

BOOK REVIEWS

Peter J. Leithart. *Baptism: A Guide to Life from Death*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1683594635. Pp. 140. Paperback. \$15.99 (USD).

Baptism: A Guide to Life from Death is a short yet robust work by Peter J. Leithart, Reformational theologian, prolific author, and president of the Theopolis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. The book is part of the Lexham Press *Christian Essentials* series, a multi-authored set of short works expounding the foundations of the faith in conversation with the Great Tradition and Scripture. While the series aims at catechesis, *Baptism* is no mere primer on the subject. Rather, it is a theological interpretation of the biblical witness to baptism, a witness Leithart finds not only in explicit baptism texts but in a host of passages and motifs where God uses water for divine purposes, the apex being Christian baptism. While this is not Leithart's first book on baptism,¹ his stated purpose here is to help Christians move beyond their present state of division over this very symbol of their unity. He does so, not by offering solutions to intractable questions such as the proper mode and subjects of baptism, but by trying to recover the rich baptismal imagination found in the ancient church and in the Bible itself.

Indeed, Leithart's own baptismal imagination is on full display throughout. The book consists of ten brief chapters plus an epilogue. It is introduced in chapter one with Luther's "Great Flood Prayer," which assigns a high and wide-ranging efficacy to baptism. While this makes some Christians uncomfortable, Leithart claims it reflects the way most Christians, and Scripture itself, speak about baptism. It is not a mere symbol pointing to spiritual realities, but God's appointed means of conveying those realities. "What baptism pictures happens—at baptism. Baptism works" (4). Chapters two and three then survey a wide range of biblical images and rites that are fulfilled in Jesus and in the baptism which unites believers to him.

Having surveyed baptism and its biblical figuration in broad terms, the remainder of the book seeks to answer the question, "How can a little water give new life?" (31). To this end Leithart explores biblical types and figures that contribute in some way to an overall understanding of the rite. Chapters four through six probe deeper into Old Testament images which the New Testament explicitly

1 See his *The Baptized Body* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2007).

connects to baptism, namely, the flood (1 Pet 3), circumcision (Col 2), and the crossing of the Red Sea (1 Cor 10). The ark pictures believers entering the church through baptism to escape God's judgment on the world. Circumcision is fulfilled in the death of Jesus, and those united to him in baptism have their sinful flesh removed. The "baptism into Moses" at the Red Sea emphasizes the need for the baptized to persevere in the faith. Though Leithart set out to avoid controverted questions, and while he relates his baptismal theology to Baptists and paedobaptists alike, he does make a defense of infant baptism in these chapters, arguing the church is a whole *people* rather than a voluntary society of believing adults. Further, whether one is baptized as an infant or as a professing believer, the sacrament inaugurates a life of repentance; it is not mainly the capstone of a conversion (as Baptists might have it).

Chapters seven through ten connect baptism with the three-fold vocation believers share on account of their union with Jesus. For one, they are made priests, and the Levitical washings prefigure how God cleanses them through baptism so they can draw near for divine worship and service. They are also made conquering kings and queens. As Joshua led the people through the Jordan into the promised land, so too do believers pass through baptism and enter into spiritual battle *en route* to their inheritance. And just as Israel's king is idealized as one whose justice falls like rain, so too do the baptized reign with Christ to spread his goodness. Finally, the Spirit was poured out on all the baptized at Pentecost, inaugurating the New Covenant age where all God's people would serve as prophets, in fulfilment of ancient prophetic hope.

The Epilogue draws the main themes together in a direct appeal to the baptized. "Baptism is the gospel with *your name* on it" (103; emphasis original), Leithart proclaims, and he exhorts believers to continuously appropriate baptismal realities, for "Baptism's power doesn't stop when the water dries" (104).

In as far as Leithart aims to deepen the reader's baptismal imagination, this short work may be considered a success. By focusing on the way that the Bible talks about baptism, as an effective sign that does what it symbolizes, he unapologetically urges evangelicals to embrace a more sacramental view of this divine ordinance. By drawing heavily on the church fathers and the likes of Luther, he puts modern believers in touch with their catholic heritage where they may find resources to enrich their understanding of baptism, which is all-too-often impoverished by a modern mindset that is afraid to see God working through the material means of the world he created. This sacramental theme, introduced early on and running throughout the book, leaves the reader with a profound sense that baptism is meant to be a central spiritual reality in the life of the church.

He also inspires a deeper imagination by following Scripture itself in seeing

baptismal realities signified in Old Testament events and fulfilled in Christ. He is at his strongest when he looks at the New Testament texts that explicitly probe the Old Testament for baptismal images. His interpretation is a little more reaching when he links baptism to the believer's role as prophet, priest and king. For example: "We're all Naaman, lepers reborn. We're all iron sinking toward Sheol until the wood and water save us. We're all Elijah, led to brooks in the wilderness. We're all Elisha, baptized into Jesus' Jordan baptism to share his Spirit" (98). It is not that such interpretations are necessarily wrong or misleading. They are just highly imaginative and not all readers will find them compelling. Even here, if not always convincing, he is certainly interesting, showing just how active his own baptismal imagination can be.

As for his other primary goal, the book indeed holds promise for fostering Christian unity. Most works on baptism assume a particular historical position and develop that view over against competitors. In light of such divergence, how can Christians confess that they have "one baptism"? Leithart points a way forward. To be sure, he does weigh in on some of the controverted questions, showing his passion for infant baptism, and even putting in a word for paedocommunion. But in the main he focuses on a theology of baptism that applies to all Christians, stressing that much of what baptism symbolizes—union with Christ, refuge from judgment, a call to perseverance, indwelling of the Holy Spirit—is not restricted to the one-time rite but transcends that moment-in-time, extending to the whole of the Christian life. This relativizes differences over questions such as the proper subjects and mode of baptism. It is not that those questions are unimportant, but Leithart shows there is a way to think about the heart of baptism that can garner the affirmation of both paedobaptists and Baptists, of those who sprinkle, immerse, or pour. Indeed, the book's cross-confessional endorsements confirm its ecumenical value at precisely this point. If there is a lot Christians can agree on regarding baptism, perhaps they can with more integrity confess that they have "one baptism." A century ago, P. T. Forsyth urged English Congregationalists and Baptists to unite, isolating baptism as the only meaningful difference separating them. He reasoned that one group baptized infants *unto* Christian realities, the other baptized believers *into* these realities. In both cases the realities themselves are the same. Leithart's work represents a similar perspective and would be read with great value by any theologians, pastors, students or lay Christians seeking to deepen their own understanding of baptism, and it could build a bridge between Christians divided over this sacrament meant to join them to Christ and to one another.

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Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South. Mark A. Lamport, ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. Two volumes. ISBN 9781442271562. Pp. 1073. R4066 Hardcover. \$263.00 (USD).

The growth of Christianity in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, particularly during the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, has been widely recognised and discussed in academic literature. This significant volume makes a substantial contribution to the study of Christianity in all its expressions in different parts of the world by drawing together an international team of scholars to focus attention on Christianity in “the Global South.”

The editor and his large team of colleagues (“250 contributors from 70 countries,” according to the Preface, xxii) have produced a reference work which provides, for those who are able to access it, a superb resource for students and scholars of world Christianity.

The title reflects the need to choose a convenient means of describing areas of the world which are not easily categorised in a simple phrase. In the Preface, Lamport recognizes the contested nature of the chosen terminology and reflects on the complexity of the circumstances that lead to every designation being less than fully satisfactory.

The Preface explains that the *Encyclopedia* (to abbreviate the long title) is intended to accomplish several tasks: to examine “methodological” issues relating to the study of “world Christianity”; to provide “a diachronic study concentrating on the historical evolution of Christianity in the 164 countries/entities that are generally considered to constitute the Global South”; and to provide “a synchronic study that presents the state of the Church and the various denominations in each country, their strengths and weaknesses, and their threats and opportunities” (xxii).

Given the scale of this work, it would be easy for the reader to be left in a state of bewilderment, uncertain where to begin the process of digesting the book’s vast contents. Thankfully, the *Encyclopedia* has been carefully designed with the needs of the reader in mind. Five “Prologues” on particular geographical regions, each written by a specialist, provide brief (around two pages each) orientation to the region. Then, immediately prior to the first main entry, Philip Jenkins, whose book *The Next Christendom* (third edition, Oxford, 2011) has introduced many readers to recent developments in the shape of world Christianity, contributes a brief “Introduction” to the work as a whole.

The most substantial portion of the *Encyclopedia* is a collection of articles in alphabetical order, ranging from “Aboriginal Christianity” (1) to “Zoroastrianism, Christianity and” (879–81). The articles might be categorized, as suggested by the Preface, into several categories. Some deal with broad themes. For

example, there are articles on “Contextual Theology” (interestingly, there is a separate article on “Theology in Contexts: Historical Development in the Global South of”), “Integral Mission,” and “Theological Education.” In the latter case, there are distinct articles on “Theological Education in [Africa, etc.]” dealing with the major geographical regions. Other articles deal with specific countries. These vary somewhat in form. For example, the article on Nicaragua (585–88) includes substantial detail concerning the geography, ethnic composition, languages, religions and more. There is also a timeline specific to the country. (Strangely, although the article refers to various proportions of the population in percentage terms, it does not appear to indicate the population in numerical terms.) Most articles on a specific country seem to follow this format. The article on “Senegal” (710–12), however, is primarily composed of a historical narrative, with only the final two sentences mentioning the contemporary situation.

There then follows a series of articles on different geographical regions, but with a measure of greater specificity than the opening prologues. So, for example, distinct articles in this section address East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The articles in the first series are all entitled “History of the [African, etc.] Experience with Christianity.” The articles in the second series are entitled “Contemporary [African, etc.] Experience with Christianity.”

The articles in the *Encyclopedia* conclude with several “Afterwords.” In these short pieces, the authors reflect on the contribution of the *Encyclopedia* and also suggest issues that require further consideration going forward. A detailed “Timeline of Christianity in the Global South” (959–82) lists key events from AD30 to 2016. Each event in the timeline is associated with an article (sometimes several) included in the *Encyclopedia*. Finally, it concludes with a substantial bibliography (985–98), including entries for themes and for specific geographical regions; two appendices which list the articles by theme and by author; credits; an index of names; and a list of the contributors, including brief biographical details.

There are numerous features of this two-volume work that deserve attention. First, I want to emphasize what a rich resource this is. It is a trove of fascinating information which will inform the work of students and established scholars for many years. The calibre of the scholars who have been enlisted to write the articles is outstanding. Readers have the opportunity to engage with the work of well-known names in the field of world Christianity and mission studies such as Professors Brian Stanley, Dana Robert, and J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, but also with the work of many authors who may not be so familiar. A substantial number of the contributors carry out their teaching and scholarship in the Global South.

The topics addressed in this work indicate the close relationship between the

discipline of missiology/mission studies and the discipline of world Christianity. Although there is no explicit reference to “mission” in the title of the *Encyclopedia*, it is clear that mission is a significant theme in many of the articles. Along with standard article titles, such as “Mission, Biblical Theology of,” it is good to see articles that highlight the mission work which issues from various nations in the Global South entitled “Mission from Africa,” “Mission from Asia,” and so on. Likewise, the article “Mission in and to Africa” recognizes the contribution made by Africans to the growth of Christianity in the past and today.

With so many different articles by so many contributors, it is impossible to engage with the strengths and weaknesses of the individual contributions. The articles are, however, consistently scholarly in tone and will provide the reader with useful orientation to the topics as a foundation for further research. As expected, each article in the *Encyclopedia* is followed by a brief bibliography. These are typically composed of standard academic works, some more recent scholarship, and occasionally some online resources. These bibliographies frequently include resources published within a year or two of the publication of the *Encyclopedia* itself. Given the challenges involved in bringing a multi-author reference work to publication, the editor and his team are to be commended for achieving such a level of currency.

With respect to the theological perspective(s) represented in the work, there is no explicit identification of a particular theological framework. Many of the editors and contributors would, I suspect, associate themselves broadly with an “evangelical” theological framework (perhaps using David Bebbington’s “quadrilateral” as a useful way of defining the term, and recognising numerous different denominational affiliations), though some represent a Roman Catholic perspective (such as the distinguished senior scholar Professor Steven Bevans) and it is likely that a range of theological perspectives is represented among the contributors.

With respect to the physical book, the publisher has produced a very handsome resource. The text is clear and comfortable to read. While it is inevitable that there will be some typographical errors in a work of this scale, the proof-reading appears to have been meticulous. The volumes feel substantial and robust, and appear to be produced to a high standard.

I cannot avoid a brief comment on the price of the *Encyclopedia*. While the scale of the project and the quality of the final product are unquestionable, it is sadly ironic that many (most?) Christian students, scholars, and institutions will perhaps be unable to benefit from it because they cannot justify the expense of purchasing this excellent resource. Might it be possible for the publisher to make some kind of provision to enable institutions in the Global South to access the research in this volume at a more affordable price?

In conclusion, careful engagement with the contents of the *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South* will expand the reader's perspectives on the history and contemporary expressions of Christianity and will enable deeper engagement with the major questions which are raised by the shape of world Christianity now and in years to come.

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A.J. Culp. *Memoir of Moses: The Literary Creation of Covenant Memory in Deuteronomy*. London, Lexington Books, 2019. ISBN 978-1-9787-0691-0. Pp. 233. \$95.00 (USD).

This monograph is A.J. Culp's reworked PhD completed in 2012 under Gordon Wenham at Trinity College, Bristol (UK) (2). The most interesting facet of his study is its interdisciplinarity. Another reviewer rightly remarks that Culp "provides a useful model of how the social sciences, literary approaches to exegesis, and theological interpretation of Scripture can work in complementary ways."¹

Culp looks at the Bible as a "world-building" text, where readers can encounter the divine (233). Deuteronomy, he argues, contains mechanisms of memory that are meant to ingrain in each generation a sense of the importance of covenant life (2). In the first half of the monograph (chapters 1–4) he reviews relevant approaches in memory research as well as where biblical scholarship stood in relation to it. For the last few chapters (5–7, con.) he examines the three memory vectors that he identified, first exegetically and then mnemonically, and evaluates his findings (175).

In chapter 1 Culp shows that in the twentieth century biblical scholarship had limited success with memory research because of a lack of methodological tools. When the tools became available, they were not utilized because biblical scholarship was not interested in texts as memory producers (14) but only as memory products (7), favoring diachronic methods (16). Chapters 2–4 ask the "Why?" "What?" and "How?" questions. Considering Deuteronomy goes further than any other OT book in that it not only emphasizes but demands memory and puts it at the center of covenant life, chapter 2 asks why this is so (33). In chapter 3 Culp asks what kind of memory Deuteronomy cultivates (63). He does this by looking at how group memory can become personal identity (66) and lead to obedience (83).

Chapter 4 explores how Deuteronomy cultivates memory in Israel. Culp does this by firstly looking at what kind of mechanisms inculcate memory into

1 Jerry Hwang, review of *Memoir of Moses: The Literary Creation of Covenant Memory in Deuteronomy*, by A. J. Culp, *CBQ* 82 (2020): 680.

individuals and secondly, he looks for Deuteronomy's main memory mechanisms (99). He shows that an effective memory vector needs to be 1) intentional, 2) performative, and 3) programmatic (105), though distribution is also important (104). He identifies story, ritual, and song as memory vectors and discusses these in chapters 5–7 (109).

Chapter 5 inspects Deuteronomy 6:6–9, 20–25 and shows how stories and religious habits help each new generation to see themselves as participating in the exodus (4). Chapter 6 looks at ritual as memory vector (99). Ritual has a unique place in Deuteronomy's memory-making program (141) since it discusses the three pilgrimage festivals together, making Israel's calendar a yearlong commemoration of the exodus pilgrimage (162). Culp inspects Deuteronomy 16:1–17 and looks at how the feasts sediment memory into the Israelite community (159–161). Chapter 7 focuses on The Song of Moses (Deut 32) as memory vector and notes the mark it left on the rest of the Bible as well as Second Temple Jewish Literature (175). In the concluding chapter he considers how his work contributes to letting people live in the world that Scripture produces (192).

To my knowledge, Culp's work on Deuteronomy has not been done in biblical or memory research. His unique study of memory research is built on his own theoretical scaffolding. For this he drew on psychology of memory and autobiographical memory (63). In his view, no one has looked at how Deuteronomy was used to shape the community (2), and while some have studied covenant in Deuteronomy it has never been brought into conversation with memory research (3). His study on songs as a memory vector is also one among very few attempts (175). While the five aspects of memory in Deuteronomy (patriarchal promise, promised land, exodus, Horeb, and the wilderness) have been studied, others have not studied their serial relationship and presence in Deuteronomy 6:20–25 (131). Culp says that studies on the world *behind* and the world *of* the text abound, but he adds to the little work done on the world *in front of* the text (191).

Culp's work contributes to Luke Timothy Johnson's vision of faithful interpretation,² which should have as its aim focusing on the world that Scripture produces (5). Further to this point, little research has been done on the relationship between the aural and visual factors in Scripture for creating an encounter with God's "real presence" and Culp's work contributes to this (197–98).

Turning to some notes of assessment now, I repeat that the interdisciplinarity of the study is a strong contribution. He is patient about reviewing scholarship that went before, especially in his first three chapters, to show how his memory research provides him with fresh insights that are superior to what preceded him.

2 Luke Timothy Johnson, "Imagining the World Scripture Imagines," in *Theology and Scriptural Imagination*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 3.

He shows how Childs did not quite get Deuteronomy as memory device (9)³ and that Schottroff had some good ideas but lacked methodological tools (10–11).⁴ Halbwachs later developed an approach to memory that could have helped both gain better insight (12).⁵ He also provides great insight into the views of some scholars who came close to seeing Scripture as a memory producer but did not quite get there (21–26, 35, 37, 41, 43, 46).

For each of the three chapters on the memory vectors (5–7) he starts by looking at them exegetically and does this well, while drawing on the most appropriate sources who influenced the conversation on that topic. He also argues well for why he supports them or why he takes it in a previously unexplored direction. He puts forth a convincing argument for why the two most important “contemporizing techniques” found in Deuteronomy are decision making and the “eyes” motif (37). On the “eyes” motif, he shows how previous scholarship has come to faulty conclusions because they have neglected the visual aspect of the Horeb theophany (73).

One negative point is that seven years elapsed between Culp finishing his PhD and the publication of the monograph and he has less than ten bibliographic entries from the intervening years, so it is not that up to date. One particular work that might have been appropriate is the 2013 commentary by Lundbom.⁶ Culp engages with the rhetoric of Deuteronomy a fair bit, so one would expect him to engage with “a commentary bursting with helpful information about . . . rhetorical features of the Hebrew text.”⁷

Another drawback, a physical one, is that the book uses endnotes rather than footnotes, which makes navigating it cumbersome.

Hwang also finds that the study might be “methodologically conflicted”⁸ in that it is an “ahistorical study of Deuteronomy that nonetheless attempts to explore how the book brings the past and present to bear on the future.”⁹ Hwang also makes the valid point that the essays of Lohfink¹⁰ and Strawn¹¹ drew similar conclusion to Culp without the need of a heavy theoretical frame (680).

3 Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, (London, UK: SCM, 1962).

4 Willy Schottroff, *Gedenken im Alten Orient Und im Alten Testament*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967).

5 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1980).

6 Jack Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

7 Timothy M. Willis, review of *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, by Jack R. Lundbom, *RBL* 17 (2015): 89.

8 Hwang, “Review,” 679

9 Hwang, “Review,” 680

10 Norbert Lohfink, “Reading Deuteronomy as Narrative,” in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*; ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 261–81.

11 Brent Strawn, “Keep/Observe/Do—Carefully—Today! The Rhetoric of Repetition in Deuteronomy,” in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*; ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 215–40.

However, all things considered I would agree with Richard S. Hess (i) that this volume is “essential reading for memory studies and Deuteronomy Research.”

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David Bentley Hart. *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell & Universal Salvation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. ISBN 9780300246223. Pp. 222. \$26.00 (USD)

“To say that, on the one hand, God is infinitely good, perfectly just, and inexhaustibly loving, and that, on the other, he has created a world under such terms as oblige him either to impose, or to permit the imposition of, eternal misery on finite rational beings, is simply to embrace a complete contradiction” (202).

I was initially interested in reading David Bentley Hart’s (henceforth DBH) book after becoming aware that universal salvation was historically an orthodox, even common, belief. I haven’t been an evangelical Christian for several years at this point so I no longer hold a vested interest in upholding doctrines about hell. I was, however, still curious as to what a belief in universal salvation looked like and what a person was to do with hell. As I was brought up a good Baptist fundamentalist, these were new but intriguing teachings.

DBH opens the book with a personal account of his relationship with “infernalist” doctrines of hell; these are doctrines that support the idea of hell being a place of punishment where some will be destined to spend their eternities in suffering. DBH is clear from the start that he has always doubted these; not only is he repulsed upon personal conscience but also from logical coherence. This sets the basis for his argument against eternal conscious torment.

The book is divided into two parts: part 1 is a summary and presentation of his basic arguments and part 2 is a series of “meditations” on the argument. Part 2 gets more technical and deals with more advanced historical theological arguments, and these “meditations” are dealt with in a series of four questions: Who is God? What is Judgement? What is a Person? What is Freedom? Honestly, I would say most lay readers would get more than enough from reading Part 1 (which goes to page 62). DBH is quite incisive in demolishing the ethical and logical grounds for belief in an eternal hell. If you are sympathetic or even marginally open to the idea of being persuaded on this topic, I think you’ll find it overwhelmingly convincing. If not, I don’t think the meditations will get you much further, though they may be interesting to more academic readers that want to debate these issues in a public sense and who are not reading simply for themselves. DBH alludes to as much himself, “I found it a strange experience to be writing a book that I expect will convince nearly no one. The truth is that I find

it even more unsettling to have written a book that I believe ought never to have needed to be written in the first place” (202).

DBH has a notoriously punchy and sharp writing style; it may put off some readers as pompous, but I find it charming and even amusing at times. He does argue his position well, and it’s difficult to dismiss the ridiculousness of many doctrinal points of the “infernalsists.” DBH has no difficulty filling pages, as his other works are of significant length, yet this book is a quick 222 pages. In fact, I found it feeling redundant after the first half. I honestly believe this is due to the fact that hell is taken so unquestionably as a core tenant of (western classical) Christian belief that when one actually takes a moment to approach it with any real skepticism, it disintegrates. In some ways I feel like the best summary of this book is, “Hell: It’s Stupid.” I think this could leave many reeling if they are not acquainted with using critical thinking in their belief system. In a larger sense, this book reveals how unequipped the church generally is to revise doctrine and question itself and admit where it went wrong.

All in all, this is a well-written and persuasive little book. It has everything you need to quit hell for good. (And if you find it dismissible, I would say you either don’t care at all about the coherence of your beliefs or have a serious problem with logical reasoning.) As someone who no longer had an investment in hell to begin with, I found it a bit redundant at times. I also was somewhat disappointed that other than a brief note here or there, not much was really articulated about universal salvation, either in its history or theological elucidations. It was really more of an implied reality; if hell is absurd, universal salvation is what we are left with. Universal salvation is really the only comprehensible conclusion of the Christian gospel. Thus, this book will deal well with the absurdity of hell, but not get you very far in understanding the fullness of universal salvation.

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David A. deSilva. *Discovering Revelation: Content, Interpretation, Reception*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN 978-0802872425. Pp. 235. Paperback. \$27.44 (CDN). \$20.80 (USD).

During the COVID 19 pandemic (with eschatological fever on the rise) do we need yet another book on the Apocalypse? Some might bemoan this question with a sense of jaded cynicism. But others (such as this reviewer) warmly welcome the erudite contribution of David deSilva’s *Discovering Revelation: Context, Interpretation, Reception*, one of the newest additions to the steadily growing series “Discovering Biblical Texts.” The author states that “the aim of this book [is] to

lay out the various contributions made to the understanding of Revelation through a variety of approaches” including content (context), interpretive questions, and historical reception (3).

Discovering Revelation is comprised of twelve chapters of roughly equal length: chapter one (introduction) provides key comments on the overall structure of the book of Revelation as well as a brief history of its reception, something which deSilva poignantly puts as being somewhere “between fascination and repugnance” (1); chapters two to four lay down the interpretive groundwork foundations. One notes that this carries the necessary assumption that “John’s text potentially shapes his audiences’ perceptions of and responses to those elements of their shared, lived context” (45); chapters five to eleven serve as an introductory commentary on Revelation (broken up with a sensitivity towards its multiple cycles). DeSilva’s engagement with the Greek, i.e., references to grammars and lexicons, is minimal. Transliteration is used throughout. The conclusion concerns Revelation’s relevance for today. Rounding off the volume is an extensive bibliography (17 total pages) alongside thorough indices (Scripture, author, subject).

In a nutshell, chapter one offers a brief overview of the book of Revelation. Most notably, deSilva directs the reader to the sequence of repetitive sevens throughout Revelation as well as the elements of contrast and parody that portray stark alternatives (10–11). With respect to this point, the author maintains that the worship of the dragon (Rev 13) may, perhaps, be a parody of the worship of God and the Lamb in Rev 4–5 (see 11). DeSilva also suggests that “the pervasive presence of alternatives—which are presented as mutually exclusive within the narrative world of Revelation—might suggest that the act of interpreting this text should focus not primarily on decoding a linear plot but on responding in one’s situation to the alternatives it identifies as these are manifested in that situation” (11).

Chapter two explores multiple strategies for reading Revelation. DeSilva helpfully guides the reader through the “three worlds”—the world *behind* the text, the world *within* the text, and the world *in front of* the text (12–16). DeSilva also gives special attention to the three *different* genres of Revelation. As a letter, Revelation is a “time-and-situation-specific communication to its explicitly named audience” (19). Here, deSilva demonstrates that it is important to note the clear parallels between Revelation and other Greco-Roman letters (see 17–19). As a book of prophecy, deSilva helpfully distinguishes between *forth-telling* and *foretelling*, since how one approaches these particulars “will have significant ramifications for one’s approach to Revelation” (24). As an apocalypse (proper), Revelation is also the unveiling of God’s perspective on the world.

In chapter three, deSilva draws special attention to the question(s) of the origins and transmission of the text of Revelation. With respect to composition, deSilva asks whether (the apostle) John had an ecstatic experience (as in a vision) whereby he transcribed what he saw, or did he, perhaps, craft a brilliant piece of literature rooted in the Jewish Scriptures? As to dating, deSilva upholds the “hypothesis that John’s work was entirely composed during Domitian’s reign to address the situation of Christians in Roman Asia” (38).

In the following chapter, the author explores the religious, ideological, economic, and military contexts of Revelation (44–54). Concerning these things, deSilva asserts that it is the civil religion of emperor worship that John seeks to engage and deconstruct; considering the gospel of Jesus Christ as the true alternative to the gospel of Augustus (50, see also 118).

The remaining eight chapters of *Discovering Revelation* are abbreviated commentaries. Though introductory in scope, the degree to which deSilva engages with a variety of complex interpretive approaches is quite detailed. Especially helpful is the attention given to the sensory experience that one finds in John’s language of “seeing” and “hearing” in Revelation 5. DeSilva notes the tendency of interpreters to “break the code” in Revelation as though it is a trove of visionary information to be endlessly decoded when, instead, it should be understood as literary prophetic art—meant to be experienced (66).

Particularly noteworthy is deSilva’s exploration of how John uses aspects of the Exodus story as his framework for helping his readers interpret their own situation (111–20). This framework assures the original readers of Revelation that just as God was with the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, he is with them now in their present situation: “their hope must be placed in God’s liberation rather than accommodating to bondage” (118).

In addition to the above, special attention must also be given to the author’s handling of the closing visions in Revelation 19:11– 22:5 (see 167–89). Here, deSilva wisely points out the disproportionate attention these “mere three verses” bear on the millennium (172). To this end, deSilva suggests that the primary purpose of the ‘millennium’ concerns “God’s justice towards his faithful and, above all, towards those who have sacrificed the most for the sake of their loyal obedience” (177).

In sum, it is difficult to critique this volume. The author’s attempt to map out interpretive approaches is well done as is the attention that is given to the historical reception of Revelation. His pastoral sensitivity is also quite commendable. There are, however, a few quibbles.

To begin, very little space is given to the robust scholarship that is available in defense of the three major evangelical views on final judgment in Revelation, i.e., (1) Eternal Conscious Torment, (2) Conditional Immortality, and (3)

Universal Reconciliation. Instead, deSilva seems to tow the party line in his rather vague concession for the traditional view of Eternal Conscious Torment. Knowing that the overall purpose of this volume is to inform the reader of the various interpretative approaches in Revelation (see 3), this seems to be a somewhat curious decision for the author to have made. One also notes that the citation formatting flip flops between parenthetical citations and footnotes which is distracting. Lastly, the book itself is rather lack-luster with respect to tables, charts, graphs, and/or illustrations. By way of example, could one not, perhaps, have better explained the circular structure of Revelation through some sort of pictorial representation, for instance?

To conclude, David deSilva's *Discovering Revelation* is a welcome addition to the ever-increasing library of the Discovering Biblical Texts series and anyone else who is interested in the book of Revelation. Its primary audience will, most likely, be Bible College/Christian University (College) and/or seminary students, studious pastors, and the invested layperson. Highly recommended!

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Paul Copan. *Loving Wisdom: A Guide to Philosophy and Christian Faith*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN 9780802875471. Pp. 372. Paperback. \$29.99 (USD).

Paul Copan seeks to share the intellectual fruit of the Christian faith through the discipline of the Philosophy of Religion. While there is no dearth of texts related to the topic, Copan's book *Loving Wisdom: A Guide to Philosophy and Christian Faith* (now in its second edition) provides a well-rounded approach directed at a general audience while still exhibiting some of the notable virtues which make philosophy such a valuable enterprise. To what degree, however, does the second edition of this volume differ from the first and in what capacity does Copan leverage the most recent resources of the last thirteen years since the first issuing of this text? Prior to offering a delineation of these matters and a full-scale review, it is prudent to provide a general orientation to Copan's *Loving Wisdom*.

The book's *modus operandi* is laid out in the form of four emphases: (1) direct engagement with the metanarrative of the biblical story (xi), (2) a thorough delineation of philosophical themes via a distinctly Christian background (xi), (3) a clear emphasis on *praxis*, i.e., how to live out the book's implications in a godly way (xii), and (4) a heavy weight on the *euangelion*, i.e., how to better understand and share the gospel (xiii). It is also salient to note that while Copan comes from an evangelical perspective, he endeavors to write from the position of so-called "mere Christianity" (xiv).

Copan structures his text into four (roughly equal) parts: (I) "God," (II)

“Creation,” (III) “Fall,” and (IV) “Re-Creation.” A short prolegomenon, “Preliminaries on Philosophy and Faith” (1–50) and three thorough indices (Scripture, subject/author) round out the volume. Regrettably, there is no conclusion and/or final thoughts.

Copan states he has “thoroughly revised nearly all of the chapters from the first edition” (xiv). To be specific, greater attention has been given to Part II which is now comprised of eight chapters as opposed to four. The most welcome adjustment has been further discussion regarding arguments for God’s existence. For example, with respect to the validity of the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, Copan has added more details surrounding the differences between contingent and necessary forms of existence via an examination of the kinds of properties each kind of existence is associated with (see 150–55). In addition to this, the section on the *Problem of Evil* has been expanded from four chapters to six while the chapter concerning *The Hiddenness of God* has been altogether removed. Lastly, there is also now the welcome addition of having lists of various reference works (roughly six books) at the end of each chapter. While serving as a guide for further reading and research, the lack of annotations is somewhat disappointing.

To critique, it is hard to fault this volume. Copan displays a strong prominence on the Bible and his intention to directly engage with the metanarrative of Scripture is easy to appreciate. Alongside this, the author’s focus that a philosophically bolstered view of Scripture is helpful for sharing the Gospel is highly intuitive, provided that one accepts Plantinga’s view of philosophy which Copan aligns with; that it is, “not much different from thinking hard” (5).

In addition to this, Copan has succeeded at making “important philosophical themes accessible” (xi). Copan simplifies (but does not oversimplify) complex arguments and assumptions into smaller pieces. A great example is the helpful table which compares the explanatory breadth of *Theism* and *Naturalism* (see 142–44). Lastly, Copan’s pedagogically sensitive approach to start with definitions then proceed with analysis, such as with his treatment of miracles (201) and evil (213), sets out a helpful thought pattern often used by other scholars.¹

While *Loving Wisdom* brought forth many helpful tools and insights, there were some instances where Copan seemed to misinterpret or misunderstand his opponents. Copan’s analysis of naturalist “freethinkers” (19) seems to overstep when he dives into their reasons for excluding miracles and other supernatural claims. To be clear, Copan states, “Every philosophical system will have limits as to what is true . . . Rather than being a ‘freethinker’ who can explore whether

1 See, for example, Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, Revised Edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010). Cf. Evans & Manis, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking About Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009).

genuine miracles occur, he [sic] will exclude this possibility from the outset. Instead of being open to the existence of the soul . . . he [sic] says this is unthinkable or unlikely. He [sic] will seek alternative explanations of how the universe began” (19–20). It should be noted that Copan’s argument against freethinkers seems to turn against itself when he argues that Christianity (a philosophical system) is more “mind expanding” (20). Copan’s statements also do not consider how one usually arrives at such a philosophical system: with reason, evidence, and experience. Surely if the naturalist has reasons that seem plausible as to why God cannot exist, is it not a function of their epistemic duties—not their world-view—to reject claims to the contrary?

More evidence of possible misconstrual can also be found in Copan’s treatment of Erik Wielenberg’s paper, *In Defense of Non-Natural Non-Theistic Moral Realism*, in which Wielenberg defends the idea that God is not required for *Moral Realism* to be true.² Copan quips, “Wielenberg optimistically asserts: ‘From valueness, sometimes value comes.’ But to assert is one thing; to justify is another” (139). That being said, however, Wielenberg *does* aim to provide a defense of his position, which he notes is compatible with atheism: “In calling the view *non-theistic*, I do not mean to imply that the view entails atheism; the view is compatible with theism”³ Though Copan may object that Wielenberg’s position ultimately has no justification, this misses the point. There is substantial difference between the claim that one is merely asserting something and *not justifying it*, and that they are arguing for something that *has no justification*. The assertion without justification is apprehended immediately, as the interlocutor has merely given a description of their current belief—or psychological state—on a topic (Noah thinks Jesus did not exist). However, the claim that a position has no justification can only be arrived at after responsibly engaging with and defeating the evidence (justification) for the said claim vis-à-vis undercutting or rebutting defeaters. This has not been attempted by Copan in his treatment of Wielenberg’s thesis.

Despite these infelicities, Copan has done a massive service to the apologetics community in the second edition of *Loving Wisdom: A Guide to Philosophy and Christian Faith*. His expansive treatment of many issues from a Scriptural perspective combined with analytic philosophy is not only a good steppingstone for those engaging in the discipline as either sceptics or believers but also a helpful reference to those that are scholars in their own right. To conclude, Copan has given a valuable contribution to the field in showing that Christianity is

2 Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009) 23–24.

3 Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism” *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009) 24.

“historically rooted, philosophically sound, and existentially relevant” (305). Its primary readers will likely be invested laypersons, pastors, Christian leaders, and/or Bible College/Christian university students. One also hopes that this volume might be leveraged as an apologetics tool to help those looking for theistic viewpoints on Philosophy. Highly recommended.

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