

## Book Reviews

Joanna G. Kline. *Narrative Analogy in the David Story: Parallels between Genesis 25–50 and 1 Samuel 16–1 Kings 2*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2, 154. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2024. 308 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-316158252-3. \$124.00.

Joanna Kline is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Gordon College, having completed her PhD at Harvard University in 2018 under the supervision of Jon D. Levenson. Her *Narrative Analogy in the David Story* serves those who preach and teach by identifying analogies between the David story (1 Sam 16–1 Kings 2) and the Jacob story (Gen 25–50). Her work adds depth to the stories—not new meanings—since her findings are “consistent with the broader messages of the narratives in which they appear” (p. 27). This monograph is the published form of her doctoral dissertation in the Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2 series, which features interdisciplinary works written by scholars at the beginning of their scholarly careers.

Kline’s project has a fourfold objective: (1) to identify the analogies between the two stories; (2) to determine the direction of influence; (3) to suggest how her findings support or challenge theories of composition; and (4) for her work to be a case study for other narrative analogies in the Bible. To accomplish these objectives, Kline employs narrative analogy.

Narrative analogy identifies and explains connections between two passages by relying on a series of parallels rather than shared vocabulary alone (p. 19). Furthermore, the direction of dependence can be determined by ungrammaticality, conflation, and characterization. Ungrammaticality is when the “verbal locutions ... are awkward,” or details of the plot are “essential” in one narrative but “marginal or unnecessary” in the other (p. 20). Conflation is when traits or actions from two or more characters are combined in a single character (p. 21). Finally, characterization is one character’s action being portrayed in contrast to another, either positively or negatively. If both are positive or negative, the secondary text will likely be more extreme (p. 21).

In Chapter 1, she explores David’s (1 Sam 16–18) and Joseph’s (Gen 37, 39) rise to prominence. Both were shepherds who became rulers. In Chapter 2, she looks at the marriage negotiations of David (1 Sam 18–19, 24) and Jacob (Gen 29, 31–33) with Saul and Laban, respectively. Then in Chapter 3, she explores the analogies between the rapes of Tamar (2

Sam 13) and Dinah (Gen 34). Finally, Chapter 4 has two main parts. First, the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39) has parallels with David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12). Second, the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13) is read alongside both Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39) and the beginning of the Joseph story (Gen 37). Given that each chapter contains numerous parallels—themes, motifs, plot elements, characterization, similar language, structural similarity, etc.—Kline helpfully provides charts to summarize her conclusions. She includes an explanation of her findings, including the direction of influence and how each analogy supports or challenges theories of composition.

While some of Kline’s conclusions on the historical development of the text may be challenged in places by readers of this journal, there is great value in the analogies she identifies and explains for the reader. First, her approach aids interpretation by identifying the analogies in the stories, pointing to the big ideas of the passage. Second, and related to the first, her work establishes helpful guardrails for application. Old Testament texts can become containers of ideas, with application tangential to the passage at times. Kline’s work aids the preacher or teacher apply the text by showing how its features (e.g., plot, theme, characterization, etc.) portray the faith, failures, vices, and virtues of those in the narratives.

However, among all the findings Kline provides, one analogy is left unmentioned and unexplored—the deaths of aged leaders. Within Genesis 25–50 and 1 Samuel 16–1 Kings 2, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and David all die. The texts not only relate to their deaths, but all provide final words to those remaining after their passing (save for Samuel, whose farewell speech is given in 1 Samuel 12, which is outside Kline’s scope of the David story). Beyond this though, the detail of her work is impressive and gives the preacher and teacher much to appreciate when working through these narratives.

Brett Dickson  
Searcy, Arkansas

Alexander T. Kirk. *Agur’s Wisdom and the Coherence of Proverbs 30*. Ancient Israel and Its Literature. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024. 303 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1628375657. \$50.00.

*Agur’s Wisdom and the Coherence of Proverbs 30* (hereafter *AWCP*) is an insightful and exemplary academic monograph, which deserves the careful attention of the scholarly community. The author, Alexander Kirk, utilizes the tools of philology to argue that Proverbs 30 is a coherent literary text that taunts pride and greed and recommends, instead, the way

of humility and contentment. *AWCP* is characterized by cogent summaries of previous scholarship, a useful methodology, close and careful readings of biblical and other ancient texts, and a highly artistic and engaging writing style. This blend of characteristics is unusual in academic monographs. Each feature will be discussed in turn.

Chapter 2 (“Agur and His Interpreters: Wisdom Literature, Form Criticism, and the Hermeneutical Potential of Proverbs 30”) deftly surveys the concept of “wisdom literature” in the Hebrew Bible, form criticism of the Hebrew Bible (especially as it pertains to “wisdom literature”), and varying approaches to interpreting Proverbs 30. Kirk fulfills the intention he sets out at the beginning of the chapter: “I chose my examples because they seemed particularly illustrative of broad trends in reading the chapter, and they help us to get behind the most recent commentaries and examine the assumptions of the guild” (p. 30).

*AWCP* is one of many recent publications aimed at renewing and utilizing the philological method in biblical studies. Philologists utilize a variety of textual, literary, and linguistic skills to understand ancient texts. Drawing on the work of Alexander Samely (among others), Kirk suggests that scholars ought to pay close attention to “the ways of the text” to uncover the (potential) coherence, themes, and message of (seemingly) disunified texts. He does just this and discerns in Proverbs 30 a unity and coherence that many scholars have failed to see, partly because of their prior methodological commitments. His close, philological reading of Proverbs 30 enables him to uncover a consistent thread throughout: mockery of pride and greed and commendation of humility and contentment.

Examples of the fecundity of philology for interpreting Proverbs 30 abound in *AWCP*. A few examples will be sufficient to support this claim. Kirk shows the value of his philological approach in his reading of the name Agur as a literary persona. He writes,

Treating Agur as a persona means that we take him seriously as the voice animating the text and that we locate him within the world of the text with its language, symbols, and beliefs, without necessarily making historical claims about how the text was authored or redacted. (p. 68)

He pays special attention to how Agur’s voice and tone mock pride/greed and commend humility/contentment.

Kirk shows his philological skill in his assessment of the notoriously difficult term נִשְׁמָן in Prov 30:1. Scholars have suggested various meanings of נִשְׁמָן in this verse: son of Ishmael, realm of King Lemuel, load/burden/lifting, or utterance/oracle. The author unties the knot by

comparing the use of נִשְׁמָן in Prov 30:1 with its use in 2 Kings 9; Isaiah 13–14; Ben Sira; the Dead Sea Scrolls; and the Deir ‘Alla plaster inscriptions. Considering these comparisons, he concludes that נִשְׁמָן in Prov 30:1 “seems to connote a warning or a burden, a weight of teaching that must be responded to” (p. 95). Kirk’s close reading of נִשְׁמָן here opens new and exciting interpretive possibilities.

Chapter 5 (“Agur’s Beastly Ethics: The Numerical Saying, Animal Imagery, Humor, and Coherence in Proverbs 30:11–33”) repeatedly demonstrates the value of the philological method. Kirk illuminates numerous difficult sayings in this collection and shows they have the united voice already noted: mockery of pride and greed and commendation of humility and contentment. He summarizes his close reading of Prov 30:11–14 as follows,

In sum, the tone of the stanza from 30:11–14 is sardonic, employing elements of humor and disgust to mock such wicked progeny by characterizing them as rapacious animals. Pride that leads to dishonoring parents degrades you, turning you into an animal smeared with your own filth, thoughtlessly devouring the weak. (p. 170)

Perhaps the most disappointing section of the book is Kirk’s discussion of the identity of the son in Prov 30:4 (pp. 127–29). He fails to carefully engage with messianic readings of this passage, simply stating, “While many Christian interpreters have found this line bursting with theological potential, it is somewhat enigmatic from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible” (p. 127). However, his own philological method is used by many interpreters to see the Messiah here. Engagement with this argument (even in a footnote) would have been helpful. (Interestingly enough, he does engage in a messianic reading of Prov 30:4 in his 2021 popular level article in *The Gospel Coalition*: “When Scripture Gets Weird: Understanding Agur in Proverbs 30.”)

In any event, Kirk’s composition deserves mention simply because so much academic phrasing is drab and boring. The smooth flow of the writing, the syntactical variation, and his creative vocabulary are all evidence of skillful formulation. Though a younger practitioner, he provides a model of artistic word crafting benefiting even seasoned scholars. *AWCP* is an original contribution to the study of the book of Proverbs that the guild must not ignore.

Robb Coleman  
Youngsville, North Carolina

Mitchell L. Chase. *Walking the Way of the Wise: A Biblical Theology of Wisdom*. Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (ESBT). Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2025. xii + 172 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1514010914. \$26.00.

Mitchell Chase is currently Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (where he earned his PhD), and pastor at Kosmosdale Baptist Church. He has written *Good News for All the Earth* (2025), *Short of Glory* (2023), *Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death* (2022), *Hope for All the Earth* (2022), *The Gospel Is for Christians* (2020), *40 Questions About Typology and Allegory* (2020), *Behold Our Sovereign God* (2012), and contributed to the Daniel portion of the *ESV Expository Commentary* (2018). The volume under review is his *Walking the Way of the Wise*.

As the subtitle indicates, this is a biblical theology of wisdom. Significantly though, since the theme of wisdom does not advance the biblical storyline, it suffers neglect (p. 4). In fact, those familiar with the Bible typically limit their thinking about wisdom to Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (and James in the NT, p. 2). However, Chase does not think the important theme of wisdom is solely confined to these few books. He explains, “We must remember that the biblical authors both show *and* tell. The narratives teach biblical truth in ways different from propositional claims or proverbial statements. A biblical theology of wisdom must notice how the different biblical genres showcase wisdom” (p. 4). Indeed, wisdom is better understood as a concept than a genre (p. 2). Wisdom, then, in the biblical sense is more than street smarts. It is more than cleverness in a particular field. Biblical wisdom is the result of living in glad submission to God’s Word in God’s world. Biblical wisdom is believing what God has revealed and seeking to live in light of it (p. 2).

The author divides his book into 12 chapters, giving an overview of each in the Introduction (pp. 4–5). Chapters 1, 3–4, and 9 trace the theme of wisdom in the narrative books, whereas Chapters 2, and 5–8 explore the theme in the wisdom books. Finally, Chapters 10–12 unpack the development of wisdom in the NT. Jesus Christ supersedes Solomon. The way of wisdom leads to him: He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The implication of this is enormous. As Chase clarifies, “What we do with Jesus will show whether we are wise or foolish.... His voice is the voice of Wisdom, and we need to respond rightly to him” (p. 139).

Chase’s treatment of wisdom is notable for three reasons. First, his exploration of the narrative books is engaging. He skillfully shows the theme of wisdom in these books without getting bogged down with technical details. He lets readers see enough of the trees while not missing the forest.

Second, his biblical theology of wisdom does not neglect the theme of folly. In fact, Chase’s attention to foolishness illumines his discussion of biblical wisdom. For example, the book of Joshua demonstrates that the Israelites have every reason to trust YHWH, but Judges displays their folly as they do what is evil in YHWH’s sight (pp. 51–56). Quite frankly, “Doing what is right in your own eyes is evil in God’s eyes” (p. 56). Likewise, Saul’s folly serves as a foil to David’s dependence on God (pp. 58–60). Also, the straight talk of Lady Wisdom is appreciated when compared to the crooked talk of Lady Folly (pp. 84–85). And the downfall of Solomon (pp. 117–19) makes one yearn for one greater than he—the Lord Jesus (see Chapter 10).

Third, although studies of biblical wisdom often neglect the narrative books, Chase helpfully corrects that imbalance (see Chapters 1, 3–4, 9–12). He makes a persuasive case that the concept of wisdom is present even when the term is not (cf. p. 3). At the same time, he does not read wisdom into every passage. As he clarifies, “I am not arguing that everything in Scripture is wisdom; if everything is wisdom, then nothing is” (p. 3).

The only quibble I have is the length of treatment allotted to the NT (Chapters 10–12, which is 25 percent of the book). Given the supremacy of Christ and his being the epitome of wisdom (1 Cor 1:24), one would wish for more than just three chapters. It is hard to do justice to all the NT’s wealth of wisdom that succinctly. Indeed, eight NT books are not discussed (2 Thessalonians, Philemon, 1–2 Peter, 1–2–3 John, and Jude).

Nevertheless, *Walking the Way of the Wise* is a welcome contribution to studies on biblical wisdom. The ESBT series aims for a “superb and extremely difficult balance of canon-wide exegesis and a warm, lay-level tone—solid scholarship for the church’s delight” (p. ix). Chase’s volume succeeds admirably here. And since we are called to get wisdom (Prov 4:5, 7), buying this book would be an excellent place to start.

Giang Tran  
Louisville, Kentucky

Hindy Najman. *Scriptural Vitality: Rethinking Philology and Hermeneutics*. The Bible and the Humanities. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. xvii + 193 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0198865711. \$110.00.

In *Scriptural Vitality*, Hindy Najman challenges “Spätjudentum”—an antiquated idea which sees Second Temple Judaism in a state of religious and cultural decline. Instead, she posits the Hellenistic period as a time of

widespread vitality for Jewish traditions. She offers this fresh understanding of the landscape of Second Temple literature by building on critiques of classical philology and on positions normally taken for granted in textual criticism and hermeneutics. She draws on several thinkers, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Schlegel, and Peter Szondi, to develop “a forward-moving approach to philology which is integrated into hermeneutics and the growth of works, collections, and even individual psalms or units of texts” (p. 4). She uses this approach to examine Second Temple Jewish literature for its own sake and to garner an appreciation for the vitality and resilience of writing in the Hellenistic period.

Najman examines this period’s reading practices with a focus on non-canonical literature. She establishes that “the overarching hermeneutic of the texts we consider” inherit and innovate in a forward-looking manner (p. 6). Next, her brief discussion of canon examines Hellenistic Jewish textual traditions “within and beyond the Hebrew Bible,” and ways they interacted with predecessor traditions “in the face of Graeco-Roman philosophy and culture” (p. 11). She then focuses on the familiar “search for the original,” highlighting problems with textual criticism’s traditional perspective. She takes an approach whereby “we will not [necessarily] see textual variation and proliferation as error and corruption,” but “as manifestations of the vitality of the [Hellenistic era’s] traditions” (pp. 27–28).

Next, Najman appraises the impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls on discussions about textual vitality. She also examines the ubiquitous phenomenon of anonymous literature from the period, seeking to locate it alongside pseudepigraphical works. By anonymizing themselves, “these texts place themselves out of time” (p. 43). This challenges the modern interpreter—conditioned to view the author’s function as indispensable. In Chapter 4 she examines ancient texts and the idea of self, the reader, and the “emerging subject, whether as an individual or as an interpretative community” (p. 61). Read in the light of the emerging self, Second Temple literature can be seen as “a vitality which is generative for community” (p. 71), driving its readers toward togetherness and individual improvement. She dubs this trait “ethical reading.”

The middle third of *Scriptural Vitality* examines the book of Jubilees. Najman exemplifies it as paradigmatic for the development of textual tradition, asking, “How were the traditions of Scripture and tradition kept dynamic, and what were the mechanisms” of textual hermeneutics (p. 75)? She presents Jubilees, an interpretive reading of Genesis and parts of Exodus, as an “open book,” one that grows and develops both through time and into different languages. She argues that it “participates in practices of reading earlier biblical traditions as well as incorporating interpretative

materials into the work itself” (p. 85). Jubilees, then, is a text demonstrating her thesis of scriptural vitality through ancient traditions, looking into its present and forward into its future.

The last part of Najman’s work examines the role of Hellenistic Judaism in subject development, cosmological reflection, and personal transformation. Here she drives home her description of poetics bringing the text to life, which then enlivens the self. Her discussion is helpful in rethinking and sharpening our concepts of intertextuality or textual dependence. She nuances the concept of “rewritten bible,” demonstrating the creative ways in which Second Temple Jewish texts used and engaged with their predecessor traditions to reflect on humanity’s relationship with God, the cosmos, and itself. A postscript summarizes her goals of celebrating Hellenistic Judaism’s textual culture and shaking up our assumptions.

Seeing the way textual traditions develop is crucial for examining Second Temple Jewish textual communities and sects. Najman’s study thus has the capacity to shine helpful light on studies of Hellenistic Jewish literature, including the Septuagint and its various traditions. It especially impacts conversations around the pluriformity and transmission of the Greek Old Testament. How much we can benefit from using it in more traditional endeavors, such as reconstructive textual criticism, is difficult to determine though. Nonetheless, this book will be of interest to students or scholars concerned with the literature of Hellenistic Judaism. Its challenges to many positions scholars take for granted will sharpen our thinking. It is also noteworthy that *Scriptural Vitality* is an open access title.

Davis M. Sutton  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Esau McCaulley, Janette H. Ok, Osvaldo Padilla, Amy Peeler, eds. *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2024. xiv + 792 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0830814091. \$40.75.

*The New Testament in Color* is premised upon a key assertion: “It matters that we have diverse representation in the process of biblical interpretation because it is always *ourselves* as persons with our experiences, biases, gifts, and liabilities that we bring to the text” (p. xii). Accordingly, the volume attempts to make the distinctive reading strategies of various American ethnic communities available outside their own sphere. It distinguishes itself by consciously taking a “hermeneutics of trust” position

rather than the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in which “much socially located biblical interpretation has been rooted” (p. xiii). This work constitutes, therefore, an example of—or perhaps even evidence for—the value of multiethnic biblical interpretation in a form acceptable to evangelicals and other theological moderates and conservatives.

The volume begins with an introduction and five essays that describe the distinct reading strategies of the five American ethnic identities represented in the book, namely African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Turtle Island (Native), and Majority-Culture American (white). Esau McCaulley recommends beginning with these essays before tackling the commentary itself (p. xiii). Chapters of commentary on each book of the New Testament follow (although 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral Letters, and the Letters of John are treated together). Additionally, four essays tackle key contemporary issues. They are “Gender in the New Testament,” “Resources for the Mental Health of the Oppressed in the New Testament,” “Multilingualism in the New Testament,” and “Immigrants and the Kingdom of God.” No rationale is evident for the placement of these essays (one before Acts, the others before James) but neither does the placement detract from the reading experience.

The introductory essays offer commonalities and features of diversity within each ethnic community. Alongside the primary goal of commending the hermeneutical perspectives of each group, these essays conveniently introduce the reader to unique social and political realities these communities face in America today.

The commentary chapters take a variety of shapes in their attempt to provide biblical interpretation rooted in the particulars of each author’s experiences and identity. Miguel Echevarría’s commentary on John, for example, employs theological sources from Latin America, such as the work of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and *misión integral* scholar Samuel Escobar. Sourcing his reading of the more “spiritual Gospel” (see *Ecc. Hist.* 6.14.7) with these authors allows Echevarría to conclude that the message of John the evangelist is not that “God loves people’s souls but sees fit to leave them in their present squalor and oppression.” Rather, the “marginalized and oppressed can begin to experience equity and justice in the present, through the renewing work of the Spirit” (p. 189). His reading of John, therefore, maintains an appropriately realized eschatology that demonstrates the value of attending to the Latin American theological tradition.

Alternatively, Dennis Edwards focuses more on the relevance of African American Christian culture, practice, and experience throughout his exposition of Colossians. He describes how Paul’s discussion of slavery (Col 1:7; 3:22–4:1; 4:7) falls on the ears of African American Christians

and offers constructive thoughts about how to interpret it effectively. He makes insightful connections to African American culture using several other themes too. For example, he relates Paul’s pastoral perspective in Colossians to African American culture’s “utmost respect for pastors.” He also connects Paul and Timothy’s relationship with the tradition of African American pastors “identifying themselves as sons and daughters of the pastor under whom they received their calling” (pp. 482–83). Edwards thus melds NT scholarship, evangelical theological commitments, prophetic ethical authority, and pastoral sensitivity effectively. His is exactly the sort of voice one wants to consult before preaching a complicated NT text.

Additionally, the commentaries include relevant discussions of the historical and literary matters one might expect from a biblical commentary. Kay Higuera Smith’s work on Mark includes extended discussions of the temple, Torah, Qumran, and other features of ancient Jewish life. The commentaries also engage with contested issues in NT scholarship—e.g. Julie Newberry’s three helpful “framing observations” (p. 366) for interpreting 2 Corinthians 3 post-supersessionism (pp. 366–71). Consequently, the work also serves as a suitable single volume commentary for general interpretive questions, not only those related to the ethnicity and culture of the authors.

*The New Testament in Color* achieves its goal to demonstrate evangelical interpretations from specific ethnic locations. However, some chapters of commentary focus less on an author’s ethnic background than others. These chapters read as high quality, traditional, biblical commentary—perhaps with extra attention to issues of social justice. Such commentaries merit commendation. However, the stated aim of the work leaves the reader wondering why some biblical books evoke folk stories, traditional proverbs, and widespread cultural experiences, while others do not. Each author must prove, of course, that it does in fact matter “that we have diverse representation in the process of biblical interpretation” (p. xii). Most of the commentaries achieve this goal, but it may prove beneficial in a future edition to improve consistency across the volume.

Notwithstanding a bit of unevenness, *The New Testament in Color* promises to expand interpretive horizons of students and would be well suited for a New Testament introduction or biblical hermeneutics course. It would also be a convenient resource for preachers who seek interpretations that are sensitive to these issues but remain committed to “hermeneutics of trust.”

Benjamin Luke Beavers  
Saint Anthony, Minnesota

Gary R. Habermas. *On the Resurrection, Volume 2: Refutations*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024. 896 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1087778624. \$69.99.

In Volume 2 of *On the Resurrection*, world renowned scholar Gary Habermas continues his magnum opus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Having dealt with the minimal historical facts of the resurrection in volume 1, he turns his attention to attempts to refute it in his second volume. Dealing primarily with objections from the time of David Hume to the present, he seeks to give the most comprehensive account of and response to attempted refutations of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although he does not break his book into sections, by following the historical trends his work develops a porous split between *a priori* and *a posteriori* refutations.

Beginning in the second century, Habermas shows that early Christians (AD 30–140) unanimously believed in the resurrection and did not question the historicity of the four Gospels (p. 49). Since many scholars assert that any date later than this is simply too far from the crucifixion to be of “any real historical value,” he jumps forward to the eighteenth century to deal with objections to the resurrection in their more mature form (p. 51). He begins this survey of modern refutation attempts with David Hume’s essay against miracles. This interaction grounds much of his subsequent work, since he rejects Hume’s *a priori* dismissal of miracles here. Although he presents his own arguments against him, he also shows that Hume was not met with unwavering adoration; rather, several critiques of Hume’s work were published within a few years of his essay against miracles, which Habermas incorporates into his argument against Hume’s general position (pp. 68–70). Thus, if the resurrection cannot be dismissed on the grounds that people do not rise from the dead, one must deal with evidence related to the empty tomb. Habermas then shows how refutations of the resurrection arose in Liberal Christianity, were challenged within their own camp, and were challenged again by the rise of neo-Orthodoxy. This historical survey allows him to show the variety of attacks leveled against belief in a historic, bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Having defended the possibility of miracles, Habermas turns his attention to proposed explanations for the empty tomb. These include everything from the disciples simply going to the wrong sepulcher to unprecedented mass hallucinations. Although there is a consistent rejection of miracles driving these proposed explanations for the empty tomb, the author does more than simply fall back on his proof that miracles can, in fact, occur. Rather, he consistently points to methodological issues behind various approaches and offers critical evaluations of each position. For

example, if Christ’s resurrection was experienced merely as an attested vision, that could remove the need for a bodily resurrection. However, after listing six critiques, he concludes, “None of these objective visionary configurations account for the robust New Testament textual evidence” (pp. 693–701). This approach allows him to build strong, multifaceted arguments against those who seek to refute the bodily resurrection of Jesus, independently of the minimal facts approach established in Volume 1 or the reasonableness of miracles established at the beginning of this work.

As the introduction of volume 2 notes, it is rare for a book to spend more than 100 pages on attempted refutations of the resurrection (pp. 1–2). However, this work far exceeds 800 pages, which some may see as a hindrance. I believe this is its greatest strength. Christian scholars can use it as a comprehensive introduction to literature seeking to disprove the bodily resurrection of Christ, and Christian pastors now have a single volume allowing them to interact with any objection to the resurrection that may arise in their churches.

In sum, Habermas’s interactions with various proposed refutations of Christ’s resurrection demonstrate the careful scholarship that has come to mark his career. That, in turn, gives Christian readers confidence in appropriating these arguments for their own interactions with deniers of Jesus’s bodily resurrection. I would have liked to see more engagement with Islamic objections to the resurrection. Although an appendix addresses this issue, given the rise of Islam in historically Christian lands, a deeper engagement with the ways Islamic scholars seek to refute the bodily resurrection of Christ would have strengthened the work. Nevertheless, Habermas does an excellent job surveying and objecting to scholars’ attempts to refute the historic Christian teaching of the bodily resurrection of Christ. This results in a must-have volume for pastors and scholars alike.

Brian Wagers  
Bloomington, Indiana

Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski. *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024. 896 pp. Hardback. 978-0825445798. \$57.99.

*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is an exceptional work offering one of the most comprehensive and systematic defenses of the deity of Christ. The authors’ main argument is that Christ is “the eternal Son, God by nature, come in the flesh as a real human being” (p. 17). It follows *Putting*

*Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (2007) where Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski equip lay-level readers to understand and defend the deity of Christ. *The Incarnate Christ* delves deeper into this key doctrine's academic foundations, engaging modern views contrary to biblical Christology. Its detailed and wide-ranging analysis of the incarnation challenges the reader to consider not only the facts about Christ but also the validity of his claims. The riches of each chapter help the reader see the incarnate Christ in all his glory, although this substantial (almost 900-page) tome takes time to digest.

Throughout the book, Bowman and Komoszewski bring evidence from their respective fields, biblical Christology, comparative religion, and biblical studies, to depict the problems Christ presents for skeptics (p. 18). They address Christological objections from many critics, including secular skeptics, Muslims, progressive revisionists, Unitarians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals. They offer thoughtful responses to modern criticisms and present biblical solutions to understand Christ as God incarnate. They approach their opponents hospitably and seriously, attempting to understand and work through their respective views before responding with their own position.

Bowman and Komoszewski structure their work around the acronym *HANDS* to help readers see that Jesus is God incarnate. Using this acronym, they argue that Christ should be awarded the same *honor* as the Father because he shares the same *attributes* and *names* as the Father. Further, his *deeds* reveal him to be fully God. Finally, his authoritative *seat* in the heavens proclaims his divinity. *The Incarnate Christ* is thus divided into five parts, developing the *HANDS* framework, to provide a comprehensive, thorough, and accessible treatment that defends biblical truths from modern critics' disbelief in Christ's deity. The first part interacts with the divine *honors* due to Christ, worship, devotion, praise, fear, faith, hope, and love. The second examines how the Son shares the Father's *attributes*, pre-existence, creation, and sinlessness. The third investigates the divine *names* Jesus and the Father have in common. The fourth shows how Jesus's *deeds* argue for his divinity. The fifth and final part unveils the divine *seat* Christ shares with his Father.

Bowman and Komoszewski's research, while comprehensive in scope, is accessible and easy to understand. Readers with limited knowledge of the field will walk away with copious amounts of material to defend the deity of Christ. Another strength of this work is its approach. Using the *HANDS* acronym provides an easy learning device to remember the book's core arguments. Further, the chapter structure, building from the honor due to Christ and ending with the seat of authority he holds, reinforces the truth of Christ's deity.

Although not a weakness per se, the length of the book may intimidate lay-level readers from engaging it. Additionally, the title might create the impression that *The Incarnate Christ* covers various heresies through church history. These are touched on, but the bulk of the work deals with modern critics of Christ's deity. How the modern views emerged is not emphasized, but that does not minimize the book's benefits.

To say this volume is a great resource is no understatement. Each chapter is carefully presented, significantly enhancing contemporary discussions of the deity of Christ. Bowman and Komoszewski analyze diverging perspectives charitably, providing brief summaries and counter arguments to help navigate the complexities of each view. Despite its academic nature, this work equips anyone desiring a deeper defense of orthodox Christology to emerge with a greater appreciation of Scripture and its revelation of Christ in all his glory. Church lay people, pastors, academics, seminary students, and professors will all benefit from reading *The Incarnate Christ*.

Nicholas Dawson  
Granbury, Texas

Benjamin L. White. *Counting Paul: Scientificity, Fuzzy Math, and Ideology in Pauline Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. xiv + 272 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0197802243. \$99.00.

It is refreshing to see challenges to assumptions long taken for granted by Pauline interpreters. None are more fundamental than those of the nineteenth century scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur, whose research on the authorship of the Pauline corpus still undergirds assumptions on what "counts" as Paul. In *Counting Paul*, Benjamin White exposes and critiques these assumptions in their various forms through a methodologically rigorous study in the digital humanities. Building upon his argument in *Remembering Paul* (OUP, 2014), White argues that we must begin with Pauline tradition and work backwards, thereby offering a new paradigm to determine Pauline authorship.

White outlines the problems in historical Paul research in the first two chapters. Generally, the issue is twofold. First, the modern study of Paul is deeply rooted in the nineteenth and twentieth century focus on Pauline biography (i.e., the difficult question of what counts as admissible when discussing Paul's life). In the first chapter, "Studying Paul," the author traces this issue from Baur and his predecessors to current research, demonstrating the lack of methodological rigor underlying these studies.

Fascinating indeed is the role of Acts in this biographical chaos: For Edward Evanson, Acts was the standard of Pauline biography, and he argued against the authenticity of Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Titus, and Philemon because of their supposed contradiction with Luke's Paul (p. 48). For Baur, however, Acts was a proto-Catholic *apologia*, not an artifact of historical information, with only Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians counting as authentic Pauline epistles (pp. 52–55).

White then concentrates on the supremacy of style in the second chapter, "Counting Paul." The argument here claims that vocabulary and style serve as the powerful, nigh untouchable, undergirding argument for authorship and authenticity of Paul's corpus. The author then demonstrates several difficulties and problems of the "Paul-as-math-problem" approach. He introduces the concept of computational games, showing that research begins under a framework of rules established by the researcher.

Moving to the third chapter ("Computing Paul"), White argues that researchers' games are usually driven by their ideological presuppositions. For example, the computational study of David Mealand (1995) found Ephesians–Colossians to be closer to Romans, Galatians, and 2 Corinthians than 1 Corinthians. However, this study still considered 1 Corinthians and the other primary epistles to have the same author (pp. 136–38). Ultimately, White determines that the problems of the subjective stylistic studies from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to plague researchers in the computational age (pp. 148–49).

White then presents a helpful way of "Gaming Paul" (Chapter 4), by offering a computational study rooted in a clear method. He begins with event determination, "the discernment of those features that are most successful in separating texts by author" (p. 162). He moves to canonization, the body of data considered, and to inference, conclusions to be drawn from playing the game. Running two tests, he demonstrates that variance between the epistles is not a result of Pauline coauthors or collaborators, nor is the manuscript tradition responsible. Rather, the tests themselves are often done in a vacuum, usually undertaken to prove what the tester assumes from the outset, a set of "tradition-laden biases" (p. 201) that directly influence how the game is played.

Following this, the author offers a paradigm of starting in the second century and working backwards. He thereby exposes a nerve underlying much Pauline interpretation: we all see Paul through the lens of tradition. While this is no cardinal sin, we must begin with the first two centuries: *they* tell us about counting Paul, unlike the sixteenth, nineteenth, or twenty-first centuries. We should avoid the implicit (and sometimes explicit) interpretative priority of Galatians and Romans and examine the

figure of Paul through his earliest reception, including Acts, instead. Doing so, White suspects, will uncover a Paul who, in an ironic echo of the great Albert Schweitzer (quoted on pp. 26–27), resembles himself more than his interpreters.

Those asserting Pauline authorship for the 13 epistles may see no need to engage with White's excellent work in *Counting Paul*, since it will simply confirm what they already know. Doing so would be a grave mistake. He challenges many assumptions, both implicit and explicit, throughout the field of Pauline studies. For example, interpreters often extol Galatians as a glimpse of the unfiltered Paul, a tendency whose impetus lies as early as Marcion (!). However, White points out that 1 Corinthians—the most unique stylistically and thematically of the *Hauptbriefe*—boasts the most widespread attestation in early Christian literature, decades before Galatians (p. 228). If 1 Corinthians becomes the standard for authenticity though, how would that shift one's understanding of Paul and his thought?

In conclusion, this book is a superb study of what should be considered Pauline. It will challenge those unengaged in the academic conversation, but only on account of the subject matter (including its expedition into the digital humanities) and the amount of ground covered. White's writing is clear and accessible. Pauline interpreters, especially those interested in a deeper understanding of the historical Paul, need to engage White's work and let it challenge and expand their assumptions and presuppositions.

Davis M. Sutton  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Maurice E. Vellacott. *The Earliest View of New Testament Tongues: Understood as Non-Supernatural, Learned Earthly Languages*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2024. xii + 356 pp. Paperback. ISBN 979-8385228423. \$42.00.

Maurice Vellacott's book *The Earliest View of New Testament Tongues* is based on comments from the fourth century Jewish Bishop of Salamis, Epiphanius. In his text, Epiphanius refers to the problem in Corinth stemming from the use of Hebrew and Greek dialects in a prideful manner. Hence the apostle Paul must speak of earthly, known languages, not non-earthly ecstatic utterances. Vellacott's goal is thus to demonstrate the soundness of Epiphanius's interpretation of tongues. He sums up his work as follows:

My aim is to rigorously test this unique Epiphanius proposition

that the γλώσσαις-speaking in 1 Corinthians 14, with the terms γλῶσσα/*glōssa* (singular) or γλῶσσαι/*glōssai* (plural), was a controversy around the use of the Hebrew Older Testament Scripture and classic Greek dialects in the assembly and the need to interpret into a common Greek language so others could be edified. (p. 11)

The author then organizes his point with a linguistic analysis of the term for tongues (Chapter 2), a cultural analysis (Chapter 3), a history of interpretation of tongues (Chapter 4), a biblical analysis of key texts (Chapter 5), and notes on relevant Bible translations (Chapter 6).

Vellacott reviews the uses of relevant Greek terms in both Testaments to show how γλῶσσα/γλῶσσαι does not normally mean ecstatic or non-ecstatic angelic/heavenly language (p. 21). After showing that Epiphanius's interpretation fits within this linguistic framework, he moves to the historical and cultural context. He discusses how Hebrew would still have been used in the first century, Paul included. He then notes evidence for a synagogue in Corinth that was a "synagogue of (the) Hebrews" (p. 65, citing F. F. Bruce). The author also mentions that the Doric Greek dialect would have been dominant in Corinth. These cultural notes, then, fit with Epiphanius's view.

Regarding the history of interpretation, Vellacott writes, "It is significant that *glossolalia* (a non-earthly, angelic/heavenly language for public or private use) is nowhere alluded to, nor hinted at, nor found in the Apostolic or post-Apostolic Fathers, nor in the major Reformers" (p. 161). He provides a sample of quotations and comments on various figures throughout church history to demonstrate this main point. The last major chapter before his notes on Bible translations includes discussion of tongues in Acts 2, 10, 19, and 1 Corinthians 12–14. Throughout his discussion, he continues to argue for each passage meaning a non-supernatural, earthly language. Even a verse as difficult for his position as 1 Cor 13:1 ("tongues of angels"), he interprets as the Hebrew language (p. 224). He also argues for the clearer passage in Acts 2 to be used for interpreting the more difficult passages in 1 Corinthians 12, 14. His comments on the biblical passages, then, conform to Epiphanius's view. Vellacott's final chapter consists of notes on the translation of γλῶσσα/γλῶσσαι in the history of English Bible translations, as well as notes on Luther and Calvin. He sees Epiphanius's view as compatible with the "intent of the earliest English translations" (p. 317).

Vellacott's book deserves reflection because he shows that Epiphanius's view is a legitimate interpretative option. However, a few caveats are in order. Although the reader will understand the basics of Epiphanius's view in this book, it would have been beneficial if the author had

provided more discussion of the text and the historical context of Epiphanius himself. Also, interpreters who are not yet convinced may have a difficult time reading Vellacott due to the way he refers to those who disagree. For instance, he somewhat disparagingly uses terms like "from a strict scholarly point of view" (p. 16), "the skeptic" (p. 203), and "a contrarian" (p. 251). He also refers to one scholar's comment as "inexplicable" (p. 247), and another's comments as "presumptuous" (p. 248). He asserts that those who might see two different kinds of tongues in the different passages (which is linguistically possible considering semantic range) have "arrived at this position on the basis of their theological presuppositions rather than from biblical evidence" (p. 255, quoting Thomas Edgar approvingly). Such comments distract from the contributions of scholars seeking to weigh all the options on their own merits without disparaging the work of others. Nonetheless, Vellacott's position remains well worthy of consideration.

Alex Carr

Wake Forest, North Carolina

Stephen O. Presley. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church: Recovering an Ancient Vision*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. xi + 204 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1540966414. \$24.99.

*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church* is a simple title hinting at the profundity of its content. Stephen Presley's work provides a wealth of material on how to do biblical theology in the modern context by retrieving the methods of the early church. He rightly finds modern methods of biblical theology, which study texts academically but not as Scripture given to the church by the living God, lacking. As a solution, he proposes an "ecclesial biblical theology" (p. 7), recovering the premodern hermeneutic of the patristics. The modern church needs to recover the "social imaginary," the view of life and the world held by the early church, if we are to come to the theological conclusions of that church.

In the first chapter Presley explains his vision for an "ecclesial biblical theology." This project consists of seeing Scripture as God-given, the rule of faith as a hermeneutical guide, and liturgy as faith-shaping. Next, Chapter 2 addresses hermeneutical assumptions. The Fathers approached the text with a metaphysic. They read Scripture believing the Triune God is the true God who providentially works in the world, including how he gives Scripture.

Chapter 3 explores the biblical theology of the fathers, explaining the "literal sense" (i.e., the words in context). This provides the roadmap for

connecting texts in Scripture under a cohesive narrative. It is the basis for close readings using intertextuality.

Then, in Chapter 4, Presley addresses the spiritual sense, a way of seeing Christ in all the Scriptures. Since the Son is preexistent in the text, we should be able to find him there. To aid us, the author divides the fathers' method into three categories: personal, prophetic, and partitive. The "personal" reading means the Son speaks and is present in the Old Testament. For example, prosopological exegesis teaches us that the persons speaking in a text may be the members of the Godhead (e.g., Psalm 110). As for prophetic, Presley argues for a "two-advent hermeneutic," reading Scripture by looking for prophecies of either the first or second advent of Christ. Finally, partitive exegesis means we distinguish the two natures of Christ. At times, Scripture tells us of his divinity, at others, his humanity. This chapter really shines by showing us how to see Christ in the Scriptures.

Chapter 5 moves to address the reader's role in interpretation. The fathers argued for a cycle of virtue in biblical reading. Virtue is necessary for proper interpretation, and proper interpretation produces more virtuous readers. Presley presents three parts of Scripture which especially help with virtue formation: the life of Christ, the wisdom literature, and other spiritual models (e.g., Joseph, Moses, Job). For the fathers, wisdom literature plays an important role in biblical theology because it teaches the reader to be virtuous.

Finally, Chapter 6 argues for biblical interpretation within the context of the ecclesial community. The liturgy and preaching shape church members into virtuous interpreters. Biblical theology, moreover, is intended for proclamation. It is not to be relegated to academic pursuits. In fact, the church and its rule of faith guard the interpreter from missing the point of Scripture.

For all its merits, the book has a minor weakness. Presley does not qualify the church fathers' practices or interpretations. In other words, they did not get everything right. Contemporary Baptists would have serious trouble with some of Augustine and Origen's views, for example. I grant that our hermeneutic should lead us to Nicaea. This is the author's larger point, and he makes it well. But are there dangers in a hermeneutic's other destinations? Would the fathers' exact hermeneutic also lead us to Wittenberg (Protestant), Geneva (Reformed) and London (Baptist)? Were their errors a result of inconsistency? Simply noting these questions would have improved this work. I'm not claiming the fathers' hermeneutic will lead us astray but wish Presley had explored whether (and if so, how) we should *not* follow them. He does hint at this when he encourages us to "embrace the best of patristic biblical interpretation" (p. 176). However,

this merely implies potential problems with wholesale adoption of the patristics at the book's very end.

In any event, Presley's work is an important one, encouraging Protestants to retrieve a pre-modern hermeneutic. Many Christians today seem to reach Nicaea by hermeneutical bushwacking rather than traveling the fathers' well-trodden path. By recovering their early view of interpretation, we might see the weaknesses of our own presupposed metaphysics and instead treat sacred Scripture as given by the Triune God to testify to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Drew N. Grumbles  
Albany, New York

J. V. Fesko. *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: An Introduction to Covenant Theology*. Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2024. 139 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1642896183. \$14.00.

J. V. Fesko's *Signed, Sealed, Delivered* usefully defines a covenant and describes the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. Laity looking for an explanation of these theological concepts will find this book useful. However, Christians seeking a biblically sound defense of covenant theology, aimed to win over doubters such as dispensationalists or Arminians, should look elsewhere. The author introduces himself as having had "Baptist convictions" that "shifted to Reformed theology." Unfortunately, this reveals an assumption that Baptists cannot be Reformed.

Baptists will be particularly interested in Fesko's assertion, common in Reformed theology, that baptism replaces circumcision. It is argued that just as infants were circumcised in the Abrahamic covenant, infants should be baptized in the new covenant. Fesko offers a heading, "Circumcision to Baptism," that he claims shows why (but not whether) circumcision gives way to baptism (pp. 95–106). He devotes nearly one-tenth of the book to this assertion but fails to prove it. He passes from Jesus's explicit statement that the Lord's Supper is the new covenant sign (Luke 22:19–20) without comment to the claim that the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) makes baptism a covenant sign, even though the Commission mentions neither "covenant" nor "sign." Although he uses many Scriptures to prove tangential points, he does not establish his central claim that baptism replaces circumcision. He simply assumes it.

Even though Fesko's animus toward Baptists reveals itself, it is more pronounced in his *Word, Water, and Spirit* (2010). For instance, he assumes that ἐβαπτίσαντο (1 Cor 10:2) refers to the Christian rite, ignoring the literal "immersed." He then claims, "Those who received the Red Sea

'believer's baptism' were barred from the promised land because of their idolatry and sin ..., but those who received the Red Sea 'infant baptism' were the ones who entered the promised land" (p. 105). Moreover, he argues that infants are "admitted to the covenant community by the sacrament of baptism" (p. 105) but does not believe they are regenerated by baptism. This implies that unregenerate people are made members of the church—something no family of Christianity held before Reformed paedobaptists. He also asserts (falsely), "Anabaptists ... argued that the Old Testament was irrelevant for New Testament Christians" (p. 63).

Most regrettable though is Fesko's hermeneutic and the theology of Scripture that underpins it. Although he asserts, rightly, that "we may speak only when scripture speaks" (p. 25), his conclusions stretch far beyond Scripture. For example, he claims that circumcision, involving cutting, "reveals the covenant curse" (p. 99). He then argues that Jesus's crucifixion was a "circumcision-crucifixion" (pp. 99, 103), referencing Colossians 2:11, because both involve cutting. He also says Jesus's metaphorical use of "immersion" in Mark 10:38–39 ("the baptism with which I am baptized") means that "baptism is ... a sign of covenant judgment" (p. 100). Additionally, he interprets 1 Cor 10:1–4 to say that Pharaoh's army was baptized, and 1 Pet 3:20–21 to say the entire world was baptized in Noah's flood (pp. 101, 104). This, he asserts, shows that baptism is a covenant curse for the unbelieving. But neither passage suggests that unbelievers are baptized. He reads that into them. Eisegesis pervades his handling of Scripture. All too often, he ties together a string of distorted Scriptures, out of context, with leaps in logic, to land in the predictable, predetermined place the Westminster Confession of Faith would have him.

Fesko also suggests—inadvertently but revealingly—that a close examination of Scripture may not support his findings. He likens Scripture to an impressionistic painting: "when we look more closely at the details, we see blobs of paint and color where features blur and the picture becomes less clear" (p. 3). This implies that careful exegesis does not show Scripture teaching what he claims is the big picture. That denies the perspicuity of Scripture, whether he realizes it or not.

In sum, something as significant as a covenant sign that the church must provide should depend on explicit, divine words, not on inferences, contortions of logic, and filling in the blanks. Fesko even likens the Bible to hearing only half a phone conversation. We must fill in the blanks to make sense of it (p. 37), and that filler is traditional covenant theology. Unfortunately, this otherwise useful *Introduction to Covenant Theology* (to cite the subtitle) handles Scripture slavishly in service of preconceived conclusions. A more careful use of the Bible would have benefited (and possibly

persuaded) those not already convinced.

John B. Carpenter  
Yanceyville, North Carolina

Robert S. Smith. *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2025. 446 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1683598121. \$34.99.

What is a man? What is a woman? Transgender theory questions the ontological goodness of the body and affirms gender from a psychosocial perspective. While some contemporaries embrace this ideology, the church grasps for understanding and answers to the transgender assumptions in general and how the Bible addresses this topic in particular.

Robert S. Smith provides *The Body God Gives*, which evaluates transgender theory and responds to it from both a "theo-anthropology and theo-ethic perspective" (p. 3). His thesis is "to evaluate the central ontological claim of transgender theory: that the sexed body *does not* determine the gendered self" (p.3). His analysis includes a biblical response to this theory. He also leans on Augustinian theology and Kevin Vanhoozer's "Drama-of-Redemption Model" (pp. 48–57).

His work contains three parts. Part 1 explains the complex nature of the term "transgender." Supporters of transgender theory argue that a broad range of individuals might fit into this category (pp. 11–14). Although broad in definition, the underlying assumption of this ideology denies "that the sexed body reveals and determines the gendered self" (p. 15). The first part of the book concludes with various evangelical responses to transgender theory. This brief overview reveals how the author's theological method provides a unique discourse in comparison to other contributors.

Part 2 traces the historical influences transgender theorists utilize to deduce that gender exists as a social and psychological construct (pp. 63–93). This theory contains both philosophical and biological arguments. Theorists claim that intersex conditions provide a gender spectrum between male and female. Smith's statistical analysis shows that 0.015 percent of people are born with this (biological) abnormality. Even then, he argues that intersexuality does not change the male-female binary because this condition creates an epistemological challenge rather than an ontological one.

Historically, the philosophical aspect of "gender" started in the fourteenth century (p. 98). Then, the first and second waves of feminism pro-

vided transgender theorists with the separation of gender from one's biological sex (p. 107). Like these theorists, Smith also distinguishes gender from sex (pp. 151, 161). However, his view explains how the human body "provides the foundation (and so determines the boundaries and direction) for authentic gender cultivation" (p. 210).

Part 3 provides biblical arguments against transgender ideology. The value of this section cannot be overstated. Smith responds to many trans affirming theologians who utilize Scripture to support their position. He presents their arguments and responds with a historical-grammatical hermeneutic. He also explains how doctrines like the *Imago Dei* and the resurrection deny transgender theorists' claims.

This work contains a plethora of strengths. One is Smith's explanation of human beings as "hylomorphic psychosomatic" unities, which precludes the bifurcation of humanity into sex and gender (pp. 225–27). Although ontological holists and substance dualists might disagree with hylomorphism (every physical entity combines matter and form), the holistic dualist argument strengthens the body's ontological grounds for informing one's gender. Throughout this book, he insists the two are not ontologically separate categories nor is gender superior to the body as transgender theorists claim.

Although a technical work, Smith's pastoral tone permeates his writing. The promulgation of transgender theory derives from the "somatic effects of sin" (p. 301). The fall coupled with the doctrine of original sin is why people struggle with gender incongruence, which leads to transgender theory (p. 366). The author provides gospel hope here to those who have undergone gender reassignment surgery or hormonal therapies for transforming their body into their perceived gender. The promise of a believer's bodily resurrection will heal all those who either struggle with gender dysphoria or have altered their bodies.

Despite the book's strengths, there is one minor weakness to Smith's argument. He believes gender and the sexed body ought to remain distinct (pp. 151–59). This position seems inconsistent with the theo-anthropological ethic he posits—i.e., hylomorphism. If the sexed body informs one's gender and its corresponding roles, it seems disadvantageous to separate the two on cultural and psychological grounds. Perhaps the two have differing functions ontologically and epistemologically, but they are not distinct in nature. The psychosomatic unity of the human constitution seems to imply they are inseparable—i.e., the one informs the other. However, this minor weakness does not deflect from the work's significant contribution to transgender theory.

*The Body God Gives* exists as a welcome resource in a time of gender confusion and transgender theory. Its central contribution is that God's

desire for one's gender is revealed by the design of the body, which is rejected by transgender theory (p. 275). The Bible affirms the ontological goodness of the body. This position informs our understanding of roles and responsibilities as human beings made in God's image. The Bible also affirms the male-female binary. Smith's book is a must read for scholars and pastors.

Jeremy Kyle Bell  
Holland, Texas

Emily Conroy-Krutz. *Missionary Diplomacy: Religion and Nineteenth-Century American Foreign Relations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024. 331 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1501773983. \$46.95.

Emily Conroy-Krutz's *Missionary Diplomacy* is a well-researched, well-written, and convincingly argued book on the relationship between the American Protestant mission movement and the U.S. State Department in the nineteenth century. Early on, she points out, "both the State Department and the mission movement were small and weak, with outsized ambitions for eventual influence over the whole world" (p. 11). By the century's end, however, the State Department had undergone significant professionalization, while the missions movement had become one of the most influential forces shaping America's foreign relations. She argues for a narrative of change, connection, and increasing complexity between missionaries and American diplomacy.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 examines the role of missionary intelligence. Throughout the century, foreign missionaries often served as the primary link between Americans at home and the wider world. They reported, lectured, and published extensively about their mission fields, thereby educating the American public. In doing so, missionaries enjoyed privileged influence over how the U.S. understood foreign nations. As educated eyewitnesses, they were often regarded as experts on specific regions.

Part 2 introduces the growing complexity of American foreign relations as the century progressed. Traversing Asia, the Pacific, and the Middle East, Conroy-Krutz shows that missionaries served as consuls, workers, and at times, provocateurs who forced State Department intervention. Known among diplomats as "missionary troubles," instances of physical violence or violations of missionaries' rights prompted them to seek U.S. protection and sympathy. Missionary roles including medicine, education, and economic ventures—often considered a field of

evangelism—complicated the lines between religious and national interests. Conroy-Krutz raises important questions: Could missionaries be treated as U.S. citizens abroad? Did their involvement in government functions compromise the separation of church and state?

Missionaries could be seen as victims or instigators. For example, the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) missionary John Stephens was assassinated in 1862 by a pro-Roman Catholic mob in Mexico. In contrast, the Ponape crisis of 1887 involved the arrest of ABCFM missionary E. J. Doane and subsequent consular intervention by the United States in the Caroline Islands by 1890. In both cases, Conroy-Krutz argues, the State Department was compelled to act—regardless of whether missionaries were troublemakers or victims.

Part 3 concludes with case studies from the Philippines, China, Congo, and Turkey at the turn of the century. By the 1890s, the State Department had become much larger and more professionalized, and these case studies illustrate that missionaries could either advance or hinder U.S. interests abroad. As the author summarizes, “Across the century, missionaries forced the government to articulate new conceptions of the rights of US citizens abroad and of the role of the United States as an engine of humanitarianism and religious freedom” (p. 12).

Conroy-Krutz displays several notable strengths. First, in an era when historians often cast missionaries solely as villains or heroes, she provides a balanced, respectful, and thoroughly researched account of missionary diplomacy. She treats historical actors not only with humility, but also with a critical eye toward their intellectual frameworks and cultural assumptions. Though her research primarily centers on the ABCFM, she supplements her analysis with material from government archives and other denominational sources, including Baptists and Methodists.

Second, the book is especially helpful in its sustained focus on chronological “connection points” between mission work and American consular activity. Each chapter contributes fresh insights into this evolving relationship, demonstrating not only historical change but also deepening complexity.

On the other hand, some readers may wish for more theological analysis to deepen the book’s argument. For instance, greater attention to the missionaries’ theological frameworks—especially millennial visions of America’s global role or the link between gospel proclamation and civilizational progress—could enrich the study. How central was obedience to Jesus’s command to “preach the gospel to all nations” to their motivations? How did their theological commitments shape both their work and their allegiance to the United States?

Additionally, more reflection on missionary pragmatism would

strengthen the analysis. To what extent did missionaries attempt to “convert colonialism”—adapting aspects of colonial systems that aligned with their goals? This tendency, rooted in theological presuppositions, likely influenced how they navigated their relationships both with local populations and U.S. diplomats. These are not weaknesses though so much as avenues that could strengthen her overall thesis.

In any event, Conroy-Krutz has written an excellent sequel to her earlier work, *Christian Imperialism* (Cornell, 2015), offering scholars and teachers a valuable resource for understanding the entangled histories of American foreign relations and the modern missionary movement.

Taylor Mendoza  
Corona, California

Mark R. Glanville. *Preaching in a New Key: Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2025. 238 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1514010990. \$28.00.

In *Preaching in a New Key*, Mark Glanville—an accomplished jazz musician from Australia pastoring in Vancouver, Canada—attempts to “re-contextualize expository preaching from start to finish” (p. 19). Lamenting that most recent preaching books have operated within the modern, Christianized western milieu, Glanville submits his “method and theology for expository preaching in post-Christian neighborhoods as an introductory textbook for new preachers and a recalibration for experienced preachers” (p. 19). Drawing on the improvisational nature of jazz music, as a stranger-turned-neighbor in his post-Christian community, Glanville instructs preachers to ensure their sermon’s “through line” (main memorable point) resonates with the central idea of the text. Preachers must also exhort their people creatively to enjoy the tenderness of Christ and invite their neighbors into the contrastive community of church life.

The book has four parts. In Part 1: “Deeper,” Glanville urges a preacher’s deeper self-awareness as he relates to the shared experience of church community within the post-Christian atmosphere of doubt. In Part 2: “Craft,” he discusses tangible matters of sermon preparation. In Part 3: “Tradition,” which he considers the most important, he invites the preacher into a deeper and richer interpretation of Scripture, which he identifies as our Christ-centered, authoritative tradition. In Part 4: “Beauty,” he celebrates creativity in preaching, encourages a posture of sympathetic participation with one’s listeners, invites churches to foster space for shared community experience and development, and explains how to preach the Old Testament. Presenting the latter, especially as it

contains violent texts, relates to contemporary preachers' imperative to call for justice in our post-Christian world.

Positively, Glanville argues that "Christian preaching is a concept that comes to us from Scripture itself" (p. 24). I agree and appreciate his helpful discussions on biblical terms for preaching. I also resonate with his definition of expository preaching as Christ-centered proclamation that explains and applies the Scriptures. His discussions on the preacher's emotional health and trauma-informed preaching are worthwhile and timely, especially his treatment of the "deeper self," in which one is fully aware (and fully at rest) as a person and a preacher. Additionally, the author offers good advice on sermon preparation (including his "preacher's sketchpad"), a helpful template for sermon structure (pp. 89–90), and various checklists that assist a preacher in thinking through and working with a text. Finally, in Appendix A, he outlines a process for thematic preaching.

With those strengths in mind, some concerns arise. First, the alert complementarian reader will hear Glanville's egalitarian tone. Second, when considering the evangelistic element of sermons, I wonder why he stops short at his neighborhood, with little (if any) mention of the nations. Third, his "new key" may fall flat when he prioritizes healing neighborhoods (with the tenderness of Jesus through a contrastive community church witness) rather than clearly proclaiming the biblical gospel to sinners and saints. Fourth, I wish he had provided earlier and clearer definitions of what he means by "tenderness" and "contrastive community." He eventually explains that a contrastive community is one "where every person, especially the most vulnerable among them, could thrive" (pp. 137–38). Fifth and finally, he defines the term in Chapter 13 (the next-to-last chapter): "By the phrase 'contrastive communities,' I mean churches that embody and extend the tenderness of Jesus in their neighborhood" (p. 195). Not only does this definition come late; it also sounds vague as he strums another under-defined term: "tenderness." I may be responding more rationally and less creatively than he would like, but I could not help asking, "What does that mean?"

Throughout, I continued wondering how Glanville would address sin. Sadly, he does not. Perhaps the closest he gets is implicit, when he suggests (quite skeptically, it seems) that at times there *may* be need for a call to repentance (p. 73). Another example is his definition of preaching the gospel. He asserts, "To preach the gospel is to show that Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, has defeated evil and death and secured a future for the world" (p. 149). Fair enough. But why not include something as central as sin, like Paul does in 1 Cor 15:1–4? Overall, the author's sentiments come across as far too human-centered—perhaps even post-

Christian.

Glanville intends *Preaching in a New Key* for beginning preachers. However, I would recommend it be reserved for veteran preachers and post-graduate theology students. They should be better equipped to compare his thesis and insights with their own preaching experience and the broader field of homiletics.

Michael Hull  
Chapin, South Carolina

Philip Jenkins. *Kingdoms of This World: How Empires Have Made and Remade Religions*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2024. x + 340 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1481319935. \$42.99.

This volume adds to Philip Jenkins's consummate array of published works. Here, he demonstrates the role empires have played in the fluctuating fortunes—and focus—of major world religions. Significantly, this imperial dimension "teaches us how and why given religions reached their current geographical limits" (p. 226). However, while belief systems "resolutely backed by states and kings have an enormous advantage over their competitors," other factors must play a role, "or else Christianity would not have survived the persecutions in either Rome or Persia" (p. 226). The imperial dimension Jenkins introduces should certainly be of interest to students of Christianity and other world religions.

Delving into Jenkins's book, it is important to note the vast expanse of his canvas. Covering over four millennia, he presents a portrait of empire-religion relationships, global in its reach. This breathtaking scope inevitably excludes key elements, some of them regrettable. He nevertheless draws on an impressive 910 sources, delivering a helpful contribution to our understanding of contemporary world religions.

The work is divided into two parts, "Empires and the Making of World Faiths" and "Worldwide Empires and Unintended Consequences." The first begins with valuable pointers on the nature of empires. When "one nation or people rules several or many others, which originally had some kind of independent existence" you have an empire (p. 22). Interestingly, while "colonialism grows out of imperial rule ... empires have existed without colonialism, which means not just occupying a territory but settling it, usually with people of the imperial motherland" (p. 25). On this count, imperial British India was not colonial, given the tiny fraction of British settled in the subcontinent. Conversely, America was both: "If the United States under Andrew Jackson and James Polk

was not an aggressive imperial power, engaged in extensive colonial settlement, then the whole concept of 'empire' has no meaning" (p. 26).

In any event, empires have evidenced widely differing religious manifestations: "Imperial ideologies did matter, but rarely could empires simply decree a new faith and expect universal obedience" (p. 36). Jenkins provides numerous fascinating details in this regard, especially in the book's second part on unintended consequences. However, what he leaves out on the religions side is a matter of some concern. Significantly, he provides no clear definition of religion. In a Western Hemisphere context, he notes sixteenth century (and later) Christians' definition of religion in terms of "resemblance to the known monotheistic faiths" (p. 123). He goes on to describe nineteenth century German-born Oxford scholar Max Müller's view of "other religions through a Judeo-Christian lens" (p. 190). He then makes the telling observation that Asians following multiple traditions simultaneously found themselves classified separately "as Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist" (and Shinto): "Such a taxonomy could not have emerged without ... imperial intrusion" (p. 198). Important insight though this is, that is the closest he comes to defining religion. He acknowledges modern anthropologists' recognition that "an assemblage of customs and practices" could constitute a religion (p. 123) but ignores Paul Tillich's helpful definition of religion as one's ultimate concern (and neglects to present an alternative definition of his own).

Unfortunately, Tillich's perception is not the only key religious element he ignores. David Bentley Hart (*Atheist Delusions*, 2010), Rodney Stark (*The Triumph of Christianity*, 2012), and Tom Holland (*Dominion*, 2019) convincingly demonstrate the revolutionary (and positive) role Christianity has played in making the West what it is over two millennia. Empires have played their part, but they are not the only (or even the most important) factor. Jenkins does mention "the role of religion in assisting people during disease-related crises" (p. 226), and the "spiritual conquest of multiple Germanic barbarian peoples" (p. 68), but the latter occurred while the (Western) Roman empire was crumbling. Acknowledging the above scholars' prominent contributions, if only in a footnote, would have enhanced his work.

Moving to other religions, he recalls that "Hinduism has been a very dynamic tradition, which has changed greatly over time" (p. 92). In the process, Hinduism virtually replaced the Buddha's reform movement in the Indian subcontinent by the twelfth century AD, but "borrowed heavily from Buddhist practice and thought" (p. 92). He argues that such borrowing led to "attractive new forms of devotional practice to the gods (*bhakti*), with a new focus on such beloved deities as Vishnu and Shiva" (p. 92). However, Jenkins completely neglects the hugely influential (and

quintessentially Hindu) Bhagavad Gita's role in promoting devotional Hinduism from the beginning of the current era, only mentioning that text in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century interactions with Westerners.

As for Islam, he presents a helpful description of the ascendance of that religion over time: "Historically, Islam offers an excellent example of how empires can build up established religions in a way that severely constrains rivals" (p. 100). Here (and indeed, throughout the book) Jenkins's treatment helps us appreciate why the twenty-first century global map of world religions is the way it is.

A final note reflects the perils of the book's huge scope. More work (and sources!) would be necessary, but I missed critical analysis of several taken-for-granted positions. Such analysis might reflect recent scholarly questioning of established (liberal) narratives on the emergence of Judaism and Christianity (and include a more careful reading of Scripture). Also, the legitimacy of referring to Buddhist monastery libraries, which were centers of instruction, as "full-fledged universities" (p. 80, cf. pp. 84, 91, and 93), is rejected by several scholars. And it is particularly unfortunate that Jenkins makes no mention of the serious scholarly interrogations of Islam's foundational story taking place over the past few decades.

This work nevertheless treats the important topic of empires and religions professionally. I would recommend it as a useful addition to the library of any world religions scholar.

Ant Greenham  
Raleigh, North Carolina