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Book Reviews

Duane A. Garrett. *Job.* Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024. xviii + 664 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1683597582. $62.99.

Job is one of the most fascinating and complex books of the Bible. Its theological and philosophical questions have made it one of the most commented upon, and its Hebrew is a challenge even for the most advanced experts. In the Spanish language context, for example, it was one of the most popular biblical books during the medieval period and at the onset of the so-called "Spanish Golden Age," where both religious and non-religious authors used it to explore the problem of suffering within different worldviews. Additionally, the literary depth of the text and its linguistic difficulties make any commentary on Job a monumental task.

Duane Garrett's commentary addresses these challenges with an analytical approach that combines translation, exegesis, and theological reflection. Following a general introduction to the book of Job, the commentary is divided into five parts: The Prologue: Job's Affliction; The Debate; The Wisdom Poem; The Three Great Speeches; and The Epilogue: Job's Vindication. This division reflects Garrett's proposed chiastic structure of the book (pp. 1–2), with chapter 28 ("The Wisdom Poem") serving as the center. He believes this chapter represents the voice of the poet-author of the book, not that of Job or his friends (p. 353).

The introduction to the commentary is clear and well structured. Here Garrett summarizes the central debate in Job on theodicy and warns Christian readers about the difficulty of reconciling Job's innocence with their "all have sinned" theology (p. 41). His observations on the intertextual relationship of Job to other books of the Bible (pp. 7–14) and his proposals on the dating of the book based on these relationships are notable. In addition, he offers a good analysis of the unity and integrity of the text (pp. 16–20) in which his proposals for reorganizing the book differ from those of other scholars. In any event, he makes the cogent point that reorganizing the book's structure does not address or resolve the inherent complexities associated with it. His suggestion that the text may be included within the "apocalyptic" genre (p. 26) is questionable though and should not occupy such a prominent place in the introduction. Similarly, the section on biblical parallels in the introduction, while valuable, overlaps with intertextuality, and the distinction between the two remains unclear.

The commentary follows a structure typically beginning with a general introduction to each passage, outlining its thematic units. These units are then analyzed, and, after a brief introduction, some textual notes are given, if necessary, followed by the translation, exegetical comments, and biblical theological reflections. Garrett also includes sections of application and devotional implications at the end of each passage's analysis, a feature that adds practical value for readers. However, the placement of textual notes before the translation is problematic, since it leads to unnecessary confusion for readers who lack the contextual framework provided by the translation or the text in the original language. This issue appears to be an editorial inconsistency though, because it counters Garrett's stated methodology which places translation before textual notes (p. 46). Moreover, that sequence is observed only in the first thematic unit (Job 1:1–5) but is abandoned thereafter.

Most of the commentary on individual verses tends to be brief, which could limit the depth of analysis. However, one of the strengths of the commentary is the attention it gives to difficult, obscure words and hapax legomena, reflecting the linguistic challenges of Job. Some verse translations seem unnecessarily long though. While Job is a great challenge for any translator, Garrett does not appear to follow a specific translation style; it is sometimes hard to distinguish whether we are facing a functional equivalence translation or a paraphrase. Additionally, specific problems include the following: The translation of גבר as "warrior" in Job 3:3 is misleading. In Job 19:19 he translates וְזֶה־אָהֲבוּנִי נֶהְפְּכוּ־בִי as "And I love this man! They have turned against me." He probably considers that זה is a singular demonstrative, but the translation feels forced in the context of the verse. Then, in Job 42:6, וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־עָפָר וָאֵפֶר is translated as "And I change my mind concerning dust and ashes." This does not make sense. A more plausible translation is Edward Greenstein's "I take pity on dust and ashes!" or simply, "I recant and relent over dust and ashes." Another example is Job 12:2 (p. 186), where his decision diminishes the weight of the phrase and strips away part of the irony inherent in the Hebrew text.

The analysis of Elihu's speeches is helpful but is not without its inaccuracies (p. 414). For Garrett he is an arrogant young man, but I understand the author of Job to skillfully portray a young man who makes all the mistakes that an intelligent, passionate, and inexperienced young person would make in front of a group of older, experienced men. Finally, the introduction to the divine speeches (chaps. 38–42) is surprisingly brief, especially considering the lengthy introductions offered in other

sections, such as Job 28 and the speeches of Elihu.

In any event, Garrett concludes his commentary with an insightful reflection: the accuser

> was wrong to think that the fear of God is no more than a prosperity gospel, [but] it is also wrong to think that God desires his people to be in a state of permanent affliction, or even to suppose that God's decision to bless or afflict are arbitrary, having no more purpose than blind lock. (p. 580)

Together with the other closing comments, this reflects a profound consideration of Job's innocence and divine purpose, offering a balanced view of the problem of pain.

Despite some debatable translation choices and too-brief treatment of certain topics, Garrett's commentary is a notable contribution to the study of Job. It offers detailed linguistic analysis and effectively links interpretation with theology, making it a helpful resource for those wishing to delve into this complex biblical book.

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James M. Hamilton Jr. and Matthew Damico. *Reading the Psalms as Scripture*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024. iv + 152 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1683597766. $19.99.

This work by James Hamilton and Matthew Damico strives to present an accessible and coherent approach to reading the Psalter as Scripture. Their case is presented at the popular level and represents the overflow of Hamilton's work on the Psalms in the Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary series. The combined authorial insights represent pastorally rich and biblically saturated ideas that are meant to serve the Church, from two men committed to caring for their local church.

The primary argument of *Reading the Psalms* is that the Psalter, rather than a "haphazard collection," is an "intentionally arranged anthology" (p. 4). They defend this argument chapter-by-chapter from the level of individual Psalms and their contents up to the relationships between the five books of the Psalter to show how the books form an "impressionistic metanarrative" that was appropriated by the biblical authors (p. 53).

Reading the Psalms contains an introduction, nine chapters, and a review of seven theses that summarize the authors' argument regarding the intentional craftsmanship of the Psalter. After the introduction, the chapters progress through the topics of the Psalms as a book, superscriptions,

individual compositions, the structure of the Psalter, intertextuality, messianic typology, and singing psalms. While the argument is built intentionally and reflects intense, scholarly study, footnotes are sparse, and the authors' case moves forward with minimal repetition and virtually no engagement with counterpoints. However, the argument is clear and the content is rich.

The work has many merits. As mentioned, a noticeable strength is the straightforward and distilled presentation of the material at an accessible level. For example, the chapter discussing the structure of the Psalter provides a clear explanation of its organization, how the doxologies and superscriptions reflect the author's intent, and leaves the reader with an awareness of the "impressionistic narrative." To increase the work's usefulness to the Church, *Reading the Psalms* is rife with practical implications and local-church applications of the preceding material (e.g., an entire chapter dedicated to singing). Many chapters conclude with application-oriented discussions rather than delaying discussions to a closing chapter, a feature that serves practitioners (e.g., pp. 77, 103).

Though the book is brief, the reader gains a clearer sense of the Psalms' integrity within themselves and the larger canon of Scripture, along with how reading the Psalms as argued should begin to impact modern Christians. However, this same brevity produces some minor challenges: Terms fundamental to the authors' argument are left undefined (e.g., "impressionistic"), and some aspects of hermeneutics are generally assumed rather than grounded or defended (e.g., typology). Some explicit sense of these authorial particularities on topics fundamental to their argument would at least show the audience "their cards," in a good-natured way, allowing convinced readers to grow and further apply these same principles elsewhere. Also, unexposed laity are likely to leave these brief descriptions believing there is consensus where there is not. Finally, the fundamental structure of Hamilton and Damico's approach is unquestionably framed around the superscriptions within the book of Psalms. They briefly defend the superscriptions' inspiration and legitimacy but considering how integral they are to the approach advocated, more discussion is warranted, especially given the lack of scholarly consensus on the issue (pp. 27–29).

Notwithstanding such minor deficiencies, *Reading the Psalms* is well worth the investment for pastors and laity who generally desire to reap the benefits of the Psalms at a high level without struggling through a lengthy, critical commentary. This book serves as a helpful companion to both average Bible study and more critical research because it encourages readers to maintain a view of the forest while exploring the trees. In sum, Hamilton and Damico have produced a helpful work by and for the

Church.

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John H. Walton. *The Lost World of the Prophets: Old Testament Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature in Ancient Context*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2024. 183 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1514004890. $22.00.

John H. Walton provides another installment to his *Lost World* series with this volume focusing on prophecy in the Old Testament. The typical structure of these books is to list a series of propositions through which Walton attempts to reconstruct the world lost to his readers. In this installment, he helps them recover the biblical world of prophecy. The work contains sixteen propositions related to prophecy in the Old Testament, organized around five major movements: prophecy in the ancient Near East; the institution of prophecy; the literature of prophecy; methodological and interpretive issues; and apocalyptic. His concluding chapter provides a strategy for reading prophecy.

Walton argues that the modern church focuses its interpretation along two main ideas and therefore loses the message of the prophets in the process. The first idea arises when "prophecy is studied with a focus on eschatology—the shape and sequence of the end times" (p. 2). The second idea occurs when "prophecy is used for the purposes of apologetics, most commonly to prove that Jesus is God" (p. 3). Thus, these two foci see "fulfilment as the message" (p. 3).

Walton proposes that the intent of the author is central to understanding God's message today. This intent is lost when interpretation primarily focuses on eschatology and fulfillment. He suggests that the way to recover the message of the prophets is to set them in their literary, historical, theological, and cultural milieu. Understanding this fourfold context can help the reader of prophecy establish the intent of God's message to its original audience, and for us too. From this, all sixteen propositions flow to help the reader understand the original setting of the prophetic authors and therefore hear God's word to us.

Overall, Walton's book serves as a good introduction into the world of biblical prophecy for the uninitiated. His work acquaints the reader with the concept of prophecy in the ancient Near Eastern environment. Since his book is intended for people within the church, it is important to note that he is not saying that OT prophecy is just like its ancient Near Eastern counterparts though. He explains:

> As always, [my] approach is not going to assume that the people of Israel thought exactly the same as their neighbors, but that broader context should be the default. That is, if the Bible does not demonstrate a distinctiveness on a particular point, it is more likely that the Israelites thought like those around them more than that they thought like we do. (p. 19)

By saying this, he both clarifies the distinctiveness of OT prophecy and demonstrates its shared cultural backdrop. Understanding prophecy in its original context, he argues, helps avoid over-interpreting the prophet's message.

For Walton, the message of the prophet is not the same as fulfillment. This is, perhaps, the aspect of the book that will most likely provoke push-back from a church audience. However, this resistance may stem from misunderstanding his intent. He warns against merely interpreting a prediction that has been fulfilled, especially regarding passages that are often labeled Messianic. He gives attention to several examples, most notably Mic 5:2 (Matt 2:6, "And you Bethlehem in the land of Judah"), and Hos 11:1 (Matt 2:15, "Out of Egypt I called my Son"). Some may misread him as dismissing their Messianic nature. However, he wants to distinguish the prophet's message for his immediate audience in contrast to our modern concept of Messianic fulfillment.

Moreover, Walton wants to avoid a minimalistic approach, by which "only the fulfillments that are cited in the New Testament are considered credible" Messianic prophecies (p. 110). He also eschews the opposite—of seeing Messianic prophecies on every page. He elucidates,

> We can see that the New Testament shows much more interest in revealing fulfillment than in a text-in-context interpretation of the Old Testament prophets. This does not subordinate the fulfillment, nor does it undervalue the contributions of the New Testament. I only suggest that we need to recognize the different tasks that they have. (p. 115)

In other words, he affirms the value of both the OT and NT contexts, emphasizing the importance of interpreting each on its own terms—a welcome concept for this reviewer.

There is much lacking in Walton's work in terms of interaction with more critical issues related to prophecy, apocalyptic literature, and the use of the OT in the New Testament. But his work is clearly intended for a more popular audience rather than an academic one. He stays well within the bounds he has set for his intended readership. Some may criticize his

exclusion of critical discussions, but those would have resulted in a fundamentally different work, aimed at a different audience.

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Tremper Longman III. *The Old Testament as Literature: Foundations for Christian Interpretation*. Approaching the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. xii + 292 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1540961310. $34.99.

This volume is the first in Baker Academic's new series, Approaching the Old Testament. Subsequent volumes, still under development, will address the OT and history, and OT theology. Tremper Longman III presents himself as a biblical scholar, rather than a literature expert, but this first book provides tools for a reflective literary exploration of the Hebrew Bible and integrates brief historical surveys with expositions of current interpretive trends. The book is structured into three parts, covering Literary Theory and the Conventions of Biblical Narrative and Poetry, an Analysis of Illustrative Prose-Narrative Texts, and an Analysis of Illustrative Poetic Texts.

Longman affirms the Bible as the Word of God and asserts that biblical interpretation must focus not only on the voices of human authors but also on the voice of the Divine Author (p. 2). The literary shape of the text aids the reader in understanding the author's intent, and he implies that literary genre is an integral part of divine inspiration (which is key to understanding the meaning of the text, p. 26).

The first part begins with a presentation of the dynamics between author, text, and reader (Chapter 1), raising questions about the necessity of knowing the author's identity to interpret the text (p. 10). While Longman's exploration of the text-reader relationship is interesting, his generalizations about the influence of factors such as age, gender, or ethnicity on reader perception, lack contextual depth. For instance, in Caribbean or Indigenous contexts, biblical theological readings are mostly shaped by meanings imposed during the first missionary campaigns, not by ethnic, environmental, or gender factors.

Chapter 2, one of the most valuable, traces a journey from the historical-critical method to ideological interpretations, and explores the current landscape of literary studies of the OT. Chapter 3 examines literary genres as tools for interpretation, briefly focusing on the history of genre scholarship in biblical studies. A notable shortcoming here is the author's decision to start genre analysis by using a psalm, without first grounding the

discussion with examples from modern or contemporary literature. Although this is addressed in later chapters, in-depth exploration of specific genres along with their characteristics is initially lacking. In any event, chapter 4 analyzes "narrative prose" as a genre, presenting a historical overview of narratology, tracing the literary journey from author to reader, and then analyzing this genre within the biblical corpus. The section on "focalization" is one of the best contributions in this chapter, offering a brief yet thorough summary of the term and its use in narrative theory.

Chapter 5 introduces biblical poetry with an approach accessible even to readers new to the subject. However, one problematic aspect of Longman's methodology is his asserted "emphasis on the semantic level, the level of meaning" (p. 107). He seeks to distinguish between structures (which he calls "levels") that are syntactic, poetic, and semantic. While distinctions between the first two are traditional, semantics is present in both. Thus, the idea of a "semantic level" is confusing, since meaning permeates the entire structure. Chapter 6 enriches the analysis though, by defining and providing examples of intertextuality within the books of the OT, equipping readers with tools for personal research.

Longman then transitions to the second part, focusing on prose-narrative analysis, with examples from the Torah (chapter 7) and the historical books (chapter 8). Here he addresses theological challenges with poise but sometimes reads too much in the text.

Finally, the third part analyzes poetry in the psalms (chapter 9), wisdom literature (chapter 10) and epic poetry, including poetic passages in the prophetic books (chapter 11). In this section, Longman's use of a consistent structure (genre, poetics, and voice) facilitates comprehension and application of the analytical principles—a feature that would have been helpful in the second part as well. His analysis highlights the literary and theological richness of poetic texts, though some sections would benefit from greater contextual depth.

In sum, *The Old Testament as Literature* provides a good foundation for those beginning to study the Hebrew Bible from a literary perspective. However, it also presents certain weaknesses. First, it does not apply exercises in literary analysis to non-biblical texts before addressing the OT. This would have facilitated a more natural transition, and it is precisely the criticism made by C. S. Lewis, which Longman himself cites: "If [a critic] tells me that something in the Gospel is legend or romance, I want to know how many legends and romances he has read" (p. 25). Second, there are some conceptual errors. For example, classifying Gen 1–11 under the genre "figurative depiction of a historical event" (chapter 7) does not align with any recognized literary genres. Similarly, his definition of

plot as "discourse" is problematic. Third, his "literary readings" lack conclusions. Although he justifies this decision (p. 264), readers would benefit from conclusive reflections in his analyses.

All told though, Longman's exploration of the various ways the Bible has been studied as literature throughout history, his exposition of different literary approaches applied to the OT, and his coverage of available and relevant literature on the subject make this volume a valuable contribution.

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Jason S. DeRouchie. *Delighting in the Old Testament: Through Christ and for Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. 368 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433591228. $32.99.

Most Christians typically turn to Ephesians and 2 Corinthians instead of Ecclesiastes and 2 Chronicles when given a choice for their devotional life and ministry practice. However, a pattern of neglecting the OT is unhealthy for believers because they rob themselves of three-quarters of God's revelation of himself and his ways, and their understanding of the NT is diminished. Jason DeRouchie, Research Professor of Old Testament at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes to help readers see the vital importance of the OT for Christians today (p. xix). *Delighting in the Old Testament* is a culmination of decades of research and writing on the role of Christ in biblical interpretation (p. xxii).

In sum, DeRouchie wants "to help Christians make connections to Christ and practical application to the Christian life from every page of the Old Testament" (p. 34). Christian leaders and laypeople are his target audience. The footnotes allow advanced readers to see his influences and dive deeper into his methodology, while the practical questions at the end of each chapter are helpful for personal or small-group study.

The book has four parts, including an introduction and conclusion—which should not be skipped. His introduction gives ten reasons why the OT must not be ignored by Christians. In Part 1, "Reading Well," DeRouchie shows how Jesus helps believers interpret the OT. He supplies readers with a biblical-theological foundation for a Christocentric interpretation of the OT. In Part 2, "Seeing Well," he offers seven ways the biblical authors model reading the OT to envision Christ. Readers will find Chapter 6, "The Message of Genesis and the Hope of Christ," to be a helpful case study on how to put the hermeneutical approach into practice.

In Part 3, "Hoping Well," DeRouchie gives key principles that guided the NT writers when they claim OT assurances and show how Jesus fulfills promises by maintaining, transforming, or completing them. Taking hold of the commitments of God in Christ appropriately fuels sanctification but mishandling them leads to detrimental results. In this vein, readers will find his polemic against Prosperity Theology useful (pp. 141–51).

DeRouchie's Part 4, "Living Well," evaluates various perspectives on Old Covenant law and gives four case studies to show how Jesus maintains, transforms, or annuls the law. He asserts, "The Mosaic law does not *directly* bind the Christian in a legal manner, but we treat all the OT laws as profitable and instructive when we read them through the lens of Christ" (p. 193). He takes a progressive-covenantal approach to the Mosaic Law compared to a dispensational, classic covenantal, or theonomic viewpoint. Readers will be helped by his critique of general equity theonomy, recently popularized by Douglas Wilson and Jeff Durbin, and Christian Nationalism, popularized by Stephen Wolfe (pp. 219–28). He concludes the book by providing seven tips for delighting in the OT.

DeRouchie maintains a dual thesis: First, he argues the OT is Christian Scripture which God gave with Christians in mind. The faithful remnant in the OT understood many of God's mysteries. Still, even the OT writers believed most of their words would be more meaningful for those in the Messianic age than their current generation (p. 34). Second, he argues faith in Christ alone supplies the necessary light to see and savor the OT. Consequently, Jesus's appearance in salvation history gives us the essential lens for a complete understanding and appropriation of the divine OT author's intended meaning (pp. 16–17).

Finally, DeRouchie persuasively advocates for a redemptive-historical, Christocentric hermeneutical approach to OT interpretation (p. 117). He describes his methodology clearly:

> An approach that is *redemptive-historical* is one that accounts for how God's work and purposes in Scripture progress, integrate, and climax in Christ, and how all faithful biblical interpretation must account for the way Jesus's life, death, and resurrection inform and influence everything God is doing in space and time. (p. 73)

His use of the term Christocentric is loaded though. First, biblical interpretation and application must be connected to the cross to be Christian. Second, Jesus's life, death, and resurrection inform the message of what is already in the OT, *and* the entire OT points toward its fulfillment in Christ. To be clear, DeRouchie's redemptive-historical, Christocentric hermeneutical approach is distinct from those offered by Walter Kaiser and Abner Chou (grammatical-historical), Daniel Block (Christotelic), and Abraham Kuruvilla (Christiconic).

Do your OT hermeneutics and ministry practice align with the truth that God created all things by the Son, through the Son, and for the Son (p. 25)? Moreover, does your homiletical practice imitate the apostles' pattern of preaching Christ from all the Scriptures? Pick up DeRouchie's book to say yes as you grow in your delight of the OT and as you do it *through* and *for* Christ.

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Michael R. Licona. *Jesus, Contradicted: Why the Gospels Tell the Same Story Differently*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. 288 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310159599. $34.99.

In this volume, Michael Licona addresses the specific literary challenge that the four canonical Gospels raise when read alongside one another: Although strikingly similar in overall focus and narrative shape, they often differ in ways that call out for explanation. As he engages this issue, Licona draws upon personal experience, an apologetic framework, extensive historical research, and close textual analysis. This volume represents an accessible articulation of positions he develops at greater length and detail in his previous works.

To begin, it might be helpful to state directly that this review disputes the book's central theological thesis. Contra Licona, the nature of the differences between the Gospels does not require a substantive revision of the classical meaning of the inspiration or inerrancy of Scripture. Accordingly, this brief review's summary and comments focus on the insights of the work and their value for evangelicals who might ultimately disagree with the conclusions.

An important strength of this volume is its emphasis on intellectual honesty. Licona begins with an account of his personal disorientation when confronted with the synoptic problem for the first time (pp. 1–7). He also shares correspondence from skeptics and believers as they have wrestled with this issue (pp. 224–35). He helpfully illustrates the importance of maintaining a conceptual space for Christians to honestly grapple with textual, theological, and historical difficulties they find challenging or troubling when reading the Bible.

The goal, in this sense, is to *inoculate* believers against skeptical falsehood, not insulate or *isolate* them from any exposure to critical viewpoints. In this vein, Licona makes a compelling case that the truth of Christianity is not shaken by disagreement, even in theologically significant matters. As he asserts throughout the book, "If the resurrection happened, then

Christianity is true!" (pp. 6–7). This bedrock starting point provides a strong conceptual foundation for believers to stand upon as they encounter difficulties, and weigh competing theological claims. However, considering all that the biblical texts claim, I would want to say *more* than this, certainly not *less*.

Another helpful aspect of Licona's book is his ready access to the complicated synoptic problem itself. The opening chapters in particular show the likelihood of a literary relationship between the Synoptic Gospels, that each author made distinct compositional decisions, that simple harmonization cannot solve every textual tension, and that Mark's Gospel was written before the others (pp. 7–50). Additionally, a working understanding of the synoptic problem can help one when examining Gospel differences.

Historically, Licona's comparative analysis strengthens the current consensus among NT scholars that the canonical Gospels are a form of ancient biography. He asserts that readers should take more seriously "the implications of the biographical genre on our reading of the Gospels" (p. 13). Accordingly, the bulk of his work studies the features and "compositional techniques" of ancient biographers (chiefly the *Lives* of the ancient historian, Plutarch) and demonstrates that the Gospel authors use these same techniques in their own writings (pp. 82–168). His central thesis is that "many items in the Gospels become clearer when the Gospels are read through a lens that has first-century literary conventions in view" (p. 18).

Theologically, Licona interrogates key affirmations of Scripture's divine inspiration and comprehensive truthfulness. His central contention is that any view of Scripture should be consistent with what can be observed in the biblical texts (pp. 190–91). This principle, alongside his comparative historical analysis of the Gospels, drives his revision (or "fine-tuning") of the doctrine of inspiration. He thus adopts a "flexible inerrancy" position (i.e., the overall message of Scripture is without error, but not necessarily every word).

The book is written for those who have little or no prior knowledge of the synoptic problem or the key ideas within a theology of Scripture. This emerges from the comments at the end of many chapters encouraging a reader who may feel troubled, disoriented, or uncomfortable with the basic information presented (e.g., pp. 18–19; 145–47). Such readers would not have encountered Gospel differences and would think of inspiration only in terms of strict dictation (regardless of what they've been taught). On the one hand, this feature of the book is helpful (and certainly needed in our increasingly post-Christian culture). On the other hand, though, what is often needed is not a rejection or substantive revision of

classical doctrines like inspiration or the central affirmations of inerrancy but rather the *articulation* and *clarification* of these theological claims. Most evangelical proponents of these doctrines teach neither a dictation theory of inspiration nor a view of inerrancy that cannot account for textual features like awkward grammar or particularities of genre expectations.

In any event, Licona's work deepens many historical insights on the Gospels as a form of ancient biography. His book is also a model of accessible writing to a broad audience. Even if one is not as optimistic about the explanatory power of biographical devices nor as pessimistic about the value of any kind of reasoned harmonization, there is much in this work that is useful for studying the four Gospels.

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Thomas R. Schreiner. *Christ Crucified: A Theology of Galatians*. New Testament Theology. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. xv + 158 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978–1433581304. $24.99.

The New Testament Theology series fills a literary space between traditional commentaries and expositional studies. The series addresses each NT book's theological contributions while incorporating the historical background and literary connections within the book, the author's corpus, and the entire biblical canon. Thomas Schreiner's work on Galatians does not veer too far into background details nor falter into academic minutia when addressing debated matters. Rather, this monograph excellently links academic interest in biblical history and inquiry with the theological significance of Paul's early letter.

Schreiner first considers the occasion for Paul's writing. He reconstructs the characteristics of those seeking to undercut Paul's ministry and message before progressing to the major Pauline theological claims within the letter. His use of mirror reading does not overreach in his sketch of the opponents, as he connects Paul's refutations and teachings to the apparent situation within the Galatian churches. The opponents sought to undercut the validity of Paul's gospel message, claiming it was not an accurate representation of the Jerusalem apostles from whom Paul must have received it. Paul, therefore, devoted the first large portion of the letter to a defense of the independence and legitimacy of his message, which was verified by—not received from—the other apostles.

Part 2 is the core of Schreiner's monograph, focusing upon the components and contents of Paul's gospel proclaimed to the Galatians. The author presents his most worthwhile insights here. He delivers thorough

comprehension of Scripture and ongoing academic conversations with fluidity, in-depth textual evidence, and compelling reason. Although disagreements within academia permeate his discourse, they never become the focal point of his elucidation of Galatians. He concisely yet sufficiently addresses Pauline assertions on circumcision, the Law, salvation history, covenants, and consistent moral living, demonstrating how these teachings radiate from the hub of the sacrifice of Christ. He persuasively argues that Paul viewed the death of Christ as the determining crux of history, theology, and practice for God's people.

In the concluding chapters, Schreiner shows how Paul's treatise on Abraham reveals the church's essential nature as the people of God, establishing boundaries and expectations for everyday life, including how the church eats from the same table, regardless of whether one is circumcised or not. He determines that Paul uses the latter chapters of Galatians to characterize key outcomes of being Christian, giving examples of what it looks like to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh (which he identifies as the natural state of unregenerate people). The new way of living for God's people is by the Spirit's leading, who empowers righteousness in desire and action, with effects for the individual, the community, and structures within the church.

Schriener includes his own review of another book as an appendix. He apparently shares his notes on John Barclay's 2015 monograph *Paul and the Gift* because he believes it will advance academic debates and discussions on Galatians beyond the new perspective introduced by E. P. Sanders in 1977 (cf. p. 76). Here he shares both his appreciation and critique of Barclay's contribution.

Schreiner's monograph functions as an insightful and articulate theological foray into the participants, themes, and arguments of Galatians, including academic debates surrounding these matters. He fairly critiques the various views and offers his stances according to the biblical evidence. His Galatians installment in the New Testament Theology series is accessibly written for pastors, seminarians, and lay people interested in biblical theology. It is easily digested with excellent summaries provided after each chapter. These do not give away all the treasures of the chapters but sufficiently provide the author's main points and outline. I would argue that this contribution to the New Testament Theology series is a sound required reading option for a class on Galatians. It should also be strongly considered as supplemental reading for an introductory course on biblical theology.

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Matthew V. Novenson. *Paul and Judaism at the End of History*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2024. xiv + 306 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1009019354. $39.99.

Matthew Novenson, adopting a perspective akin to the Paul-within-Judaism hermeneutic, seeks to illumine the age-old interpretive deadlock of Paul's relationship to Judaism. He argues that the premier way of understanding this relationship is through the apostle's distinctly Jewish understanding of ethnicity and eschatology. Paul is a Jew who does not understand "Judaism" as we moderns do, and he never forsakes his ethnic identity: "Judaism is the air Paul breathes, so to speak, the water he swims in" (p. 4). In fact, Paul's Jewishness constitutes the precise difficulty of interpreting him, because it provides the foundation for his understanding of time. Because of the coming, death, and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus, Paul sees the re-creation of the cosmos as a present eschatological fact—that is, Paul sees the new creation as a present reality.

The author outlines his reading in Chapter 1, where he briefly discusses the two terms driving his study, ethnicity and eschatology. He makes it clear that his endeavor in *Paul and Judaism* is a historical one, concerned with Paul's thought in his first century situation. He focuses his study on the seven "undisputed letters," certain not to sit well with some readers, but offers a nuanced discussion of the Pauline authorship dispute and the thorny historical issues behind it. In Chapter 2, Novenson discusses the term Ἰουδαϊσμός and the significance of its scarcity in Paul's corpus. This previously published chapter (Mark W. Elliott et al., eds., *Galatians and Christian Theology*, 2015) presents a riveting discussion of Paul's brief but famous autobiographical statement in Gal 1:13–14. In Chapter 3 the author addresses an important question, virtually taken for granted: "Who actually says justification from works of the law?" (p. 50). He sorts through various data points to demonstrate that no extant author held the view of justification from works of the law. Rather, this construction is "Paul's own polemical invention" (p. 76), used to argue against gentiles-in-Christ taking on the law, who thereby reject the Messiah and eliminate redemptive progress.

Chapter 4, "Paul versus the Gentiles," is perhaps the most important in the book. Novenson argues that gentiles-in-Christ are the primary audience of Paul's dispute over gentile circumcision, in contrast to the oft-held assumption that Jewish "judaizers" were compelling the gentiles to take on the law. He makes a persuasive case that gentiles are at the heart of the gentile circumcision controversy, not "judaizing" Jews. Any reader interested in Paul's audience must interact with Novenson's contribution here. Chapter 5, in a similar tone, is sure to ruffle the feathers of many a

reformed Christian though (a group to which the current reviewer belongs). Entitled "The Legalism of Paul," it features the author's in-depth study of the thorny and slippery concept of "legalism." He concludes that "measured by the rule people otherwise use when they speak of 'legalism,' Paul was a legalist" (p. 134).

In Chapter 6 Novenson examines Paul's ethnic chauvinism: From beginning to end, Paul understood Jews to be constitutionally virtuous and gentiles constitutionally wicked. Only after the indwelling of God's pneuma do gentiles begin to do good. He then moves in Chapter 7 to the issue of "true Israel" or "spiritual Israel," and through careful textual analysis argues that Paul does not apply either term to those gentiles who are in Christ, despite modern English translations. In Chapter 8 the author argues that Paul understood the resurrection of the righteous to be a present reality, which was always promised to the Jews but has now, by God's mercy, been offered to the gentiles. Chapter 9 concludes with his discussion of the law and its place in Paul's eschatology. When humans become God's pneumatic creatures, the law adapts to their new state of being—a new "righteousness that agrees with but also transcends the righteousness prescribed by Moses" (p. 241).

Novenson's reading of the difficult problem of Paul and his relationship to "Judaism" is fresh and meticulously researched. There are certainly idiosyncrasies in his treatment of Paul, but any Pauline interpreter must reckon with his careful scholarship. His book is intended for an academic audience and would be a definite challenge for someone unfamiliar with the scholarly conversation. Nevertheless, his writing style is accessible and precise, rendering the book an enjoyable read. Overall, *Paul and Judaism at the End of History* is a first-rate historical study in Paul's letters, certain to provoke serious thought on Paul's thoroughgoing messianism, understanding of ethnicity, and eschatological viewpoint.

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Patrick Gray, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. xx + 430 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0190904333. $178.00.

Although the Catholic Epistles (CE) have traditionally received considerably less attention than other portions of the NT canon, scholarship relating to these writings has steadily increased in recent decades. In addition to a growing body of publications treating major themes and hermeneutical issues related to the CE, recent studies have sought to provide a fuller picture of the historical background and reception of each work.

Designed to address the recent developments in the evaluation of the CE and Hebrews—a writing often studied alongside the CE despite its historical connection to the Pauline corpus—is this recent addition to the Oxford Handbook series. As explained by the editor, Patrick Gray, the volume "seeks to assess the relevance of these works to various questions that are often posed to other parts of the NT canon, to report on the current state of scholarship devoted to the interpretive issues they raised, and to survey their rich and often overlooked afterlives" (p. x).

Arranged in four major units, the handbook contains twenty-four essays produced by a diverse body of scholars from around the world. Some contributors hold more traditional perspectives on foundational subjects, such as the authorship and dating of the CE, while others view some or all the writings as later products of church history with no direct link to the apostolic community. Each essay is written in a concise and accessible manner with notes kept to a minimum. Included at the end of each essay is a helpful "References" section that includes an up-to-date bibliography of useful sources.

Part 1, "General Issues," address a wide range of subjects relating to Hebrews or the CE. Most of the essays in this section address foundational historical matters. These include treatments on major textual issues (Thomas Kraus), the canonical reception of the writings (Darian Lockett and Clare Rothschild), the subject of authorship (Armin Baum), the relationship between Hebrews and the CE to Pauline Christianity (Bryan Dyer), what the writings reveal about the early relationship between Christianity and Judaism (Matt Jackson-McCabe), and the eschatological hopes of early Christians (Simon Gathercole).

Part 2 addresses specific issues relating to the study of Hebrews. The first essay in the unit (Kenneth Schenck) provides a helpful survey of a wide range of contested issues related to the writing's background such as its literary features, authorship, dating, the intended readers, and offers a brief treatment of recent scholarship on the theology of Hebrews. Also included in the unit are essays on the controversial subject of supersessionism (Philip Church), the use of Scripture by the author of Hebrews (Susan Docherty), and the way the author of Hebrews portrays the atonement of Christ (David Moffitt).

The essays contained in Part 3 address issues frequently discussed in secondary literature on the CE. The first four essays explore contested issues related to the background and theology of one or more of the CE (Alicia Batten on James; Duane Watson on 1 Peter; Travis Williams on 2 Peter and Jude; William Wright on the Johannine Epistles). The unit also contains an essay on the relationship between James and the historical Jesus (Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr), as well as essays on the ecclesiology (David

Downs) and eschatology (Katie Marcar) of the CE.

The fourth and final unit addresses the reception of Hebrews and the CE. The essays provide an intriguing discussion of how various theological subjects were understood during various periods of church history and how the writings have shaped Christian thought and practice. The first four essays provide a historical survey of the reception of one or more writings (Jason Whitlark on Hebrews; David Gowler on James; Patrick Gray and Adam Booth on the Petrine Epistles and Jude; Alicia Myers on the Johannine Epistles). Also included are essays on the treatment of Hebrews at the Council of Trent (Alan Mitchell) and how the CE and Hebrews have influenced creeds, confessional statements, and worship in the Protestant tradition (Lance Peeler).

As is the case with any project of this scope, readers will naturally find some essays of greater interest or value than others and resonate to various degrees with the conclusions drawn by each scholar. Considered as a whole, however, the volume makes a significant contribution to the study of Hebrews and the CE. Those wishing to explore specific issues related to the background and message of these writings or become more informed on recent developments in biblical scholarship will find the volume a valuable resource. Unfortunately, the hefty retail price of the hardback edition will naturally limit the work's readership. We can hope that Oxford University Press will release a more economically priced paperback edition soon.

Benjamin P. Laird
Lynchburg, Virginia

C. Kavin Rowe. *Method, Context, and Meaning in New Testament Studies*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 332 pp. Hardback. 978-0802877598. $69.99.

_____. *Studies in Luke, Acts, and Paul*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 384 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0802882745. $75.99.

In these volumes, Kavin Rowe brings together thirty-one essays from across his career that highlight his substantive contribution to the fields of hermeneutics, NT studies, and the history of early Christianity. Rowe has a direct writing style that matches his methodological clarity and his penchant for precision. These features serve his analysis of the often complex and technical issues of history and exegesis.

One way to characterize these essays is with the terms *conversation* and *comparison*. A dialogic quality enlivens the methodological discussion in these studies from several distinct angles. There is serious engagement

with various biblical texts and interaction with a wide range of dialogue partners. His series of essays on Luke and Acts, for instance, usually includes the close reading of a particular biblical passage that serves as an anchoring focal point through which he engages broader biblical-theological themes (see *Studies*, 3–72, 110–214).

A good example of this is his treatment of Acts 2:36, a text that speaks of God *making* Jesus "both Lord and Christ" (*Studies*, 179–200). In his analysis, Rowe situates this text within the narrative framework of Luke-Acts and notes the tension generated by the fact that Luke has already identified Jesus as Lord in strategic ways in the preceding narrative. He then surveys the history of interpretation from Arian interpreters to historical-critical commentators and then articulates the "Christological coherence" of this passage (*Studies*, 179). His argument for a confessional approach to the discipline of NT studies is likewise rooted in the exegesis of strategic passages about the nature of truth alongside interaction with contemporary scholarship and the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (*Method*, 3–19).

Rowe also includes several essays that state the big idea or the specific thesis of one of his larger works and then proceed to interact with critical responses to that larger work. These include his study of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, especially in relation to Empire studies (*Studies*, 3–23), the theological truth claims of the book of Acts (*Studies*, 95–109), his narrative analysis of Jesus as Lord in Luke's Gospel (*Studies*, 73–94), and his examination of the Stoic tradition (*Method*, 155–78). These entries provide helpful précis of his primary arguments in the larger works. For readers already familiar with those volumes, these interactions provide clarification and depth of understanding. For Rowe, this further engagement with critics is an "attempt to reason together in search of common wisdom" (*Studies*, 95).

Alongside conversation, he also endeavors to complexify and clarify the art and science of comparative analysis. In particular, he develops his proposal that certain traditions constitute "grammars of life" that integrate an array of historical, theological, textual, and social dimensions (*Method*, 155). To compare traditions such as these (Christianity, Judaism, or Stoicism), this comprehensive element must be considered. Rowe observes in this vein that "comparison between strong traditions of life asks us what we make of the truth claims of others" and therefore requires us "to specify what posture of reasoning *we* take toward *them* and what the consequences are of our rejection/acceptance" (*Method*, 156). For him, "comparison is finally a question of truth, of relationships, of politics, and thus of practical reason." Accordingly, the act of comparing comprehensive traditions "questions the shape of our existence, both what we've

been and what we will become" (*Method*, 156).

In other words, more is at stake in this kind of historical comparative analysis than simply descriptive data-gathering and conceptual synthesis. For Rowe, comparative inquiry is "less a question about a specific method than it is about being human in a world with competing accounts of what that is" (*Method*, 200). When examining mutually exclusive traditions that are integrated into an entire way of viewing the world, the interpreter or historian requires extensive time and a vantage point of considerable range. Practically, then, "to study alternative traditions as an academic is to learn patience" (*Method*, 178). His central claim about comparative inquiry in the ancient world is provocative and has prompted rejoinder and criticism from a variety of methodological angles. However, he summarizes many of these criticisms and responds in several essays that were originally portions of published forums on his work (see especially *Method*, 179–215).

A final feature worth noting is the way these essays evidence Rowe's composite skill as an exegete, a historian, and a theologian. He writes within an interdisciplinary atmosphere where exegesis is organically informed by a set of historical and theological instincts. There are obviously specific areas or interpretive positions among these essays that will evoke disagreement (something surfaced by his own replies to various criticisms). Nevertheless, as a collection of substantive ideas and conclusions presented for students and other scholars to consider, these volumes admirably succeed.

Ched Spellman
Cedarville, Ohio

Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024. xxiv + 424 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310234388. $39.99.

In *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer applies the guiding principle of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* to hermeneutics by providing the "mere essentials" to read "the Bible *theologically*" (p. xiii). He believes "that we need all the theological disciplines, and several kinds of biblical criticism, to read the Bible rightly, in ways that do justice to both its human and divine authorship" (p. xxii). For this to happen, he argues that a transformational and trans-figural interpretation is necessary "to attend both to the Bible's literal sense and to the light in the letter" (p. xxii).

The purpose of Vanhoozer's work is "a call for a return to biblical Christianity, for a theological approach to reading Scripture with and for

the people of God, past and present, from east, west, north, and south" (p. xvii). He argues that a mere Christian hermeneutic is a principled approach to biblical interpretation that (1) asks what we are doing in reading the Bible, particularly for its literal sense, and (2) emerges from both the historic consensus on the essentials of the faith and a church-based understanding of what the Bible is primarily for (pp. xvii–xviii).

His goal of the "book is to think about biblical interpretation in the Bible's own theological terms" (p. xx). In doing so, he attempts to solve the hermeneutical divide to "recover Christian practices of reading the Bible theologically, for the sake of the well-being of the church, academy, and world" (p. xvii).

Vanhoozer accomplishes his goal over the course of three parts by casting a vision for transformational reading that is applicable to all who claim Christ as King. In Part 1, he begins by assessing the divide of "reading cultures" in the church from the medieval period (e.g., scholastic versus monastic) to modernity (e.g., exegesis versus theology). He highlights how the church and academy have wrestled with understanding the letter of the text, and the spirit of the letter, arguing that a balance is needed. In Part 2, he continues his discussion on *sensus literalis*, emphasizing a trans-figural interpretation that is Christoscopic in nature and grammatical-eschatological in methodology. He argues both are necessary for the church and the academy. Finally, Part 3 develops the principle and motif for a mere Christian hermeneutic *light*—the knowledge that comes from the light of Christ's face. Vanhoozer describes this approach as trans-figural reading that leads to understanding Scripture through the transfiguration of Christ. Through this trans-figural interpretation, the reader encounters the light of Christ and is transformed in both mind (understanding the text) and heart (being conformed to the image of the Son).

The author presents a comprehensive assessment of the history of hermeneutics and biblical interpretation in his pursuit to develop a mere Christian hermeneutic. He explores various elements of hermeneutics, ranging from a survey of the history of interpretation to understanding *sensus literalis* and *sensus plenior*, comparing reading literality with reading literally, and proposes a trans-figural literal interpretation. Readers not familiar with the divide over biblical interpretation will find a treasure trove of valuable research here.

What Vanhoozer accomplishes is not only helpful, but also thought-provoking. The mental rigor he encourages through his work benefits the reader greatly in understanding the "why" of interpreting Scripture. While the first two parts of the book can be challenging to grasp for those not familiar with the subject, the final part brings everything together and presents practical pathways for applying a mere Christian hermeneutic to

Scripture. In the end, these minor difficulties pay off as he provides a rich study on the "why" of hermeneutics.

In sum, Vanhoozer emphasizes that it is not "how" one approaches Scripture, but "why" one reads Scripture. He asserts that the "chief purpose of reading the Bible theologically is to learn Christ—which involves much more than learning *about* Christ" (p. 360). It is to be conformed to the image of the Son. "Mere Christian hermeneutics is ultimately a vision for forming reading cultures that, in turn, form readers who can bear witness to the light by proclaiming the excellencies of him who called us into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9)" (p. 372). Vanhoozer not only provides a compelling solution to what it means to read the Bible theologically; he also emphasizes the importance of doing so. *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* guides the reader in understanding the "why" and the "how" of reading Scripture well, enabling one to encounter the face of God through Christ and be transformed into the likeness of the Son.

Nicholas Dawson
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Eric Yang, ed. *Exemplars, Imitation, and Character Formation: A Philosophical, Psychological, and Christian Inquiry*. New York: Routledge, 2025. 264 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1032639352. $136.00.

In 1 Cor 11:1, Paul urges his readers to "be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (NET). Similar NT exhortations include Matt 11:28–30; John 13:15; 1 Cor 4:14–17; Eph 5:1; Phil 3:12–17; 2 Thess 3:7–9; and 1 Pet 2:21. Imitation of exemplary persons also has an extensive history, both within the Christian tradition (e.g., *The Rule of St. Benedict* or *The Imitation of Christ*) and beyond (e.g., *The Analects of Confucius*). However, as Eric Yang points out in his *Exemplars, Imitation, and Character Formation*, this substantial history has received relatively little systematic analysis in today's philosophical and theological discussions.

Many will agree that imitating Christ is important, but what does it mean that Christ is an exemplar? What does it mean to "imitate" him? What does the process look like? What goals of imitation are realistic and what are not? Yang's book brings together a host of authors to begin answering these questions. They do so in conversation with the foremost ethical theory of exemplarism today, set forth in Linda Zagzebski's *Divine Motivation Theory* and *Exemplarist Moral Theory*.

Yang's work is split into three sections, covering philosophical, psychological, and theological perspectives. The first section, focused on philosophical problems, deals with questions on the force of moral charisma (pp. 9–26), whether a community can serve as a moral exemplar

(pp. 27–40), the difference between imitating and emulating (pp. 41–56), the role of modeling in exemplar ethics (pp. 57–66), and the importance of admiration and emulation of human exemplars (pp. 67–80). The second section, dealing with psychological questions, provides a set of interesting studies on the role of empathy in appraisal (pp. 83–101), families as exemplar communities (pp. 102–15), the role of tradition in Roman Catholic spiritual formation (pp. 116–35), and exemplarism in the development of practical wisdom (pp. 136–56). The third and final section, focused on theological topics, examines Martin Luther (pp. 159–86) and Antony of Egypt (pp. 215–30) as models of the imitation of Christ, the possibility of imitating divine love (pp. 187–99), Christ as an exemplar accessible to anyone (pp. 200–14), and the possibility of indirect imitation of saints through a divine medium (pp. 231–41).

I have a minor criticism of the book's model, popular though it is. Although there is value in providing articles from different disciplinary perspectives on the same topic, this easily leads to reading a book piecemeal. Philosophers read the sections on philosophy, psychologists the sections on psychology, etc. This model offers little in the way of actual interaction between the disciplines. As a correction to this trend, it would be helpful to introduce joint projects in which individuals from different disciplines unify their methodologies, study together, and provide combined results. This is certainly not unheard of and could provide greater interdisciplinary value for the readers. That said, I do not want to argue that this work should be different to what it is.

Positively, each chapter raises interesting and important problems, and several engage the same fundamental ideas from different perspectives. This is especially true of chapters 2 and 7 which both address the idea of an exemplar community, and chapters 4 and 14 which examine the fundamental issue of suitable imitation. In many cases, direct imitation of the actions of an exemplar is either impossible or inappropriate for those seeking to emulate that exemplar. In some cases, directly imitating an exemplar would be morally deforming rather than morally forming. These chapters offer significant, working answers to this problem from the context of exemplar ethics. Further, both themes are significant in the development of exemplar ethics and virtue ethics overall (p. 243).

Linda Zagzebski also raises an important question in her afterward to the book: What leads so many modern people to resist admiring exemplary people? Why do we love to see heroes fall rather than strive to be more like them? She does not provide an answer, nor do any of the chapters. However, the question itself is thought-provoking and, within this context, opens important avenues for new empirical and theoretical research.

In sum, while one can hope to see more examples of deeply interdisciplinary work in the future, Yang's collection is a helpful addition to the literature on exemplar ethics. It highlights important problems, proposes interesting new solutions, and overall, extends the discussion a few more steps in the right direction.

Kyle Smith
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A. Andrew Das. *Remarriage in Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 384 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978–0802883742. $45.00.

A common assumption within the Protestant tradition is that individuals with biblical grounds for divorce are free to remarry. In his comprehensive treatment of the subject of remarriage in early Christianity, Andrew Das challenges this viewpoint, arguing that Jesus, the biblical authors, and early Christian interpreters all shared the perspective that remarriage is permissible only after the death of one's spouse.

In the first chapter, Das examines the practices of divorce and remarriage in various first-century contexts. Aside from some unique exceptions, he observes, the remarriage of divorced individuals was commonly permitted. During the Second Temple period, divorce for any reason was widely recognized in Jewish culture and the right to remarry widely assumed. The situation was not very different in the Greco-Roman world. In fact, during the reign of Augustus, divorced women and widows under fifty were legally required to remarry (p. 52). "By the time of Jesus," Das explains, "most of his fellow Jews would take divorce and remarriage for granted. Greeks and Romans likewise permitted divorce and remarriage" (p. 15).

The heart of the book, chapters 2 through 5, examines the primary biblical texts that address divorce and/or remarriage (Matt 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7). Those who hold that remarriage is sanctioned when there is a biblical ground for divorce will naturally disagree with Das's treatment of various aspects of these texts. In short, he finds no evidence in the NT that remarriage is permissible in any case except for the death of a spouse. As he contends, Jesus's teaching explicitly prohibits divorce except in cases of infidelity and prohibits individuals from marrying a divorced person. Regarding the much-disputed passages in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 5:32 and 19:9), he explains that the exception clauses "are understandable in view of the requirement for divorce in situations of spousal infidelity among many first-century Jews" (p. 143). While Jesus permitted divorce in cases of πορνεία, it would be misguided, he argues, to assume that the permission to divorce entails the right to

remarry. This is not stated anywhere, he observes. In fact, Matt 5:32, along with Luke 16:18, explicitly describe marriage to a divorced woman as adultery.

In the case of Matt 19:9, Das argues that the exception relates only to the verb ἀπολύω and does not include γαμέω. He also favors the longer reading found in Codex Vaticanus that contains the additional words "and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery," a clause like that found in Matt 5:32 and Luke 16:18. He notes how Jesus's pronouncement naturally transitions into his reference in 19:12 to eunuchs. Those who choose to follow Jesus's instructions and not remarry, he reasons, are like those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In his treatment of Paul's teaching on marriage in 1 Cor 7, Das observes that the basic instruction throughout the chapter is "stay as you are unless Paul provides an alternative" (p. 197). Notably, "Paul does not include any language to allow for an exception to marry another in cases of legitimately grounded divorces, and one should not assume so in view of the emphatic instructions" (p. 196). He examines five details in Paul's instruction which many interpreters regard as evidence that he assumed or recognized remarriage in cases other than the death of a spouse. In contrast to this perspective, he concludes, "The matter of remarriage is only explicitly mentioned in vv. 11 and 39 when Paul denies it as an option apart from the death of a spouse. The rest of the chapter, even 7:15, simply does not mention it" (p. 230).

In the final chapter (chapter 6), Das seeks to demonstrate that Christian writers up to the Council of Nicaea universally accepted the position that remarriage is permissible only after the death of a spouse. After examining the writings of several early interpreters, he asserts, "One searches in vain for an ante-Nicene source that cites the Matthean exception clauses as justifying remarriage after divorce for *anyone* …. The ante-Nicene authors never even raised the possibility that the innocent parties in a legitimate divorce are allowed to remarry" (pp. 279–80).

Regardless of what one may think about his conclusions, Das's study serves in many ways as an exemplary model of biblical scholarship. He addresses a difficult and sensitive subject and follows the evidence where he believes it leads. Throughout the volume, he carefully explores a wide range of evidence, interacts with a variety of scholarly approaches and theological positions, offers keen exegetical observations, and demonstrates sensitivity to those who share alternative opinions. Even those who find his thesis unconvincing must applaud his effort to defend a position that clearly runs counter to modern perceptions and sensibilities. At the very least, his substantial work on the subject deserves a fair hearing and careful consideration.

Benjamin P. Laird
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Thomas S. Kidd. *Christian History Volume 2: From the Reformation to the Present.* Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2024. 446 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1087737010. $54.99.

Teachers are acquainted with painful decisions surrounding textbooks. When it comes to Church History, replacing a trusted source can be a difficult choice. While many factors are included in the adoption process, Thomas Kidd's newest textbook deserves serious consideration. He was a long-time professor of American History at Baylor University. He now teaches Christian History at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is able to capably communicate historically accurate information in a readable, succinct, but not overly simplified manner. Each chapter of his work is divided into short sections. They range from a half page to three pages and are engaging to the non-expert. These sections allow the reader to digest the complex themes of a particular topic of Church History in one brief sitting.

However, do we need a new Church History text? This book offers a few unique features to justify the existence of another survey. Kidd is an expert on Evangelical and Baptist history, especially in America. He approaches Evangelical history with deep sympathy but also historical fairness. His text speaks to the complex legacy of the First and Second Great Awakenings and their impact on global Christianity. He is aware of the excesses of early nineteenth-century revivalism, while still recognizing its considerable impact on American culture and what his Baylor collogue, Rodney Stark, called the "churching of America." In fact, his treatment of the Second Great Awakening may be the book's greatest strength. Significantly, he highlights the impact of African Americans during that Awakening, to raise Richard Allen and George Liele from obscurity to the ranks of key leaders in Christian History. This book may provide students in Baptist or Evangelical seminaries a much-needed foundation for understanding their own faith background.

Second, Kidd provides an updated text that recognizes the prominence of the experience of Majority World Christians. He begins this narrative by highlighting the efforts of Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the early modern area. He gives the missionary zeal of eighteenth and nineteenth-century pietism and Evangelicalism considerable attention. As his story proceeds into the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these

American and European movements are consistently connected to global Christianity. He demonstrates a thorough understanding of the complexities of Latin American Christianity, for instance. Many texts offer a cursory glance at Latin American Christianity and the impact of Liberation theology. However, Kidd recognizes the importance of the theme of liberation and offers a more complete picture by describing the shift of Latin Christians from Catholicism to Pentecostalism. The last forty years in Latin America have witnessed far more Evangelical conversions than social revolutions.

Despite the needed attention given to Christianity in the Global South, Kidd's point of reference remains Western Christianity, particularly in its Protestant, Evangelical, and Baptist expressions. His telling of the last five hundred years of Christianity centers in the West. That, however, may not be a weakness. Starting points are inevitable. Many professors will find this approach fits their own course objectives.

With such a well-crafted textbook, it is difficult to voice critiques. Nevertheless, Kidd's selected bibliographies at the end of each chapter unnecessarily preference recent scholarship while neglecting classic works of Church History. I understand the scholarly desire to rely on the most up-to-date material, but it is futile to introduce readers to secondary literature on the English Reformation without reference to Eamon Duffy or to Evangelicalism without David Bebbington. Students of Church History would benefit greatly from knowing what major voices have spoken about the subject.

Additionally, this book is an example of a tendency in recent Protestant scholarship to downplay the impact of Renaissance humanism on the Reformation and to emphasize the continuities of the Reformation with previous eras. (See Matthew Barrett's *Reformation as Renewal*.) I presume this tendency follows Richard Muller's interpretation of Reformation history. Muller's emphasis on continuity is a needed corrective, but humanists like Erasmus are unfortunate victims of this trend. In my estimation, the influence of Erasmus, through his critique of late-medieval Catholicism, calls for lay piety, production of the *Textus Receptus*, and calls for vernacular translation, are the building blocks of Protestantism. These deserve a more prominent place than this book affords. Humanism is not a tangential piece of Reformation history, but a key influence on Zwingli, Melanchthon, Bullinger, and Calvin.

Nevertheless, these weaknesses can mostly be explained by the limitations of such an extensive topic. Any survey text on Church history will neglect something important. Overall, Kidd's work is masterfully written. Readers will be captivated by the story of the Church. Theological ideas

are introduced, but history takes the driver's seat. Church History professors of Evangelical or Baptist institutions would do well to adopt this book.

David Lytle
Riverside, California

Jacob E. Hicks. *To Contest with All the Powers of Darkness: New England Baptists, Religious Liberty, and New Political Landscapes, 1740–1833*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2024. 218 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1621908289. $55.00

While discussing religion and politics might be frowned upon at dinner parties, it is essential to the historian's task. In *To Contest With All the Powers of Darkness*, Jacob Hicks argues that New England Baptists and the United States developed together and shaped one another.

Chapter 1 could easily serve as a primer on Baptist distinctives, touching on themes of baptism by immersion, biblicism, church discipline, regenerate church membership, congregational authority, and associationism. Hicks tells the familiar story of the establishment of the Separate Baptists during the Great Awakening and details Rhode Island Baptists' hesitancy to establish the Warren Association in 1767. Two years later, the association formed its "Grievance Committee." By 1772, influential preacher Isaac Backus led the committee, which detailed state harassment suffered by Baptists and drafted legislation to eliminate religious persecution.

Hicks's narrative follows the transformation of New England Baptists from unorganized dissenters into a "sustained political movement" through printed media (p. 40). Early on, Backus and the Grievance Committee recognized the importance and effectiveness of print in unifying Baptists in their political endeavors. Consequently, printers and booksellers in the early republic made Backus famous, spreading the Baptist political message and uniting naturally sectarian churches around a common cause. In fact, Baptists did not win early battles for religious liberty through appeals to the court or the Crown but through mass appeal in the press. Indeed, a separate monograph could be written exploring the role of the press in the disestablishment of religion in the early republic. It is noteworthy that religious liberty, not confessionalism or creedalism, was the foundation for unity and associationism among early American Baptists.

Hicks then details John Leland's efforts at unifying Baptists as a political movement. Leland had been a successful political organizer for the Baptist cause in Virginia, having helped James Madison win election to

the Virginia Ratifying Convention. He worked to assure Baptists they could trust politicians. He was a thoroughgoing Jeffersonian, which went together with baptistic individualism. His influence helped spread Democratic-Republican ideals among Baptists in Virginia and New England. Hicks also notes the unlikely political alliance of Congregationalist church members and dissenting religious groups in the 1820s. This came about as Congregationalist churches struggled with Unitarianism in the early 19th century, forcing Trinitarian Congregationalists to become dissenters. Simultaneously, Massachusetts Baptists were becoming part of the mainstream. Indeed, this was a peculiar political union, yet they created a strong Democratic-Republican coalition.

Dying in 1841, Leland lived long enough to see Baptists evolve from disorganized, dissenting churches into a "mainstream, 'evangelical' united front" moving toward political hegemony (p. 113). Thus, by the 1830s, Massachusetts Baptists were no longer dissenters or Democratic-Republicans. They were New Englanders. They now identified themselves by their regional distinctives rather than denominational distinctives. They traded their doctrines of separation and dissent for political power, seeking to legislate their interpretation of religious morality. Perhaps modern Baptists, especially those who eschew traditional Baptist identity in exchange for political hegemony and "Christian nationalism," would do well to consider Leland and John Taylor's lament as summarized by Hicks: "Baptists were losing their identity, and most were glad to do it" (p. 137).

In sum, Hicks demonstrates the relevance of studying history—specifically Baptist history—as its themes resonate with contemporary challenges regarding the establishment of religion and religious liberty. The only complaint one might bring to the text is its price compared to its brevity. Although well-written, it consists of only 146 pages, excluding end notes and bibliography. Nevertheless, Baptist historians and historians of the early republic will benefit significantly from *To Contest with All the Powers of Darkness*. It would also make a welcome addition to the bibliography for Baptist studies or early American history courses.

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