Southwestern
JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

James Leo Garrett Jr. and the Southwestern Theological Tradition

VOL. 65 NO. 1 | FALL 2022

BOOK REVIEWS

Christian Platonism: A History. Edited by Alexander J. B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, xv+497pp., $130.00.

The discussion of Christianity's relationship to Platonism has taken place in various pockets of academia, ranging among the disciplines of history, philosophy, and dogmatics, as well as hermeneutics and biblical studies. German scholars such Adolf von Harnack of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century steered the conversation for subsequent generations, asserting the Hellenized nature of the post-New Testament Christian faith. The search for the "kernel" of truth sought to ascertain the essence of the biblical message, while also inaugurating fields of study to distinguish the "Jesus of history" from the "Christ of the Bible." The assumption within these inquiries is that Platonism and Greek thought in general had unduly influenced biblical interpretation and doctrinal development in the early centuries of church history. Not until recent generations of scholars has the question been reversed: what is the influence that Christianity had upon Platonism? C*hristian Platonism: A History* brings together a score of academic voices to shed further light on the interplay between Christian faith and practice and the wide-reaching philosophical system of Platonic thought. Editors Alexander Hampton and John Peter Kenney attempt to show how "Platonism has been, and remains, the most powerful tradition of realism and anti-materialism in Western thought" (p. 4). They ably accomplish their goal with this volume, demonstrating the multivalent way Christianity and Platonism have interacted over the course of 2000 years.

Part one of the text deals with conceptual considerations, with chapters highlighting specific notions found in Platonic philosophy and how Christian thought has found coherence. Themes of the "the One" in Platonic thought (chapter 3) and Platonic theories of creation (chapter 4) are discussed with an understanding of how they cohere with Christian theological notions of the Trinity and God's divine activity. In these chapters, the authors provide helpful coordinates for readers to understand how the thought of non-Christian Platonists fused with Christian theology. As an example of the insights available to readers from part one, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz notes how Platonism impacted trinitarian theology by providing support for "participation metaphysics" and "the more general theological dictum of divine immateriality and intelligibility" (p. 76). Part one concludes with a view of Thomas Aquinas and his theological interaction of Neoplatonism a la Dionysius, impacting his view of divine participation.

Part two provides readers with a historical survey of Platonism's impact on Christian thought, starting from the Bible and biblical world and ending with modern theological discussions. Platonism's impact on early Christian doctrinal development in western and eastern Christianity is clear, yet authors in this section provide helpful nuance to demonstrate the limits of Platonism when encountering biblical reflection (in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, for instance). Many scholars here note the influence of Platonic voices such as Philo, Plotinus, and Porphyry upon early Christian thinkers. Additionally, the influence of Dionysius is discussed at length. Helpful to note is how Christian thinkers prioritized biblical texts while cohering with Platonic concepts insofar as they comported with Christian doctrinal priorities. Renaissance and early modern thinkers such as Marsilo Ficino (1433–1499) and Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) began recovering and understanding Platonism for its own sake.

In Part 3 entitled "Engagements," the authors place Platonic thought in conversation with various fields of inquiry. Whether natural science, art, or love and friendship, this section demonstrates how Platonism continues to bear weight upon our modern thought and practice. This section serves as an application of sorts, showing readers how Platonic thought and Christianity merge towards current day considerations. This section contains helpful insight; however, some of the conclusions as it pertains to Christianity were lacking as explained below.

This volume is a helpful companion in the renewed discussion on the relationship between Christianity and Platonism. It does not, however, answer every question with satisfaction. First, some chapters are rather abrupt in their conclusions. For example, chapter seven on the concept of theology appears to end in mid-thought and does not provide a satisfying conclusion to an important topic. Second, missing in this discussion is how Christianity was shaped by the Jewish thought world, including the theological foundation of the Old Testament. Platonic thought later buttressed discussions of Christian theology, but certainly the Old Testament and its theological categories had a major, if not controlling, role to play. Third, some chapters barely scratch the surface with their conclusions as they pertain to Christian thought. A specific example of this is the chapter on love and friendship. While helpful in understanding Plato and Aristotle's conception of friendship, as well as modern philosophers' interaction with them, how these observations impact Christian thought and practice is noticeably absent. The Christian tradition has much to say about love and friendship, yet this chapter did little to explore that in conversation with Platonic philosophy. Last, a concluding chapter or epilogue would have served to draw the multiplicity of observations together and provide readers further reflection for how to move forward in this discussion. In multi-authored volumes wherein writing styles and argumentation methods are mixed, a healthy and robust concluding chapter helps to bring all these voices back into conversation with one another for the sake of communicating one consistent message.

Despite these critiques, this volume provides ample evidence demonstrating the intimate connection between Platonic philosophical concepts and Christian appropriation for the sake of buttressing theological reflection. Each chapter stands as a microcosm of this important discussion, narrowing in on a particular facet towards building a larger whole. While some chapters might leave readers less than satisfied, and the lack of a concluding chapter may harm the effectiveness of the argument, this text needs to be read by those interested in the Platonic influence upon Christianity. Theologians will gain further clarity towards understanding how Christians read and integrated Platonic thought into Trinitarian theology, metaphysical renderings, and theological anthropology. Philosophers will increase their awareness of how Christian thinkers (at least in the early and medieval church) sought a synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Christian theology for the sake of reinforcing divine realities. Later chapters in the "History" section of this text are instructive for their negative examples, providing reflection on what can happen when philosophy takes precedence over theology (as in the case of the Cambridge Platonist movement). For Christian scholars in general, this book will shed further light on Christianity's ability to unite with certain systems of thought insofar as Christian theology is not compromised.

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An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Recovering the Wildness of the Spiritual Life. By Jason M. Baxter. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021, 208pp., $22.99.

The notion of mysticism has a muddy, and often misunderstood, relationship to the Christian faith. From a full embrace to flat-out rejection, and everywhere in between, Christians have disagreed on its place—let alone its definition—in Christian spirituality. Complex and complicated, the idea of mysticism is difficult to define among even accomplished scholars of the field. Jason Baxter, associate professor of the arts and humanities at Wyoming Catholic College, seeks to address the confusion and propose a way to understand and appreciate Christian mysticism. He does so by exploring key works of Christian literature to understand how such authors described their experiences with God, collating that experience to bring forth a common idea of mysticism and how it can still function in Christian spirituality today. His task is great, and he provides numerous insights along the way, though the result may still leave readers feeling no less confused on how mysticism helps (or hurts) Christian faith and spirituality.

Baxter views his task in primarily literary terms, meaning, his exploration of mysticism began in the reading and teaching of literature. Thus, this text arose out of efforts to address his students' questions on the subject. Baxter begins by tracing the modern existential crisis in the twentieth century via numerous literary figures such as Shūsaku Endō and Thomas Merton. It is no coincidence that the rise of a "secular world" has displaced many and left many wondering if there is not more to life than what we merely experience in our physical world. Indeed, our time is "weird" in the sense that it is utterly different that any era proceeding it. Baxter does well to identify this crisis and observe why the recovery of mysticism, or something akin to it, might be a necessary effort. After his assessment of numerous twentieth-century voices, Baxter steps further back in time to understand the connections between mysticism among pre-Christian religion and philosophy. The primary player in this discussion is Plato and his philosophical descendants, namely the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry. The concept of the "One," arising from Plato's cosmology and given distinct and mystical shape by Plotinus, was the destination of soul unencumbered by worldly desire.

From Plato, Baxter draws a direct line to Augustine and the "inward turn" presented by the bishop of Hippo in his *Confessions*. Baxter notes that, while certainly influenced by the Platonic tradition preceding him, Augustine "departs from the Platonic account in important ways" (p. 67). The inner turn of Augustine is to discover the God who was always there. It is an inward turn that moves back towards God. The ascent of the soul lauded by Platonists must be reckoned with the descent of Christ affirmed by Christians. No possibility of connection with God exists apart from God making such connection possible in the first place. Baxter highlights the role of love in the mystic experience of Augustine, one where love for God and the joy of knowing Love itself was integral for greater heights of spiritual ecstasy. This experience of love, however, is always tempered by the reality of sin and the impossibility of the full divine gaze this side of eternity. Hence, any such mystical experience is but a glance into the infinite beauty of God for Augustine.

From here, Baxter flips the coin to the other side of Christian mysticism to explore the unknowability of God, presented by voices such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, and Meister Eckhart. This is the mysticism of casting aside worldly desires and pursuits to experience God directly. For someone like Gregory, the pursuit of virtue was integral to one's knowing and experiencing of God. For Dionysius the experience of God came through the *via negativa*–the recognition that God is completely other and to experience God was to remove preconceived notions and knowledge of who he is. Eckhart similarly emphasized the utter transcendence of God, and like his predecessors Gregory and Dionysius, emphasized the limitations of language to adequately describe God. All three focused on the role of nature in mediating our knowledge and experience of God. Baxter then moves to focus upon the Desert Fathers tradition, with its emphasis on spiritual warfare and contemplation. Evagrius of Pontus is a prominent voice in this tradition, and later monastic voices such as Hugh of St. Victor and Francis of Assisi were significantly influenced by earlier such mystics. This mysticism recognized our disconnect from God, from oneself, and from creation. Only in detachment from creation, can one truly appreciate creation for what it is, an opportunity to contemplate and experience God. This natural contemplation flourished in the east, according to Baxter, and was all but neglected in the West until the later Western monasticism of the Victorine and Franciscan traditions. Mystic experience of God for these individuals included the necessary practice of asceticism to shed one's desires.

Baxter concludes with an emphasis on *lectio divina* as a means of mystical reading and a guide to experience God through Scripture. He highlights the work of the Carthusian monks Guigo and Hugh of Balma, as well as the hermeneutical stylings of Meister Eckhart as models approaching this method of reading Scripture. The "participatory" nature of pre-modern Christian readings of Scripture represented in the tradition of *lectio divina*, according to Baxter, is an important element in regaining the "wildness of scriptural promises" (p. 151). The text concludes with brief sketches of four additional medieval figures who exemplify the Christian mystic tradition, specifically with a focus upon the love of God. These figures represent the flourishing of the mystic tradition leading up to the modern era, and thus provide readers with concluding figures who show the "wildness of spiritual life" as Baxter has described it. Baxter does well to show how these individuals, and the others discussed in the text, maintain a distinct Christian character as opposed to non-Christian (mainly neo-Platonic) notions of mystic encounter with the One.

An Introduction to Christian Mysticism introduces pivotal Christian mystics, and their influences, to many who may be unfamiliar to the discussion. The text misses its intended goal in providing a more thorough biblical and theological reflection to the topic. I agree that the experience of God grows as the "fruit of love and virtue and patience and diligence in prayer and discipleship" (p. 8), but if this is the definition of mysticism then every Christian is called to be a mystic. Missing is a robust biblical and theological foundation to define the term and its practice. Mysticism is akin to sanctification in the terms provided. While Scripture and theology are not absent, Baxter's emphasis is on the individual figures and movements represented in the mystic tradition. Additionally, the assumption is that the exploration of mysticism resides chiefly in classical and medieval figures, rather than potential candidates in the Reformation and early modern periods. Tom Schwanda and others have made a case for reading the Puritans and early evangelicals such as Johnathan Edwards as mystics, albeit in a manner dependent upon theological foundations reared in the Reformation. While the "wildness" of Christian spirituality is promoted, the text is more commentary upon mystic figures and their thought rather than how such figures can help modern Christians correct what might be seen as dry and "heady" Christian spirituality. It is true that the notion of mystery is challenged by our modern secular culture, but is a recovery of mysticism the answer? If mysticism is the key to recovering the wildness of Christian spiritual life, Baxter would have done well to help readers understand how the mystic tradition helps solve our modern dilemma. Indeed, it seems that a recovery of the basic notion of the grandeur of the triune God, his beauty and redemptive work, and the implications of our union with Christ for our experience and knowledge of God are more foundational for addressing the secular crisis we face today. As one sympathetic to a mediated and nuanced recovery of mystic voices within the Christian tradition, I was hoping that Baxter would give us more tangible suggestions for readers. Thus, the book's value lays in starting the conversation for those who are interested in the topic but might not be a "go to" manual or guide for how Christian mysticism addresses our secular world today.

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Sequencing the Hebrew Bible: The Order of the Books. By Casey K. Croy. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield-Phoenix Press, 2021, 247pp., $75.00.

In this monograph, Casey Croy contributes to the field of canon studies by examining the sequence of books in the Hebrew Bible and developing criteria for how canonical compilation might relate to textual composition. Croy defines "compilation criticism" as an examination of the Hebrew Bible that seeks "to discern if the arrangement of its books is significant" (p. 1). The goal of this analysis, then, is "to establish links between and among the Hebrew Bible's books so that a cohesive whole emerges from the (sometimes disparate) parts" (p. 1).

One of the most common objections to the study of canonical contextuality is the presence of multiple arrangements in different manuscripts or reception traditions. Croy's aim in this work is to address this particular challenge. As he poses, "Since multiple arrangements of the Hebrew Bible emerged in antiquity, is compilational criticism still a viable approach to understanding the Hebrew Bible?" (p. 3). Croy argues that this variation does not render book ordering irrelevant but rather is a sign of its significance for authors and compilers of the various canonical collections. His thesis is that "multiple arrangements of the Hebrew Bible are needed to account for all the compilational features within the Hebrew Bible" (p. 23). In other words, "compilational criticism must consider multiple arrangements of the Hebrew Bible because the composition of some of the Hebrew Bible's books was influenced by more than one arrangement" (p. 57; cf. pp. 23–43; 206–13).

One of Croy's key assumptions is that "the final forms of some books of the Hebrew Bible reveal an awareness of an emerging canon" (p. 25). Those who produced some of these books "were aware of an emerging canon of Scripture and composed their books to fill a specific role within the arrangement of that emerging canon" (p. 27). This claim further requires "the presence of an emerging canon of the Hebrew Scriptures" that would have "influenced the composition of some books" (p. 57). In these instances, there would be textual features that can plausibly be understood as referring to a broader collection (i.e., canon-conscious composition). These literary features would be "understandable within the book itself" but could be better explained "by pointing to how the book in question was intended to form an intentional compilation with another book" (p. 58).

After describing the most important ancient witnesses to the Jewish arrangements of the Hebrew Bible and proposing methodological controls for "compilation criticism" (chapters 2–3), Croy discusses the compilation of Nahum in relation to Micah and Jonah (chapter 4), Ruth in relation to Judges, Proverbs, and Psalms (chapter 5), and Chronicles in relation to Kings and Ezra-Nehemiah (chapter 6). In addition to these local case studies, Croy also considers "macro-canonical structures" like an exile-return model in relation to the prophetic history that spans Genesis through Kings and the "messiah model" that notes strategic prophetic and poetic texts in relation to the anchoring position of the book of Moses (chapter 7).

While the sharpness of the argument shifts depending on the evidence at hand, Croy sees in each of these compilational studies possible evidence that demonstrates his basic thesis: that "the text or wording of several books within the Hebrew Bible was influenced by more than one arrangement of the Hebrew Bible" (p. 206). Accordingly, the study of the Hebrew Bible's shape must include the analysis of multiple arrangements rather than a single linear sequence. For Croy, this necessity follows not only from the presence of multiple ordering traditions in the history of interpretation (which is recognized by many canonical interpreters) but also from the textual reality of compilation-conscious comments within select Old Testament books (which is the refinement Croy is proposing).

By interacting with the relevant scholarship and providing several exegetical case studies, this work advances several strands of the current conversation about the nature of canon formation and canonical hermeneutics. Croy develops here some of the methodological parameters that can help navigate the relationship between composition and canonization in the canon formation process. I am thankful for Croy's work in this volume and hope many students of the biblical canon consider its claims carefully.

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Basics of Latin: A Grammar with Readings and Exercises from the Christian Tradition. By Derek Cooper. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020, 432pp., $59.99.

This Latin textbook, written by Derek Cooper and published by Zondervan, has the feel and rhythm of another textbook that is popular in the market–Mounce's *Biblical Greek.* Like Mounce, Cooper offers a similar structure with an engaging curriculum and a grasp of the ecclesiastical tradition of Latin that quickly acquaints his readers with Latin. Cooper explains his justification for a Latin textbook in the Christian tradition in his introduction: the body of Christian literature is greater than that of the classical, even though the classical works are more familiar to the general public.

The layout of the curriculum is straightforward. The first chapter covers nouns, prepositions, and some conjunctions, while also providing the general structure of the language in usage and case system. Vocabulary is key and so a list of prepositions serves as a starting point. The author provides the etymology that the Latin vocabulary serves (or rather, the cognates in the English) to assist with making connections to the English language. It is worth noting that Mounce (the Greek textbook) and Wheelock (another widely used Latin textbook) do not do this but rather prepositions are scattered throughout various chapters.

At the end of each chapter is a reminder that there are exercises in the back of the book under Appendix I: *Exercitia.* Following this appendix is another appendix with a key for those exercises. These exercises try to familiarize students with translating the Latin text. Even with the first chapter, given the minimal amount of Latin, students are encouraged to look at some (very short) expressions from Genesis. Cooper encourages his readers to look at the English translation. With the key and ample instruction written in the text, it becomes clear that the textbook presents itself as a self-study for the Latin language. It is worth nothing that Zondervan offers a DVD-component of the curriculum that is sold separately ($199); it contains 28 lessons over 5 discs.

After the first chapter, Cooper takes the student through the first declension along with a nice foray into verbs with sum, the verb for "being," as in "I am" or "I exist." He assures his reader that these terms will be explained later. At the end of the chapter is another reminder that there are exercises in the back of the book, which students are expected to complete.

The third chapter presents the second declension with the fourth chapter presenting the third declension. Students are instructed to parse for case, number, and gender, along with the dictionary entry of the word (lexical form) and the English equivalent. Up until this point, students are given mostly nouns in all three declensions and the difference in form in each of their gender forms. The exercises convey the importance of students' pace of vocabulary study with fill-in-the-blank sentences.

Chapter five covers adjectives in all three declensions of all three genders. The next two chapters cover fourth and fifth declensions which are common in usage but not as numerous as those in the first three declensions. This concludes part one.

Part two covers the verb system in the indicative mood with tenses that make use of the first two principal parts: present, imperfect, and future—in both active and passive voices. The other tenses will not be covered until part five, but the author is intent on getting students to translate the Latin sentences framed from the basic structure consisting of subject, verb, and object. With nouns addressed in part one and basic verb tenses in part two, students practice translating Latin sentences taken from Christian literature.

Parts three and four provide instruction for irregular verbs and pronouns along with the vocabulary. The frequent usage of these words will help students. Parts five through eight will give the rest of the instruction on verb tenses (perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect), then with participles and moods other than the indicative (imperative, subjunctive, and infinitive).

The pedagogical method overall is sound. Most of the material covered is for the first year of Latin instruction. With more advanced syntax such as conditional clauses, the author directs his readers to consult another grammar text (e.g., see page 191; Allen & Greenough). There are some peculiarities of ecclesiastical Latin that will become noticeable, but by and large, Cooper has covered sufficient material to get students to start with Latin as quickly as they can. Cooper's work is tremendous in its ability to keep students engaged in Latin.

While there are other grammar texts used in theological education such as Collins's *A Primer of Ecclesiastical Latin* and Wheelock's timeless text, Cooper's work offers a unique approach to Latin instruction with copious examples of biblical and patristic literature within each chapter. The book is positioned for self-study, but this curriculum could easily make its way into the classroom setting with additional assignments and tests developed to evaluate the progress of students' acquisition of the language.

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Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine's City of God. **By Veronica Roberts Ogle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, x+201 pp., $99.00.**

In *Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine's City of God,* Veronica Roberts Ogle, assistant professor of philosophy at Assumption University in Worcester, Massachusetts, argues that Augustine's conception of the earthly city points to a reality beyond itself. Specifically, Augustine's "sacramental grammar" is intended to demonstrate a dual understanding of *civitatas terrena* (p. 4). This understanding of the city is directly related to Augustine's semiotics, namely the idea that earthly things serve as signs pointing to God—a view that lies "at the center of Augustine's whole worldview" (p. 4). In this way, Ogle argues against a literalistic reading of Augustine's rendering of the earthly city, approaching the issue as one of rhetorical device understood best in a sacramental ontology. This sacramental perspective relates to Augustine's "Christianized notion of Platonic participation" (p. 4). Augustine's use of *civitas terrena* is not a capitulation to earthly devices and politics; it is intentional for the purpose of symbolizing the tyrannical nature of the earthly city. Thus, Ogle provides a fresh and convincing argument towards understanding Augustine's rhetorical goals in *City of God*.

Chapter one establishes the foundation by explicating Augustine's view of the earthly city as dominated by *amor sui* (love of self). The logic of the earthly city inevitably leads to evil and ruin. For those who do not love neighbor for the sake of God, disaster is bound to follow. Consequently, for those who dismiss the authority and love of God, their priorities must be oriented towards themselves. The earthly city "is primarily defined by its members' shared attempt to shield themselves from God's love" (p. 28). Pride is the ultimate barrier to understanding true happiness in God, a story recast throughout history beginning with Satan's rejection of God's sovereignty (p. 33). Augustine consistently "[deflates] all of the earthly city's claims" and thereby demonstrates the inglorious nature of the world and its forfeiture of true power found in God alone. Ogle moves into chapter 2 with a focus on Augustine's rendering of pride as the primary cause of Rome's fall. Augustine must "convince [his readers] that there is a facet of reality beyond the imperial sights of Rome" (p. 44). Augustine, as Ogle indicates, does not unnecessarily disparage Rome but takes pains to "highlight the gap between Rome and the truly Just City" for the sake of instruction (p. 48). Augustine reinterprets the history of Rome with Christ as "the unabashed protagonist" who is at work towards renewal and transformation (p. 51). While Rome lauds mercy and justice, their history indicates otherwise. Thus, Christ is extoled as the truly just and merciful one. A culture of heroism and competition can only breed pride and love of self; a culture of sacrifice and deference breeds love of God and love of neighbor.

In chapter three, Ogle advances the psychagogic element of his rhetoric, seeking to provide a way towards healing by exposing faulty worldviews. Hence, Augustine creates a cognitive dissonance according to Ogle by leaving his readers "no way to solve the problem of *amor sui* on their own" (p. 69). Here the way of happiness according to the world is exposed and the way of politics by Rome's standards left wanting. Only Christianity can fulfill the promises made by philosophy and politics. Chapter four builds further upon the argument by exposing Augustine's political pessimism by positing the need for humility as the way forward. Roman history was replete with examples of those who feigned desire for justice, whether King Tarquin of Rome or those who overthrew him. Ogle notes that for Augustine, "the patterns of behavior in which Rome was trapped could only really have been reversed by its members' willingness to give up their desire for preeminence" (p. 113). Hence, for those seeking the flourishing of the early city and the promotion of virtues, Christianity was the "better religion for the *ciuitas*" (p. 115)

Chapters five and six bring Augustine's sacramental worldview to bear on the question. Ogle highlights Augustine's word-centered view of the world, with Scripture as the primary revelation of knowledge and all creation pointing as signs to the divine reality. Hence, the theory of signs presented in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* serves as the "sacramental worldview of the City of God, only viewed from another angle" (p. 128). Only through meditating upon Scripture with the eyes of faith can one see the fallacy of *amor sui*. The love of God (*amor Dei*) was "the original meaning of the creation" and demonstrates that the "cosmos is governed by an economy of gift" (p. 135). Politics *per se* are not the issue; it is politics governed by love of self. Hence, Augustine asserts that the earthly city "points us toward the Church as the community in which humility's font, *amor Dei*, is best nurtured" (p. 181).

Ogle gives readers a well-argued and readable text. While resting on the shoulders of previous work and current conversations, Ogle's work stands on its own. It should be read by those working in Augustine's political theology, as well as those who are concerned with the latest research on *City of God*. Students and scholars alike will find much in Ogle's text to enhance their reading of *City of God* and their appreciation of Augustine's theology contained therein.

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Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation: Ancient Wisdom for Current Controversy. By Gavin Ortlund. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020, 264pp., $30.00.

The doctrine of creation has received consistent attention throughout the history of the church. It has been intensified over the past 150 years following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and the subsequent scientific and Christian responses to that work. Within the span of the twentieth century, conservative Christians have challenged the place of evolution within a biblical doctrine of creation. The purpose of this review is not to highlight all of those responses, but rather to focus on one recent entry into the conversation. In his *Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation: Ancient Wisdom for Current Controversy,* Gavin Ortlund proposes that we look back in order to move forward in this discussion, specifically engaging the thought and work of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD). Ortlund embarks upon a retrieval project in order to address modern questions on historical Adam and evolution debates. Augustine is the perfect conversation partner for this debate, as Ortlund asserts, because "the doctrine of creation is at the very heart of Augustine's Christian faith, his pastoral vocation, and the overall shape of his theology" (p. 2). Thus, the doctrine of creation was highly personal to Augustine and informed much of his thought and even spirituality. Ortlund accesses Augustine's main writings on creation, particularly his commentaries on Genesis, but also the discussion of creation within his *Confessions* and *The City of God*. This data serves as the main coordinates throughout the text to help readers see and understand the depth of thought Augustine gave to the doctrine of creation, and its value for today.

Chapters one through four are dedicated to understanding different facets of Augustine's doctrine of creation and putting them in conversation with some of the modern-day discussions around evolution and creation. Ortlund demonstrates consistent reliance upon the primary source, yet not in an effort to proof text, but in an effort to work constructively with Augustine's thought. This is not a full treatise on Augustine's doctrine of creation, but it is tapping into the mainstream of Augustine's thoughts on creation within his main texts on the subject in order to bring to bear helpful historical insights on contemporary discussions. The main take away from Augustine is that his doctrine of creation was multi-faceted and multi-perspectival. Thus, the main virtue for approaching this conversation, according to Augustine, is humility. Ortlund does well in drawing out the implications of this thought in Augustine's work for our modern consideration. Particularly, he works through Augustine's so-called literal interpretation of Genesis as well as Augustine's view on animal death prior to the fall. On these issues and more, Ortlund notes that Augustine was "patient of having multiple interpretations of difficult passages" based on his desire to discern the spiritual consequences of different thoughts (p. 97).

The final chapter draws all prior discussion into conversations on the historical Adam and evolution. This much debated topic is carefully discussed, interacting with contemporary scholars and theologians while weaving Augustine's thought into the thorny bits of the debate. While some claim Augustine as a champion for evolution, others claim him as a stalwart of Adam's historicity contra evolution. The final consensus by Ortlund is that Augustine cannot be contained in either box but rather he "retains a surprising degree of flexibility with respect to interpreting particular details in Genesis 2-3" (p. 239). In this chapter Ortlund summarizes three ways in which Augustine can be brought into modern debates on evolution and the historical Adam. He calls these three "instincts" (1. Evolution, therefore, no Adam; 2. Adam, therefore no evolution; 3. Adam *and* evolution). Ortlund is careful not to suggest that Augustine lends himself firmly to any one view, but his epistemic humility provides a much-needed corrective in debates that can tend to demonize the other and champion one's own view as the only possible answer to the question. If one were to categorize his thoughts on the subject, Ortlund concludes that Augustine is "favorable to harmonization efforts in the realm of instinct three" (p. 239).

Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation is an accessible text in order to enter the mind of Augustine on creation for the specific purpose of addressing contemporary discussions. Bringing voices from the "*congregatio fidelium*" of the past (as Karl Barth has described it) to bear on contemporary theology is part of the work of theological retrieval —a significant concern for Ortlund in his writing—and should be a concern for all evangelical thinkers as we continue to do theology in the twenty-first century. This text, as Ortlund has described, is "an attempt to hear, and help others hear, a voice from within that *congregatio* that must not be ignored" (p. 8). This text can easily be added into courses on theological anthropology, the doctrine of creation, current issues on science and the Bible, and can serve as a good conversation partner for those wishing to engage in the debate on evolution and historical Adam. While Ortlund does not presume expert knowledge of Augustine's thought, a proper introduction to Augustine may be a pre-requisite before engaging this text. For the purpose it was intended to serve, Ortlund's work is commendable and worthy of the reader's time.

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***You Need a Better Gospel: Reclaiming the Good News of Participation with Christ.* By Klyne R. Snodgrass. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022, 190 pp., $22.99.**

In *You Need a Better Gospel: Reclaiming the Good News of Participation with Christ,* Klyne Snodgrass adds to the growing conversation among scholars and writers related to the need for a more comprehensive definition for "the gospel." This conversation begins with an assumption that the current definition for the gospel within evangelical circles is "deficient, inept, and inert" and that what is passed along as the gospel is "neither compelling nor taken seriously" (pp. 3-4). Snodgrass's comments echo recent works by Scot McKnight (*The King Jesus Gospel*, 2016), Bill Hull (*Conversion and Discipleship*, 2016), and Matthew Bates (*Gospel Allegiance, 2019),* all of whom challenge the church to present a gospel message that goes beyond the basic plan of salvation and focuses on a life intimately engaged with God through his Son. Snodgrass refers to this message as the "gospel of participation" (p. 8).

In the opening chapter, Snodgrass begins to deconstruct a prevailing gospel, what he refers to as a "simplified…message about saying the right words so you can go to heaven, even though the Bible has relatively little focus on going to heaven" (p. 9). While not denying the importance of the conversion experience, the author contends that the gospel goes beyond a single prayer or a cathartic moment of confession. He reconstructs the meaning of the gospel by connecting it to the disciple's "ongoing life with God…characterized by participation with, solidarity with, and attachment to Christ" (pp. 11-12). Faith, then, goes beyond agreement with certain beliefs or doctrinal positions, or even commitment to transcendent truth; along with these ideas, the biblical concept of faith in both the Old and New Testaments has a relational quality indicating "trust… loyalty…and allegiance" (p. 13). According to Snodgrass, the gospel is an invitation into a life of participation with Christ, "where life is engaged and experienced, not merely observed" (p. 23).

In chapter two, Snodgrass offers a historical apology for the gospel of participation. He cites several biblical scholars and authors—both contemporaneous and from the recent past—who have affirmed a participatory gospel. Moving backwards, the author quotes Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and other church fathers, reformers, and Christian movement leaders to demonstrate that "nearly all great Christian thinkers have emphasized participation" (p. 31). After establishing the historical lineage of his proposal, Snodgrass proposes several reasons why this gospel has failed to make an impact in the present day. He admits his suggestions are speculative; there is no definitive answer as to why this understanding of the gospel is not widely preached and taught. Perhaps, he says, "the cost is too high" (p. 32).

Chapter three provides a fuller discourse on the concept of participation. Herein, the author identifies significant biblical terms related to the act of participation in the life of Christ. He points to terms such as "in Christ," "with Christ," and "abiding/remaining" in the New Testament, as well as Old Testament terms like "cling/ hold fast," "join to," and "covenant." Snodgrass contends that the Bible is rife with direct and indirect teaching promoting a life of faith in which God's people are actively participating (engagement, obedience) with the Lord as he oversees their transformation into the image of Christ.

Over the remainder of Snodgrass's work, he systematically works through the biblical evidence for the gospel of participation. He starts with foundational Old Testament texts including the story of Abraham and the exodus of God's children from Egypt to the Promised Land. Moving on, the author highlights relevant passages from the Psalms and Major Prophets (Jeremiah, Isaiah), focusing on the role of God's covenant plan with Israel, as he called them through his leaders and prophets to live out a faithful relationship with him: "in other words, participation with God" (p. 70). Snodgrass then examines the Synoptic Gospels as a unit and explores the Gospel and Letters of John to identify the teaching and example of Jesus as He called his disciples into a kingdom community with one another and into a progressively intimate relationship with him. According to the author's interpretation of *pistis*, faith is a participative activity on the part of the disciple who believes "into" Jesus rather than simply believing "in" Jesus, which creates a "movement into a close association with Jesus, a commitment to, an attachment to, and a participation with him" (p. 95).

The author's treatment of Paul's writings focuses on a handful of well-known passages in his epistles, all of which speak to the application of the gospel of participation and lead to the conclusion that participation is the point of salvation. As he walks through 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:4, Ephesians 2:4-10; Romans 6:1-14; and 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Snodgrass identifies words and phrases that reflect the believer's participation in the plan of salvation. In the process, the author skirts around the edges of reformed theology without veering out of bounds: "Salvation is totally the work of God in which we are totally involved" (p. 113).

You Need a Better Gospel certainly affirms the author's thesis that "Christian faith is about participation with God" (p. 8). Even in the short form of less than 200 pages, Snodgrass constructs a convincing and consistent (albeit at times repetitive) argument for seeing the gospel as an interactive and engaging life with God, in Christ. Recent authors have identified the need for an understanding of the gospel that is wider and deeper than one moment of conversion and one that challenges believers to a lifetime of discipleship. Although "participation" may not be the most inspirational descriptor, the word is nonetheless accessible for any audience.

Accessible is also the word one can apply to Snodgrass's entire presentation. His writing style and method targets a wide audience of readers from scholars to students and pastors to pew-sitters. Some may criticize his lack of attention to doctrinal precision; there is little direct engagement with key theological concepts such as justification, adoption, substitution, or glorification. However, the author speaks to the essence of these ideas within his discussion. Snodgrass closes the book with a nod to application by offering four "requirements" for inculcating participation in the life the believer and the church (pp. 168-171). Each offering is relevant and practical, yet missing is any suggestion related to body life or establishing community. This area would seem important to developing a reflection of spiritual participation among disciples within the church. Aside from these observations, *You Need a Better Gospel* is an intriguing addition to an important discussion we must have about the meaning of the gospel and its implications for making disciples who move from conversion to "participatory" discipleship in a seamless process.

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Between Dixie and Zion: Southern Baptists and Palestine before Israel. By Walker Robins. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2020, 235pp., $49.95.

There are few things as exciting to a historian as discovering a surprising historical anecdote. Many good works of history have begun with the discovery of a seeming historical oddity in an archive or finding an intriguing anecdote that opens a vista to the unexpected. Walker Robins begins *Between Dixie and Zion: Southern Baptists and Palestine before Israel* with a story that may prove surprising to modern Southern Baptists. He describes the 1948 Southern Baptist Convention where messengers overwhelmingly voted against motions that called for the SBC to commend Harry S. Truman – himself a Southern Baptist – for his official recognition of the newly proclaimed state of Israel.

Historic Southern Baptist refusal to support the new Jewish state may come as a shock to modern readers. It certainly does not square with modern scholarship that often presents evangelicals as a unified pro-Israeli voting bloc. Recent scholarship has made much of the connection of American evangelicals and the Israeli state (e.g., Samuel Goldman's *God's Country: Christian Zionism in America* and Daniel Hummel's *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations*). Robins challenges simplistic characterizations of evangelical support of Israel with an in-depth examination of diverse Southern Baptist approaches to Palestine in the Mandate Era (1923-1948).

Robins asserts that polarized categories of pro-Zionist and pro-Arab are alien to the diverse realities of Southern Baptist interpretations of (and interventions in) Mandate Palestine. Robins also challenges monocausal representations of Southern Baptist attitudes towards Palestine based on a premillennial dispensationalist eschatology. Rather than cramming historical figures into tidy political or theological camps, Robins examines the diverse "types of encounters" through which Southern Baptists interpreted Mandate Palestine. He demonstrates that Southern Baptists reflected a variety of opinions on political and cultural matters in Palestine.

The driving impulse in Southern Baptist interest in Palestine was not Zionism or Arab nationalism but the spread of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Reaching Palestine for Christ was the fundamental goal of Southern Baptists, although this could be expressed in pro-Zionist or pro-Arab language by different Southern Baptists. Robins argues that Southern Baptists displayed "Orientalist" interpretations of Mandate Palestine. In so doing, he is drawing on Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism* (1978), which critiqued Western perceptions of "the East." Robins asserts that most Southern Baptist commentators reflected "Orientalist" assumptions pitting the "backwards" Arabs against the modern Zionists. This did not always reflect an embrace of political Zionism, but Robins shows Southern Baptist affinity for the "Western" ways of Zionists.

Between Dixie and Zion explores an ambitious range of Southern Baptist engagement with Mandate Palestine. Robins begins by introducing three lenses through which Southern Baptists interpreted Palestine: missions, biblical prophecy, and pilgrimage/tourism. He follows this with chapters examining the travel writings of Southern

Baptists and missionary engagement in Palestine. Chapter three is noteworthy, as it tells the story of the first Baptist missionaries in Palestine: Shukri and Munira Mosa. Shukri Mosa was a Palestinian Arab who was converted under the influence of Southwestern Seminary president L. R. Scarborough whom he met while peddling Holy Land souvenirs in Texas. Mosa founded the first major Baptist work in Palestine and for many years served as the primary voice to Southern Baptists on the behalf of missions in Palestine. Chapters five through nine focus on SBC engagement with the "Palestine question" in the United States. Chapters five and six detail the life and work of Jacob Gartenhaus, the first SBC Home Mission Board missionary commissioned to evangelize Jewish Americans, and the work of the Woman's Missionary Union that supported Gartenhaus in his efforts and publicized the work of SBC missionaries in Palestine. Chapters seven through nine explore the growth of premillennial dispensationalism in the SBC and the closely connected career of J. Frank Norris as well as the pushback from those who rejected Norris's marriage of premillennialism and Zionism. Robins shows that dispensational eschatology was influential but not the driving force in Southern Baptist attitudes towards Israel. Robins analyzes Truman is his final chapter, and he argues that Truman's support of the formation of the state of Israel synthesized the "politically expedient" with Truman's "faith and instincts" (p. 148).

Robins bookends his work with the rejected motions celebrating Israeli statehood in 1948 and a 2002 SBC resolution supporting "the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state" (p. 159). The concluding chapter provides a brief dash through theological developments within the SBC from 1948 to the present. This short summary of decades of change includes broad-brush statements and unsupported claims. This, however, does not detract from the diligent work reflected in the bulk of this book. It demonstrates the need for further work on theological development in the SBC in the twentieth century. Historians of religion will find much commendable in this short book, especially those with an interest in Baptist history. Robins treats his historical subjects as real human beings. He allows for individual inconsistency, and he does not enforce foreign categories onto historical actors. Furthermore, Robins writes well. He remembers that history is done best when it tells a story. The story of "Southern Baptists and Palestine before Israel" is a story worth recovering.

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Preaching Life-Changing Sermons: Six Steps to Developing and Delivering Biblical Messages. By Jesse L. Nelson. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022, 143pp., $16.99.

Desiring to assist preachers in the tasks of sermon preparation and delivery, Jesse Nelson magnifies the life-changing capacity of preaching and offers six practical steps for sermon preparation and delivery. As Robert Smith Jr. notes in the book's Foreword, Nelson writes with a hermeneutic of assumption. The assumption is that "pulpit work" begins with the perspective that the biblical text undergirds both the development and delivery of a sermon. Addressing the need for yet another preaching book, Nelson identifies five reasons for readers to take up and read this volume. Two of those reasons focus on African-American preaching and preachers. Nelson notes that his book includes information on African-American preachers, a subject missing in most preaching books, and that it treats some nuances of African-American preaching. The remaining three reasons center on his desire to bring the seminary classroom to the pastor's study through a practical and simplified approach for sermon preparation and delivery.

Arguing that the way to avoid preaching confusing sermons is to preach the text of Scripture, Nelson proposes six distinct steps in six chapters which are intended to facilitate preaching of text-based, life-changing sermons. The six steps are: seek the Spirit, select your Scripture, study the Scripture, structure your sermon, speak in the Spirit, and share the Savior. Within each chapter, Nelson includes personal illustrations, a profile of a preacher who models the particular step well and words of wisdom from a preacher on the implementation of the step.

The emphasis in the first chapter on the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching is a refreshing reminder. After appropriately identifying the Spirit as the author of Scripture, Nelson challenges the reader to seek the Spirit through prayer, expressing his conviction that it is the most neglected discipline for preachers. In the following chapter, the matter of Scripture selection is addressed. Here, the author's five reasons for preaching through books of the Bible are illuminating and merit careful consideration from all who are tasked with a preaching assignment.

In a chapter devoted to the study of Scripture, Nelson addresses the elements of observation, interpretation, and application as a part of the exegesis of a preaching text. Additionally, a striking strength of the book, given its stated practical and introductory focus, is his section on preaching from different Bible genres. Preachers, both veterans and novices, often are guilty of imposing "three points and a poem" on every text of Scripture. Heeding Nelson's advice can alleviate the peril of genre insensitivity. The book's fourth chapter treats the matter of the structuring of one's sermon. The reader will find accurate guidance with reference to the understanding and development of the sermon's main idea. Ideally, Nelson notes, it should be a single sentence that includes both subject and complement. After offering helpful insights relating to the functional elements of the sermon body (explanation, illustration and application), he addresses variations of sermon structures. The proposed variations, while helpful and consistent with text-based preaching, do not reflect the text-driven approach of letting the text itself dictate the structure of the sermon.

The final two chapters of the book include practical principles for sermon delivery and for extending a biblical invitation. Exhorting readers to deliver their messages in the power of the Holy Spirit, Nelson's treatment of the Spirit's anointing is commendable and noteworthy, given that it is neglected in most preaching texts. Additionally, his three steps for being a Spirit-filled preacher (asking, believing, and complying) exemplify the many practical and applicable insights which pepper this book. Regarding the use of notes or manuscripts in sermon delivery, this reviewer would have preferred a greater emphasis on the need for delivery with few or no notes. Nonetheless, the author's commitment to Spirit-filled preaching is clear. In particular, the reader will benefit from sustained reflection on Robert Smith's primer for sermon delivery. Nelson's inclusion of it serves to remind readers of one of the many key contributions of historic African-American preaching. The book's final chapter is devoted to a discussion of sharing an effective gospel invitation. In his emphasis on sharing the Savior, Nelson rightly observes that, while expository preaching is Christ-centered, the preacher should not bend every Scripture toward Christ. Rather, the goal is to reveal Christ in the Scripture. Ideally, the invitation itself should reflect and flow out of the content of the passage one preaches. Then, once the transition from sermon to invitation is accomplished, the preacher also may desire to include personal testimony as a part of his concluding remarks.

Finally, while the author does include basic resources for a preaching library in the third chapter, a more extensive bibliography, with a particular focus on expository preaching texts, would be a helpful addition to the book. Nelson does offer helpful guidance for beginning preachers through three appendices which contain examples of sermon outlines and sermons. Ultimately, he accomplishes his objective in writing this volume. His emphases on solid biblical content and effective delivery will serve well both the beginning and veteran preacher.

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***Luke-Acts in Modern Interpretation*. Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Ron C. Fay. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021, 392pp., $31.99.**

This is the second volume in the Milestones in New Testament Scholarship series, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Ron C. Fay. Porter is president and professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College; Fay is assistant professor of biblical studies at Liberty University. Their series aims to provide books about significant scholars and their impact on specific New Testament books and topics (p. 9). The editors decided on which Lukan scholar to focus each chapter. Their criteria were: (1) the scholars have made a significant impact on Luke-Acts studies; and (2) they have a complete or nearly finished body of writing. In other words, they have either "died or concluded the vast bulk of their careers" (p. 18).

1. *Humanizing.* With the extended biographical information about each scholar, this book helps to put a human face on these ten major scholars. One might already know Adolf Harnack denied Jesus' preexistence, miracles, and deity (p. 64), but how did it affect him personally? His Lutheran denomination considered him *persona non grata* and did not let him evaluate how well prepared his students were for ministry (p. 70). His father, a longtime university theology professor, wrote him a letter saying no Christian could hold Adolf's position on Jesus's resurrection, and they never mended their personal estrangement (pp. 58, 69).

F. F. Bruce wrote his excellent commentary on the Greek text of Acts under difficult conditions: his long stays in British air raid shelters during World War II (p. 198). Well-known scholar C. K. Barrett believed his first calling was as a Methodist preacher. He had a vibrant preaching ministry throughout his career. He also had a dry sense of humor (p. 272).

It was interesting when the chapter writer had a personal encounter with his or her subject. Stanley Porter heard F. F. Bruce speak at a lecture and seminar, and Porter gave some insightful observations (pp. 194-95). While a Ph.D. student, John Bryon had several encounters with C. K. Barrett (p. 272). However, most writers in this book had no personal connection with their subject. Most of the biographical sections were well written, but some were surprisingly short (chapters 4, 9-11).

2. *Nuancing.* This book can help one take a nuanced view about Luke-Acts scholars to avoid generalizations. For instance, Harnack was a prolific writer who influenced many scholars in the classic liberalism of his day (pp. 57, 63-63). Yet, he espoused the traditional authorship of Luke and Acts: Luke the physician from Antioch who joined Paul on parts of his second and third missionary journeys (pp. 76-82)—conservative views still positively impacting scholars today. Conversely, F. F. Bruce, who helped revive evangelical biblical

scholarship in England and had many biblically conservative views, held some beliefs that were not as traditional (p. 193). He thought evolution was compatible with Genesis, assumed a late date for the book of Daniel, and believed the book of Isaiah had multiple authors (p. 242).

3. *Interconnectedness.* The individual chapters, as well as in the Introduction and Conclusion, help the reader to see where these ten scholars fit chronologically in the last two hundred years and learn how they all built upon their predecessors. Often, they started work in new directions. Of course, some new ideas never took hold, such as those of Richard Pervo (p. 346). The Introduction was excellent, giving the chronological and theological setting for each of the ten scholars (pp. 17-55).

4. *Suggested Improvements.* The inclusion of many of the scholars appearing in this volume is justified, but some choices are questionable. The editors admit that their choice was subjective (p. 14), but one wishes they had included I. Howard Marshall and Darrell L. Bock. Bock may still produce more scholarly works on Luke-Acts, but he has already published an impressive amount. The influence of both men is evident in the number of times they are mentioned in the Author Index (pp. 393, 396). It would help to keep the chapter lengths more comparable. The two shortest chapters also had some of the briefest biographies (chapters 4, 9). Lengthening them would better fit the purpose of the book and help the reader better learn about the scholar. Numbering the chapters would help, but for the purpose of this review, this writer counts the Introduction as chapter one. The Scripture Index and Author Index are helpful. Adding a Subject Index would also be beneficial. Since the Conclusion was just a brief version of the Introduction, adding some connections with current Luke-Acts scholarship would benefit the reader (pp. 381-89).

Porter and Fay's volume fulfills its stated purpose of each chapter fitting in between a dictionary or encyclopedia entry and a biography of a Luke-Acts scholar (p. 10). It is helpful for master's and doctoral students as well as other scholars in providing information that is more than cursory but less than an entire book about a scholar. A good history of interpretive milestones in Luke-Acts studies for the last two hundred years, this book is a great help in showing how these ten particular scholars intersect.

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The Book of Acts as Story: A Narrative-Critical Study. By David R. Bauer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021, 304pp., $32.99.

David R. Bauer serves at Asbury Theological Seminary as dean of the School of Biblical Interpretation and Ralph Waldo Beeson Professor of Inductive Bible Studies. His expertise is narrative criticism, which applies the tools of studying literature to the Bible. In this volume he presents a sustained narrative-critical examination of Acts to prove: (A) Jesus is the dominant character; (B) Acts presents a consistent message; and (C) narrative criticism can give insights and answer questions not possible from historical criticism (p. 3).

In the first three chapters Bauer explains narrative criticism and shows how this interpretive method is the best one for studying Acts. He defines terms that are important in this process, such as: character, plot, and author. Although these may seem easy to understand, they can get complicated. So, his clear explanations are helpful for terms such as: (A) the narrative world versus the real world (p. 13); (B) types and purposes of characters (pp. 26-27); and (C) the five points of view one encounters in the text (pp. 38-44).

1. *Aspects of this Study.* The next four chapters are section-by-section narrative analyses of Acts with highlights of certain verses and words. The commentary section follows. For a model on how to apply narrative criticism, Bauer does a fine job in this sustained approach. He mentions many figures of speech, such as irony (e.g., pp. 102, 177, 195, 199), hyperbole (p. 132), and litotes (pp. 44, 201). He points out examples of rhetorical structures, such as flashback (pp. 135, 198) and *inclusio* (a bookending literary technique, pp. 63, 242). He is adept at comparing and contrasting elements within successive narrative material or speeches, such as anticipatory introductions (p. 50) and redundancies (pp. 46, 155). He effectively demonstrates how Luke maintains a consistent message throughout Acts. Along

the way, Bauer sometimes contrasts views in order to help the reader better understand what he claims (pp. 169, 197, 236). Surprisingly, Bauer says little about the "we" sections in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-37; 28:1-16), which should be a goldmine to a narrative critic (p. 36). Similarly, this volume pays the least attention to the last major section in Acts, 19:21-28:31 (pp. 217-48). The book needs a subject appendix. For instance, if a reader wants to know where Bauer found the use of inclusio in Acts, the only viable option other than a complete re-read of the book is to search an electronic copy.

2. *Benefits of this Study.* What are some benefits in a narrative-critical approach to Acts? Here are six. First, its primary focus is on the biblical text. Bauer mostly ignored how the text came to its final form and simply dealt with canonical Acts. Second, it helps clarify what tradition may otherwise obscure. For instance, Acts 13:1-19:20 deals with just two missionary journeys. There is no break between what we traditionally call the second and third journeys (p. 169). Third, new and helpful perspectives arise, such as the realization that Luke treats the church at Antioch almost like a character (pp. 162-64). Fourth, one discovers the major themes and emphases Luke carefully weaves throughout the book (p. 63). Fifth, understanding spatial point of view gives helpful insight: in Ephesus there is a shift of focus from Paul to other workers, showing the gospel is not dependent upon any one person doing ministry, regardless of how great he or she is (pp. 215-16). Sixth, one finds the thirty-six speeches in Acts are an integral part of the narrative and should not be examined apart from it (p. 63). Luke uses the speeches to drive the story forward (p. 65). Bauer effectively identifies the category of many of the speeches, such as farewell (p. 223), defensive (p. 227), and forensic (p. 237). He gives some helpful speech outline charts (pp. 208, 222) as well as section charts (pp. 180, 215), but more of both kinds of charts would benefit the reader.

3. *Limits of this Study.* Although Bauer claims to employ only narrative criticism (p. 3), he sometimes employs historical criticism, which is a better way to interpret Scripture. This reviewer believes narrative criticism alone is a deficient method of biblical study since it is synchronic, ignoring history and setting. Also, it can lead to overreaching speculation. For instance, did Luke omit charges against Jesus in his Gospel in order to put them in Acts in regard to Stephen's

martyrdom (p. 119)? Yet, narrative criticism is a helpful methodology when used carefully, as Bauer often does in this study. Expanding the commentary section (only 181 pages) would improve the book and give the reader more examples of Bauer's interpretation of the biblical text.

Bauer writes clearly about a subject he has mastered over decades of study. His book is helpful for pastors, undergraduate and seminary students, and teachers as a judicious example of using narrative criticism on the book of Acts. He does not allow this interpretive method to undermine or ignore the traditional interpretation of the text; rather, he demonstrates narrative criticism also can be a legitimate interpretive method.

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***The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts*. By Patrick Schreiner. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 179 pp., $23.99.**

Students of the Bible have long valued the book of Acts for its historical presentation of the spread of the gospel as it overcomes geographical, ethnic, and religious boundaries. Undoubtedly, increased appreciation for the ministries of the Apostles–specifically Peter and Paul–is a natural overflow of any reading of Acts. The historical moniker "Acts of the Apostles" is case in point. Fewer readers of Acts, however, exult in the *theology* of Acts, perhaps because of the transitional and programmatic nature of Luke's narrative.

Patrick Schreiner recognizes these important truths, yet his purpose in *The Mission of the Triune God* is to focus on the theology of Acts by drawing together several themes from Luke's narrative. In fact, Schreiner identifies seven themes "to summarize Luke's main theological aims" and to demonstrate that "Acts is about God, the God who continues his mission to glorify himself by blessing the nations through his chosen people" (p. 27). These themes are integrated, but they also build upon each other throughout the narrative.

The mission of the Triune God is foundational to understanding the theology of Acts. Chapter one establishes the work of God the Father, orchestrating the "action" of the narrative according to his plan to multiply the Word and advance his kingdom. Chapter two focuses on the Son, the risen and ascended Lord who gives life and rules over all. Chapter three shows how the Spirit–the promise of the Father and the Son–comes to extend the mission of Jesus' exaltation by saving, recreating, and reconciling a new people and a new kingdom community.

The theological themes of chapters four through seven build upon the trinitarian foundation. Specifically, the mission of the Triune God in Acts is exhibited in the multiplication of the Word, the dissemination of the gospel message of salvation to "all flesh" (from Jews to Gentiles to barbarians), the establishing of the church as the new people of God, and the mission of believers to be witnesses for Christ to the end of the earth.

Schreiner's writing is accessible and enjoyable–it isn't often that a serious work in biblical theology includes contemporary cultural references (from Kanye West to Gustav Holst) that set up theological emphases. The accessibility, however, does not betray the academic and pastoral vigor that Schreiner demonstrates in tracing the theological themes of Acts. As such, *The Mission of the Triune God* is a valuable supplement for preparation in preaching through Acts, but also a helpful catalyst for deeper study and engagement with the narrative of Acts and its theology.

One of twenty volumes in a series on New Testament Theology by Crossway, Schreiner's contribution faithfully executes the overall purpose and aim. As stated by editors Thomas R. Schreiner (Patrick's father) and Brian S. Rosner–both noted biblical theologians in their own right–this series is a project in biblical theology that includes historical and literary dimensions of the biblical text but focuses on the theological emphases in view of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus (p. 13). Readers will benefit from Schreiner's achievement of these goals for the book of Acts in T*he Mission of the Triune God*.

For example, Schreiner adeptly weaves together the Old Testament teachings of Exodus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Psalms (and more) into the progressive tapestry of God's mission to form a people for himself, ultimately in the Church, through the person and work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts does not exist in a theological vacuum, but rather fulfills and propels the Old Testament witness to God's mission in the world.

Essential to Schreiner's thesis is that Acts is a renewal document: "a model, a prototype, an exemplar for the renewal of the church" (p. 20). By renewal, Schreiner correctly defends the ongoing work and witness of the church to the nations after Luke concludes Acts 28. Jesus rules and reigns now through the church, and the commission to be his witnesses (empowered by the Holy Spirit) has not ceased after the activity of the early church recorded by Luke. The theology of Acts establishes this reality, as the Word *continues* to multiply, and the kingdom of God *steadily* advances (even in the face of persecution). Schreiner writes to encourage the contemporary church not to forget, or lack faithfulness to, the mission of the Triune God until Jesus returns.

Certainly, other themes could be included and more could be said about the theology of Acts than Schreiner has articulated. Readers will be hard-pressed, however, to find a clearer, more concise treatment of a biblical theology of Acts than this work. *The Mission of the Triune God* is a notable contribution and a commendable resource for any theological and pastoral library.

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What Does It Mean to Be a Thoughtful Christian? By David S. Dockery. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022, xiii+108pp., $9.99.

Christians in the twenty-first century are facing many unwelcome challenges in the secular world. Christians need to ask fresh questions about how to think wisely in order to stand firm based on the revelation of God. The title of this work points out the fundamental and foundational question concerning how to live in the world in a Christian manner. David S. Dockery, distinguished professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in a timely manner, unfolds another fine book pertaining to the Christian worldview.

Beginning with the focus of the book, by "thinking deeply or carefully or reflectively about things," says Dockery, "we will explore what it means for thoughtful Christians to 'think Christianly,' to love God with our minds" (p. 4). While rejecting both the ideas of being "thoughtful without being Christian" and being "Christian without being thoughtful," Dockery emphasizes that Christians need to commit themselves not only with hearts and souls but with their minds as well (pp. 9-10).

In the rest of the chapters, Dockery develops a list of eight large thinking and acting categories for living out a Christian framework in a thoughtful manner. Above all, thoughtful Christians recognize all true knowledge flows "from the one Creator to his one creation" by a concept of "faith thinking" (p. 16). Christian reason and thinking provide a genuine interpretive framework to all knowledge and experience in the world, which is called "the pattern of Christian truth" (p. 22). Dockery presents five important doctrines with a concise but rich articulation, which include creation, humanity and the fall, salvation in Christ, the Holy Spirit, and eschatology (pp. 23-28).

Based on this pattern of Christian truth, believers are urged to adopt a "Christian worldview," which, following Graham Cole, is presented as "a comprehensive life system, shaped by Scripture and influenced by key Christian doctrines, as well as the Christian intellectual tradition," which seeks to answer the basic questions of life (p. 33). Dockery maintains that God himself in the revelation of Christ is the framework through which Christ followers see, talk, and act by the power of the Holy Spirit. In accordance with this Christian framework, the Bible serves as the supreme authority for the foundation of the pattern of Christian truth (p. 43). In addition to affirming biblical authority, thoughtful Christians have always valued the Christian intellectual tradition and a commitment to education and cultural engagement (p. 49). As a result, Christian thinking embraces a holistic approach to both theological fields and general academic disciplines (pp. 58-59).

This Christian framework points to a harmonious pathway for thoughtful Christians to be, to live, and to serve faithfully in the church, culture, and the world (pp. 73-76). In this regard, Dockery says, "Reflective Christian thinking therefore points to ethics" (p. 66). In addition, thoughtful Christians also seek to reflect kindness, consideration, wisdom, humility, and hope (pp. 67-68).

Thoughtful Christians are the people of God who live by the authoritative Word of God. This simple but profound statement connotes that thoughtful Christians know how to think faithfully and biblically, valuing the Christian intellectual tradition and a Christian worldview. I gladly recommend this fine work which is grounded in the truth that Jesus Christ "is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col 1:17).

Wang Yong Lee
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