God created women to be different from men, and those differences should be embraced and used to bring God glory. Trying to erase those differences is a symptom of not trusting God's good design. Reissig's informal and conversational style is easy to read, and her convictions are sincere. She exhorts women

to find their value in God and relish their position as the image-bearers He created them to be.

Adrianne Miles
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Mark Wilson. *Victory through the Lamb: A Guide to Revelation in Plain Language*. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. 223 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1941337011. $15.99 (Paperback).

Mark Wilson's popular level guide to the book of Revelation helpfully summarizes the message of John's vision with a focus on its meaning for the church. Wilson has established himself as a credible scholar on Revelation with several well-received books and articles, but what distinguishes him from others is his research while residing in Turkey/Asia Minor for over a decade. As the founder and director of the Asia Minor Research Center in Antalya, Turkey, he is an expert on the cities, history, and archaeology of the seven churches of Revelation. This affords him perspectives and insights for reading Revelation in a way that is tethered to history, but with a pastoral emphasis, applying it to the modern church.

Revelation, according to Wilson, is not "a kind of biblical crystal ball" for reading current events in the media, but "it was to help Christians get through the daily struggles of life that they were facing" (p. 11). The language and imagery of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament and one should read Revelation on its own literary, cultural, and historical terms. He believes the rapture will occur after the tribulation (post-tribulation). The thousand years of Revelation 20 is a future event (premillennial), but the millennium is merely a symbolic way to describe eternity in the new heaven and earth (p. 13). We should expect tribulation because ever since "Jesus' ascension, the devil, through his earthy representatives, has been bringing tribulation against the people of God" (p. 14). As such, the message of Revelation speaks to every generation of believers with a message of future hope through the victory of the Lamb.

Wilson primarily focuses on the theme of victory throughout the book of Revelation. He recounts the recent martyrdom of two Turkish Christians in 2007 as what moved him to show how Revelation addresses the church with a message of victory through the Lamb. His guiding premise is, "Christians have and always will suffer tribulation until Jesus returns at his second coming" (p. 10).

This premise, then, converges well with the central message of Revelation: "believers can overcome the tribulations of life, even persecution and martyrdom, because of the victory won by the Lamb of God" (p. 11). Wilson thus highlights the importance of the victor sayings (Rev. 2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) to the seven churches with their promised rewards of a "future *provision* in a renewed *place* with the *person* of Jesus" (p. 42). How they will have victory is found in Rev. 5:5–6 where John discovers that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who "overcame" (*nikao*) is the slain yet standing Lamb. He writes, "[t]he victory promised to all believers can only occur because Jesus the Lamb of God has already triumphed over death, the devil, and hell" (p. 55). This victory was achieved only through the sacrifice and suffering of Christ, which is the pattern a believer must follow in order to have victory.

The book consists of twelve chapters guiding readers through Revelation's parts. Each chapter features an aspect of the victory theme in a section of Revelation: (1) Victory in the Seven Churches (1:1–3:22); (2) Victory and the Lamb (4:1–5:14); (3) Victory of the Large Multitude (6:1–9:21); (4) Victory of the Two Witnesses (10:1–11:19); (5) Victory of the Male Child, the Woman, and Her Offspring (12:1–17); (6) Victory over the Beasts (13:1–18); (7) Victory of the 144,000 and the Harvest of the Victors (14:1–20); (8) Victory in the Song of Moses and of the Lamb (15:1–16:21); (9) Victory over Mystery Babylon (17:1–19:10); (10) Victory over the Lamb's Enemies (19:11–20:15); (11) Victory in the New Heaven and New Earth (21:1–2:5); (12) Victory at Jesus' Second Coming (22:6–21). He begins each chapter with a "martyr account" taken from ancient texts and a fresh translation of the Greek text of Revelation. The martyr accounts, many of which occur in Asia Minor, frame the theme of tribulation and victory within the context of church history. Wilson's fresh translation of Revelation is also remarkably engaging. While there is nothing ground-breaking, he weds interpretation and translation together beautifully. The bulk of each chapter summarizes the contents of Revelation succinctly. Throughout the summary he elaborates on key words and passages related to the theme of victory.

Wilson's book is a well-written, insightful, and inspiring guide to Revelation. Although he often skims the surface of the text and only provides sporadic footnotes, Wilson clearly demonstrates a commanding grasp of the latest scholarship on the recent research of Revelation. One could quibble with his early dating of Revela-

tion or specific interpretations of some passages, but overall his interpretation is extremely judicious, faithful, and theologically solid. I am often asked what book would I recommend for an average Christian on the message of Revelation—I will gladly recommend *Victory through the Lamb.*

Alan S. Bandy
Shawnee, Oklahoma

Bryan C. Babcock. *Sacred Ritual: A Study of the West Semitic Ritual Calendars in Leviticus 23 and the Akkadian Text Emar 446*. Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 9. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014. xiv + 271 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1575068268. $59.50 (Hardback).

Archaeological endeavors in the Levant have undeniably enriched Biblical studies. The epigraphic and textual material uncovered has provided the catalyst for numerous comparative studies which in turn have served to elucidate the cultural milieu of the biblical texts. In this revision of his 2011 dissertation completed under Richard Hess and Gordon Wenham, Bryan C. Babcock adds to a growing compendium by examining parallels between Leviticus 23 and an Akkadian text, Emar 446. The goal of Babcock's study is twofold: to establish whether Leviticus 23 preserves an early West Semitic multi-month festival calendar tradition and, if found to do so, to challenge a late dating of the Levitical text founded on parallels with the first millennium Akītu festival (p. 2).

In the book's opening chapter Babcock outlines his proposed approach. The need for a carefully articulated modus operandi for comparative studies is well highlighted by the "parallelomania" so memorably bemoaned by Samuel Sandmel ("Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 [1962], pp. 1–13). Babcock's method is satisfyingly comprehensive and, drawing on insights derived from the approaches of William Hallo, Meir Malul, Kenton Sparks and, in particular, Gerald Klingbeil, clearly articulates the broad range of factors that must be considered to establish a credible link between ancient texts. In doing so, Babcock aims to advance comparative scholarship by attempting "to move beyond the mere listing of superficial similarities and differences to a deeper understanding of the compared rituals" (p. 18).

Chapter 2 presents an overview of ancient Near Eastern ritual calendars from the third through to the first millennium B.C. In

addition, Babcock surveys scholarship related to the OT festival calendar texts (Exod 23; 34; Lev 23; Num 28–29; Deut 16; Ezek 45) with a particular eye to their relative dating. Unsurprisingly, he finds little consensus on this score. Also included in chapter 2 is an extended critique of Jan Wagenaar's thesis that Leviticus 23 is dependent upon the first millennium Babylonian Akītu festival and therefore reflects an exilic/post-exilic provenience (pp. 54–78). Babcock's criticism of Wagenaar ably demonstrates the potential of his proposed methodology to expose the weaknesses of alternative approaches as well as their corresponding conclusions.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine Leviticus 23 and Emar 446 respectively. For both, Babcock offers a new translation (including transliteration and normalization of the Akkadian script). Discussion of each text's structure and literary features follows. The treatment is detailed, including verbal analysis, identification of implied audience, and exploration of literary devices (e.g., chiastic structures). Babcock then discusses specific ritual elements, collating these under a number of headings—sacred time, sacred space, sacred objects, ritual participants, and ritual sound and smell. The result of this close analysis is a "thick" description of both texts, suggesting in turn potential points of similarity and dissimilarity.

Babcock's penultimate chapter capitalizes on the analysis proffered in the previous two by directly comparing Leviticus 23 with Emar 446. Following Malul and Soggin, Babcock argues that in assessing a potential connection between texts, it is points of unanticipated similarity that are especially significant (p. 238). Of consequence, therefore, are nine unexpected parallels identified as being present between the texts in question (pp. 238–239). These points of contact, Babcock contends, suggest a genuine link, one best defined as "awareness of another society's cultural practices" (p. 239). Common tradition is deemed the most likely type of connection. A short concluding chapter summarizes the main points of the study and suggests avenues for further research.

While Babcock's assessment of Leviticus 23 and Emar 446 is comprehensive, a major point of difference remains unaddressed: Emar 446 exists as a standalone text, Leviticus 23 does not. Thus a form-critical isolation of the latter from its wider context is problematic. At a minimum, chapter 23 forms part of the so-called Holiness Code (Lev 17–26); arguably, it also needs to be read as an integral part of the wider book and even of the Pentateuch *in toto*. The resulting implications regarding the purpose and rhetorical

force of Leviticus 23 (aspects evaluated by Babcock) are not really addressed.

Nevertheless, *Sacred Ritual* presents a model of methodological clarity in which the posited approach is fastidiously followed throughout. The result is a clear articulation of the central thesis and a persuasive demonstration of the common heritage that connects Leviticus 23 and Emar 446. It is this methodological thoroughness that perhaps represents one of the more significant implications of Babcock's work for the wider field. In light of the approach exemplified, it is not hard to think of posited connections between the OT and other Near Eastern texts and rituals which seem somewhat unsubstantiated by comparison. Babcock's approach will thus doubtless prove conducive as a means of (re)evaluating these studies.

Sacred Ritual is a lucid and thoroughly persuasive monograph. With it, Babcock has set a high standard for other comparative studies to follow.

G. Geoffrey Harper
Croydon, New South Wales

Gailyn Van Rheenen, with Anthony Parker. *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*. 2d. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 512 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310252375. $27.76 (Hardback).

Following nearly two decades as a missionary practitioner in both North American and African contexts, Gailyn Van Rheenen has served as graduate professor of Missions at Abilene Christian University since 1986. A renowned missiologist, Van Rheenen is also author of *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (William Carey Library, 1991) and founder of www.missiology.org. Anthony Parker serves as adjunct professor of Intercultural Studies at Johnson University as well as a training coach for Pioneer Bible Translators. Parker has 14 years of experience as a field missionary in West Africa.

The first edition of *Missions* was published in 1996 and has been used widely as a textbook for basic missions courses in varying contexts. The second edition builds upon the initial 11 chapters in the first edition, most of which have gone through some revision. One example is how the current edition reframes the biblical and theological foundations for missions using the popular language of

"story" and the framework of the grand meta-narrative of Scripture. In addition, there is a significant expansion of 8 additional chapters that address the many changes and challenges in 21st century missions practice and missiological thinking. New chapters have been added related to spiritual awakenings, the role of the local church in missions, types of missionaries, missions history, and the proper use of both money and short-term missions in a long term strategy. There is also a chapter expanding upon one of Van Rheenen's signature contributions to the field of missiology, the "Missional Helix."

Missions has several strengths that make it a truly helpful resource as a potential primary or supplementary textbook. First, the authors have done a splendid job of grounding the task of the missionary squarely in sound biblical theology (chapters 1 and 3). Second, they have introduced the reader to how the task of missions has developed over the centuries (chapter 8) as well as the stages for on-going development in the current context (chapter 2). Third, they have captured what many have missed in other texts, the centrality of the Church in the task of missions (chapter 4). By addressing the role of the Church as "God's Embodiment of Mission," the authors ground the missionary calling (chapter 5–6), preparation, sending and nurturing of missionaries (chapter 7) within the context of Biblical community. Perhaps the most helpful parts of the book are those chapters that deal with the missionary task (chapters 9–14), though it is unfortunate that the application chapters (15–16) are limited in their context to North America and Tribal Africa. In fact, there is not a full discussion of the concept of Unreached Peoples until the final chapter of the book!

For all of *Missions*' strengths, two additional weaknesses were apparent that made the book's flow a bit less than ideal. The first is related to the organization of content. Though each of the 19 chapters contains helpful material to any student of missions, the authors would have been wise to further divide the book into sections arranging the chapters under the headings as follows: Biblical and Theological Foundations (chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5), Historical Development (chapters 2 and 8), The Missionary Calling (chapters 6–7, and 19), Missionary Practice (chapters 9–16), and Missionary Stewardship (chapters 17–18). A second potential distraction is the authors attempt to personalize the subject by weaving the characters of "Jim and Julie" throughout the content. Though well-meaning, the use of this narrative often comes across as forced and

contrived in order to drive home the point that "You are Jim and Julie!" (p. 480). I would agree that every Christ-follower should understand his or her missionary identity, but the addition of fictional characters to a textbook is unnecessary.

There seems to be no shortage of new missions textbooks that have been published over the past several years: Moreau, Corwin and McGee (2015), Terry (2015), Pratt and Sills (2014), Goheen (2014), Tippett (2013), Tennent (2010), and Winter and Hawthorne (2009). Van Rheenen and Parker's new edition falls within this flurry of new publications attempting to inform Christians of their vital role in God's mission. While all of the aforementioned authors are evangelical, by virtue of their respective missions experience and context, each (including Van Rheenen and Parker) brings to the table a helpfully nuanced understanding of our place in God's redemptive story. Though the weaknesses mentioned above have prevented me from adopting *Missions* as a textbook for my own courses, I am gleaning very helpful material from it and would recommend it as one of several resources to bring about a fuller understanding of a vitally important subject.

George Robinson
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Allen P. Ross. *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42–89)*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013. 841 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0825425639. $44.95 (Hardback).

This is the second of three volumes. Volume 1 appeared in 2012; Volume 3 is forthcoming. Allen Ross serves as Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School and in his 40 years of teaching has also been at Dallas Theological Seminary and Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry.

In each discussion of a psalm Ross gives an original translation, textual notes, compositional and contextual observations, exegetical analysis, expositional commentary, and the overall message and application.

Ross's translation is footnoted with abundant textual and grammatical notes. The textual notes focus on the MT and LXX, but also on other translations where needed. The grammatical notes are technical but significant for interpretation. They are user-friendly; words are translated first with the original after. Those without benefit of the languages will still find good profit here.

(Ross also uses the English numbering system that is easier for English only readers.) Compositional and contextual notes give the psalm's type (e.g., national lament [Ps 44]; individual lament [Ps 51]; royal psalm [Ps 72]), and anything that can be known of the context of the psalm, revealed primarily in the superscription. Here Ross will at times include what other OT scholars have suggested about the psalm or make reference to the psalm's use in Israel's worship. But Ross avoids the excesses of critical scholarship, tying his observations to the wording of the psalm.

The exegetical analysis (really a brief outline) is a rendering down of the text in the words of the text. From the exegesis of the text, Ross gives a complete yet concise summary of each verse(s), section, and finally the entire psalm. For example, for Ps 48:4–8 Ross gives, "The psalmist describes how the LORD of armies defeated the enemies of his holy city to establish it forever." What follows this is a similar summary of the verse(s), contributing to the overall sectional summary. When these are combined they yield a summary for the entire psalm. This overall summary might seem wordy and repetitive, but it grows organically from the exegetical observations of the verses. One might expect the exegetical commentary to be in this unit but Ross places it in the following section.

The commentary in expository terms combines the exegetical observations with an outline that is more generalized, suggestive of possible teaching points. So in the example above for Ps 48:4–8, Ross gives the expositional summary, "God is to be praised because of his mighty victories in defending his dwelling-place." In this discussion Ross provides careful observations about the meaning of the text, drawing on grammar, lexicon, and larger literary structures. He displays what I regard to be the correct method for interpreting a text: attention to the meaning of a word (lexicon), the relationship of that word to those surrounding it (syntax); and the literary setting of the passage (for the Psalms the literary motif of the verse[s]).

Regarding word meaning, Ross frequently provides in footnotes word studies of theological and interpretive import. These are referenced across the volumes so that, for example, the discussion of "loyal love" in Ps 51:1 references his word study in Ps. 23:6. One can only hope that the final volume will have complete and intuitive indexes for these notes. Regarding syntax, Ross follows in the tradition of Waltke/O'Connor's *Hebrew Syntax*, but again in a way that makes the interpretive options plain for a more general audi-

ence. Regarding structure, Ross employs a modified form criticism (i.e. the proper recognition of literary genres in the outline of a psalm, such as in an individual lament, where one might expect the lament proper, the petition, a statement of confidence, and sometimes a vow to praise after deliverance) without the excesses of that method (e.g. tracing a supposed *Sitz im Leben* for the origin or use of a literary type, quite apart from any direct textual evidence). In this section Ross will also frequently discuss the NT use of the psalm. Absent from Ross's discussion is interpretive material based on observations from contiguous psalms or exegetical information based on the position of the psalm derived from a reconstruction of an editorial process.

A concluding brief message and application section provides guidelines for teaching the psalm and possible NT counterparts to the material. These suggestions grow out of the exegesis and provide guard rails for the use of the Psalms in preaching.

In my opinion, Ross' three volume work should be a model for commentary writing and will be the most helpful complete commentary for the study of the book of Psalms. Kregel Publications is to be commended for its willingness to allow a commentary of this heft. Misspellings or technical errors are rare; however, the Hebrew furtive *patach* should be offset in future works they publish.

Chip McDaniel
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Haddon W. Robinson and Patricia Batten, eds. *Models for Biblical Preaching: Expository Sermons from the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014. viii + 189 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0801049378. $19.99 (Paperback).

Models for Biblical Preaching is designed to be a companion text to Haddon Robinson's classic homiletics book *Biblical Preaching*. After a short introduction by the editors, the book contains eleven sermons from Robinson's former students. Ten of the eleven sermons are based upon particular Old Testament texts. One topical sermon is included, which explores the apparent tension between the love and justice of God. Considering the subtitle of the book, "Expository Sermons from the Old Testament," the intentional inclusion of a topical sermon seems to be an odd decision. In any event, the styles of the various sermons are diverse. For example, some of the

sermons follow the text closely while others have a more storytelling, bigger picture approach to the passage.

Though displaying different styles, all the preachers model how to effectively weave illustrations and application into their expositions. In addition, each of the sermon manuscripts is followed by a series of questions answered by the author of the particular sermon. These questions vary depending on the chapter, but they tend to be questions related to describing the sermon preparation process, the use of notes (or lack thereof) while preaching, and advice for particular kinds of preachers (e.g., young preachers, mature preachers, and women preachers).

In a time when many preachers are neglecting expositional sermons from the Old Testament, Robinson and Batten have nobly offered examples of how it can be done. And for those who buy in to the notion that good preaching is more often caught than taught, this volume will be filling a void that is sometimes lacking in homiletics textbooks.

One of the major weaknesses of a book of modern sermons, which seeks to teach by example is that it is, well, a book. The editors seem to acknowledge the limitation of studying sermons in print: "These printed sermons resemble cadavers. Cadavers are lifeless bodies that medical students dissect to discover how muscle, sinew, and nerve are put together. While printed sermons fall far short of being living sermons with breath and fire and spirit, it is profitable to study them and see what the preachers intended to do and how they planned for the sermon to have life and coherence" (p. viii). This raises some questions. Why would a preaching professor attempting to get his students to catch on to good preaching or a preacher looking to improve on his trade turn to a written compilation of sermons rather than to recordings of sermons? In a technological age where video and audio of sermons can be accessed easily from the websites of even modest size churches from around the world, why use manuscripts? Or to use their analogy, why settle for cadavers? Perhaps a better tool would be a list of online sermon links provided on a website, which also includes post sermon interviews conducted with the preachers. The manuscripts of both the sermons and the interviews could also be made available in print form on the website (or in a book) as a supplement to the recordings.

A few other issues seem relevant for potential readers. The book includes two sermons from female preachers. Surely some

will wonder, on one hand, why there is not more of an equal distribution between women and men. On the other hand, some will object based on their understanding of the New Testament that the inclusion of two sermons by women was two too many. Evaluating this issue falls well outside the confines of the review. Nonetheless, it will likely be an elephant in the room for some, so it bears mentioning.

Curiously, the preachers selected are found in a limited geographic region (five sermons from preachers in the Northeast United States, three from Colorado, two from the Midwest, and one from southern California). All of these preachers delivered their sermons within the United States, yet representation from the Bible Belt was completely omitted. This might be due to the limitation of these sermons being selected from Haddon Robinson's past students. However, since most instructors will stress the importance of relating appropriately to different contexts, offering a rather monolithic selection of geographic contexts seems to be a serious limitation for a collection of sermons to be used for a course.

In conclusion, *Models for Biblical Preaching* includes high quality expositions and could be a useful supplement for sharpening future or current preachers. However, the shortcomings of the medium and the lack of geographical diversity of the contexts for the sermons might lead preaching professors to make use of technology to accomplish what this volume rightly intended to achieve.

Josh D. Chatraw
Lynchburg, Virginia

Gary M. Burge. *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals*. Ancient Context, Ancient Faith. Vol. 4. Ed. Gary M. Burge, Lynn Cohick and Gene Green. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 139 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0310280477. $14.99 (Paperback).

Jesus and the Jewish Festivals is Gary Burge's fourth volume in the six-volume series, Ancient Context, Ancient Faith by Zondervan Press. The series partners Burge with two other distinguished scholars to present a "cultural anthropology" of ancient Israel (p. 12). The volumes address physical geography, the role of religious symbols and storytelling, and ritual and festival customs.

In this volume Burge demonstrates the way that the symbols and cultural codes of the Jewish festivals shaped the theological

presentation of Jesus in the New Testament. His focused study on festivals maintains a constant awareness of the wider issues discussed in the other volumes in this series.

The book progresses naturally through seven chapters: The Festivals of Judaism, Jesus and the Sabbath, Jesus and the Passover, Jesus and Tabernacles, Jesus and Hanukkah, Jesus and his Final Passover, and The Early Christians and the Jewish Passover.

Chapter 1 provides a cultural and historical overview of the ancient festivals with a particular focus on Israel's religious and agricultural calendars. The diagrams and discussion in this chapter do an excellent job of helping the modern reader appreciate how farmers, shepherds, and ranchers naturally integrated their story of faith into their daily lives, finding meaning and purpose in everything they saw and did.

Chapters 2–6 take the reader through the major festivals that figure significantly in the books of the New Testament. In chapter 2, Burge rightly identifies the Sabbath as the core and foundation of Israel's intuitive ritual-consciousness: through daily and weekly rhythms of sun and moon and work and rest, Israel's cultural memory grounded her constantly in her story of creation and salvation. Chapters 3 and 4 cover Passover and Tabernacles, the first and last of the three annual pilgrimage festivals. I will comment below on Burge's conspicuous choice to leave the second festival, Pentecost, out of this arrangement. That lacuna aside, Burge ably describes the grounding features of Israel's festival life: "[historical] recitation and a liturgical meal anchored Israel annually in the great story of salvation" (p. 63). Burge moves from this conclusion to include us in the spirit of the liturgies that are evident in the New Testament and the early centuries of the church. The church calendar from Advent and Christmas, through Lent, Easter and Pentecost, continually grounds Christians in meals, storytelling, and practices that remind us of our story of salvation in Jesus.

As Burge advances through Jesus' final Passover (chapter 6) and the festivals of the New Testament church (chapter 7), he shows convincingly that our life and faith as Christians are intricately grounded in the festival life of ancient Israel.

Burge's style is lucid and clear, which allows him to unpack technical scholarly issues in ways even a novice reader can understand. This, combined with the book's handsome photos and diagrams, make it an exceptionally attractive and readable book. But one wonders if the book tries too hard to be visually catchy. Sever-

al of the photos provide little added value (e.g. the Roman god Janus on p. 71 or the model of beer-makers on p. 69) while others raise interpretive issues that confuse the reader. The mosaic on p. 130, for example, supposedly supports Burge's point about the end of the sacrificial law, but the truncated caption does little to help us understand how this is so. The unusual layout of the book (approximately 5" x 9") seemed awkward to this reader, and somewhat difficult to handle.

Furthermore, while the content is generally thorough and clear, Burge clearly reads back into the Old Testament through the lenses of New Testament history and culture, not to mention an explicit hermeneutic of covenantal discontinuity (law versus gospel). One would like to see a complementary move forward from Old to New with more openness or transparency on hermeneutical commitments.

Burge's view of the Sabbath, for example, is conspicuously reduced to a command for weekly rest. However, taken together, the two formulations of the law in the Old Testament teach Israel that the rhythms laid down in creation (Exodus) undergird the larger humanitarian and agrarian aims of Sabbath-keeping (Deuteronomy). These two versions of the Sabbath law, in turn, inform the one-, three-, seven-, and forty-nine year cycles of tithing, resting the land, cancelling debts, and releasing slaves (Exodus 23, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15). The description of the laws in Deuteronomy 15, meanwhile, has been carefully grouped together with the triennial pilgrimage festivals in chapter 16, with their explicit interest in the marginalized in society being provided for in the celebrations. Lacking this more robust theology of the Old Testament Sabbath, Burge's discussion of Jesus and the Sabbath (pp. 43–48) fails to capture these connections between ritual meals, rest, and compassion, and thus the humanitarian momentum implicit in the Jewish law.

In the same way, the failure to root Pentecost in the theology of the Sabbath leaves Burge unequipped to explore the prominent role of the Pentecost celebrations in Acts 2 and 4 where Luke creatively depicts a Spirit-led-life out of the legal vision in Deuteronomy 15 and 16, and Leviticus 23–25.

Burge's hermeneutical leaning toward covenantal discontinuity leads him to be selective in his interpretation at a few other minor points, yet it is a weakness that arises from his laudable effort to tackle biblical texts with a fully theological and interdisciplinary

approach. More of this is surely needed today and Burge is to be congratulated for his efforts here. His book will benefit teachers, pastors, and students at every level.

Ryan O'Dowd
Ithaca, New York

Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, eds. *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. vii + 397 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433681042. $31.99 (Hardback).

Commitment to and trust in the church has seemingly been on the decline in Western culture for some time. Even in doctrinal study, ecclesiology can receive short shrift in relation to other topics of theology. Thankfully, however, a number of ministries are currently dedicated to bringing our attention back to the church, both in a theological and practical sense. On the forefront of this ecclesiological renaissance, Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman—who have labored on a number of works regarding this topic—have helped produce a work dedicated to the right ordering of the church, such that churches can truly understand and experience biblical renewal and re-establish trust and commitment in our present age.

Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age focuses on the idea of church polity or governance. In the introduction Leeman lays out what becomes a central argument of the book: "The difference between a local church and a group of Christians is nothing more or less than church polity. To argue for polity is to argue for the existence of the local church" (p. 1). Leeman lays the groundwork in this introductory chapter to help the reader understand that every church has some way of constituting itself, maintaining criteria for membership, and making decisions. However, one must be careful to study Scripture in order to rightly know who possesses authority, what leadership offices are in the church, and how one determines who is either within or outside the bounds of the gospel (p. 2). The authors of this work labor to demonstrate from Scripture (and tradition) that an elder-led, deacon-served, congregationally-governed church is what comprises a biblical polity.

After the introductory chapter this work is divided into five distinct parts. First, two chapters are spent dealing with the historical

roots and biblical/theological case for congregationalism as a proper approach to church governance. The authors aver that "under the lordship of Christ and under the authority of divinely given elders who lead, the last and final court of appeal in matters related to the local church is the congregation itself" (p. 49). Specifically, in a biblical/theological sense, congregationalism is argued for in that the redemptive developments of the new covenant and an already/not yet eschatology necessitate this new leadership paradigm.

Part two spends five chapters outlining the biblical and historical realities of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Emphasis is placed numerous times on the fact that the ordinances are a visible manifestation of the gospel, and as such are of great importance. Part three deals with the closely related issues of church membership and church discipline. These two serve as the identifying markers of the church, since "a church does not so much have members as it is its members" (p. 165). Membership and discipline must be properly understood if one is to grasp both the nature of the church and the means by which we can ensure health within the church. Part four, the lengthiest section of the book, delineates the realities of how elders and deacons should function in the church. Here, both historically and biblically, an elder-led, deacon-served structure is argued for, where elders are committed to the service of the Word and deacons enact a service dedicated to practical matters. In the final section of the book Leeman addresses a congregational approach to unity, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity.

A particular strength of this work is the way in which the contributors have written a work on polity that is robust and far-reaching, reminiscent of the way in which church governance was once treated (see, for instance, Mark Dever's *Polity* for some excellent historical examples of this). Each contributor has some tie to the Southern Baptist Convention, which may in some ways limit its readership. However, potential readers should understand that this work is an excellent contribution to the discussion on church governance that goes beyond pragmatic concerns, to guidance gained from biblical and theological realities. Admittedly, much of the content can be found in many other books on ecclesiology, but readers will find unique and helpful contributions from the chapters by Stephen and Kirk Wellum regarding how the new covenant and inaugurated eschatology affect the idea of priesthood and congregationalism, as well as all of the chapters by Jonathan Leeman.

The reality of the "keys of the kingdom" receives ample attention from Leeman, and readers will be readily helped by his penetrating insight on how this matter relates to polity.

Pastors, church leaders, and scholars alike will benefit from this book. The real challenge, however, is left to the members of ordinary churches. Thus, for both pastors and church members, it seems fitting to conclude with this point from James Leo Garrett: "The congregation is where the reform will be won or lost, and leadership is crucial" (p. xi).

Jeremy Kimble
Cedarville, Ohio

Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. H. Lawrence. *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2012. 1642 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-3447067263. **€** 298 (Hardback).

The three oversized (8.5 inches by 12 inches) and hefty (nearly 10 pounds) volumes of *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (*TLC*) are a magisterial achievement in textual collocation and embody the quintessence of ancient Near East (ANE) literary genre comparison. *TLC* includes a total of 106 documents. These span three millennia and are written in ten languages from Anatolia to Arabia, the Nile to Mesopotamia. As the title suggests, the volumes focus on ANE law-collections, treaties between communities, and covenants between individuals and groups.

The purpose of the volumes is to gather and analyze the main textual witnesses of ancient Near Eastern treaties, laws, and covenants in one location. The authors extend Mendenhall's proposal of comparing the biblical texts to 14th-13th century BC Hittite treaties to examine the entire ANE corpus "in its own right." The volumes took Kitchen nearly sixty years to complete with Lawrence's contribution finally finishing the project.

The first volume contains texts in transcription and translation that are arranged by date (oldest to youngest), region (East, West, North, South), and similar text type (law, covenant, etc.). The compendium is not meant to be a new text-edition of each document but an accessible anthology which the authors desire to be useful for comparative study. Most of the documents are presented with a transcription on the verso and an English translation on the recto. Arranging the lines in parallel on facing pages provides for easy

reference to the original text and comparison between the transcription and translation.

The second and third volumes—although not themselves diminutive at 268 and 288 pages—comprise only one-third of the total length of the project. The second volume contains textual notes on each document, multiple indexes, and a collection of maps and charts (so-called chromograms). The third volume includes a meta-historical survey of these texts along with a chronological assessment of the changing cultural realization of treaties, laws, and covenants in the ANE.

The audience of this journal is likely to be particularly interested in the covenants contained within the biblical corpus. *TLC* situates the reported treaties in the book of Genesis using the traditional dates within the 19th-18th centuries BC. The documented treaties are between Abraham and Abimelek at Beersheba (Gen 21:22–24; 21:25–33), Abimelek and Isaac at Gerar (Gen 26:26–31), and Laban and Jacob at Gal'ed (Gen 31:44–54). The pre-19th century BC personal covenants are included as reported in the biblical corpus between YHWH and Noah (Gen 9:8–17) and YHWH and Abraham (Gen 15:7–21). The 13th century BC covenant reports are divided roughly by biblical book. Exodus (20:1–25:9; 34:8–28; 35:1–19) and Leviticus (11–15; 18–20; 24–27) encompass the agreement between YHWH and Israel at Mt. Sinai. Numbers (5:11–31; 27:6–11; 36:5–9) records supplementary statutes from Sinai and Moab. Deuteronomy (1:1–32:47) is treated in its entirety. And Joshua (24:1–28) provides a compact report of the covenant at Shechem. The 1st millennium BC promises between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 18:3–4) and YHWH and David (2 Sam 7:1–17) are grouped together as reports of personal covenants in the book of Samuel.

Several critical remarks are in order. As the Assembler so eloquently retorts: Endless is the task of assembling books (Eccl 12:12). Because of this, no anthology is complete—even one as expansive and up-to-date as *TLC*. A case in point is that *TLC* does not include the 2009 discovery of a new tablet witnessing a version of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, that is, an Assyrian loyalty oath (*adê*), from Tell Tayinat (Timothy Harrison, "Temples, Tablets, and the Neo-Assyrian Provincial Capital of Kinalia," *Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 6 (2011), pp. 29–36; Jacob Lauinger, "Esarhad-

don's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 64 (2012), pp. 87–123).[2]

The composite text, "Covenant, YHWH & Israel, I (Moses at Mt. Sinai) Extensive Report" (vol. I, pp. 695–768), includes an amalgamation of various texts that *TLC* links together as a single continuous report. This reconstruction is not defended or even discussed. The narrative organization and traditional source divisions are jettisoned without explanation in favor of this newly discovered document. A similar concern may be expressed about the unified assemblage of the various passages from the book of Numbers as a single text without explanation.

Regarding the treaties, law codes, and covenants in the Hebrew Bible, the authors remind us rightly that "These brief texts are … summary reports of such proceedings, as (e.g.) in the vast corpus of documents from Mari" (vol. II, p. 32). Even though the texts are ostensibly from a later time, the language of the texts is reconstructed to an earlier form of Hebrew (?), having been transcribed using an arcane system attempting to eliminate their "1st-millennium features." In practice, this means that the authors omit *plene* vowel-letters by placing non-consonantal *y*, *w*, and *h* in parentheses even with some historic diphthongs, e.g. *b(y)n* (elsewhere, at times, *r(')š* but not with *z't*) and the feminine-gender construct form *mṣb(t)*. The definite direct object marker (*'t*) and the article (*h-*) are likewise excluded as first millennium irritants, but other innovative particles, like the relative particle *'šr*, are not designated in like fashion. Even if one excuses the difficulty of inconsistency, it is unclear as to why these conventions are continued with the 1st-millenium covenants from the book of Samuel.

The authors admit that these volumes are not intended to be new text editions. Nevertheless, the compilation of texts is a desideratum for the wider field of ANE studies and even a must for comparative studies. That said, the textual notes in the second volume present a befuddling picture. They are varied to the extreme. Philological, lexical, cultural, and (rarely) literary commentary provide little by way of explanation or consistent elaboration of the

---

[2] For a helpful comparison of these texts to the book of Deuteronomy, see the treatment in the recent Arnold and Hess volume (Samuel Greengus, "Covenant and Treaty in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East," pp. 91-126, in Bill Arnold and Richard Hess's *Ancient Israel's History. An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

interconnections between different texts or even of the documents themselves. This mélange makes finding relevant discussion concerning the collection or important genre features nearly impossible. Rather, the commentary looks to be a collection of fifty years of sundry notations and unmeaning cavils. The indexes and (color!) comparative charts of vol. II, on the other hand, are a veritable gold mine for the comparatist.

H. H. Hardy II
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, eds. *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture.* Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013. xvi + 490 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433676789. $34.99 (Paperback).

As its subtitle indicates, *In Defense of the Bible* seeks to enter the fray as a valuable introduction to an apologetic for the authority of Scripture. The seventeen individual essays comprising the book are suitably divided into three topical sections, each doing its part in reflecting the characteristic progression of the apologetic task of moving from philosophical and methodological challenges (Part 1) to textual and historical challenges (Part 2), and finally to some of the contemporary exchanges in ethics, science and theology that have bearing on biblical authority and truthfulness (Part 3).

At stake in the opening sequence of essays (Part 1) is whether it is possible to give a rational defense of Scripture's divine inspiration, and by implication the infallibility and complete truthfulness of what it affirms. In the leadoff chapter, R. Douglas Geivett's fictional dialogue sets forth a line of thought for why it is reasonable to think that a benevolent Creator *can* and *would* speak to us (p. 13). Geivett's salient point is that God is a personal and self-conscious agent who, although incorporeal in his being, is able to speak in the physical world similar to the way we use our own minds to act in the physical world (pp. 26–27). Douglas K. Blount's defense of the rationality of inerrancy is based on an objective view of truth (the correspondence theory). Truth is an objective feature of the world that Scripture employs as the basis upon which all its assertions are factually correct. Truth also offers an intuitively recognized existential quality of "excellence" or "measuring up" for Scripture's nonassertive discourse (p. 54). In tackling the matter of higher criticism, Charles L. Quarles focuses on methodology and argues that

the antisupernatural assumptions employed by various scholars of the critical method are "not intrinsic to critical approaches" (p. 64). He concludes with some useful guidelines for navigating the calmer waters of higher criticism through the lens of a robust supernatural worldview (pp. 87–88). Finally, Richard R. Melick, Jr. proposes that Scripture contains a "self-correcting mechanism" that serves to safeguard the reader from erroneous conclusions (p. 90).

Part 2 unlocks a vast array of valuable insights designed to respond to challenges of textual corruption and allegations of deficient textual integrity or historical accuracy. Paul D. Wegner ably identifies the generally innocuous errors one encounters when correctly applying the rules of OT textual criticism (pp. 130–32) and agrees with much current scholarship that some 90 percent of the text is without error and trustworthy (p. 133). Daniel B. Wallace follows in a similar vein and responds specifically to the recent criticisms of Bart Erhman (p. 141), making the case that the vast wealth of manuscript evidence for the NT text makes it the best-attested text of Greek or Latin in the classical world (p. 151). This gives us every reason to think that the NT text is wholly trustworthy, containing over 99 percent of the original wording (p. 160). Terry L. Wilder follows suit and argues that readers of antiquity, far from uncritically accepting forgeries into the biblical canon (p. 168), had clear procedures for detecting their presence and rejecting them (pp. 169–70). Similarly, Mary Jo Sharp offers a procedure for dismantling the so-called parallels between the story of Jesus and the ancient pagan myths (p. 185). In chapters nine and ten Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Paul W. Barnett consider the archaeological evidence and historical research and argue for the historical reliability of the OT and NT, respectively. The closing essay of Part 2 (chapter eleven) finds Douglas S. Huffman skilfully arguing that charges of contradictions are reasonably dispelled when one reflects on Scripture's internal consistency and takes into account mistaken assumptions and misplaced expectations lying behind alleged inconsistencies (p. 269).

Part 3 opens with Matthew Flannagan and Paul Copan defending Scripture against the charge that it teaches ethnic cleansing and genocide. They argue that a loving and just God can have morally sufficient reasons for commanding killing in certain instances, including alleged cases of killing the innocent (p. 324). However, Scripture employs "hagiographic hyperbole" that speaks against excessive literalism, since, often for justifiable reasons, some

among the ethnic groups slated for destruction clearly survive the attempt (p. 310). James M. Hamilton then argues that if one looks through a biblical-theological lens (p. 336), it's not difficult to see that Scripture condones neither slavery nor sexism.

Of particular note is William A. Dembski's defense of a modified version of the *concordist* approach on the question of whether Scripture and science conflict. He argues that there is in fact conflict, but there is also overlap, and where there is overlap there is harmony between the two (pp. 349–50). Dembski clarifies that Scripture contains the information that theology explains. Similarly, science explains the information contained in nature (p. 370). Consequently, if there is any conflict, it would be between theology and science, not between science and Scripture.

Moving to the concluding essays of the section, Craig A. Blaising argues that once we get past the confusion brought on by historical-critical approaches to Scripture (pp. 381–83), we can see that Scripture presents a coherent and reliable theological message (p. 375). Paul D. Wegner, Terry L. Wilder, and Darrell L. Bock argue that we have good criteria for determining that the Protestant canon contains just those sixty-six books that are "well-justified" in light of those criteria. Finally, Steven Cowan argues for the inspiration of Scripture on the basis of a Christological approach (p. 436)

In closing, most will probably judge the merits of a volume on apologetics on its ability to offer a rational and engaging treatment of the issues. In that respect the book succeeds remarkably well. All the same, there may be some tensions on the perceived deliverances of the apologetic task. Blount, for example, thinks that the merits of his argument depend largely on a person's assumptions (p. 61), whereas Dembski argues that "apologetics needs to shake up the unbelief of the unbelieving" on both sides of the camp (p. 350). And finally, Mary Jo Sharp's essay, while offering quite good evidence, is nevertheless non-conclusive and may benefit from a sobriety that leaves open the possibility that others will find it less compelling (p. 200). Whatever these caveats are worth, the serious Christian apologist should find *In Defense of the Bible* a valuable tool to have in the marketplace of ideas.

Thomas A. Provenzola
Lynchburg, Virginia

J. Richard Middleton. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. 332 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0801048685. $26.99 (Paperback).

The subtitle of Richard Middleton's latest book is an appropriate descriptor. In *A New Heaven and a New Earth,* Middleton exerts three hundred pages of energy to show that the typical "pie in the sky" eschatology held by many Christians today is not supported biblically. Instead, Middleton argues, the Bible teaches that God's work of salvation in Christ is for this world, the cosmic order, of which humanity is the head but which includes all of creation. Thus popular notions of cosmic annihilationism, an immaterial heaven, and the like should be discarded and replaced with a properly biblical eschatology, one that is material, holistic, and robust.

Middleton's means of arguing this position is one familiar to those who read biblical theology regularly; after introducing the issue at hand on both a historical and theological level, the argument proceeds first by giving an overview of the biblical story, particularly focusing on the purpose of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and the subsequent purposes of salvation post-fall (Part I, "From Creation to Eschaton"). Then, in Parts II and III, Middleton walks through each section of the Old and New Testaments, respectively, and demonstrates that salvation in every corpus of Scripture is presented as holistic, material, and for the entire creation. Part IV shifts to dealing with "Problem Texts for Holistic Eschatology;" verses like 2 Pet. 3:10–13 are placed under intense scrutiny here to see if any evidence of creation's obliteration or an immaterial afterlife can be found. They are each found wanting in that regard. Finally, Part V explores ethical implications of understanding salvation as material and holistic. The main focus here is on what it means for the kingdom of God to have arrived in Jesus but at the same time to await its consummation at his return. Cultural transformation and material manifestations of the kingdom (e.g. healing) are especially prominent in this exploration. The final chapter asks how Christianity moved from a material and holistic view of salvation, and particularly of the eternal state, to an immaterial view. Middleton points to Augustine and Neo-Platonism as the primary culprits.

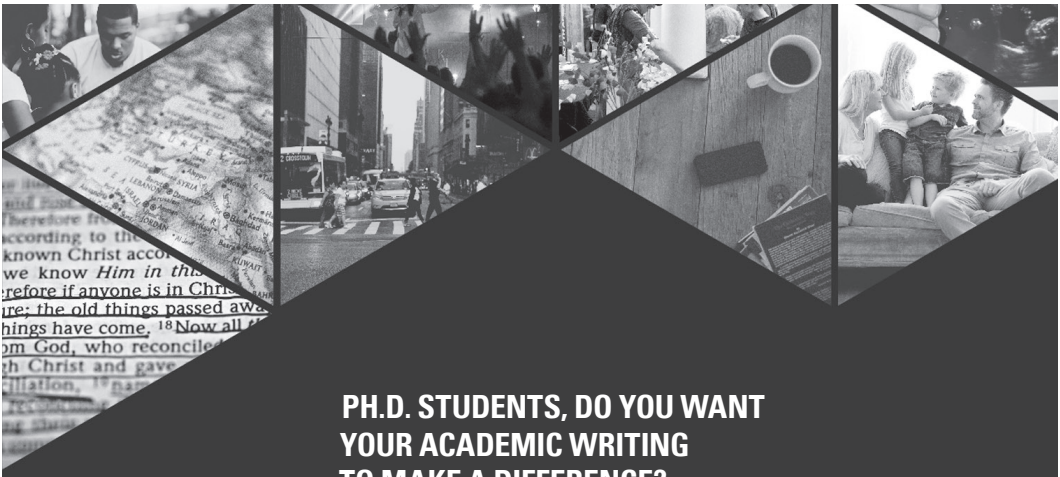
A New Heaven and a New Earth is, on the one hand, somewhat of a rehash of conclusions that N.T. Wright, Al Wolters, Randy Alcorn, and others have made about biblical eschatology. The idea

that salvation is holistic, material, and cosmic is not new, although Middleton at times seems to think that he is publishing somewhat groundbreaking material. This might have been a truer sentiment if the book had been published nearer to when it was contracted almost a decade ago (p. 15), but due to a variety of circumstances Middleton had to delay the completion of the volume. The book certainly makes a contribution though, since in my opinion Middleton's work is much more accessible to an informed lay audience than previous works on the topic. While N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope* may be the exception, other works on holistic salvation and eschatology that come to mind are not as accessible as Middleton's for a variety of reasons (length, complexity of argument, etc.). So, Middleton does contribute to the field here, although it is probably more on the lay level, popularizing biblical eschatology, than it is on the academic level, correcting wrong notions within scholarship.

This is not to say that it is an unimportant or minor contribution; far from it! The eschatology one experiences "from the pews" is often immaterial, lacking in an understanding of its cosmic scope, and many times disconnected from ethics in this life (other than the basic foundation of all Christian ethics, to repent, and to do so before Christ comes). If Middleton's work can right the ship of popular level eschatology, then it will have done the church a great service.

As far as the book's content is concerned, in large part I am in agreement with the portrait that Middleton paints. Two main areas of disagreement remain though. First, Middleton's view of the afterlife in the Old Testament seems beholden to older notions of development in Israelite thought about the resurrection from the dead and the intermediate state. Second, Middleton lays much blame at the feet of Augustine (and later Aquinas) and the influence of Neo-Platonism. Neither of these arguments convinces, and on the latter, Hans Boersma has done much to combat the notion that early and mid-Medieval thought disconnected the "sacred and secular" realms via Neo-Platonic thought (see his *A Heavenly Tapestry*). Still, Middleton's overall argument that the Bible presents salvation for all of creation and therefore does not present an immaterial afterlife, is a convincing and needed one in today's pews.

Matthew Y. Emerson
Shawnee, Oklahoma



PH.D. STUDENTS, DO YOU WANT YOUR ACADEMIC WRITING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The Intersect Project Ph.D. Student Challenge Symposium is designed to engage future teachers, pastors, and church leaders in pursuit of a better understanding of the theology of faith, work, and economics and to facilitate broader discussion in both the church and the academy on the intersection of these key issues.

The Symposium will be a one-day event hosted on the campus of Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, NC on **Friday, June 3, 2016.** Ten doctoral students will be selected from among the applicants to compete for three cash prizes. The winning paper will be published in the Southeastern Theological Review and all other finalists' papers will be published on ***intersectproject.org***.

If you're interested in applying, see if you're eligible and overview the process at ***iamgoi.ng/phdsymposium***.

Visit the new
intersectproject.org

INTERSECT
WHERE FAITH MEETS CULTURE

Southeastern Theological Review
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
120 S. Wingate St.
Wake Forest, NC 27587