

BOOK REVIEWS

Kristin Kobes Du Mez. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York: Liveright, 2020. Pp. 356. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-631495731. \$28.95 (USD).

There has been a flurry of books recently released on conservative evangelicalism, especially in the political and social sciences. Kristin Kobes Du Mez, Professor of History at Calvin University, takes a more historical-cultural approach similar to her mentor George Marsden¹ in *Jesus and John Wayne*. The primary intersection of her analysis involves (a) masculinity, patriarchy, and militarism; (b) fundamentalist theology; and (c) American politics and nationalism in the twentieth century.

Having already been covered in media venues such as NPR and Vox, *Jesus and John Wayne* is largely known for one of its central theses: white conservative evangelicals in America do not support President Trump begrudgingly, but *enthusiastically because* of (not despite) his character. Furthermore, this love affair for tough-guys goes way back:

Conventional wisdom tells us that fundamentalists and evangelicals retreated from public view and political engagement after the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, or with the end of Prohibition in 1933, or out of a desire to focus on individual soul-saving, or due to various combinations of the above, only to reappear on the national stage in the 1970s, seemingly out of nowhere. But as we will see, the roots of a militarized and politicized evangelical masculinity stretch back to earlier in American history.

Antecedents can be found in the nineteenth-century southern evangelicalism and in early-twentieth-century “muscular Christianity,” but it was in the 1940s and 1950s that a potent mix of patriarchal “gender traditionalism,” militarism, and Christian nationalism coalesced to form the basis of a revitalized evangelical identity. With Billy Graham at the vanguard, evangelicals believed that they had a special role to play in keeping America Christian, American families strong, and the nation secure. The assertion of masculine power would accomplish these goals. (11)

¹ George Marsden (Notre Dame) is known for his seminal work on American evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

The incentives for strong male protection were ultimately based on fear—and “evangelical fears were real.”

Yet these fears were not simply a natural response to changing times. For decades, evangelical leaders had worked to stoke them. Their own power depended on it. Men like James Dobson, Bill Gothard, Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, Mark Driscoll, Franklin Graham, and countless lesser lights invoked a sense of peril in order to offer fearful followers their own brand of truth and protection. Generations of evangelicals learned to be afraid of communists, feminists, liberals, secular humanists, “the homosexuals,” the United Nations, the government, Muslims, and immigrants—and they were primed to respond to those fears by looking to a strong man to rescue them from danger, a man who embodied a God-given, testosterone-driven masculinity. As Robert Jeffress so eloquently expressed in the months before the 2016 election, “I want the meanest, toughest, son-of-a-you-know-what I can find in that role, and I think that’s where many evangelicals are.” (13–14)²

Du Mez’s (highly compressed) narrative first sketches the basic elements of American evangelical religion and examines the cultural, religious, and political dynamics of the first and second world war era. In addition to the seminal influence of Theodore Roosevelt, a crucial development was the shift from a relatively nonviolent and non-nationalist faith to a nationalist and militaristic one. “As late as 1952, the NAE [National Association of Evangelicals] had joined mainline groups in denouncing the nation’s peacetime militarization, but by the end of the decade, the conflation of ‘God and country,’ and growing reliance on military might to protect both, meant that Christian nationalism—and evangelicalism itself—would take on a decidedly militaristic bent” (36). This was even more true for the Vietnam war—an event that was rigorously defended by Christian nationalists, and where American soldiers became enshrined in countless books on Christian manhood as exemplary for the next half century. The cowboy model of actor John Wayne consistently appears throughout the book as the answer to both the nation and the church’s woes and enemies—not to mention an iconic image that facilitated the rise of cowboy Presidents from Reagan to the Bushes. “Those inspired by Wayne’s bravado came to see all of life as a war, and toughness as a virtue” (56). Du Mez’s narrative also incorporates the role of whiteness and racism as a compounding element to this particular socio-religious and political culture.

The book then examines the 1950s–1970s ideal for femininity and the

2 On the use of fear more generally in political and authoritarian contexts, note Chris Hedges, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (New York: Nation, 2012), 263.

unprecedented elevation of the nuclear family in American life. Chapter 4, “Discipline and Command,” looks at the influence and family models of Bill Gothard and James Dobson. Chapter 5 looks at the influence of Jerry Falwell and the LaHayes, Chapter 6 on Oliver North and Ronald Reagan’s administration, and then a continuation of a well-paced analysis and scholarly rhythm into the era of Promise Keepers and the 1990s. By that time, the art and science of evangelical masculinity was refined into countless Bible studies and consumed on a scale like never before. Key here is the influence of John Eldredge, James Dobson, and lesser-known figures like Douglas Wilson. The subordination of women and “leadership” of men became a holy orthodoxy everyone should be fighting for.

Du Mez’s story then arrives in the more recent world of the Quiverful movement and homeschool programs, Mark Driscoll’s manly megachurch empire,³ the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and its influences, Duck Dynasty, the renewed post-9/11 Christian nationalism and Islamophobia, and the new evangelical-industrial complex of Eric Metaxes, The Gospel Coalition, and Trumpism. “Evangelicals hadn’t betrayed their values. Donald Trump was the culmination of their half-century-long pursuit of a militant Christian masculinity. He was the reincarnation of John Wayne . . . a man who wasn’t afraid to resort to violence to bring order” (271).

The last chapter before the conclusion “Evangelical Mulligans: A History,” is perhaps the most important, as it reveals the results of this entire enterprise: large-scale mass abuse and sexual assault of women and children.⁴ Readers unfamiliar with the sources, documents, and events will likely be shocked at how many or most of the big names they read about in the previous fifteen chapters appear in this one. Du Mez demonstrates considerable restraint and generally lets the facts “speak for themselves”: the program of toxic masculinity, evangelical nationalism, and religious fundamentalism have staggering costs attached.⁵

In reading *Jesus and John Wayne*, it feels like the author was tossed a slow ball. It became particularly clear after the first few chapters that the enterprise of patriarchy, masculinity, and its direct connections to conservative politics are so explicit, so culturally saturated, and so influential that it hardly required much

3 Note Jamin Andreas Hübner, review of Jessica Johnson, *Biblical Porn: Affect, Labor, and Pastor Mark Driscoll’s Evangelical Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018) for *Priscilla Papers* 32:4 (Autumn 2018): 29–30.

4 Du Mez naturally focused more on men’s abuse of women and church members than molestation and coverups of children. But it is certainly a part of this story about power in church and family, and in reading the narrative, I couldn’t help but be reminded of the scandal(s) and coverups that split the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in America (ARBCA), Jennifer Greenberg and the Orthodoxy Presbyterian Church, and the countless other similar examples from reformed and Baptist churches that simply do not make major headlines.

5 This is particularly true given the catastrophic effects of sexual and child abuse on society. See Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York: Penguin, 2014), Part III.

digging. This isn't to cheapen the obvious academic labors involved in the book's production; indeed, the finer details and little-known facts accentuate the narrative in powerful ways. Contemporary readers must also come to grips with what appear to be "strange" facts, such as: "Billy Graham was a lifelong registered democrat" (33) and, "As late as 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution urging states to expand access to abortion" (68).⁶

Official evangelical doctrine appears to have little bearing on political or social decisions (4–6). Quite the opposite: the research and history demonstrate that American evangelicals adapt themselves to whatever person or party promises to give them power, while those same candidates adapt to their image to voters and adopt their pet issues. Bush became a ranch-owner just before starting his election. Reagan invited Falwell, Robertson, and LaHaye to be briefed by Oliver North to gain evangelicals' support in overthrowing the Nicaraguan government. Trump abandoned his support of the democratic party, his pro-choice position, and later got photos with a Bible in front of a church to win the white evangelical vote. In short, there is no question that conservative evangelicals are a tool in the hands of the political establishment—and today, of the Republican party.

Some caveats, however: (1) Though there are similarities, much of *Jesus and John Wayne* obviously makes little sense for Canadian evangelicalism, where the ethos is much different; (2) It is somewhat curious that the subtitle is "How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith . . ." when the purpose of the book is to show how the evangelical faith has always been corrupt in central ways to begin with (was there ever an *uncorrupted* evangelicalism?); (3) toxic masculinity is in no way limited to conservative evangelicalism; it would be interesting (and perhaps more fair) to also see the same kind of study conducted on Protestant liberals and liberal politics, even if it is likely to be less entertaining; (4) we might forgive Du Mez for excluding the episode of Chuck Swindoll—the original endorser of *Wild at Heart*, a Vietnam vet, and mega-church pastor from Texas—riding into church on a Harley. (Of course, such examples supporting her thesis are endless!)

If one wants to know what "toxic masculinity" or even "American evangelicalism" really means, *Jesus and John Wayne* is the best single volume for that exploration I am aware of. Lucidly-written, well-researched, fast-paced, and thoroughly untamed, it's a wild ride not to be missed. (Giddyup!)

Jamin Andreas Hübner
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6 Du Mez continues: "But with the liberalization of abortion laws, and as abortion proponents began to frame the issue in terms of women controlling their reproduction, evangelicals started to reconsider their position. . . . Only in time, as abortion became more closely linked to feminism and the sexual revolution, did evangelicals begin to frame it not as a difficult moral choice, but rather as an assault on women's God-given role, on the family, and on Christian America itself" (68–69).

James K. A. Smith. *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019. Pp. 256. Paperback. ISBN 978-1587433894. \$15.79 (USD).

James K.A. Smith's *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts* is a sprawling and ambitious work. Smith uses Augustine, filtered through the existential philosophy he has studied, as a starting point for what amounts to a kind of memoir. More autobiography than argument, the book invites readers to go on the road with the author and Saint Augustine, which is ultimately also a journey inward. It is not wholly about Smith's life, but Smith chooses key intersections of his own story with Augustine's (and Heidegger's and Sartre's) to tell a story about a variety of topics.

Smith does not so much argue that Augustine is the best guide for such a journey as he invites readers to decide by going on the journey. Like the philosophers he studies, he uses Augustine as a way to access and reflect on what he sees as truths about humanity in general. In one well-delivered passage of the book, Smith contrasts the rhetoric of Augustine's day, which sought to tell unique stories and stand out from everything else, with Augustine's *Confessions*, which, like modern day recovery literature, seeks to provide a story that people can find themselves in. Indeed, recovery literature is a thread that runs throughout the book, with Smith even comparing Augustine to an AA sponsor at the beginning. He contends that what Augustine offers Christians is essentially the same thing that recovery literature offers addicts: a story of desire, failure, and grace in which they can recognize their own stories. Augustine mastered the Roman oratory tradition but also broke with it in creating stories in which others can find their own story.

The roadmap to Smith's journey is the sprawling and ambitious part. He covers ambition, friendship, mothers, fathers, sex, death, and freedom amongst a host of other topics with only a loose organization and few markers about where the trip is going. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* is mentioned frequently in the book and the organization of the book can at times seem as unpredictable as one of Dean and Sal's road trips, which can be frustrating even when one finds Smith's reflections interesting. Being more autobiography than argument, the book proceeds more through story than syllogism. Smith's approach arrives at grand narratives through particular stories, which is one of the appeals of the book. He is a master of balancing the general and existential with the particular and historical. One minute he is mining Augustine's life for eternal truths about humanity and the next he is describing the scene of one of his pilgrimages in service of such a reflection.

However, sometimes Smith's attention to particulars is more distracting than helpful. Occasionally his penchant for pop culture references seems showy and doesn't add much to the argument. For example, in a passage where he applies

Augustine's reflections on his former "freedom" (which left him hopeless and depressed and looked like the "freedom" of the addict), Smith ends the paragraph with "This is what the Fleet Foxes call 'helplessness blues.'" The reference doesn't add any explanatory power to the previous sentences and just feels like a superfluous cultural reference to tease the soundtrack to the book. At times, Smith goes a bit off the road with such indulgent references; a tighter and more defined structure might have helped keep the book more "on the road."

This also serves to demonstrate a broader weakness to the book's approach. It often filters Augustine through existentialism in order to make Augustine relevant to modern readers through the use of contemporary references. While there's nothing inherently wrong with this, it mostly ignores the "New Canon" (articulated by Michel Barnes and Lewis Ayres) approach to Augustine scholarship (which Smith never mentions), which looks at Augustine less as an existential philosopher bent on articulating a grand narrative of existence and more as a bishop and pastor whose writings are primarily rooted in his advice to his flock. While Smith's version of Augustine remains compelling, it also tends to neglect the ways in which Augustine directed his flock and often, like Smith himself, entertained the general and existential through the particular and historical. This doesn't negate Smith's vision of Augustine, but it would temper some of the existential excesses of his account to root Augustine in his pastoral setting.

On the Road with Saint Augustine is an enjoyable and somewhat whimsical read. As such, it is a fun vehicle for the author to offer his own thoughts about the myriad aspects of human existence. It is a good introduction to Augustine for the non-specialist and one that hopefully draws readers further into the work of Saint Augustine.

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David P. Gushee. *After Evangelicalism: The Path to a New Christianity*. Westminster John Knox, 2020. Pp 225. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0664266110. \$19.00 (USD).

It is no great secret that conservative evangelicalism has left a bad taste in the mouths of many.¹ Whether it is widespread support of Donald Trump, hardline stances against LGBTQ inclusivity, or otherwise, many have felt alienated, confused, and outcast. One may begin to wonder, is there a better way to practice Christianity, and if so, what? It is to these people that Gushee is writing: *After Evangelicalism* is intended to show those who have left evangelicalism that there

1 Evangelicalism globally is more diverse than it is in America, and many of the criticisms will not apply to global evangelicalism (though many will). However, Gushee's primary target is American evangelicalism, though he does not always specify his American context.

is Christianity, well, *after evangelicalism*.² Gushee, using the analogy of a maze (which is also the cover design), puts it this way: “The goal of this book, then, is to offer clues for getting out of some of the most difficult spots in the evangelical maze, in order to come out on the other side—not just alive and intact, but still interested in a relationship with Jesus.”³

Gushee divides his book into three main categories: authority, theology, and ethics, each containing three chapters. This order is intuitive, since theology generally flows from authority, and ethics from theology. He begins with a brief overview of evangelicalism, focusing on its origin in fundamentalism and subsequent growth, arguing that any semblance of normativity is imposed by its adherents, rather than inherent to the theology; additionally, Gushee portrays evangelicalism as a modern religious phenomenon rather than a timeless tradition of the church.

Chapters 2 and 3 serve to describe the various sources and methods for practicing theology; the trajectory of these chapters serve to relegate the bible from its often-overemphasized role (frequently manifest in biblicism, or worse, bibliolatry) and promotes other sources of knowledge (Gushee uses the Wesleyan Quadrilateral at this point, but adds the arts and sciences).

In part two, Gushee moves into the task of practicing theology, in three chapters: God, Jesus, and Church. Here Gushee introduces a litmus test that he applies to his theological claims: the burning children test. The test is born from the Holocaust, and stated this way: “*No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that is not credible in the presence of the burning children*” (emphasis original). Gushee follows by telling the broad narrative of the Hebrew Bible, and the narrative of Jesus through the Gospel of Matthew. In his chapter on church, Gushee contrasts the evangelical church with various biblical and creedal statements (e.g., the church is a body, a covenant people, is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic), and encourages post-evangelicals to attend churches outside the evangelical circle.

Part three discusses topics of sex, politics, and race. In these chapters, Gushee offers his most incisive criticisms of the evangelical church in what he sees to be significant moral failures. This is the most valuable portion of the book for two reasons: first, Gushee shows the most sophistication (which is unsurprising, since he is an ethicist), and second, he covers topics that are extremely pertinent to our time, namely Trump and race.

2 This is not pertinent to the content of Gushee’s book, but it is worth noting that the cover design of *After Evangelicalism* looks nearly identical to Stephanie Williams O’Brien, *Stay Curious: How Questions and Doubts Can Save Your Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019).

3 Gushee is hardly the first person to write in this space. For instance, Brian D. McLaren, Peter Enns, and Rachel Held Evans have all written various books relating to post-evangelical forms of Christianity; more recent books, such as Jamin Hübner, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: A Letter to a Friend and a Professor’s Guide to Escaping Fundamentalist Christianity* (Rapid City, SD: Hills, 2020), have attempted not only to offer an alternative Christian theology, but to analyze evangelicalism to show various weaknesses.

One significant issue with the book is that it feels rushed. The first two sections are not covered in great depth, nor does there appear to be any significant contributions in these sections. To anyone with a healthy understanding of theology and biblical studies, most of these chapters will be covering old ground. Some of this may be forgiven, since its subject matter is so broad, and the book is so (comparatively) short. It would be difficult to sufficiently discuss any of the three parts on their own in a book this size, let alone all of them together.⁴

However, some parts might not be so easily forgiven. For instance, in his chapter on Jesus, Gushee is heavily reliant on James Dunn's recent *Jesus According to the New Testament*. While Dunn's work is obviously valuable, Gushee would have done well to include insights from a greater variety of works and scholars. Additionally, Gushee occasionally makes claims without adequate argument. In his chapter on scripture, Gushee offers two possible interpretations of *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος* in 2 Tim 3:16, either "all God-breathed scripture" or "all scripture is God-breathed," chooses the former (what he calls "limited inspiration") and defend it by saying that it makes the most sense to him. Again, some of this is forgivable, since the targeted toward a popular audience (and he does cite an exterior source), but further discussion of the Greek would have been helpful in the footnotes and avoided a half-baked feel.

On the whole, nevertheless, Gushee offers a broad, level-headed look at what Christianity can look like for those who leave evangelicalism. Further, the book's discussions on Trump and race are valuable for the current context, especially for those who find themselves alienated from evangelicalism from precisely those reasons.

To use the metaphor of a maze, Gushee's book is not a map that will get you through the entire thing; nor is it a picture of what things look like on the other side. However, it offers some hints for navigating the maze, and it gives hope that there is more to Christianity than evangelicalism.

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John H. Walton. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible. Second Edition.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. 384. Paperback. ISBN 978-1540960214. \$29.24 (USD).

What was the conceptual worldview/cognitive environment of the people of Israel? How is Yahweh different from the gods of the ancient Near East? What

⁴ There is also the possibility that Gushee was forced to race to submit before a deadline, but this is speculative.

is comparative study? Why do students of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (HB/OT) need comparative study? These key questions (and more) are all effectively answered within John H. Walton's *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, now in its second edition. Walton states that through this work he seeks to "sift through the information provided by the specialists who have diligently made the literatures and cultures of the ancient Near East available to us" and to "perceive some of the important basics of that ancient cognitive environment" (313). Walton also notes that he specifically conducted this study "with the intention of demonstrating that Israel was indeed a partaker of this cognitive environment and shared many of the basics in some degree with its neighbors; Israel was immersed in the ancient cultural river" (313). That is not to say, however, that there were not a few major distinctives with respect to Deity that Israel expressed as compared to the rest of the ancient world (such as "God was one—and their worship of him was aniconic," or "God had spoken in ways and to an extent not evident in other cultures," etc.) for, clearly, these points were at the core of Israelite identity and had a significant influence on their cognitive environment (see 316). Nevertheless, Walton maintains:

Many aspects of their cognitive environment remained in continuity with the rest of the ancient world. These points of continuity and discontinuity should have an important role in our interpretation of the Bible, and knowledge of them should guard against a facile or uninformed imposition of our own cognitive environment on the texts of ancient Israel, which is all too typical in confessional circles. This recognition should also create a more level playing ground as critical scholarship continues to evaluate the literature of the ancient world. (316)

The volume is divided into five main parts: (1) Comparative Studies, (2) Literature of the Ancient Near East, (3) Religion, (4) Cosmos, and (5) People. These main units are of unequal length and contain between one and six chapters a piece—not counting the many excurses and so-called "Comparative Explorations." Concluding the volume are an appendix that delineates almost thirty of the most significant "gods" of the ancient Near East (including Yahweh), five remarkably thorough and immensely helpful indices (including "Scripture," "Foreign Words," "Modern Author," "Ancient Literature," and "Subject"), and a bibliography that is almost double the length of the original edition (fifteen pages as compared to eight).

Part 1, Comparative Studies, is comprised of two chapters that introduce the concept of comparative study, its history and methods, and its necessity for the student. Walton asserts that comparative study "constitutes a branch of cultural studies in that it attempts to draw data from different segments of the broader

culture (in time and/or space) into juxtaposition with one another in order to assess what might be learned from one to enhance the understanding of another” (7). Within this section also, Walton speaks to the question of taking an apologetic approach to comparative study (30), expresses his belief that the writers of the HB/OT did not regularly engage in polemics against the surrounding cultures and ideologies (14), and cautions against both “parallelomania” and “parallelophobia,” stating that we must instead “silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural environment” (5). Alongside this, Walton offers ten principles of comparative study and some clear goals of cognitive environment criticism (17–18).

Part 2, Literature of the Ancient Near East, consists of a single chapter in which many of the major pieces of ancient Near Eastern literature are sorted by: (1) major language type (Egyptian, Akkadian, Hittite, Sumerian, Ugaritic, etc.), and (2) category (such as “myth,” “literary texts and epics,” “ritual texts,” “divination/incantation texts,” etc.). Walton astutely notes, however, that though these categories are often identified as “genres,” such labels are “hazardous because they generally impose a classification system that reflect our own ideas of literary types” (33). He thus also asserts that these categories are “heuristic” and are used “to offer some organization to the list” (33).

Students and scholarly readers alike will not be disappointed that the author’s engagement of the ancient Near Eastern texts are taken from both the standard “critical editions” and the more accessible volumes, such as *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (James B. Pritchard, ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), *Old Testament Parallels* (V. H. Matthews and D. J. Benjamin, eds., New York, NY: Paulist, 1997), *Readings from the Ancient Near East* (B. T. Arnold and B. E. Beyer, eds., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), and *The Context of Scripture* (William W. Hallo, ed., Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002), including, most notably, *The Context of Scripture*’s fourth volume, thereby tremendously increasing the user-friendliness and overall accessibility of this work while retaining the highest standard of academic rigor.

As compared to the first edition, this chapter is arranged in a much more pleasing format, with clear and visually appealing tables. The ability to see all the texts at-a-glance is a real boon to the student and is an immense time saver. One major drawback compared to the first edition is, however, that the texts themselves are not annotated. That is, unlike the first edition that provided roughly a paragraph for each of the texts under discussion, the second edition of Walton’s volume merely retains the overarching introduction/orientation sections to each of the major units.

In parts 3, 4, and 5, Walton draws on the primary source materials that were noted in part 2 in order to explore a variety of specific elements of the ancient Near East, such as “The Gods,” “Temples and Rituals,” “State and Family

Religion” (part 3), “Cosmic Geography,” “Cosmology and Cosmogony” (part 4), “Human Origins and Role,” “Historiography,” “Divination and Omens,” “Cities and Kingship,” “Law and Wisdom,” and “Pondering the Future on Earth and after Death” (part 5).

Interspersed throughout the book are over 30 “Comparative Explorations.” They vary in length from less than ½ page to over 5 ½ pages, and cover a number of topics including, “Genesis 1 and Temple Building,” “Image of God,” “Dreams and Dream Interpreters in Israel,” and “Yahweh’s Council.” Many of these explorations have been brought up to date in terms of context and/or are revised for better clarity in this second edition. Notably, one specific comparative exploration that appeared in the first edition, “Israelite Principles,” is not present in the current volume. Alongside these comparative explorations are also a number of excurses, such as “Polytheistic Iconism” and “Ziggurats,” that are quite useful. But regrettably, they are not noted in the table of contents.

Additionally, the volume also contains close to ten tables that outline a variety of topics such as, “Similar Perspectives on Creation and History in the Ancient World,” “Modern, Ancient, and Israelite Perspectives on History and Historiography,” “Literary Context of Law in the Pentateuch and the ancient Near East,” and “Ancient Near Eastern Prophetic Oracles.” Two tables that are brand new to the second edition are “Aspects of Afterlife Belief” and “Royal Rhetoric in the Bible and the Ancient Near East.” However, two tables found in the first edition, “Roles for Comparative Study” and “The Comparative/Contextual Spectrum,” have been removed. Though not an immense setback, this reviewer does wish that these tables were retained, if only for the sake of better orientating those who may be uninitiated to the subject—even if they were, perhaps, in need of some supplementation as to their proper use(s). This matter is somewhat addressed by Walton in an extended comment:

I would contend that while the committed reader of the Bible may find excuses not to care about comparative studies in the critical or defense roles, he or she cannot overlook its importance for interpretation. If we do not bring the information the ancient cognitive environment to bear on the text, we will automatically impose the parameters of our modern worldview, thus risking serious distortion of meaning. Consequently, the objective of this book is to improve the exegetical analysis of the Old Testament based on information derived from the ancient world. We will therefore not take an apologetic approach (30)

It is worth noting as well that though the first edition contained only around twenty illustrations, the second edition boasts over thirty images of high-quality resolution (except for one rather grainy image entitled “Ninurta Battling Chaos Beast”).

Some notable new pictures include the “*Coffin Texts*,” the “Tel Dan inscription,” the “Atrahasis tablet,” “Baal, the Canaanite storm god,” the “*Book of the Dead*,” and a drawing of “Nut, Geb, and Shu.” Readers of the first edition may be disappointed that some images appearing there (e.g., the “Cyrus Cylinder,” “Cuneiform Writer,” “Seven-headed Chaos Beast,” and “Relief: Darius Seated: Xerxes Behind”) do not make an appearance in this second edition.

With the above in mind, I am hesitant to agree with the assertion of JoAnn Scurlock who states in her endorsement that this “new book replaces an older edition over which it is infinitely superior” (back cover). Although the second edition of Walton’s volume is superior in terms of its updated content, clearer reframing of certain discussions, and an impressive streamlining of many of its charts, graphs, and tables, etc., there is still value in consulting the first edition; this volume is not a wholesale replacement for it. For example, in chapter 3, the annotations of the ancient Near East texts of the first edition are superior to the mere summaries found in the second edition. Indeed, this second edition would have been better served by retaining what was deleted from the first edition, while perhaps providing more commentary or clarification, as necessary.

Pedagogically speaking, the writing style of *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* is clear and accessible, appealing to both the specialists and the uninitiated alike. Additionally, Walton’s volume also has a very pleasing format with ample, but not too much, white space, easily identifiable headings and subheadings, a thorough table of contents, and plenty of charts, graphs, tables, and the like, all of which are offered in a remarkably clear format. Each chapter is a reasonable length, as is the book itself. In my view, students would not be overwhelmed by reading this text in its entirety for a one-semester course, even if an additional text (or two) were also assigned.

To conclude, Walton’s book is by far the most accurate, up-to-date, and accessible resource that is available on the subject, bar none. Its primary readership includes beginning to intermediate students of the HB/OT and, one hopes, all serious expositors and teachers of Scripture. Highly recommended!

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Mark D. Nanos. *Reading Paul within Judaism. Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos. Vol. 1.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017. Pp. 188. Paperback. ISBN 978-1532617553. \$23.00 (USD).

Each new Pauline study seems to add a new level of complexity to understanding the essence and identity of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Mark Nanos, Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, hopes to shift the paradigm

for understanding Paul. Over the past twenty years Nanos has become a prolific author/essayist, both in print and on the internet. This is the first volume in a projected four volume series.¹

The preface begins with a reminder of the presuppositions we all bring to a text. Writing as a Jew (an “outsider” [xiii]) Nanos champions an inter-Jewish reading of Paul. The chapters, for the most part, proceed chronologically, written between 2004 and 2015. These essays originated in seminars and journals (*Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting*, and *Studies in Christian Jewish Relations*). The diversity of venues for these essays portrays a broad range of ecclesiastical and scholastic interaction with Nanos’s thesis. For a collection of essays based on a specific thesis, it is not surprising to find a repetitive rhythm. This review will first summarize Nanos’s “Paul within Judaism” thesis. Then there will be a brief analysis of the three parts of the book, including the ways each chapter contributes to that thesis.

In *Paul within Judaism (PWJ)* Nanos frames Paul’s letters to non-Jewish Christ followers in an inter-Jewish, not inter-Christian, context. Paul should be read through the lens of his first audience, whose identity is conceptualized under the umbrella of Judaism. Nanos strives for terminological clarity, temporal accuracy, and the avoidance of anachronistic interpretation.

The awaited age, when the nations would worship the One God with Israel, had dawned through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was their faith in Christ that made these Torah-observant followers of Jesus distinct from a host of other Jewish subgroups. Paul was not setting out to establish a new religion (111). The question Paul sought to answer was, “What was necessary for the non-Jewish Christ followers to be identified as equal partners with Jewish Christ-followers?” Paul’s answer was that equal status was not gained by the works of the law (*ergou nomou*, aka “circumcision,” 45, n. 111). The non-Jewish Christ followers were equal in status, while retaining their ethnicity and social identity (Gal 3:28). They were to remain in the pre-existent social condition in which they were called by Christ (1 Cor 7:17–24). Their practice and lifestyle of observing Jewish purity norms was to reflect their new identity within Judaism through the obedience due the One God of the *Shema* (the ultimate Jewish ideal), the creator of every nation.

Thus, at the time Paul wrote his letters, Christ followers were situated within Judaism. His letters must be read in that context. Understanding the “chronometric” (a term coined by Nanos) aspect of his thesis is a key piece of Nanos’s interpretive approach. It means that the dawn of this new age and the promise of

1 Now in print: Mark D. Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism. Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos, Vol. 2* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018); Mark D. Nanos, *Reading Corinthians and Philipians within Judaism. Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos, Vol. 4* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

the restoration of Israel and the gathering of the nations has begun in the present time (22, n. 55).

Part I is entitled “A New Approach to the Apostle. Paul as a Torah-observant Jew.” The lone chapter in this section is the longest in the book (56 pages). It is an updated version of “Paul and Judaism. Why Not *Paul’s* Judaism?” (emphasis original) that appeared in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle* (Mark Given, ed., Hendrickson, 2009). The essay originated at an SBL meeting in 2004. His aim in this essay is “to prod the Pauline interpretive community to paradigmatic change” (17). This is the foundation for his PWJ thesis.

A brief historical survey shows how the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), falls short of its claims to minimize an anti-Jewish image of Paul. Two primary texts are considered. In 1 Cor 9:19–23, the way the traditional approach and the NPP portray Paul he becomes a disingenuous individual (“chameleon-like” [6]). Rather Nanos sees here a demonstration of Paul’s rhetorical adaptability, later described as “arguing like” or “reasoning like” (98). Galatians 1:3–14 reveals how Paul views his role as a calling (rather than a conversion), in the context of the Hebrew Scriptures. Nanos redefines “the leaders” from whom Paul was distancing himself as Paul’s former group of Pharisees, not the apostles (33).

Part II is entitled “Exploring the Implications for Exegesis and Christian-Jewish Relations” and includes five essays. His goal in chapter 2 is to demonstrate how the interpretive attempts to soften Paul’s criticism of Judaism, particularly by the NPP, do not work. Just the opposite happens. If Christian Judaism is bankrupt, then logically how much more bankrupt is non-Christian Judaism (69). A cautionary note regarding the presuppositions residing within traditional and NPP scholarship comes into play here. He believes Pauline studies have been based, unconsciously, on scholarship (i.e., Baur, 66) that has an inherent anti-Jewish bias. Paul is not anti-Jewish. Paul’s target audience is non-Jewish Christ followers of Jesus who were being told to get circumcised so they can be full participants in Israel.

Chapter 3 was originally an essay dedicated to Krister Stendahl in a 2008 publication. The myth of a “Law-free gospel” needs to be dismantled. “Paul did not teach the end of the Torah” (79). For Paul, the Torah will be interpreted differently for Jews and for non-Jews now that the new age of the Messiah has come upon us. Nanos is adamant against the use of the anachronistic term “Christian.” That descriptor was not available to the assemblies of Paul’s time (86).

Among the specific texts that Nanos engages to demonstrate Paul’s view of Torah within the Christ assemblies is the Antioch incident described in Gal 2:11–15. For Nanos’s Paul, the matter was about food being shared, not the food that was being served. The text is not an indictment of Jewish food laws. Neither does the passage demonstrate a divide between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles. The

“certain ones from James” who came to Paul were Jewish outsiders who had been allowed access by James to meetings in Jerusalem (92). Likewise, in his reading of 1 Cor 8–10 and Rom 14–15 Nanos finds no condescension directed by Paul towards Torah faithful Jews. In all, Nanos seeks to reveal the limitations of the circular logic of traditional interpretations of these passages. His thesis is motivated by his desire for a new level of respect in relationships between Jews and Christians.

Chapter 4 begins by affirming the theological, social, and historical significance of the *Shema*. Rom 3:29–31 is Paul’s “direct appeal to the *Shema*” as the basis for his understanding “the equal standing of non-Jews within the community of the people of God” (111). He sees the *Shema* Israel as the center of Paul’s theology (111). In the *Shema* particularism meets universalism: the LORD is our God thus Israel is privileged. At the same time, as the LORD alone, God is the creator of all humanity, the God of all the other nations. For non-Jewish Christ followers to be forced to become ethnic Jews by undergoing circumcision would render the declaration that God is “the God of all the nations” meaningless. Paul’s calling was to the nations, but he did so under the Jewish ideal of *Shema* Israel (121).

Chapter 5 concerns Rom 2:25–29 and Josephus. Nanos demonstrates the subtle nuances that differentiate “becoming a Jew,” “becoming Jewish,” and “practicing Judaism.” Our interpretive mistakes come from a monolithic perception of Judaism, that ends up branding all Judaism as anathema to Paul. The NPP tries to have its proverbial cake and eat it too by saying that while Judaism as such has been superseded for Paul, all who follow Christ are for him “true” or “spiritual” Jews. Josephus narrates several incidents of non-Jews wanting to become Jewish (including the oft-cited narrative of King Izates of Adiabene). For Nanos, Rom 2:25–29 does *not* suggest that Jewish identity is replaced with a “Christian” one. Paul assumes here the role of Nathan to the David played by his non-Jewish Christ following readers. They are not to judge each other. Rather, they are to judge themselves and seek to internalize Jewish ideals.

In Chapter 6 Nanos looks at Rom 15:7–13, which portrays Christ-following gentiles worshiping God amid the Jewish people who remain the people of God. Nanos proposes from here a way to “think about living for the success of others” (167) rather than maintaining a “who is in, who is out” mindset.

PART III contains one essay entitled “A Jewish Contribution to Pope Benedict XVI’s Celebration of the Year of St Paul (2009).” This chapter could be read either as a primer or a summary of Nanos’s thesis.

A paradigm will not change with the reading of one book. It can open one’s eyes to problems and inconsistencies within one’s own perspective. It can alert us to our predispositions and assumptions. It can instruct us in alternative points of

view. I believe Mark Nanos accomplishes those things with this offering. The nuanced repetition leads to a better understanding as you work through each essay.

Nanos reveals the dangers of reading our Christian categories into Paul's embryonic faith. I appreciated his focus on the social and religious context at the time Paul was writing. I was surprised that there was not more interaction with Social Identity Theory. His case for Paul's opponents in Gal 1 being his former Pharisaic party members was not as convincing. It is a stretch to see Paul as a Torah-observant Jew, but something must be done with those Torah-affirming statements Paul makes in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Galatians. Neither the traditional approach nor the NPP has demonstrated absolute conclusiveness regarding all aspects of Paul. Nanos exposes cracks in their foundations. I also found his translations to be helpful. His use of new terminology (i.e., "foreskinned," "news of good in Jesus Christ") has a way of getting the reader's attention. Still, it seems his pendulum swings too far. For Nanos, Paul's embrace of Judaism is total, almost to the point where being "in Judaism" supersedes being in Christ.

I applaud Mark Nanos for working extremely hard to overcome the anti-Jewish bias that he sees as resident in Pauline studies for centuries. He does make a case for this being a liability that has become so ingrained in the field of Pauline interpretation that those of us who are not Jewish are unable to see or hear it. It often takes an outsider to show us our blind spots.²

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The Christian Idea of God: Philosophical Foundation for Faith. Keith Ward. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 229. Paperback. ISBN 978-1108410212. \$29.99 (USD).

Keith Ward is Professor of the Philosophy of Religion (University of London) and Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, and his book *The Christian Idea of God* comes as the third installment of his trilogy in Christian philosophical theology—the first being *Morality, Autonomy, and God* (2013) and *Christ and the Cosmos* (2016). "But this book," he remarks on p. 2, "is meant to stand alone as a cumulative argument giving a philosophical foundation for Christian faith."

I was terribly skeptical about reading the book. First, I was worried it would be a work of analytical philosophy and read like Alvin Plantinga or Bill Craig—syllogisms, propositional logic, symbols, and equations, in short, a dreadfully mechanical and boring exposition of abstract ideas that a small part of the academic

2 Mark Nanos is accessible on his homepage (www.marknanos.com) and the Paul Within Judaism website (<http://www.thepaulpage.com/paul-within-judaism/articles/>). If you are unfamiliar with Mark Nanos, I would recommend starting with "Paul, Why Bother?" which is posted on his homepage.

population strangely enjoys. Second, I was concerned that the upfront argument for “personal idealism” would be esoteric, detached from human experience, and disconnected (or even at odds) from the main themes of Christian theology and lived work of the church. Third, monographs by Cambridge University Press with no endorsements by a divinity and philosophy Professor in the ivory towers of academia are often, too, the sure sign of incoming yawns.

I couldn’t have been more mistaken. *The Christian Idea of God* may be the best work of Christian theology—with a philosophical bent—that I’ve ever read. The “idealist” flavor hardly stands in the way of a theologically sound and biblically-informed perspective (it was actually persuasive in many ways); it’s extremely easy to read and rarely technical; it is highly concise and shows depth of central issues about the meaning of life and meaning of God and creation; and it is shockingly honest and humble about its conclusions. This is the type of work I wish I would have read years ago instead of Moreland and Craig’s *Philosophical Foundations for the Christian Worldview*,¹ or similar works from a rather cloistered and technical perspective more or less enslaved to the demands of high school evangelical apologetics clubs. Indeed, Ward, author of *Confessions of a Recovering Fundamentalist* (2019),² has the tempered wisdom necessary for a sort of apologetic that is genuinely convincing and penetrating, if ever such works exist. Yet, the book really isn’t really an apologetic, as much as a subtly persuasive description. “God is not an inference from what we know to be real,” of course. “God is the implicit reality which we know in all our knowing. The philosophical task is to spell out what it means to say that mind is the basis of reality” (13).

Ward’s “personal idealism” may not strike some readers as unusual as it may first sound. After all, “Almost all believers in God are idealists in some sense. Christian theists believe that God created the universe through Wisdom (the *Logos* of John chapter 1), that the universe is good (of value), that there is a purpose in creation (that intelligent beings should know God and enjoy God forever), and that human minds are made ‘in the image’ of the Creator (so God is not totally unlike human minds)” (50). The first chapters explain how Ward contents himself “with saying that I think the empiricists are correct in holding that all knowledge begins with experience. . . . Perceptions and thoughts have a distinctive kind of

1 William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for the Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

2 Keith Ward, *Confessions of a Recovering Fundamentalist* (Eugene: Cascade, 2019). I authored the similar book, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: A Letter to a Friend and a Professor’s Guide to Escaping Religion Fundamentalism* (Rapid City: Hills, 2020), and was sure to include the best endorsements possible, such as those by two delivery truck drivers, including one from “Emily” who called it “a damnably dangerous book.” Ward appears to have beaten this high status in his *Confessions*, which is endorsed by “He Who Shall Not Be Named” (endorsement: “Fake News!”) and even a member of the prestigious “Society of Fundamentalist Theology (Soft).”

reality which is not reducible to the sort of purely physical properties with which the natural sciences deal” (25). He also plumbs the depths regarding the simple—but profound—fact that there is “no reason for thinking that a mind without a material body is impossible . . . dreams are experiences of things that have no material existence” (78).

As I shall go on to show, idealism does not see God as a person “outside” the universe, only occasionally interfering in it, and it does not see God as a changeless “Pure Form” which the universe cannot affect in any way—both of them fairly common versions of theism. It sees the universe as the progressive and developing self-expression of God (the supreme mind or Self), and God as being changed by the inclusion of created things in the divine being, either now or in the future. God and the material universe thus form a unity, though one in which the mental or spiritual aspect has ontological and causal priority. That is the sort of view I hold. Such an idealism is “personal” insofar as it holds that the supreme Self has the personal characteristics of knowing feeling, and willing, even though this being may be much greater than anything we would ordinarily call a “person.” (11)

Very similar to John Haught’s recent (and excellent) book *The New Cosmic Story*,³ Ward argues that consciousness or “mind” is in a sense “primary.” The modern materialist account sees matter as all that exists, the beginning and end of the universe, while mind or consciousness (and religion) is a sort of accidental phenomenon (though apparently necessary for survival). Ward’s personal idealism (and Haught’s “new story”) turns this upside down: mind/consciousness is, yes, the emergent product of millions of years of material evolution (74), but *that was the intent, design, and “end game” all along*, and, indeed, it is from nonmaterial origin to begin with. Ward naturally cites Hegel favorably (e.g., 136), because the whole chronological history and future and story of the cosmos is a grand *return*, not a directionless journey towards oblivion and darkness.

Consciousness is not some odd and inexplicable aberration in a basically material world. It is the origin and basis of all human knowledge. In a sense, it is matter that needs explaining, not conscious experience. . . . Consciousness [for materialism] would just be a functionless add-on to a world of completely explanatory physical laws. For idealists, however, the existence of consciousness makes a difference and has contributed to the evolutionary efficiency of the human species. . . .

3 John Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

The whole material world can be seen as an instrument for bringing about particular sorts of consciousness and providing them with objects of knowledge and opportunities for purposive action. Far from consciousness being a by-product of matter, the physical universe is a precondition of a means to the emergence of particular forms of embodied consciousness. (25)⁴

Ward's idealism did raise some questions, however. In discussing 1 Cor 15, he says that "whatever the resurrection body is, it will not be flesh and blood. That means it will not be physical. . . . Perishability is a basic law of our universe. So if spirit bodies are to be imperishable, they cannot exist in the physical universe at all" (160–61), and, "The New Testament does not want us to have our old bodies back again; it wants us to have different bodies, spirit bodies, in a spirit-filled universe" (163). But, was there no significance in the fact that Jesus' resurrected body (the "firstfruits" of all resurrected bodies) retained the nail scars? How did Thomas touch a hand that was "not physical"?

Ward is very careful, nevertheless, about misunderstanding this perspective, which gives primacy to mind and the spiritual:

But I do not think that human persons are or should be disembodied. Human sentience and intelligence emerge from complex integrated physical structures. They are not optional extras added to a physical reality which is completely explicable in purely physical terms. (75)

[T]he material world must have exactly the sort of properties that are needed so that minds can emerge from matter, in a new but natural way. . . . This means that there is good reason why the universe exists and why we exist. It means that the Creator values the world and values us. . . . Christians have a special reason to value the material universe, because they believe that the Creator took human form and united human nature to the divine nature in Jesus. (103)

There is no basic contrast between persons and nature, since humans are parts of nature which have become persons. They are nature personalized. (110)

The Christian Idea of God is organized well and flows naturally in its arguments. Yet, it is difficult to really summarize the flow of twenty-two short chapters, which

4 And in a mind-bending extension of this orientation—based on the bizarre new physics of quantum mechanics and subjective observation (i.e., it doesn't "exist" until it is observed by a subject), readers encounter the idea that "it is the final conscious state of the universe itself that is a causal factor in its own physical origin. The universe generates a cosmic intelligence that then becomes cause of its own originating processes. But what this paradoxical suggestion really points to is the existence of a transtemporal consciousness that can originate the universe as a condition of the existence of the sorts of consciousness the universe generates through and in time" (91).

come at readers somewhat like a sketchbook. Readers will find great insight to “the unitary self” and our “inner lives” (30–31), freedom and illusion (38), the idea of “laws” in nature (and how they are not even “necessary or even consistent with actual scientific practice,” (41), personal causality (43), objects in space-time (44), bodies and souls (46), soul and spirit (47), intelligibility and “God” (56–57), music and beauty (58–59), objective morality (60), God as an external sovereign being “the wrong place to start” (61), the place of Abrahamic religion (66–68), information theory (ch. 9), complexity and probability (94–97), “the mind of God” (100, 206), evolution and sin (104), creation and stewardship (113), nature and perfection (115), creation as organic in relation to Hinduism and Buddhism (118–19), providence, openness, and design (124), love and God’s attributes (135), God’s freedom and causality (137–38), God changing (149), resurrection (160–62), sacrifice (184), God’s empathy (194), suffering (p. 208–209), etc.

I found it fascinating that some of Ward’s conclusions are remarkably similar to the Vanderbilt theologians Peter C. Hodgson and Sallie McFague. Like Hodgson’s “lure of the spirit,”⁵ Ward says that “divine causality is the patient attraction of love” (206), and similar to McFague,⁶ he says, “It may not be the case that the cosmos is already the body of God. It is perhaps too autonomous and its conscious agencies too self-willed for that. Yet its destiny is to be the body of God” (202).

The Christian Idea of God is a wonderful and accessible gateway into theology and philosophical theology. It also serves as a dose of sound and hopeful thinking for a generation of nihilistic and/or materialistic post-conservatives who doubt that the idea of God makes any real sense at all. I hope it will have the wide readership it deserves.

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David Fitch. *The Church of Us vs. Them: Freedom from a Faith That Feeds on Making Enemies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2019. Pp. 224. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1587434143. \$21.99 (USD).

Why are Christians so angry? In *The Church of Us vs. Them*, David Fitch observes that while Christians usually fight with “a smile and some prideful condescension,” there is real anger simmering below the surface (15). Fitch argues that the antagonisms in contemporary North American Christianity arise from the transformation of core theological insights into identity markers. He identifies this process as an “enemy-making machine,” where a truth birthed in a particular context—e.g.,

5 Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 95–98.

6 Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

Methodists' commitment to teetotalism – becomes a timeless distinction between good and bad Christians. To be clear, Fitch does not object to Christian groups defining their theological beliefs or practical convictions. Rather, Fitch's concern is how such insights become antagonisms, such as "I belong to Cephas" vs "I belong to Paul."

After defining this dynamic, Fitch identifies three clues that the enemy-making machine is active. First, he suggests looking for banners, distinctives that work by rallying one group against another. Second, Fitch warns us to watch for feelings of perverse glee when we are proven right about our opponents' degeneracy or failures. Third, Fitch observes that banners tend to lose their content, becoming empty symbols that identify who is in and out but do not help us follow Jesus in our daily lives.

Fitch then looks for evidence of enemy-making in three areas, beginning with attitudes towards scripture. He observes the popularity of doctrines of Biblical inerrancy or infallibility among organizations as diverse as the Billy Graham Association, Compassion International, and Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church. Fitch argues that the vast divergences in teachings between these groups, combined with the qualifier that only the lost original autographs of the Bible are inerrant, makes this kind of commitment to scripture an empty symbol. Indeed, Fitch suggests that claims of being "biblical" are often a way for Christians to gain authority for themselves and judge those with different beliefs.

As an alternative, Fitch argues for understanding the Bible as "nothing less than the Grand Drama of God" (65). He contends that rather being a weapon we possess, scripture is a narrative that invites our attention to and participation in the Story God is enacting. He concludes with practical suggestions, including that the Bible should be read primarily in community with the purpose of seeing how God is working, rather than individually with the aim of scoring points against outsiders.

Fitch next examines how the traditional expectation of conversion has been transformed into a modern emphasis on decisions for Christ. He suggests the phenomena of Christians repeatedly going forward for altar calls arises because their decisions are empty, disconnected from meaningful life changes or even church attendance. This emptiness then allows "the decision" to become another banner, a means of dividing those who are in or saved from those who are out and damned. Fitch argues that this is why so much anger (and hidden enjoyment) arises in debates over who will go to hell: because conversion is understood as a group identity marker, rather than the beginning of a life of discipleship.

In contrast, Fitch argues that "the gospel requires a response more akin to a marriage vow than a vote in an election" (105). He contends that just as the story of Jesus continues past crucifixion to resurrection and ascension, so too the

Christian life starts with forgiveness but ends in new life under Christ's lordship. Fitch explores what this means by recounting stories, such as of a missionary who discovers the transforming work God is doing before his arrival, or his own experiences of evangelism and discipleship happening in spaces where people can be present and listen to each other. He argues that a belief in God's active presence should free us of the need to pressure others into making decisions, and instead allow a dialogical understanding of conversion.

The final area Fitch looks for enemy making is Christian nationalism. He notes how Christians who worked for abolition saw their efforts as making America a Christian nation, before 20th century debates led many churches to divide personal salvation from social transformation, turning the idea of a Christian nation into a political banner instead. Now, Fitch laments, "the daily tasks of simply being present to the sick, of unwinding the sexual confusion of the ones around us . . . and of sharing with the poor all go ignored" (133). He claims this failure is because Christians are too busy fighting to win elections and defeat their enemies to remember their local context.

Against this, Fitch argues for re-centring the local church as political—not in the sense of supporting a particular party, but a place where the people of God live out the rule of Lord Jesus, as modelled by examples such as Clarence Jordan's racially integrated Koinonia Farm community. He suggests "the church is not against the world; it is just ahead of it," meaning that it is called to display the reality of God's work in the world rather than try to control the world (153).

Finally, Fitch contends that the ecclesial practices of gathering around the Lord's table, giving thanks, sharing the word and the peace of Christ, and receiving communion help create a space beyond enemies, which can spread outside the doors of the church. He concludes the book with a reflection on John 8, suggesting that Jesus here models a refusal to indulge the anger and perverse enjoyment of the mob that is using the law as a banner to sanction stoning the woman caught in adultery. He highlights Jesus' tactics of patient listening, silence, distraction, asking questions, and exposing contradictions as ways that we also can defuse the antagonisms created by the enemy-making machine and invite people—both "us" and "them"—into the peace of Christ's presence.

Fitch's brisk style masks a deep analysis of the psychological and spiritual dynamics in evangelicalism. Plundering his more difficult work *The End of Evangelicalism*, Fitch uses analogies and stories to make academic concepts like ideology, master signifier, and perverse enjoyment understandable by lay readers. He also draws on a breadth of sources, with citations ranging from Kathie Lee Gifford and Jerry Falwell to Ruth Padilla DeBorst and Willie James Jennings. Yet despite a wide potential scope, Fitch is focused almost entirely on North American white evangelical Christianity.

To be sure, the banners of biblicism, decisionism, and nationalism are clearly present here, but the lack of examples from other faith traditions give the reader few hints how his argument might apply to, say, Latin American Catholics. I also wonder about Fitch's claim that national political engagement tends to distract from local issues of justice—what if Christians were to vote out of a settled commitment to their neighbourhood? Still, given the increasing political polarization in North America, Fitch's focus on that context allows for a coherent, compelling argument, with insights into phenomena such as white evangelical support for Donald Trump during his presidency. I would recommend it for all audiences, but especially for church groups and introductory undergraduate courses.

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Basics of Hebrew Accents. Mark D. Futato, Sr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. Pp. 128. Paperback. ISBN 978-0310098423. \$16.89 (USD).

Given the dearth of accessible introductory material on the subject, as a whole, most students of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (hereafter HB/OT) have had little to no exposure to the intricate and oft-mysterious accentuation system(s) of the Masoretic Text (MT). Regrettably, this situation often results in many individuals being unable to grasp the full import of these not-insignificant diacritical marks; usually deeming them to be of minimal value to exegesis and a clearer understanding of the text. Enter *Basics of Hebrew Accents*, authored by Mark D. Futato Sr. Futato's goal for this volume is modest: "In this book I will not only introduce you to the accents, but you will [also] learn how to use them to be a better reader of the Hebrew Bible" (13). The author undoubtedly succeeds in this goal.

Prior to offering a full-scale review, though, it is prudent to give a general overview to the work. Aside from a brief introduction, *Basics of Hebrew Accents* is divided into five chapters of uneven length. Chapter 1, "The Three Jobs of the Accents," covers the basic fact that the Hebrew accents are indicators of three things: (1) the stressed syllables in words, i.e., word stress; (2) the syntactic relationship between words, i.e., sense; and (3) the intonation of words for singing, i.e., chanting. Chapter 2, "The Accents and Sense, Part One: The Disjunctive Accents," and Chapter 3, "The Accents and Sense, Part Two: The Conjunctive Accents," work together to help the reader know the names, symbols, and functions of the disjunctive and conjunctive accents (respectively) and the role that they play in the interpretation of the text. In Chapter 4 "The Accents and Exegesis," the student learns to read particular verses "through the lens of the masoretic accents" (67). Finally, Chapter 5, "The Accents in the Three," covers the poetical sections of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms, with special emphasis given to Ps

29. The volume is complete with a Scripture index, a two-page bibliography of works cited, and two appendices. The first appendix provides a “five-point” guide to “determining the accents in a verse” while the second appendix is basically an annotated bibliography on that material which is useful “for further study.” This section divides itself into “next steps” and “reference material(s).”

There is very little to argue with in this work. The author is exceptionally pedagogically sensitive throughout the volume. Futato avoids clumsy nomenclature (more on this later) and clearly recognizes that the work is an “introduction to the subject, not an exhaustive treatment” (62). This is perhaps most telling in dealing with the “rules” of particular accents, such as the *merekha* and the *munakh*, with respect to their specific placing and order. In addition to this, the format of the book itself is also quite user-friendly. There is good use of white space and an ample supply of illustrations throughout the text. The use of gray shading to highlight the key features of the passage or verse “at hand” is also most welcome.

Though the SBL Hebrew Font that is used throughout the volume differs somewhat from that of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), no student should be inordinately challenged or in any way encumbered by these matters. In fact, some users might even consider the use of the SBL font in *Basics of Hebrew Accents* a boon since it is an exact match with the font(s) that are used in most Bible study software programs, such as Logos and Accordance (see 17). In much the same way, while some readers may take umbrage with Futato’s decision to not overtly employ the language of “emperors,” “kings,” “princes,” and the like (see 31–33; cf. 105) concerning the four main groups of the disjunctives accents, it may be argued that there is a less steep learning curve involved for the uninitiated by avoiding such terminology. This is not to mention, of course, the direct benefit that is provided to the reader by preventing any false impressions about what the accents are actually doing if identified through these names.

Unlike, however, another recent volume on Hebrew accents, namely *The Fundamentals of Hebrew Accents: Divisions and Exegetical Roles Beyond Syntax* by Sung Jin Park (Cambridge University Press, 2020), Futato’s work does not include any “exercises” wherein one applies the principles of each chapter or section for themselves through “workbook like” tasks. This absence may be considered to be a not-insignificant draw back for those educators who wish to take advantage of this particular style of assignment.

Perhaps the most unique “take-away” tool in the entire work is a clear system of “diagramming” or “graphically representing” verse(s) according to the accent divisions. Futato effectively demonstrates to the reader how they can make “tree diagrams” of the “Hebrew Cantillations” by hand, through their word processing document, or with the aid of Logos Bible Software (see 52–55). In my estimation, this section alone is worth the price of the volume.

That being said, however, the most stimulating aspect of the book for most readers will likely be “The Accents and Exegesis.” Concerning this section, Futato states:

In this chapter we’re going to do some focused exegetical work through the lens of the masoretic accents. First, we will look at some texts where the accents make a subtle difference in our interpretation. Second, we will look at some texts where the accents make a more significant difference. Third, we will look at a couple of text where it appears that there are errors in the masoretic placement of the accents. (67)

Since space forbids an exhaustive survey of this chapter, a few illustrative examples will have to suffice, one from each section.

- (1) “Subtle Differences.” After a brief but carefully argued exposé, Futato maintains that the placement of the *atnakh* in Gen 1:1 emphasizes the fact that “‘God’ and no other created. So when contemporary Bible scholars tell us that Gen 1:1 is a polemic against the religions of the surrounding cultures, they are simply reiterating what the accents told us long ago through the placement of *atnakh*” (68).
- (2) “Significant Differences.” In the first example of this particular section, Futato concludes that though the “great sea monsters” of Gen 1:21 may “ultimately” be good “under the umbrella of verse 31a . . . the interpretation [that is] encoded in the accents by the Masoretes” seems to be that the pronouncement “‘and God saw that it was good’ only extends backward to nodes under the second *zaqeph*, thus avoiding the implications that the sea monsters were good” (78–79).
- (3) “Errors.” After a thorough survey of the textual evidence of the Old Greek/Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, 1QS 8.12–14, the New Testament (Matt 3:3 and Mark 1:3), and the MT, Futato opines that “the masoretic reading of Isaiah 40:3a is clearly out of sync with other streams in ancient tradition, and it seems to be so erroneously” (86).

Futato recognizes that “the boundary between subtle and significant is fuzzy and subjective, but it has a heuristic value” (76). Irrespective of whether or not the reader will agree with the conclusions of the author on each and every point, they will likely be richly rewarded by engaging in the process as a whole.

To conclude, *Basics of Hebrew Accents* provides an accessible and inviting entry point to those who want to understand Hebrew accents and are looking for clear, concise, and practical instruction in the subject matter. The effective use of biblical illustrations, combined with ample white space, a clear, easy-to-use format, detailed exegesis, and impeccably precise use of reference grammars, makes *Basics of*

Hebrew Accents by far the most accessible introduction currently in print. Its primary readers will likely be intermediate to advanced students of the HB/OT and, one hopes, all serious expositors and teachers of Scripture. Highly recommended!

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Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice. Sylvia C. Keesmaat and Brian J. Walsh. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019. Pp. 416. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1587432842. \$27.00 (USD).

The Reformer Philip Melancthon called Romans “an outline and compendium of all Christian doctrine,” a sentiment that has persisted for nearly 500 years.¹ In many ways, Keesmaat and Walsh’s *Romans Disarmed* serves as an anti-thesis to Melancthon’s words. Coming fifteen years after their creative, anti-imperial reading of Colossians,² Keesmaat and Walsh’s latest book offers a similar treatment of Paul’s most influential letter.

The authors claim that Romans is a letter that needs to be disarmed, after a history of being turned into a weapon utilised for “theological violence” (106). Thus, Keesmaat and Walsh seek to rescue the text from theological abstraction and read it contextually, finding meaning through a process of “double immersion” (36) in both the ancient world of the text and contemporary world of the reader.

Arguing that Romans was written from a place of grief (see Rom 9:2), Keesmaat and Walsh claim that “you can’t really understand what Paul is up to [in Romans] if you don’t have some access to [a place of grief]” (5). Similarly, since Paul wrote Romans to a group of socially powerless people at the heart of the Roman Empire, the authors emphasise the need to read Romans “from the perspective of the margins” (7), both in the ancient and present contexts.

Keesmaat and Walsh primarily understand Romans to be an “anti-assimilation letter” of anti-imperialism (90). Furthermore, they argue that Romans should be understood contextually to be “fundamentally about home” (106). That is, it was a home-creating letter for both Jews and marginalised Gentiles in Rome, who had been rendered homeless by the empire and found a home in Messiah Jesus.

Seeking to immerse the reader in the ancient world, Keesmaat and Walsh write an entire chapter of fictional narrative that especially shows how a gentile, slave woman named Iris and a poor, Jewish craftsman named Nereus may have heard,

1 Quoted in David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 598.

2 Sylvia C. Keesmaat and Brian J. Walsh, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

struggled with, and appreciated Paul's letter. Using intertextual exegesis,³ the authors claim that the sin/injustice language of Rom 1–3 refers to economic injustice. Thus, they translate δικαιοσύνη as “justice” instead of the usual “righteousness” and ἀδικίαν as “injustice” instead of the usual “wickedness” (12, 18–19). Keesmaat and Walsh go on to interpret “the weak” and “the strong” mentioned in Rom 12–14 as those of low and high socio-economic status, showing how the inclusive, Christian meals would have subverted the status-centred meals of Roman culture (245–51).

In their view, Paul's understanding of idolatry is inextricably bound to economics, and one's relationship to the land. Keesmaat and Walsh also argue that Paul was an “eco-theologian” (209), cognisant of and lamenting environmental destruction brought about by the Roman Empire. They likewise explain how idolatry leads to corrupted sexual violence and thus understand Paul's condemnation of same-sex sexual activity in Romans 1 to be directed at the violence of the imperial family and a society of pederasty and sexually abusive slave-masters (331–40).

Although there are other works that highlight an anti-imperial interpretation of Paul,⁴ and an anti-imperial reading of Romans,⁵ Keesmaat and Walsh's book is unique in exploring in depth implications for the contemporary world and the Church today.

Since Keesmaat and Walsh identify global capitalism as the major imperial force (i.e., Roman Empire) of the twenty-first century, the practical initiatives in the book are rooted in critiques of capitalistic, consumeristic lifestyles that inevitably lead to environmental crisis. In this they are deeply influenced by the writings of Wendell Berry and Naomi Klein.

Keesmaat and Walsh believe that the Church needs to be faithful to groan with a suffering creation (see Rom 8) and respond by being good stewards. Since they maintain that a capitalistic worldview will unavoidably lead to conflict with the land, they assert that what is needed is no less than an entire new worldview where the Church's trust and worship is not rooted in the economy.

Becoming practical to the point of discomfort, Keesmaat and Walsh challenge contemporary society's addictive and idolatrous relationship with convenience and technology, questioning the use of plastic, household appliances and cell phones (182–86). They helpfully craft questions for the reader to ask themselves before purchasing any product, such as: “Does the *making*, the *use*, or the *discarding* of this item harm community or creation?” (186). Keesmaat and Walsh

3 Keesmaat and Walsh are especially indebted to the methods of Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) as acknowledged on p. 35.

4 See especially the work of Richard Horsley and N. T. Wright whom Keesmaat and Walsh frequently engage with.

5 See Neil Elliot, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) whom Keesmaat and Walsh regularly cite.

understand these types of questions to be what Paul is getting at in Romans 6:12–13 when he writes that Christians “should no longer be tools of injustice but rather of justice” (186).

Keesmaat and Walsh then turn to issues of “food production and consumption” (187). They describe Adam and Eve’s sin as “eating something out of season” and say that the “contemporary movements toward local food, farmers markets, sustainably raised meat, and urban agriculture [aren’t] just a trendy food fad; [they are] a biblical imperative” (188).

This leads Keesmaat and Walsh to direct the reader to the practices of the Indigenous First Nations of Canada, whose worldview in their estimation is far more Biblical and Pauline as shown by their relationship to the land. Furthermore, throughout the book they insightfully connect the tragic history of the Indigenous people of Canada with their fictional characters from the first century, all of whom were rendered homeless by empires (77–90).

Keesmaat and Walsh also argue that the Church needs to be a community where the economically weak are built up by the strong (see Rom 12–14). They believe that the Church needs to secede from empire (read global capitalism), if “we are to renounce idolatry in our lives” (258). In contrast to a capitalistic worldview, the authors argue that we ought to embrace an “economy of care,” that is thoroughly local (262–63). This leads to further practical suggestions such as a guaranteed basic income, tuition support, affordable housing, local currencies, community shared agriculture initiatives, buying local and fair-trade products, eating less chocolate, drinking less coffee, owning fewer clothes and rejecting investment portfolios in favour of local micro loans (264–67).

Throughout the book they repeat the assertion that to separate spirituality from economics or salvation from politics is to forfeit the power of Romans and Scripture itself. This culminates in a bold claim made in the last chapter: that Paul and the Christians in Rome he wrote to “wouldn’t likely have any idea what modern Christians mean when they” speak of salvation (368).

Keesmaat and Walsh’s work is rare among academic books in that it is practical, passionate, personal, political, and provocative. With their use of an interlocutor, fiction, poetry, contemporary reflection and Targum translations, *Romans Disarmed* is undoubtedly the most engaging Biblical studies book I have ever read.

Communicative excellence aside, students of Paul and Romans will recognise that Keesmaat and Walsh build their interpretation of Romans on several major assumptions. If Paul was not as anti-imperial as they insist,⁶ and if Paul’s purpose

6 As argued by John M.G. Barclay, “Why the Roman Empire was Insignificant to Paul,” in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, WUNT 275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 363–87. See also Scot McKnight and J. B. Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013).

in Romans was not primarily motivated by the situation of the Christians in Rome,¹ then the foundation of their book begins to crack, leaving their contemporary reflections in question. Many readers will also be suspicious of their contemporary applications, given that the majority are heavily left-leaning on the political spectrum.

Despite these potential issues, Keesmaat and Walsh are to be applauded for maintaining that the Bible has something to offer 21st century North Americans as we confront colonialism, divisive politics, environmental crisis, and the increasing reality of a post-Christian society. Although few readers will be as persuaded by the author's arguments as their interlocutor,² Keesmaat and Walsh's ancient and contemporary arguments deserve a careful reading by academics and Church leaders alike.

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Preaching Women: Gender, Power and the Pulpit. Liz Shercliff. London: SCM Press, 2019. Pp. 224. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0334058380. \$22.99 (USD).

If one does a search for books on “women preaching” on Amazon.com, readers will find a plethora of books related to the topic, though many will focus either on how to preach on the women of the Bible or on the history of women preachers. Thanks to the work of scholars such as Marion A. Taylor, Catherine Brekus, Priscilla Pope-Levison and others, the history of women preachers and biblical interpreters has been resurrected for the Church to study.³ Women have been preaching and teaching throughout the ages; it is not a new phenomenon.

Liz Shercliff's book stands out by addressing preaching and homiletics from a woman's point of view and experience in the present day.⁴ While her intended audience is not simply women, the book shifts its gaze towards the woman preacher in the pulpit. As a teacher of homiletics, Shercliff states that “women and men, young and old, from our diverse heritages and circumstances, to ‘find our own voice’. There is value in recognizing and valuing women's spirituality,

1 The scholarly discussion regarding the purpose of Romans remains intricate and lively. Any technical commentary will give an overview.

2 A reality the authors anticipate on p. 274.

3 See Marion A. Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740–1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), and Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Turn the Pulpit Loose: Two Centuries of American Women Evangelists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

4 See Alice P. Matthews, *Preaching the Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). Matthews addresses preaching and homiletics from the listener's point of view, applying gender studies research to explain the gendered differences in listening to and applying sermons.

and discerning where it overlaps and complements, supplements and enhances, confronts and challenges that of our brothers—so we can all be drawn closer to the Living God who is at work in us” (ix).

Shercliff is a priest in the Diocese of Chester in the Church of England and is the founder and coordinator of *Women's Voices*, an annual conference for women preachers. She teaches homiletics through The College of Preachers, a multi-denominational organization that equips and trains preachers; Shercliff also writes for their flagship publication *The Preacher* magazine. Shercliff holds a M.A. in Adult Education from The Open University and an M.A. in Mission and Ministry from St. John's College, Nottingham. Her book is the product of almost three decades of preaching, parish ministry, and teaching.

The book is designed to be the resource she wished she had when she was learning to preach (xviii). As a result, throughout each chapter, she includes portions of her own sermons as illustrations of her attempts to find her unique “voice” as a preacher, learning to speak the truth of Scripture *as a woman*, especially when talking about women. And at the end of each chapter, the author offers a text and/or a series of questions for personal reflection, so that the reader can use them as a means of developing self-awareness and their own preaching voice.

In Chapter 1, Shercliff orients her audience by reviewing the nature of preaching and who the preacher is. She defines preaching as “the art of engaging the people of God in their shared narrative by creatively and hospitably inviting them into the exploration of biblical text, by means of which, corporately and individually, they might encounter the divine” (5). Shercliff asserts that the very fact that a preacher is a woman affects how the sermon will eventually be received; “whether intentionally or otherwise, women preachers preach differently, because we are heard differently” (6). She believes that women preachers are already present in their sermons merely by being in the pulpit; they cannot become “invisible.”

In Chapter 2, Shercliff explores how she found her own “voice” when preaching, having realized that she had been taught to preach like a man, not as herself. She includes an article she wrote for *The Preacher* magazine, entitled “Do women preach with a different ‘voice’?” Her conclusion was “yes!” She writes:

Unless preachers, particularly women preachers, get to grips with preaching about the experiences of women, the faith will not be truly embodied for the whole community. While women, I believe, should preach as women they should avoid speaking only to women. The aim should be to image God better by preaching and hearing, human, gendered sermons rather than androgynous sermons aimed at homogenous congregations. This will benefit both women and men, by allowing

them to enter into each other's experience and understanding of God.

(24)

Chapter 3 focuses on how the inherent patriarchy imbedded within our culture, especially church culture, silences women. Patriarchy is the *narrative* of our present-day culture, affecting both genders; it is not a mere system that can easily be changed. For Shercliff, women preachers need to learn how to tell the truth about this narrative.

After briefly outlining how culture, writ large, the media, science and the arts have downplayed, and even erased the accomplishments of women, Shercliff subsequently gives a brief history of the biblical texts that ultimately canonized the marginalization of women's leadership in the Church, ultimately resting the power upon the patriarchal Roman Church early in history. Thus, in Shercliff's view, while "women are now preaching in many branches of the Church . . . its distinctive prophetic possibilities are being largely ignored, and women are being invited into the existing company of preachers, rather than being asked to help redefine preaching itself" (54). Shercliff believes that women preachers need to speak truthfully about the patriarchy and sexism that saturates our culture as well as that of the Church, and from her point of view, the Bible itself. And the place to do that is from the pulpit.

While briefly touching on the scholarship of progressive and feminist thinkers on hermeneutics and homiletics, Shercliff formulates her charge to women preachers: "We have to persist. We have to promote the cause of the voiceless. We are to speak truth. We are to subvert culture." (73). For Shercliff, men's and women's voices *together* can transform God's people and their understanding of God.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the reader is asked to consider how women's experiences of faith and life are distinctive and affect faith development, coupled with how preachers might read and thus tell the stories of Bible women. Here, Shercliff also incorporates the listener into the discussion and proposes three ways in which she believes women experience church-based Christian faith differently from men. First, the Church expects women to read themselves "into" patriarchal language. Women are to expect their experiences to be ignored and their voices silenced.

Second, relationship is central to women's faith. "Women come to faith through relationship and interpret sin as broken relationship" (92). She asserts that coming to faith is not merely cognitive but embedded in a strong "connectedness" to others. Shercliff notes that the Gospel narratives place Jesus in networks of relationship . . . especially with his disciples; "he did not instruct them with key points to remember, but gave them bread and wine to take into their bodies, or

washed their feet” (93).⁵ In this light, women preachers must not only speak *about* women’s experiences of faith, but also speak *from* those shared experiences of connectedness and relationship.

Lastly, as a result of the burdensome expectations assumed by women in the Church, and the disregard for their experience of faith, Shercliff believes that the historical doctrines of the Church become remote, distancing women from both the Bible and from God/Jesus. Doctrines become interpreted from a male, patriarchal point of view, and God is portrayed as “male” with masculine characteristics. As a result, the women portrayed in the Bible are “either ignored or rendered weak” (95). Thus, in order to properly look at the women in the Bible, Shercliff proposes her four-fold approach to reading biblical passages: culture and tradition (communal sources) plus experience and position (personal sources) (xvi).⁶

Coupled with the three reading approaches she feels are open to women preachers: rejection, repatriation and redemption, Shercliff believes that a woman preacher must be clear on what strategy she will use and why (106). She uses Mary, the mother of Jesus, as her exemplar for applying her methodology. In a sermon on Luke 1:39–56, Shercliff concludes that it is Mary, in the Magnificat, who first announced the “gospel” message that “favours the oppressed, allows them good things and gives them access to power” (116). She encourages her readers to look at the underlying story in the biblical text from the point of view of biblical women; many times, the story that has been handed down through tradition no longer holds up.

Chapter 6 offers some sermon ideas that would enable women to preach as women. Here, Shercliff uses Bible women as sermon subjects in order to bring them out of the shadows and to the forefront. Some examples include looking closely at Mary of Magdala’s story in John 20:1–8. From the Old Testament, there’s Deborah, Jael, both warriors, as well as Hannah, Hagar, and Rebekah, who cried out in prayer and God heard. Given the number of books in print, preaching about the Bible’s women is a highly promoted fertile ground for every preacher.

Chapter 7 offers a model of preaching that would focus on bringing to light “silenced perspectives” that would ultimately enable women listeners to meet God in a new way that speaks to them. Once again, Shercliff returns to her model of sermon preparation and applies it to a sermon example she provides. After reflecting on culture, tradition, experience and position, themes should emerge that should raise theological questions that the preacher must answer for themselves and their congregation. Research, especially historical research, can aid in

5 Shercliff makes reference to the Church as the “‘body of Christ’ rather than a group of like-minded people,” citing 1 Cor 12:27 and Eph 4:4.

6 Shercliff references her book co-authored by Gary O’Neill: *Straw for the Bricks: Theological Reflection in Practice*, (London: SCM, 2018).

developing realistic and reasonable interpretations. Finally, this is followed by a conscious reflection on how best to communicate what has been learned and reflected upon.

Shercliff offers her model for preaching as “her” model, not “the” model. In her reflection at the end of the chapter, she asks the reader if they have a “conscious” model of preaching. What she hopes the reader will do is invest the time to create a sermon that will enable the people they preach to explore their faith in a scriptural way and wrestle with their issues honestly and sincerely.

Finally, Chapter 8 is a short postlude, where Shercliff summarizes what she has set out to do in her book. She finishes with her call to women preachers to speak the truth and calling out patriarchy and sexism where it exists in our culture and in the church. “When God’s revelation is warped by exclusion, or dismembered by suppression all people suffer. The fullness of God’s presence in our lives needs God’s activity in both women and men to be manifest, otherwise both excluded women and exalted men suffer” (168).

As a female preacher, the concepts Shercliff presents are appealing and make sense in theory. But in practice, it is not clear cut. Clearly, the gender of the preacher and their demeanor in the pulpit immediately affects how a sermon is received. And within more conservative evangelical circles, women’s voices are silenced by prooftexts with a powerful history of interpretation.⁷ Shercliff’s advocacy for preaching about the women in the Bible is a worthy imperative, since they can be role models that we as preachers can hold up to women (and men), allowing them to relate *as women* to the biblical text.

However, with respect to a person’s experience of faith and the biblical text, I believe it is unique and individual to each and every person; gender is just one of the factors that come into play. It can take years of regular preaching for an individual preacher, regardless of their gender (or other demographic), to find their unique “voice,” assuming that they are consciously attempting to do so. The samples provided from Shercliff’s own sermons show her to be an engaging and empathetic preacher, who clearly calls upon her own life experiences to speak biblical truth. Had she focused more in this area rather than solely on gender differences, the book might be more impactful. An experience-based approach to the biblical text would make better preachers of us all, regardless of our gender and personal faith experience.

But one issue Shercliff does not address is the role of leadership that is often embodied in the preacher, especially if they are *the* spiritual leader of a given faith

7 To learn more about the internal struggles surrounding women in ministry, I recommend reading from both sides of the aisle. For those who promote women in ministry, peruse the literature and resources for Christians for Biblical Equality: <https://www.cbeinternational.org>. To study and understand the opposing views of those who do not support women in ministry, peruse the literature and resources for The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: <https://cbmw.org>.

community (i.e., pastor, minister, priest, etc.). And the question of leadership leads to the question of power and the exercising of it. For Shercliff, power still rests with the patriarchy that still guides our culture; therefore, as women preachers, our goal should be to subvert that power. But how do you accomplish that subversion and lead? What Shercliff lacks is a deep dive into social science gender research to inform her thesis and application.⁸

In this writer's experience, men and women are not monolithic and do not "hear" sermons uniformly as a gender. Everyone learns differently and responds to different styles of sermons. Some of us prefer logic and reason, peppered with lots of facts, while some of us respond better to experience and empathy. In today's world, not all sermon illustrations are going to be received as gender-specific. (For example, I have a friend who is an avid American Football fan; she would fully comprehend and appreciate the proverbial football reference.) Therefore, because differences such as gender and other demographics affect the giving and receiving of sermons, I believe a variety of sermon styles, used over time, will be more effective in speaking to a diverse congregation of individuals.

Nonetheless, I believe that Shercliff's book contributes to the growing body of work being done in the Church and the academy to teach preachers how to speak to every individual that makes up their audience. Age, education, income level, gender, race and/or ethnicity, culture of origin, life experience, current events . . . these are just some of the factors that need to be considered by the preacher, not only with respect to the make-up of their audience or congregation, but also with respect to themselves, because all these factors bring inherent biases that can affect the way one approaches the biblical text and preaches. The more heterogeneous our congregations, more "languages" our sermons will need to speak.

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Love Anyway: An Invitation Beyond a World That's Scary as Hell. Jeremy Courtney. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. Pp. 286. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0310352426. \$17.99 (USD).

Many autobiographical stories of post-evangelicals terminate in a nebulous phase of agnosticism, angry atheism, or constructive progressivism. However, when

⁸ Again, I reference Alice P. Matthews, *Preaching the Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). Dr. Matthews, a missionary pastor's wife, earned an inter-disciplinary doctorate from the University of Denver. Her book draws more deeply on gender research and is able to articulate gender differences across multiple factors so that preachers of both genders can learn to speak to the whole of their audience. And part of her pedagogical method also includes questions to reflect upon in order to gain better self-awareness. Personally, I would recommend the use of these books together in a learning environment, mostly because Shercliff's sermon samples are highly useful.

Jeremy Courtney and his wife bailed on the Middle-Eastern mission field (like so many others who become disillusioned with fundamentalism and arrogant proselytism), there was a simple but profound undergirding energy that held his life and mission together across one phase of his life to another: *loving like Christ*. This life and action-based instead of belief-based orientation became the basis of his growing non-profit for war refugees, the Preemptive Love Coalition.

Courtney set out to Turkey to win Muslims to the Lord, but found himself confused, arguing with his traditionalist pastor, and losing friends and precious donors because, like David Gushee in *Still Christian: Following Jesus Out of Evangelicalism* and my own story,¹ he couldn't reconcile an exclusivist, Islamophobic, and dogmatic system of unquestionable absolute truths with the command to love one's neighbor as themselves. When people are being bombed, tortured, killed, and forced out of their homes to starve in the desert, it's obvious to any compassionate person what such people need: love, protection, food and water, shelter, and essential support. If being a "Christian" and being "like Christ" means anything, it would seem to be this. But that is not all. It is precisely in *this context*, in the real-life training grounds of loving people in life, that theology and faith is born and actually have meaning. Discovering this when lives are literally on the line—and in a transformative, personal biography, creates a very jarring experience for readers.

Love Anyway chronicles this tale of Courtney and his team, exploring many internal struggles of the typical North American evangelical Christian out of the fishbowl, as well as the external struggles of dealing with the realities of war, politics, human suffering, survival, and recovery. Thrusting themselves into the warzone of peak Islamic State horror, Courtney and his team prove unbelievably determined not only to feed the hungry against all odds, but to see if hell can actually be survived and mitigated by following the Greatest Commandment. This is all the more remarkable when this unconquerable, unearthly persistent drive is pitted against perhaps the most notorious mass cynicism of our species: *the idea that cyclical, generational violence cannot be changed*. This "The Way things Are" mantra (to use the author's words) mercilessly haunt the love coalition and their work at every corner and phase—but somehow, *somehow*, does not have the last word.

"Grace and grit" is perhaps the best description of *Love Anyway*. Readers will encounter disturbing accounts of genocide, war violence, and PTSD, but also a spirit of incredible power that stands unmoved by the corporate gods, the imperialists priests, and the central bankers that plan, incubate, fund, and nurture such

1 Jamin Andreas Hübner, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: A Letter to a Friend and a Professor's Guide to Leaving Religious Fundamentalism* (Rapid City: Hills, 2020).

“extravagant brutalities of modern warfare.”² The book stands alongside Shane Claiborne’s *The Irresistible Revolution*³ and Shawn Banzhaf’s *The Five L’s*⁴ in terms of its spirit-inspired response to war and its effects. It finds camaraderie alongside such on-the-ground figures as Dorothy Day and Mother Theresa. And it exhibits the truth-telling boldness of Martin Luther King Jr. and fearless Christian thinkers like Chris Hedges and Cornel West.

In reading the book (cover to cover in one afternoon), I also found myself pondering the absurdities of the Ben Shapiros, Jordan Petersons, and Donald Trumps of our age who pride themselves on criticizing a world-and-life-view based centrally on empathy, and speak publicly to audiences of millions about how the problem with our world today is “too much compassion.” *Love Anyway* dispels the idea that love and compassion is for the weak, that empathy hinders human progress, and delivers a sharp arrow into the chest of the anti-empathy zombie monster that continues to plague our contemporary world.⁵

Caring for the refugee has a rich history in Jewish-Christian practice and thought, and we live in an age of refugee crises in many countries across the map. Readers will do well to both buy and read *Love Anyway* and prioritize one’s privileged North American budget around funding the Preemptive Love Coalition. Until then, the book will surely inspire many.

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Evangelical, Sacramental, & Pentecostal: Why the Church Should be All Three. Gordon T. Smith. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017. Pp. 132. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0830851607. \$18.00 (USD).

For many adherents of the Christian faith, the very title of Gordon Smith’s work may sound like something of an oxymoron. Within Pentecostal circles, sacramentalism is frequently dismissed as a euphemism for empty ritual, the rejection of which was one of the very catalysts that gave rise to the movement in the first place. Conversely, Pentecostalism has dismissed by some within more liturgical churches as a capitulation to unrestrained emotionalism, negligent of the profound sense of the Spirit experienced through the ordinary means of grace such as baptism and

2 David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 107.

3 Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

4 Shawn Banzhaf, *The Five L’s: A Practical Guide for Helping Loved Ones Heal After Trauma* (Rapid City: Hills, 2021).

5 See Zurich, “Decline in Human Empathy Creates Global Risks in the ‘Age of Anger’,” (April 9, 2019), available online at: <https://www.zurich.com/en/knowledge/topics/global-risks/decline-human-empathy-creates-global-risks-age-of-anger>. For more on this topic, along with toxic masculinity’s role in it, see Banzhaf, *The Five L’s*, ch. 1.

the Supper. Still others, in the evangelical tradition, assert that the primary way in which believers should expect to encounter the living God is neither via one's personal experience nor participation in the sacraments, but through the knowledge of his written Word.

In Smith's view, however, the church need not default to one of these three paths. On the contrary, he asserts that the church must be all three at once, "if we want to appropriate as fully as possible the grace of the ascended Christ" (3). Grounding his case in the triune nature of God himself, in his introduction Smith labels the "Word, sacrament, and immediate presence of the Spirit" as the three prongs of "an ecology of grace" crucial to the church's fullness in Christ (4). This "ecology"—inspired by the likes of Calvin and Wesley, to whom Smith appeals to demonstrate its consistency with an evangelical ethos (50–51)—is the means by which the church ought to understand its union with Christ (7). His first chapter, a discussion of John 15:4, surveys the various ways the church has traditionally understood the call to abide "in Christ," concluding that, "the three—Spirit, along with Word and sacrament—are the means . . . by which we abide in Christ as Christ abides in us" (21). Each of these means is the focus of a chapter; 4–6 are entitled the Evangelical principle, Sacramental principle, and Pentecostal principle, respectively.

Each tradition would likely find certain points of contention with Smith. While appreciative of his emphasis on the pneumatology of Luke-Acts in chapter 2, and on the Spirit's work in Jesus's earthly life (23), the Pentecostal would like him to explicitly affirm their doctrine of Spirit baptism in calling for the church to be authentically "Pentecostal." The evangelical would applaud his assertion that pneumatology must ultimately "be thoroughly Christological," that the Spirit "glorifies Christ" among God's people (26). However, low church evangelicals, in particular, may be skeptical of his position that the Supper should be celebrated weekly, as in liturgical settings (40). Moreover, in Reformed evangelicalism, his statement that "Luther and Calvin could not incorporate into their own teaching a legitimate expression of the inner illuminating grace of God" (104) would like meet with protest—particularly since the latter has frequently been praised as "the Theologian of the Holy Spirit" by devotees. The sacramentalist, certainly, would wholeheartedly concur with Smith's proposal "that conversion to the Christian faith necessarily includes baptism" (38) and his caution to those evangelicals and Pentecostals who mistakenly believe "that it is possible to have a full-orbed Christian life with minimal exposure to the sacraments" (45). On the other hand, some sacramental communities may balk at his assertion that the Scripture readings for a particular service necessarily ought to have some connection with the sermon preached (90) or find odd his insistence that the

Spirit's work should always be highlighted when the Lord's Supper is celebrated (93).

However, all things considered, Smith's volume is quite generous and refreshing, constructively offering a much-needed corrective to the imbalances that characterize many local congregations. It identifies the greatest strengths of these three ecclesial traditions and consistently highlights how they are, despite their differences, well-positioned to complement each other. His analysis of Acts 2, which depicts the preached Word and the Lord's Supper as the core of Spirit-empowered church's gathering (32), serves as a powerful reminder that, though intriguing to the contemporary reader, his vision of the local church is hardly a revolutionary concept—it is, rather, an ancient model.

Though Smith may appear rather charismatic in his assertion that “[w]e are only truly the church when we live, together, in the fellowship of the Spirit” (98), this fellowship is firmly grounded in the constant celebration of the sacraments and preaching of the Word. His discussion of Christian initiation (129) is also timely. While Smith notes that the church of Acts viewed reception of the Spirit and water baptism as “the basics of initiation” for new converts (28), this concept is largely lacking in the contemporary Western church—particularly in evangelical circles, which so strongly affirm the sole authority of Scripture, ironically. It seems a direct link may be drawn to this phenomenon and the question of community he frequently raises. While few orthodox churches would deny the absolute necessity of Scripture for Christian vitality, Smith reminds his readers that “to be truly the church is to be a community immersed in a sacred text”—not simply a weekly gathering of persons who interact with that sacred text privately (37). On these two points, then, Smith's work seems to push back on the rampant individualism of Western Christianity, for which it ought to be commended.

Moreover, his appeal to Wesley, Calvin, medieval mystics, and the Fathers to bolster his case reinforces the fact that authentic Christian community requires not just appreciating the voices of other believers within the church today, but those from ages past. Perhaps the prime example of this is his sixth chapter, “The Pentecost Principle”, in which he draws the bulk of his discussion concerning Christian experience not from the contemporary Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, but figures like Bernard of Clairvaux (101) and Ignatius Loyola (103). Indeed, both the critical Pentecostal and sacramental reader ought to consider the rich spiritual experience of such individuals as evidence their distinct branches of Christendom may hold much more in common than at first glance. One would imagine this is Smith's goal given his assertion that, “The Spirit is an ecumenical spirit; if we are in the Spirit, we are committed to working with and fostering the unity of the church universal” (120). Thus, a deep reverence for tradition and

community, coupled with a high premium on personal experience, serve to greatly enrich one another.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this title is its accessibility. Smith's writing is truly within reach of the wider Body of Christ that he wishes to address. The work is constructed in such a way that the informed layperson may understand the content, yet with enough depth to satisfy the ordained minister or ecclesial focused academic. On the one hand, Smith's work is theologically rich, grounding his case in the core Christian doctrines of the Trinity, union with Christ, and the incarnation, while also highlighting how they are vitally connected with one another (106). On the other, it is intensely practical, drawing on his own experiences in congregational settings, on the mission field, and his career in theological education. In short, this volume reads as one not merely written about the church, but ultimately for the church.

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The Christian World Around the New Testament. Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. Pp. 757. Paperback. ISBN 978-0801098918. \$0.95 (USD).

The Christian World Around the New Testament is a compilation of scholarly articles by New Testament professor Richard Bauckham. It is the sequel to a similar volume *the Jewish World Around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), also a compilation by Bauckham. Instead of being organized chronologically and focusing on Jewish elements, *The Christian World* focuses on topics surrounding Christian origins and identity, therefore organized topically into the following categories: Gospel Audiences, Gospel Traditions, Gospels and Canon, Early Christian People, Early Church, Early Christian Apocryphal Literature, and Early Patristics.

Bauckham's scholarship in the volume substantially overlaps some of his other books because it represents the original articles from which they came. For example, most of the first two sections comprise the research behind his most well-known work, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017 [orig. 2007]). The same can be said for several of his other monograph publications. *The Christian World* nevertheless contains a large amount of material not published in book form, which helpfully facilitates a broader audience beyond the halls of academia.

Bauckham's work is similar to N. T. Wright and James Dunn in that it comes from a Christian perspective and focuses on Christian origins—especially the

Jewish context of early Christianity. He is more like Dunn than Wright because of his focus on form criticism and the origin of the gospels (something Wright has mostly left to his colleague Michael Bird to address¹). For example, Dunn brings attention to local oral performance as an explanation for synoptic differences, while Bauckham pushes in the other direction, questioning whether there is even such thing as a “Matthean community” or “Lukan church” (for example), and closing the gap between the time of Christ to the time of stabilized, written Gospel traditions. This subject is particularly interesting to those curious about the “date” of the gospels (such as myself).² These first sections in *The Christian World* concisely question a number of academic consensuses to (a) correct the over-corrections of contemporary scholarship, and (b) because of the evidence and inference to best explanation, as opposed to outright apologetics.

The book has 31 chapters and over 700 pages of text, which is considerable. However, the small chapter size, wide-ranging topics, and contemporary introductions by the author to each section makes the book quite readable for (what most will probably use as) a reference work. Readers can also expect numerous selections surrounding Bauckham’s specialty in apocryphal literature—which is the largest section in the book. Anyone seriously concerned about Christian origins and the shape of early Christianity should read *The Christian World Around the New Testament* (and probably the earlier *The Jewish World Around the New Testament*).

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1 See Michael Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). Wright is supposed to address this topic in the last volume(s) of his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series.

2 I bring this to readers’ attention in my review of Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) for *Reading Religion* (November 12, 2018); review of Philip Esler, ed., *The Early Christian World (Routledge Worlds)* (New York: Routledge, 2017) for *The Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 15 (2019): R37–40; and review of Markus Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity: From Reception to Retrospection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) for *The Journal of Greco-Roman History and Judaism* (forthcoming).