

BOOK REVIEWS

Zachary K. Dawson. *The Message of the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis*. Linguistic Biblical Studies 22. Leiden: Brill, 2022. Pp. xiii + 350. Hardcover. ISBN 978-9-0045-1008-1. \$251.00 (USD).

The Book of Acts is widely recognized as a crucial link between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, unique in its historical, literary, and theological significance. At its core is the call to bear witness to Christ “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” (NET). In this context—and especially in light of the New Perspective on Paul—no small debate exists regarding the role and influence of the so-called Judaizers. These figures, who arrived from Judea to Antioch (see Acts 15:1 and following), accepted Gentiles into the Church yet opposed Paul and Barnabas on the matter of circumcision, the physical sign of the covenant.

Zachary R. Dawson’s *The Message of the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles*, a revision of his 2021 doctoral dissertation undertaken at McMaster Divinity College, argues that Luke’s construal of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and its co-thematic passages aims to persuade Jewish believers of Luke’s audience not to separate from multiethnic churches; this is accomplished through subverting the value orientations of a prominent Noahic tradition within Second Temple Jewish literature which promoted strict Jewish isolation from Gentiles (2).

In addition to an extremely helpful glossary of methodological terms (306–12) and three appendices covering the Transitivity Structures of Acts 10:1–11:18; 15:1–29; and 21:17–25, *The Message of the Jerusalem Council* is divided into seven chapters. A markedly thorough bibliography (313–36) and two indices (Author and Ancient Sources) round things off.

Chapter 1, “The Relationship between Purpose and Parallelism in Acts: A Literature Review” (1–27), surveys the history of scholarship on the Book of Acts—often referred to in German scholarship as *Actaforschung*—tracing how discussions of parallelism (i.e., structured regularity used to create foregrounding and invite interpretive reflection; cf. p. 309) have shifted over time. Dawson notes that, for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, parallelism was understood primarily in typological terms and that only more recently has it become nearly synonymous with repetition. Moreover, it is only in the past fifteen years or

so that parallelism has begun to be defined through the lens of modern linguistic approaches to literature (27).

In chapter 2, “Linguistic Stylistics: Theory, Model, and Methodology” (28–76), Dawson seeks to address this lacuna by accounting for parallelism in the Book of Acts through a stylistic analysis grounded in an explicit Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework. Despite the density of material (social-semiotic stylistics in conversation with Mikhail Bakhtin, anyone?), Dawson is an exceptionally clear writer. He supplements his analysis with thorough definitions (note the glossary mentioned above) and illustrative diagrams (see p. 40 for an excellent example). For those unfamiliar with the technical nomenclature—such as dialogism, mode(s), markedness, register, taxis/tactic system(s), thematic formation, and transitivity—this chapter can be overwhelming. Nevertheless, I remain firmly persuaded that an appropriate method is essential to effective exegesis. As such, I advocate: “the method is [often] the magic.”¹

The bulk of the book consists of analyzing various portions of Acts (and certain other texts, such as Jubilees, for instance). Chapter 3 (77–132) is titled: “The Story of Cornelius and Peter: A Transitivity Analysis of Acts 10:1–11:18.” Using Ronald D. Witherup as his primary discussion partner for analyzing repetitions in the Cornelius story, Dawson notes:

Peter functions consistently as a more dynamic character than Cornelius, being the active agent of more process types and even the foregrounded participant in scenes where Cornelius is the primary participant. Thus, Cornelius is never elevated in the story so that he can be demoted as Peter rises; Peter, from the first pericope, is established as a foregrounded agent, whose actions are patterned to contrast against the background of Cornelius’s. (128)

While the significance of this point might not be fully appreciated by Witherup (and others):²

- 1 Dustin G. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah’s Flood in Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022), xxii. As Stanley E. Porter (and Steven M. Studebaker) assert: “having an appropriate theological method is the first step in helping to ensure that one can determine what counts as evidence and that one has a means of evaluating this evidence to form coherent theological findings. Without a method, it is only an accident if one arrives at important or viable conclusions (and how would you know anyway?).” *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), “preface.” Cf. Zachary K. Dawson, “The Textual Traditions of Acts: What has Discourse Analysis Contributed?” *Biblica* 100 (2019), 560–83 alongside the *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation* series, i.e., *Volume 1: Prevailing Methods before 1980*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), *Volume 2: Prevailing Methods after 1980*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), and *Volume 3: Further Essays on Prevailing Methods*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Zachary R. Dawson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).
- 2 Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Review of Dawson within *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 33 (2023), 240–42 (esp. 241).

Peter is the participant involved in the foregrounded patterns that symbolically articulate the theme, and the patterns of contrast with Cornelious play an integral role in this.... A summary of the foreground patterns from each pericope regarding participants, processes, and circumstances, can reveal the larger trends created across the story as well as the thematic content that is consistently foregrounded for the purposes of symbolic articulation. (128–29)

Chapter 4 (133–73) covers “Peter’s Vision and 1 Enoch’s *Book of Dreams*: An Intertextual Thematic Analysis of Acts 10:1–11:18.” As alluded to above, Dawson concludes that Luke attempted to subvert—that is, to oppose—certain value positions representative of the Noahic tradition as seen especially in 1 Enoch, including a stance against the social isolation of Jews from Gentiles as the necessary measure to maintain their moral purity as well as the belief that the Jews would see the rise of a new Jerusalem and the subordination of the nations to a faithful remnant of Israel prior to the work of the Messiah who would restore the earth to its prediluvian Edenic conditions (173). Concerning Peter’s prominence (noted above), Dawson also asserts:

The additional foregrounded patternings in the Cornelius story that promote Jewish hospitality of Gentiles and table fellowship thus make the value orientations of the Cornelius story emphatically clear to the Jewish believer. However, Luke apparently did not consider this one episode sufficient to communicate the full message of this theme. The full communion of Jewish and Gentile believers entails more than their coming together over meals but includes larger questions about the Law. The patterns of redundancy of this episode are thus carried forward in Acts to the Jerusalem Council. (173)

Chapter 5 (174–217) “The Jerusalem Council and Paul’s Alleged Apostacy: A Transitivity Analysis of Acts 15:1–29 and 21:17–25” and chapter 6 (218–44) “An Intertextual Thematic Analysis of the Noahide Laws in Acts 15 and 21,” therefore, make these matters clear. In brief (218), Dawson seeks to answer two questions: (1) how can an intertextual thematic analysis shed fresh light on the four abstentions of the Apostolic Decree as a recurrent thematic formation in Acts 15 and 21, and, (2) what can the same analysis help reveal about the value positions at risk in Luke’s social environment and Luke’s stance towards them? He concludes:

Luke’s theme ... is a statement against a Noahic tradition represented in such pseudepigraphal Second Temple literature as 1 Enoch and Jubilees that promoted notions of Jewish purity that required complete separation from Gentiles. The statement however, is not meant to

negate these values, because he uses the same thematic elements that imply the legitimacy of certain Jewish conservative norms that governed the life of the church, but rather is *subversive*, since Luke uses the intertextual thematic formations of the Noahic tradition to facilitate the unity of the redefined, multiethnic people of God. (262, italics original)

Dawson also argues that Luke's use of verbal artistry suggests that some Jewish believers were tempted to adopt a separatist ideology, distancing themselves from Gentile believers. This may have caused tension in the early (multiethnic) Christian community. Luke's message, therefore, was aimed at addressing this internal conflict and would have required Jewish listeners to understand the symbolic way he communicated the need for unity within a diverse church (262).

The author's command of SFL and koine (NT) Greek is superb, with frequent reference to leading linguistic resources such as Louw and Nida's lexicon and various reference grammars by Mathewson and Emig, McKay, and Porter.

It is difficult to overstate the precision of Dawson's analytical rigor. For example, he offers an impressively detailed examination of the lists of animals found in Jewish literature, with particular attention to certain traditions surrounding Noah's Flood. Dawson concludes that Peter's vision in Acts does not merely evoke intertextual connections with various creation or de-creation narratives, nor solely with Levitical discussions of clean and unclean animals, nor even with apocalyptic literature that employs animal symbolism; rather, it synthesizes and transcends these thematic threads in a rhetorically sophisticated and theologically loaded act of symbolic communication (154). At the risk of belaboring things, Luke's engagement with the Noahic traditions of Second Temple Judaism subverts the values and beliefs associated with Jewish ethnic purity in Peter's vision, where Peter received a message from a heavenly voice, comprised of the language of the Noahic tradition (i.e., lists of animals) along with Jewish apocalyptic tropes (i.e., animals symbolizing nations and the interaction between heaven and earth) that overturns the status of Gentiles as impure and promotes the value position of hospitality between Jews and Gentiles. To anyone who truly understands the significance of this thesis, Dawson is brilliant!³ Another example of astute attention to detail concerns how certain translations give the appearance of a closer co-thematic tie between Daniel 7:5 and Acts 10:13 than exists (153–54).

To quibble, one wishes that Dawson had engaged with more of the Hebrew and/or other textual variants of the Flood narrative (Genesis 6–9) à la *BHQ/BHS* and/or Ronald S. Hendel's *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical*

3 Cf. Gregory R. Lanier, *Apocryphal Prophets and Athenian Poets: Noncanonical Influences on the New Testament* (Brentwood, TN: B & H Academic, 2024).

Edition (Oxford University Press, 1998) and that he had leveraged more of the crème de la crème of Septuagint lexicons and grammars.

In closing, Zachary K. Dawson's *The Message of the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis* is exemplary in both scope and execution. It finely showcases the value of a rigorous, linguistically informed approach to exegesis. Scholars across the spectrum—whether focused on the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the Septuagint, the New Testament, or Second Temple Judaism—will benefit from Dawson's astute, meticulous analysis.

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G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli, eds. *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Pp. xxviii + 964. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-5409-6004-7. \$64.99 (USD).

Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament is a truly insightful volume, bringing together the work of ninety-six evangelical biblical scholars, many well-known in the field. Though titled as a dictionary, the volume itself refers to entries as “essays” (xvi), which is a more accurate description. While the essays address the New Testament (NT) use of the Old Testament (OT) from many angles, the volume does not limit itself to the NT use of the OT but also examines the ways the OT uses the OT. This volume functions as a companion to the invaluable *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2007).

Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament contains five types of entries. There are fifty-five surveys of biblical books; each book of the Bible is considered at a synchronic level, specifically focusing on its indebtedness to antecedent revelation. OT essays consider how earlier OT tradition (resting, more or less, on a “canonical” (final form) approach to deal with the challenges of determining which revelation is earlier) influences the book, in addition to considering how the NT authors use that OT book. These OT essays are foundational for understanding how the NT uses the OT and fill a gap that was not able to be addressed given the format of *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.

Fifty-four essays address biblical-theological topics and themes, such as “The Day of the Lord” or how the “Image of God” begins in the OT and climaxes in the NT. Jewish Exegetical Traditions are the subject of twenty-five essays, comparing and contrasting how Jewish literature used the OT within the Second Temple period and later. These essays cover the use of the OT in the Apocrypha (four essays), Dead Sea Scrolls (three essays), OT Pseudepigrapha (four essays), Philo

(four essays), rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrashim) (three essays), Septuagint (LXX) (four essays), and Targums (three essays).

Twenty essays consider a wide range of topics related to inner-biblical exegesis, with essays on canonical interpretation, method, typology, and three essays on the history of interpretation (Early Church, AD 300 to AD 1800, and AD 1800 to present), for example. While the vast majority of the essays deal with essential components, not only surveying but advancing the field, there are also a few essays, for example the one on “Letter Couriers,” which, though engaging, do not clearly add to the discussion. Stanley E. Porter concludes this article by stating, “we know surprisingly little about the roles that the letter courier played in the process, besides the obvious one of delivering the letter to the intended audience” (460). Finally, there are five essays focusing on categories related to the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament within systematic theology.

The essays are generally four to six pages in length, arranged in alphabetical order, and conclude with recommendations for related essays within the volume, followed by an often-extensive bibliography (some including 60 sources!) focused primarily on books and journal articles. Though the essays only introduce each topic, the reader is equipped with a framework to read the Scriptures for themselves, but then also to dive in, exploring works recommended in the attendant bibliography. The authors of these essays are clearly aware of broader academic perspectives and do a good job of introducing these without getting entangled in them. The reader truly benefits from this approach, being introduced to the field, benefiting from some of the best of current scholarship, and then pointed towards resources that will aid further study if they so choose. Even as they function as introductions, these essays are not simplistic and capture the nuances of many of these topics, often in the words of those who have been making inroads in the field. One example of this is in the essay on canonical interpretation that emphasizes that “the development of the Christian canon was not due to an external force imposed upon the text ... rather, even before a more formal list of canonical texts developed, there was a growing recognition of the authority of these texts because of their intrinsic properties. In this way, in the words of Herman Ridderbos (25), ‘the canon is not a product of the church; rather the church is to be the product of the canon’” (81).

Following the entries is an extensive Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Writings (891–964), making this dictionary incredibly user-friendly as one can see at a glance where the passage they are studying is addressed. While works such as Schnittjer’s *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* (Zondervan, 2021) and the aforementioned *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, by the nature of their structure, use an inductive approach, *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* focuses on articulating components

of the exegetical, hermeneutical framework, equipping the reader to return to Scripture and see the ways the NT is using the OT (or the OT is using the OT) for themselves.

Interpreting Scripture and specifically detecting where Scripture is using Scripture (whether through quotation, allusion, echo, typology, or another means, however defined) is an art and a science. To be clear, Schnittjer relies on empirical controls, evaluating dependence, presenting evidence, and then rating every potential exegetical allusion using a rating system to ensure that the allusions he presents are both verifiable and transparent (Schnittjer, xx–xxviii). Both the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* and the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, while relying on criteria to determine dependence, interpret Scripture primarily as literature, using an approach that leans more towards seeing interpretation as an art than Schnittjer's stance does. This approach is not speculative but rather involves careful observation of the text, taking note of the details and nuances the authors of Scripture are taking note of, and building a case through many, many examples.

As a dictionary rather than a commentary, the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* gives much attention to providing a framework for interpretation. This is especially evident in the essays on biblical books. For example, in his essay on the Book of Acts, Alan Thompson does not look specifically at each quotation and allusion to Isaiah within Acts but rather points out the importance of Isaiah for understanding the Christology and Soteriology of Acts. He identifies examples where this broader framework points to the presence of Isaianic themes in Acts, looks specifically at the allusions to Isaiah in Acts 1:6–8, and points the reader to several authors who have done work in this area. In this way, after reading this short portion of his essay, the reader is provided with new lenses with which to return to Acts and wrestle for themselves with the influence of Isaiah. The authors of these essays find just the right balance here, in my opinion, leaving the reader excited to return to the Scriptures, equipped with a framework to discover the text anew.

These essays will be of benefit to scholars, pastors, students, and, in fact, anyone who is interested in reading the Bible. I will certainly widely recommend this volume!

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Kenneth D. Keathley, ed. *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views*. Brentwood, TN: B & H Academic, 2024. Pp ix + 230. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-0877-6490-0. \$34.99 (CDN) \$24.99 (USD).

Over the last few decades, as theologians and biblical scholars have wrestled with questions regarding the claims of Genesis and its compatibility with evolutionary science, the question of Adam's historical existence as the progenitor of the human race and first sinner has resulted in a variety of perspectives.¹ In 2013, Zondervan released a book that highlighted four views of Adam as part of their Counterpoints series.² In the decade since, new perspectives have arisen which this volume seeks to bring to the discussion. The editor of this volume, Kenneth Keathley, sets forward three questions that the authors are to answer: "1) How does your position interpret the biblical witness concerning the historicity of Adam and Eve? 2) How does your position integrate with the current scientific consensus concerning hominids? 3) How does your position impact the message and ministry of the church?" (15). Four authors in this book answer these questions: Kenton Sparks representing the "Non-Historical" perspective, William Lane Craig the "Mytho-historical Perspective," Andrew Loke a recent "Genealogical Adam and Eve" (GAE) model, and Marcus Ross representing "Young Earth Creationism" (YEC). Each author is a recognized authority concerning the intersection of science and the Bible.

Kenton Sparks begins with a brief explanation of why he is not an "inerrantist" (22–25). To be clear, Sparks rejects the idea that Scripture teaches a particular viewpoint about Adam and Eve (30) but affirms that the New Testament authors likely *believed* that Adam was (in fact) historical (31). Sparks identifies Genesis as "aspective works of literature" (34). This term is drawn from the aspective form of art which seeks to project the human experience into the art, contrasted with the perspective form which seeks to depict things as they are (34). Being a work of its time, i.e., pre-[post]modern, Sparks discourages using Genesis as a tool for modern scientific inquiry (40). Sparks concludes with a brief survey of evidence for long ages and [non-teleological] evolution (42–44) and calls

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- 1 A sampling of these perspectives is seen in William Lane Craig's *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, Andrew Loke's *The Origin of Humanity and Evolution*, Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin*, William VanDoodewaard's *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, John Walton's *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight's, *Adam and the Genome*, C. John Collins's, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?*, Peter Enn's *The Evolution of Adam*, and S. Joshua Swamidass's *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*.
 - 2 Denis O. Lamoureux, John H Walton, C. John Collins, William D Barrick, Gregory A Boyd, and Philip Graham Ryken, *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

believers, as a whole, to address the notable contradiction between broadly held beliefs of the church and public knowledge (48).

William Lane Craig defines myth as “a traditional, sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present forms” and “seeks to explain present realities by anchoring them in the prehistoric past and so to validate a culture’s contemporary institutions and values (70). Craig identifies ten family resemblances for identifying myth and focuses on the etiological elements in analyzing Genesis 1–11, such as being set in a “primaeval” age and anchoring present realities within this primordial time (71–75). Craig does not provide a concise definition of myth in this chapter, instead leaning into the list of “family resemblances.” Craig also highlights the connection to history through the use of chronology to bridge the gap between the primaeval era of Genesis 1–11 to the historical era of Genesis 12ff (75). In addition, Craig concludes that only one passage suggests Adam’s historicity, namely Romans 5:12–21 (81). Finally, Craig, seeking to identify biblical humanity, uses a list of criteria of what is “human,” focusing on cognitive characteristics such as abstract thinking, planning depth, and use of symbolism to evaluate hominin fossils (cf. pp. 83–84). Ultimately, Craig concludes that Adam and Eve were likely two members (though possibly a small group) of *homo heidelbergensis* who were selected by God and bestowed “rational” souls (88–89).

Andrew Loke begins his argument by surveying Scripture and showing how Adam is treated as a historical person, the first created bearer of God’s image (117–19). GAE, as Loke presents it, argues that Adam is created within the Garden of Eden as the first image bearer (117), but outside the garden, the “evolution of ‘man’” proceeded as described by contemporary evolutionary scientists (119–20). When Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden, Adam’s image-bearing descendants intermarried with the anatomically identical *homo sapiens* outside the Garden and passed the *Imago Dei* on through their descendants (120–21, 123). This process then continued, spreading the image of God to all humanity by the time of the first century AD (122). Loke cites migration studies as evidence that it is possible for two people in the ANE to be the genealogical ancestors of all people by the first century AD (125). Loke concludes by expressing the importance of resolving any acrimony and conflict between science and religion (Christianity) to better work together to fulfill the cultural mandate as image bearers and to alleviate the doubts that (according to Loke) have caused many people to leave the faith (130).

Marcus Ross begins stating that, if evolution and long ages are true, five statements that contradict Scripture’s narrative must also be true, namely: (1) humanity evolved from nonhuman primates and are not distinct from creation, (2) Adam and Eve (if they existed) were not the sole progenitors of humankind,

as a whole, (3) the Fall (if it occurred) did not bring death to human beings and had no “cosmic” consequences, see below, (4) violence, evil, and death among humans predates Adam and Eve and was part of God’s original “very good” creation, and (5) God never judged humanity with a worldwide Flood and Noah’s family did not restart the human race. Ross then walks through Genesis 1–11 claiming that Adam was a historical individual (153–54), the Fall had “cosmic consequences” (154–56, 160–64), and that humanity was wiped out and had to repopulate after a global, catastrophic Flood (156–60, 164–65). Ross next turns to science, giving a brief summation of “baraminology,” i.e., the study of created “kinds” ≠ “species” (174–75) and its applications to studies of australopithecines and hominins (176–77). After examining anatomical and behavioral evidence (177–84), Ross points to *homo erectus* as likely being what Adam and Eve and Noah’s family were (185). Other hominins developed post-Flood, and *homo sapiens* eventually became the only human morphology remaining. Ross concludes, “what is *written* in the text is indeed what is *meant* by the text, both on the surface and as we plumb its depths” (187, italics original).

Though not produced by the same publisher, from my perspective, this book admirably succeeds in providing an update to Zondervan’s 2013 *Four Views* book, highlighting two unique variants of the GAE model in Craig’s and Loke’s models. NB: one notes that both Craig’s mytho-historical³ and Loke’s recent⁴ forms of GAE have entire books dedicated to the topic. As such, the current volume helps bring the conversation up-to-date. What’s more, while *Four Views* tended to focus (for the most part) on what *Scripture* communicated, this book uniquely prompted the authors to show their perspective’s (general) compatibility with *science* (in toto).

An unfortunate weak point in this volume is the engagement with the non-historical and the YEC perspectives. The replies to Sparks’s chapter exclusively focus on his interpretation of Genesis and his approach to science, neglecting that the core of his argument is an “errantist” ontology of Scripture. Sparks himself even notes this lack of comment on his core argument in his rejoinder (63). Ross’s YEC article unfortunately received less engagement. Sparks’s reply compliments Ross’s character and briefly notes the differences in their perspectives (188–89) before launching into further critiques of Craig and Loke. Similarly, Craig briefly critiques Ross’s hermeneutics on key supporting passages for Ross’s argument (190) but then spends as much time criticizing Ross for not showing how YEC can account for distant starlight and not proving “Flood

3 “In Quest of the Historical Adam” in *Sapientia*, January 2022 <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2022/01/in-quest-of-the-historical-adam/>

4 “The Genealogical Adam and Eve” in *Sapientia*, August 2020 <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2020/08/the-genealogical-adam-and-eve-introducing-the-symposium/>

geology” (191). Loke’s critique is mostly focused on hermeneutics, though his comments seem more focused on further defending his own position than critiquing Ross (193–95). Loke finishes his response by complaining that Ross did not answer how the earth can be young (~6000 years) if there are stars visible from billions of light-years away (195).

One of the best parts of a multiple views book like this is being able to bear witness to how each contributor engages with the other’s perspectives through responses and rebuttals in a way that challenges both the status quo and one’s presuppositions/preunderstanding (even if the first and last chapters are somewhat lacking in this regard).

Another critique involves the rather cursory nature of the book. That is, due to space constraints, each view is summative rather than exhaustive. This tends to lead to a repeated refrain of “I explain this argument more fully in X” or the use of *very* lengthy footnotes. To get a fuller understanding of these perspectives, one is required to read through the bibliography.

To conclude, *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views* edited by Kenneth D. Keathley, serves as an immensely useful tool for acquainting people with the varied perspectives on this hot-button issue. Its primary audience is likely Bible College/Christian University students alongside the curious layperson.

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Takamitsu Muraoka. *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar*. Second, revised ed. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2020. Pp. x + 85. Paperback. ISBN: 978-9-0429-4397-1. \$24.00 (USD).

For those eager to read the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Aramaic, the original language of this biblical account, or, perhaps, the story of Daniel in the lion’s den, it can be somewhat difficult to find a volume that provides both a thorough chrestomathy and an effective delineation of Aramaic grammar. Enter *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar* from esteemed Orientalist, Takamitsu Muraoka, now in its second, revised edition.

While Aramaic is (by far) the most neglected of the three biblical languages within most Christian higher education programs, something that is not, however, a distinctly “Western” problem (see p. x), the importance of mastering the fundamentals of this language of revelation has acutely increased now that many contemporary Aramaic texts from the Middle East, notably the Judean Desert, are more readily available. Concerning biblical Aramaic, Muraoka states:

Biblical Aramaic datable to the pre-Christian era and possessing a firm and ancient tradition of pronunciation provides an ideal starting point for those interested in exploring not only part of the Old Testament canon, but also contemporary and near-contemporary texts of cultural, religious, and linguistic relevance (x).

The format and content(s) of the present work assumes that users have a relatively firm grasp of most of the fundamental aspects of biblical Hebrew (see p. xiv). As such, Muraoka offers no elementary explanation of different points of grammar/vocabulary that are shared by Hebrew and Aramaic, and constant references are made throughout the book to biblical Hebrew.

A Biblical Aramaic Reader consists of three main parts: (1) an outline grammar demarcating various aspects of phonology, morphology, and syntax, (2) paradigms, one should know here that both the regular verbs and *lamed-yod* verbs are covered alongside some “simple exercises” (37–38), and, last, (3) the reader. This last section contains grammatical and philological notes on Daniel 2:4b–7:28; Ezra 4:8–7:26; Genesis 31:47; and Jeremiah 10:11.

Users are required to have ready access to Aramaic lexicons/dictionaries, such as Vogt, *HALOT*, *TDOT*, and/or *BDB*, for instance, as (unfortunately) Muraoka provides no glossary of any type.

The overall format and basic contents of *A Biblical Aramaic Reader* remain relatively unchanged from the first edition (x). While certain anomalies distinct to Muraoka remain unchanged within this second edition, such as the assertion that the vocalic *sheva* does, in fact, mark a zero vowel (4), anyone familiar with the author’s other work(s) with the biblical languages will be aware that the quality of analysis is par excellence and sui generis.

It is difficult, therefore, to find much fault with this book. The annotations of the biblical Aramaic texts are succinct yet detailed with ample references being made back to the grammar itself for increased clarity on those especially “tricky” parts. The writing style, too, is remarkably lucid and clear with a number of special “treats,” such as when Muraoka (rather unexpectedly but quite appropriately) refers to, for example, “Snowball” (42) in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945).

One wishes, however, that the publisher had included an exhaustive index in this second edition. While the annotated reading section does contain numerous cross-references, this is no substitute for a dedicated Scripture index that makes clear every (!) reference “at-a-glance.” At the risk of belaboring this point, not a few times I noticed that certain examples offered within the grammar component of the text failed to appear in the annotations even though their absence appreciably affected the ability to effectively wrestle with the grammar/syntax of the text.

Alongside this, since *A Biblical Aramaic Reader* does not contain either an

author index or a dedicated bibliography, finding in-book references is needlessly laborious/time consuming. Would that the publisher had simply included a subject/Scripture/author index this time around.

One does, though, appreciate the fact that each of the exercise “keys” are provided in full (79–84) and that the “Further Studies” section is (mostly) annotated (30–31). That said, however, while one appreciates Muraoka’s emphasis on both Vogt’s lexicon and *HALOT* (31), Matheus’s *A Biblical Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon* (GlossaHouse, 2020) is an up-to-date supplement (at least in different ways) to Holladay’s exceptionally good and trusted, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1988), neither of which (regrettably) appear here.

A more significant (inexcusable?) omission, however, is the odd absenteeism of Gzella’s (Aramaic) contribution to the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2018). Of course, LOGOS users are also especially blessed to have *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Aramaic* (OT) by James A. Swanson (LOGOS, 1997), but the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* contains entries covering virtually all the Aramaic known from the ancient world and is searchable freely online (<https://cal.huc.edu/>). Beyond doubt, one would be hard pressed to find a more exhaustive source of information on the vocabulary of the Aramaic sections of Ezra/Daniel within their linguistic/historical contexts than these volumes.

Another critique is the conspicuous absence of certain key commentators (à la Goldingay, for instance, with respect to the book of Daniel and Williamson, for example, concerning the books of Ezra and Nehemiah) in the annotated “Further Studies” section. Might Muraoka have given undue attention to so-called critical and ecumenical voices to the neglect of staunchly evangelical sources? If such is the case, the reader must not come under the (false!) impression (due to this underrepresentation) that such (conservative) works are either irrelevant or subpar.

Finally, while the publisher claims that this work is “suitable for self-study” (see the back cover), only those with especially pronounced skill and adeptness at the biblical languages would be able to truly master its content without (extensive) recourse to other grammars and resources. Many of these tensions, however, have been alleviated since Scott N. Callaham published his superb (nigh incomparable!) volume, *Biblical Aramaic for Biblical Interpreters: A Parallel Hebrew-Aramaic Handbook* (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2021), which is (fortunately) directly keyed to Muraoka’s grammar.

In sum, it is difficult to find a more up-to-date and linguistically informed volume for biblical Aramaic that compares to Takamitsu Muraoka’s *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar*, second, revised edition. Its primary

users are most likely to be advanced language students alongside certain faculty, of course, of theological/divinity schools, alongside, one hopes, the studious pastor.

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Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon. *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023. Pp. 416. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-9327-9261-4. \$49.99 (USD).

Porter and Yoon's *Handbook* is an example of how the contributions of linguistic tools of grammar and syntax can become useful tools in the interpretation of biblical text. As such, this is not a traditional Bible commentary. The *Handbook* intentionally avoids dealing with the theology or historical issues related to author, date, place, and other issues that may often be considered important for the interpretation of the Bible. The reason is simply that the *Handbook*, as the others in the Series, "is designed to guide the new readers and seasoned scholars alike through the intricacies of the Greek text" (ix).

The *Handbook* begins with an introduction (xxiii–xxx) in which the authors describe their method of analysis as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The *Handbook* provides a brief overview of SFL (p xxiii–xx), although the whole "Introduction" includes discussion of important topics and concepts related to SFL. The SFL approach pays attention to the paradigms of the text and understands the texts as part of a network of systems or means of communication. The meaning intended by the author is decoded by the reader. It also assumes a shared cultural context in which both the author and the reader can communicate with one another. In other words, SFL is interested in showing how "meaning is organized and structured in a meaningful way" (xxiv). For instance, in the interpretation of ἔχομεν (where the *Handbook* prefers the subjunctive form at Romans 5:1), the understanding of the subjunctive is not as exhortative, but as "Paul's projection of the next stage of his argument, that since they have been justified by faith, they should enjoy or realize the peace that they already had" (106). This is an excellent (although brief) introduction to the issues for those not familiar with it. Given that the intended audience of the *Handbook* includes both new readers as well as seasoned scholars, this introduction serves a double purpose of introducing the SFL to both audiences. In particular, it offers brief discussions of the debates related to tense-form and verbal aspect and their implications for the understanding of the meaning of the verbs in New Testament Greek, as well as discussion on prominence, cohesion, syntactical categories, context, and co-text.

But the *Handbook* deals with more than just grammatical and syntactical analysis of the text. There are many instances in which discussions about text-critical issues are tackled with precise and careful analysis, bridging the issues of textual criticism (such as the discussion on the indicative versus the subjunctive of ἔχω in 5:1) with issues related to syntax and linguistic analysis. The *Handbook* consistently identifies the *hapax legomena* in Romans, such as συνήδομαι in 7:22 and συστενάζει in 8:22. It also includes discussion on issues related to punctuation and its implications for the interpretation of the text, as exemplified by the discussion and interpretation of Romans 9:5 (202–204). Throughout the *Handbook*, we find discussions related to the deponent verbs, and the use and meaning of the genitive (on 3:22, pp. 75–77). Also, the *Handbook* consistently calls “nominative of address” what other grammars call “vocative.” The *Handbook* includes many parenthetical references to scholarly sources that may agree or disagree with Porter and Yoon’s conclusion. The glossary (363–70) and list of works cited (371–79) are welcomed, especially for readers who may need a quick definition of important terms and scholars who may want to read more on the topic.

I believe that *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text* by Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon is a great contribution to the study of the Letter to the Romans, as well as a great tool for the discussion of the new insights SFL can offer as another tool in the interpretation of the New Testament. Every student and scholar who wants to be up-to-date in the interpretation of the New Testament, and the Letter to the Romans in particular, should include this handbook. It is a needed tool and helpful supplement to contemporary scholarly commentaries.

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Jonathan Leeman. *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. Pp. xix + 278. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4335-8763-4. \$22.99 (USD).

The modern West is in an age of widespread skepticism towards authority in its many forms. Wielding power, many think, always means abusing power. In *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing*, however, Jonathan Leeman argues that authority was designed to lift others up, and that when authority is exercised according to the standards of Scripture, it not only aids in human flourishing but is necessary to it. More than that, Leeman offers practical wisdom to those under and in positions of authority so that they might move from simple understanding to transformed action.

In part 1 (chapters 1–3), Leeman explains that authority is something granted to all human beings as part of the dominion over creation given by God to His image bearers in Genesis 1. Authority at its best, then, is simply a reflection of the character of God. It has four purposes: 1) growing those under it, 2) growing those in it, 3) creating and organizing groups, and 4) teaching others what God is like (17–29). Sadly, in a fallen world, authority is not always wielded rightly. Fallen human authority often seeks to steal God’s glory and privileges, abusing others in the process. When authority is used in this way, it “cast[s] a false image about God, like a haunted-house mirror that distorts the face it reflects” (37).

Leeman makes clear that this is not just true of the worst offenders, but of all people. Each of us has, at various times, used our God-granted authority in ways that can harm others and lie about who God truly is. Fallen authority, however, is not the end of the story. “Authority-in-redemption reaches down into a world of suffering and bears the cost. It stoops. It goes to where people are and rescues them” (49). In Christ, authority is redeemed and established as a means by which people can flourish. Redeemed authority balances the demands of truth with a heart of grace, the transcendence of commands with the immanence of care. Godly authority looks like Jesus, i.e., being willing to set the agenda and issue commands but also putting itself in a position of vulnerability in order to raise others up.

For authority to exist, however, there must also be people under that authority. Part 2 (chapters 4–5), then, seeks to define the other side in these relationships: submission. Leeman argues that submission is not the removal of one’s own agency, but rather “deferring by moral constraint to an authority figure’s judgment, even if we don’t immediately share those judgments” (65). More than just deferring, however, it also involves “deploying your resources to that same end” (67). Ultimately, submission is given to God, rather than simply to a human individual, and when done in healthy settings is the pathway to growth (cf. Rom. 13:1–7; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5). Leeman is quick to note, though, that submission to humans is never absolute (75–87). Because God is the ultimate authority, when submission to a human authority would require disobeying God or allowing oneself to be wrongly harmed, it can and must be resisted (cf. Ex. 1:15–22; Acts 4:18–20; Acts 16:37–39; 1 Cor. 7:21). “In the final analysis,” Leeman writes, “submission to the people whom God has placed over us is the ordinary pathway to life, growth, authority.... Yet our submission is never finally owed to other people.... We owe it to others only when God says we do” (85).

Having established the goals of both authority and submission, part 3 (chapters 6–10), outlines five principles of biblical authority, devoting one chapter to each. First, authority is not unaccountable, but it submits to a higher authority (91–98). Even the highest authorities must ultimately submit to God. Second, authority

must not be used to steal life from others but rather to create it (99–111). The goal of authority is that those under it might flourish, not be diminished. Third, those in authority must be teachable and seek wisdom from others (113–20). Authority does not equal infallibility, and those who possess it ought to seek wisdom from others. Fourth, authority must walk the tight rope between authoritarianism and permissiveness (121–30). Both errors cause those under authority to wilt, rather than flourish as God intends. Finally, those in authority must not be self-protective but rather willingly bear the cost that comes with their position (131–46). Like Jesus, good authority forfeits its rights and gives whatever is necessary for the good of others (cf. Phil. 2:1–11). These five principles ensure that one wields their God-given authority so that others might be built up rather than torn down.

Part 4 (chapters 11–17) takes the framework established in the rest of the book and presents how this looks in everyday relationships of authority and submission. Leeman distinguishes between “authority of command” and “authority of counsel” (152–57). Authority of command is one to which Scripture gives enforcement mechanisms: parents (the rod), government (the sword), and local churches (the keys).

Authority of counsel possesses a moral weight but no means of enforcement. This is the kind of authority possessed by husbands and church elders (cf. Eph. 5:22–33; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). With that distinction, Leeman finishes the book by offering practical advice on how biblical authority might look for husbands (167–82), parents (183–95), the government (197–219), managers (221–31), local churches (233–41), and church elders (243–55).

With this book, Leeman made a bold decision to tread into dangerous waters. A volume like this requires drawing careful lines and anticipating how people may twist the truth of God’s Word to serve their own ends. For this reason, I have no doubt that anyone who reads *Authority* may find places where they feel that Leeman is being too strict or too permissive, too opinionated or not careful enough in application. This is inevitable in anything like this, given that much of its truth must be applied at the levels of wisdom and conscience. Furthermore, it seems to me that his presentation of a small theology of government in chapter 14 may have distracted rather than added to his overall argument, and one wonders if his section on how managers wield authority contained the same degree of biblical support as the rest of the book did.

Yet, I consider this book to be a triumph! Leeman writes with exceptional clarity and depth but manages to keep it readable and compelling throughout—even despite the above critiques. Leeman is not content to leave his ideas in his readers’ minds but wants to press them down into their hearts, using real-life stories and probing questions to ensure that anyone who reads the book cannot ignore God’s call to use authority in a way that pleases Him and serves others (cf. Phil 2:1–11).

His definitions and distinctions are particularly helpful, whether it is his lucid presentation of why submission is not dehumanizing (69–70) or his case for the distinction between the two kinds of authority (149–165). The addition of both topical and scriptural indices is also appreciated for future reference. Regrettably, there is no author index.

Jonathan Leeman's *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* is a desperately needed book for our post-postmodern culture, which is rife with both abuse and an anti-authority ethos. Though a worthy addition to anyone's library, it is an especially important read for those whom the Lord has placed in positions of authority, such as husbands (with Leeman arguing from a complementarian position), parents, and local church elders.

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Chris Boesel. *Reading Karl Barth: Theology That Cuts Both Ways*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023. Pp. 174. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4982-0034-9. \$24.00 (USD).

Chris Boesel is Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey. In *Reading Karl Barth*, he not only provides an introduction to key themes in Barth but reminds readers that Barth's theology challenges our configurations of the theological spectrum, challenging both liberals and conservatives. Boesel asks how Barth's theology might function as a "life-affirming" resource in response to "destructive theological, ecclesial, and sociopolitical principalities and powers facing churches and societies today" (xii). The text is clear, engaging, and occasionally humorous, written for the "theologically interested pastor, layperson, and church congregation" (xii), especially the "perplexed progressive/post-evangelical" (xiv).

After the Introduction, the book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Approaching Barth's Theology," has two chapters. In "I've Got One Word for You: Jesus Christ," Boesel introduces the reader to Barth's Christocentrism, emphasizing that the eternal Word of God must be concretely heard. He also gives us a helpful summary statement repeated throughout the book: "in Jesus Christ (through the Spirit), God is for us, sinners, and not against us, for us *all*, each and every one, *the last, first*—and we are for God, and in God, for each other, *the last, first. Period*" (4–5, italics original). Boesel adds "through the Spirit" because Barth needed to say more about the Spirit, and emphasizes "the last, first" because he wants to highlight the universal reach of the gospel more than Barth did. What is more, "the name of Jesus Christ always refers to the living, Trinitarian history

between God and the creature within creation, in the midst of which we find ourselves addressed and called into responsible, active participation” (6). Boesel also answers a question that those new to Barth might have: why is the *Church Dogmatics* so long? First, theology is paradoxical. Human speech about God seems impossible, though God makes it possible in the gospel, so theology needs to wrestle with this. Second, the reality of God’s work “occurs as a history of personal encounter and relation,” and so each human being in history has the potential to hear and receive this, which means theological reflection is continuous (10). And third, the church has too often misinterpreted the gospel, and so the church constantly needs correction. In chapter 2, “The News is Good: God *Is* for *Us*, Period,” Boesel outlines Barth’s doctrine of election. Barth’s version of double predestination, God’s Yes and No, only means a Yes for creatures since God himself takes on the judgment of sin and death. Boesel helpfully pairs election with Barth’s rejection of natural theology, which comes from our desire to control or master the gospel, which can be manifested in any Christian tradition.

Part 2: “The Method, Logic, and Content of Barth’s Theology” has three chapters. Chapter 3, “Neither Our Possession nor at Our Disposal,” describes Barth’s early break with liberal theology and his discovery of the Bible and the transcendence of God. Boesel accurately describes how liberal theology assumed religion as a natural anthropological capacity (especially for the white, educated, and propertied European male). While Barth himself fit this mold, his break with theological liberalism began a way forward. Boesel also notes that Barth never officially broke ties with socialism, though he criticized socialist movements for breaking with international solidarity and submitting to various nationalisms. For Barth, the socialisms across Europe “failed to keep pace with the radicality of a truly Christian sociopolitical vision, at least as he understood it” (36). Boesel ends the chapter by noting how Barth’s view of scripture could be viewed as too traditional for progressives and not authoritative enough for conservatives (since scripture is a *witness* to the divine Word that is Jesus Christ). Boesel argues Barth cuts against both sides because “he sees them both as attempts to seize control of and appropriate the free and living Word of God as a human possession, possibility, and capacity” (48).

Chapter 4, “The Movement of Barth’s Theological Logic—*from* God,” qualifies God’s transcendence by discussing divine sovereignty and freedom. Boesel highlights Barth’s insistence that all things, especially salvation, come *from* God, which also “functions as the ground for and the call to exercise our creaturely freedom and responsibility” (53). And while divine sovereignty puts limits on creatures, “it involves a radically non-competitive relation, such that God’s power and control can be seen as the *ground and source* of creaturely power and agency” (59, *italics original*). However, divine freedom is more important for Barth than

sovereignty, as it is freedom to love, which is “an expression of and outpouring of God’s eternal Trinitarian life of loving freedom” (62). Boesel wants to make clear that this is not a destructive “power over,” but a power *for* creatures: “*for the redemptive well-being, wholeness, mutuality, and flourishing of the creature, of all creatures, and of all creation, the last, first*” (66, italics original). Barth’s insistence on the wide reach of God’s freedom in love cuts both ways again. For conservatives, who Boesel sees as limiting salvation (especially by insisting on an “eternally populated hell” (70)—Barth’s openness to universalism will be too much. For progressives, saving perpetrators and challenging current ethical constructs will be problematic.

In chapter 5, “The Concreteness of Barth’s Theological Logic—*Only* in Jesus Christ,” Boesel demonstrates that for Barth we move from the particular and concrete revelation in Jesus to the universal creator and sustainer of all that is. This puts general revelation in the context of special revelation and means that the actualization of God’s universal grace only occurs in the particular history of God’s work in Christ by the Spirit. The same goes for theological anthropology, as we only truly understand human nature by looking to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This movement from the particular to the universal flips patterns in Western philosophy, which tend to prioritize the universal (and inevitably become exclusionary). The chapter also discusses what this means for religious pluralism and Barth’s supersessionism, which needs critique and reconstruction.

The last two chapters in part 3: “The Ethics of Barth’s Theology—‘How Should We Then Live,’” focus on the basics of Barth’s ethics and then on how Barth’s ethics might be engaged today. Chapter 6, “We do Stuff Too: Human Agency, Freedom, and Action,” puts to rest any suggestion that Barth’s theology is too abstract. Boesel explains the *direction* of Barth’s ethics as humans turning “back to God” and then “to and for” the neighbour. The *nature* of his ethics as “free obedience,” while the *content* is gratitude towards God and proclamation and ethics towards the neighbour. Boesel emphasizes that ethics for Barth is not a pregiven list of rules but a concrete and contextual response to God’s Word to us (what Barth calls the “divine command”). What is more, free obedience to this command includes the full use of human capacities and decision processes. However, true freedom only occurs if your life corresponds to God’s will, decision, and action in Jesus (through the Spirit). So, Barth’s ethics is *concrete* and *situational* but *not relative*.

The last chapter, “Barth and Progressive Christian Ethics in and for Our Time and Place?”, highlights the way in which Boesel would like to appropriate Barth towards progressive sociopolitical ends. In terms of economic justice or critiques of racism and colonization, the applications either directly flow from Barth’s own view or presuppositions of this theology, while for issues in gender or sexuality,

Boesel disagrees with Barth and worries that he may have committed to forms of natural theology. Boesel argues that if God is for humans, then there must be a critique of patriarchy and a more inclusive vision cast, including LGBTQIA+ people. In terms of affirming religious pluralism, Barth would clearly reject the idea that all religions lead to God, though there are dialectical ways to see other religions as providing insight into what it means to be human. In regard to environmental justice and ecological sustainability, Barth needs to be expanded.

Reading Karl Barth is not necessarily a work that will equip readers to dive into the *Church Dogmatics* itself. Rather, Boesel challenges readers to start thinking theologically with and beyond Barth. With such a short text, Barth scholars might also note that certain topics are not given the attention deserved: the doctrine of the trinity as one Divine Subject in three modes, Barth's actualism and historicism, and *Church Dogmatics* IV in general, especially its christological realism. At the center of Barth's theology is the claim that human reconciliation with God occurs in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that the ascended Lord is now directing the Church by the Holy Spirit towards the eschaton. Perhaps more attention to this center would appeal to conservatives or even the progressive- or post-evangelicals Boesel wants to reach. Nevertheless, comprehensiveness is not the aim of the book, and there are other resources to prep new readers of Barth. Boesel succeeds in what he aims to do: to remind readers that Barth's theology centers on the gospel as good news, that the electing God is *for all humanity*, "the last, first." And this means we need to carefully think about how Barth is *received*. Because Barth redirects us to God's objective revelation in Jesus Christ, there is a freedom from obsessing about current configurations of the theological spectrum and freedom to think afresh about major social, political, and ecclesial issues. In other words, Boesel suggests that it is not that Barth is too conservative for liberals and too liberal for conservatives. Rather, it might be the case that Barth is more generous and realistic than liberals and more orthodox than conservatives. He suggests to us that the breadth, depth, and generosity found in Barth's theology might be a key for a theology that is yet to come.

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Heather M. Hoover. *Composition as Conversation: Seven Virtues for Effective Writing*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Pp. 161. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6603-2. \$24.99 (USD).

To preserve the integrity of academic works, individuals' contributions are scoured by editors, peer-reviewed, endorsed by well-known figures, and expected to meet scholarly standards and writing styles. This may result in some postsecondary

students interpreting such works as presumptuous or devoid of individuality. Heather M. Hoover, in her book *Composition as Conversation*, proposes a solution for the disillusioned young researcher to “open the door” to inventive, compelling writing by presenting academic composition as a visible form of dialogue—still regarding the author’s personality, ideas, and creativity.

Aside from a brief introduction and conclusion, alongside ten appendices (more on this later), *Composition as Conversation* consists of seven chapters—delineated as virtues. In the first chapter, “Be Curious,” Hoover highlights kindling one’s desire to learn and growing in asking good questions. Hoover comments that, too often, “The writing conversation is predictable” (10), so she recommends students strive for both creativity and excellence! Her practical advice is to research topics to see what sparks interest and develop curiosity about numerous subjects rather than settling for mediocrity and merely completing an assignment.

The second virtue, “Be Attentive,” centers on being observant, primarily during one’s research. Hoover propounds four principles: (1) exploring different perspectives on a subject; (2) using reputable and widely accepted sources; (3) accurately crediting the sources used; and (4) acknowledging that addressing all possible facets of an argument is an unrealistic expectation. Hoover concludes by encouraging individuals to be attentive by practicing active listening, becoming more aware of personal biases, and engaging with sources that champion opposing viewpoints.

The focus of chapter three is to “Be Relatable.” In general, academia can seem aloof. Hoover explains that relating is about respect and connection, and these may be achieved through practical applications. The student can define significant technical terms, craft a relevant and purposeful introduction, provide a topic’s history and context, have an organized and logical argument, and invite fellow classmates or peers to evaluate one’s work—all while preserving one’s genuine “voice” (56).

Hoover’s fourth virtue is to “Be on Topic,” requiring clarity, time, and repetition. The writer must make a well-paced, unambiguous argument that the audience can follow with ease and enthusiasm. Staying on topic can be aided by creating an outline, repeating concepts (yet avoiding redundancy, which may exasperate the reader), and fashioning a tight-knit conclusion.

Chapter 5, titled “Be Engaging,” necessitates the use of clear and applicable language, as even the strategic placement of words in a sentence contributes to its meaning. Because “Being engaging means being in relationship” (88), the writer must establish a connection with sources, their context, and the audience’s perspective—thereby inspiring readers’ curiosity and delight.

“Be Open-Minded” is Hoover’s encouragement in chapter 6. She defines it as having “intellectual humility,” willingly acknowledging that one cannot answer

every question or is always correct (91). Hoover clarifies that open-mindedness does not require a naïve change of opinion—the goal is dialogue, even if both parties irreconcilably disagree. This interaction is needful, for without such conversations, someone regarding oneself as knowledgeable might simply be unwilling to consider others' perspectives.

The last of the seven virtues is to “Be Generous.” Generosity within the academic realm is collaboration, that is, listening and giving of oneself while also receiving. The writing process is not based on one individual's efforts! Citing sources is an example of generosity, as it provides accessibility for others to find the same material.

The book concludes with an exhortation to “Be in Conversation” and listen and learn from others. To support the development of healthy academic conversation skills, Hoover includes ten appendices that provide practical guidelines on research strategies (125–51).

Hoover recognizes a substantial obstacle to the expectations of academia. Rather than seeing academic papers as opportunities to learn, students are increasingly declining in their passion for written assignments. This is a fair point, and Hoover puts in the work to provide practical solutions that assist students in changing their perspectives on academic composition. In short, Hoover understands that real problems require relevant solutions.

Hoover's encouragement for academic integrity with respect to citations is exceptionally commendable. She bases this on the need for appropriate interaction with others' voices, noting, “When we quote others in conversation, we draw on their good reputations, and we do so in a social contract to represent them accurately” (59–60).

In a sense, Hoover supplies a fresh perspective on academic writing. Students are encouraged to be creative and adventurous. This challenges the oft-held generalization that academia exists primarily for the advanced individual with a doctorate and a high-functioning vocabulary. With conversation as composition's stated goal, even the student with no love of the thesaurus or abstract musing may influence a vast audience.

Another positive element of this book is Hoover's knowledge of students' experiences. She provides many examples and stories from her personal involvement as a professor who seeks to foster effective writing habits in her students, and she describes many exercises she has assigned to her students that have assisted them in developing research and writing skills.

Hoover practices what she preaches. *Composition as Conversation* conveys that the heart of writing and good communication is relationship. In addition, her book is straightforward, easy to read, and expertly structured. Although the author

does not claim to have all the answers regarding conversational writing, she skillfully adds her voice to this multifaceted topic.

Composition as Conversation must not be mistaken, however, as the be-all and end-all of composition books. In a sense, this book requires a distinct and subjective prerequisite: the drive and initiative of the student. Hoover's input can be a fantastic help if students desire to improve their writing and enjoy the academic process. However, for young postsecondary students, maturity, dedication, and—dare one say—character do not always appear where an instructor would desire. Thus, the effectiveness of a book such as this is influenced by the hearts of its recipients, who may rank paper writing among the most unfortunate experiences of postsecondary schooling.

Another critique is that time can be a severe constraint. For students invested in extracurriculars, the steps to writing effectively can exhaust even the most high-capacity individual. This book's principles are excellent, but for many students, such instruction may be seen as another "outline for success" that eventually finds itself relegated to the bottom of a backpack or the back of a desk drawer.

Hoover shares her experiences and passions, but to provide enough context, she occasionally veers slightly off topic and reveals a few biases, although these may be understood as the author's efforts to connect the conceptual with the practical. The emphasis on climate change (25, 42, 43, 65, et al.), admittedly one of her preferred topics of interest, might be slightly off-putting to some readers. Religious studies are occasionally mentioned in passing, but not to the degree one might expect from a book published by Baker Academic—a (traditionally speaking) confessional evangelical publisher.

Though written for both teachers and students of the writing process (3), this book is not written *to* students, which might narrow its sphere of influence. The author is a seasoned professor, and as such, the primary beneficiaries of Hoover's work are educators who are looking for practical ways to help their students catch the vision of relational research and writing, thus opening the door of academic conversation to whoever desires to enter.

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Rhiannon Graybill, John Kaltner, and Steven L. McKenzie. *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Yale Bible, volume 24H. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 368. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-300-20667-8. \$85.00 (USD).

Susan Niditch. *Jonah: A Commentary*. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2023. Pp. xxi + 162. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-8006-9903-1. \$59.00 (USD).

In spite of its small stature, the book of Jonah perhaps tells one of the largest “fish stories” of all time. It is strange, surprising, and, for many readers—be they biblical scholars or not—somewhat “difficult to swallow.” Even though Jesus draws comparisons to himself regarding the tale (see Matt 12:38–42, 16:1–4; Luke 11:29–32), the truthfulness of its events remains uncertain in the minds of many. This leads some people to be content with merely gleaning principles and applications from the book of Jonah, while others earnestly argue for its historicity.

This narrative’s modest forty-eight verses lend themselves to be enough material for many commentaries to engage in dialogue over. Rhiannon Graybill, John Kaltner, and Steven L. McKenzie, authors of *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB), find themselves in this ongoing conversation. Their offering marks the second commentary on Jonah in the AYB commentary series alone. In it, they pay homage to Jack M. Sasson’s initial contribution (AYB 24B, 1990). They explicitly state that “we have built on his work at every stage” (5), and humbly admit “we know all too well that ours is not a final word on this fascinating biblical work” (300). How true. Not only is their commentary not the final word, but it is also not the final commentary to be published on Jonah in 2023. Susan Niditch’s *Jonah: A Commentary* (Hermeneia) also brings significant insight to the Jonah discussion. This review will consider and compare each of these commentaries.

This second contribution from AYB on the book of Jonah is not reflected in the title “A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary” (iii). The addition of the word “Another” or a change to “Newer” would have signaled so. A perusing of the table of contents reveals the underlying methodological approach for the series has not changed, even if the order has been slightly modified. This may give reason for altering the original title in only dropping the words “and Interpretation” from the end. Of course, the newest offering does contain interpretation. In fact, it has quite an eclectic collection of interpretive methodologies, some of which are relatively new to the field of hermeneutics and are still developing.

At the onset of the book’s Introduction (and with intended irony), the authors share a portion of Father Mapple’s sermon from *Moby Dick* (3). This is meant to

not only demonstrate that there are many kinds of lessons to be learned from the book of Jonah, but also to legitimize using it to “reflect on other critical, ethical, and exegetical questions” (3). This is something that they intend on incorporating into their contribution through the dedication of a whole chapter entitled “New Approaches to Reading the Book of Jonah” (51–66), but more on that later. An additional motive is also suggested, namely, to reinforce the idea that true masterpieces are never completed, not by their initiators (a nod to Sasson), or by those who follow afterwards—instead, they remain unfinished and in perpetual construction (5).

The Introduction (1–5) addresses the most pressing interpretive issues of the book. Chapter 1 (5–6) includes a concise summation of the story. Chapter 2 (6–20) delineates the two worlds of Jonah: “the world in which the story is set and the world in which it was composed” (6). Within this parameter, the historical and geographical settings are described as well as the proposed dating for the book. The authors suggest Jonah was written in stages, with the earliest portions dating in the Persian era, and then “reached its final port in the Hellenistic age” (20). Chapter 3 (20–31) acknowledges the wide acceptance of the stability of the text due to it being “virtually free” of text-critical issues (20).

Chapter 4 (31–37) focuses on Jonah’s place and relationship within the book of Twelve. One common thread woven throughout this section is the likelihood of Jonah’s original inclusion within this corpus, regardless of whether it was a later addition. This, of course, assumes one holds the position that the Twelve is a unified corpus, especially in light of Jonah being the only “work of prose” contained among the Twelve (34). This may justify an argument for a redactor making a poetic insertion to Jonah (à la chapter 2). Additionally, this conclusion stems from the presence of the *gnadenformel* “grace formula” (Jonah 4:2) that harkens to Exodus 34:6–7a and is also present in Joel, Micah, Nahum, and Malachi (34). This impacts one’s understanding of redaction (which touches development), as well as shared vocabulary and shared thematic content, and even its historicity. The authors muse:

A consequence of Jonah’s insertion in the Twelve was that its satirical dimension was downplayed or ignored, so it came to be viewed as an account of actual events rather than the mocking critique of another prophetic book that it was intended to be. In this way, the redactor(s) ... unwittingly set in motion the wheels that led to a more literal reading of Jonah that endures still today. (34)

Chapter 5 (38–51) gives a characterization of the players and makes note of literary features, the message, and genre of Jonah. Chapter 6 (51–66) is one of the more unique features of this volume. The authors do not eschew the historical-critical

hermeneutical approach in favor of contemporary ones; in fact, they affirm, “It remains an important cornerstone of the discipline (and of this commentary)” (51). At the same time, they assert that more diverse contemporary hermeneutical approaches are valid developments because they “yield new insights” and the text of Jonah proves to be “ideally suited for a hermeneutically multivalent reading” (51). The authors also concede that there are more approaches than can be addressed in this volume and, as such, must limit themselves out of a “desire of efficiency and economy” (51) but make no claim that the ones they do address are of greater importance.

Chapter 7 (66–108) illustrates the many areas of tradition and culture that the book of Jonah has been received in and, as a result, has influenced to some degree. The bibliography (109–138) is categorized to reflect these various spheres. The Notes and Comments (143–298) follow and supply the expected verse-by-verse commentary familiar to this series. An Afterword (299–300) serves as the book-end on the point made with respect to Father Mapple’s fresh lessons to be gleaned from Jonah and how the authors have attempted to follow suit.

This commentary closes with an Index of Subjects, Modern Authors, and Ancient Sources (no page numbers in the digital edition from Logos Bible Software), all of which replicate the intended purposes of coupling the new with the old in both topic and sources.

While Niditch expectedly addresses many of the same topics that AYB does, the order is not the same. With regard to introductory matters, what takes one hundred and thirty-nine pages to arrive at in the AYB takes a mere twenty-seven pages in *Hermeneia*. Thus, the related topics of narrative structure, genre, relationship among the Twelve, and textual stability are given far less discussion. This may be a detractor for those more interested in discussions on various fields of criticism, but not for persons concerned primarily with the text itself.

Most of the remainder of the book is dedicated to translation/commentary. This is almost always followed up with a word about the reception of Jonah in comparative folklore, old and recent. Take, for instance, the human instinct of “fight or flight” which Niditch expresses below:

Jonah, a servant of the deity, assumes the character motif of the runaway servant, a protagonist of various folktales, one extremely popular in African American folklore in which the slave has obvious reasons to escape his servitude. Similarly, folktales such as *Snow White* include the flight of the young girl threatened by her powerful and murderous stepmother. We might also include the figure of Ahiqar, forced to flee from his ruler when false rumors of treachery are spread about him by his evil nephew. The relative status of the one who runs

and the person from whom they are running is common and applies, to be sure, to the prophet who flees his God. The motif is also found in other contents, for example ... the “runaway cavalry hero.” [T]he image of running off, regardless of whether it is an action under the protagonist’s own control, initiates a wide range of traditional narrative patterns. (35–36)

Because Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur intentionally exclude the attributes of God correlated with harsh justice but instead focus on mercy and forgiveness, Niditch can remark about what the wider implications Jonah’s acceptance within Judaism may imply:

Several critical themes informed the reception and interpretation of Jonah and explain its place in a communal setting that marks the process of atonement. One involves the efficacy of repentance, another God’s capacious capacity to grant forgiveness, and the third the rehabilitation of Jonah and the transformation of his worldview via the interpretive process so that the story and the character of the prophet comport with the themes of repentance and forgiveness. (122)

The commentary concludes with a bibliography (125–46) and index (146–60).

With regard to referencing original languages, AYB exclusively uses transliteration. As someone who loves the struggle inherent to the study of biblical Hebrew, it is disappointing that it is not at least paired alongside the transliteration. Once more, I find transliteration to be of little help because it is essentially a foreign language in and of itself. Why labor to learn it over the real deal? Hermeneia, on the other hand, deserves kudos (IMO) for having used the Hebrew script (in addition to occasional transliteration). However, the inclusion of the *nikud* (vowel pointing) would better serve those in their first years of learning the language, without detracting from its aesthetics or claim of being a technical commentary. Another welcomed inclusion would be an explanation (or visual layout) for the syntactical methodology applied to the Hebrew text, especially for the poetic structure of chapter 2. Too often, what the colometry commentators propose is unsatisfactory because there is no agreed-upon majority standard for division, unlike the ancient established system the Masoretes handed down to us in the *te’amim*.

Those who appreciate footnotes will undoubtedly gravitate toward Hermeneia as it has four times the amount (over four hundred and thirty (!) compared to just over a hundred in the AYB). Hermeneia alone also has six (black and white) pictures in its art discussion, while AYB has none.

Additionally, while neither book has more than a few tables and figures, neither one incorporates a reference page in either the front or back matter. However, if

one is looking for a list of Jonah references in music from the twentieth century through today, they will be pleased to find several pages in AYB that note the Title/Date, Composer/Artist, and Genre (ranging from showtunes, country, rock, reggae, punk, metal, and more, see pp. 103–108).

The AYB and Hermeneia series are both respected and sought-after acquisitions to any commentary collection. These two have earned their inclusion among their predecessors. That said, I believe that Hermeneia is much better suited for the serious student and scholar.

By way of example, Niditch is open to the possibility of another author for chapter 2 of Jonah (57–58) and is uncertain whether the three days and nights are “literal” (55–56). She also spills much ink demonstrating that Jonah is just another common story among scores of other Canaanite, Akkadian, or Mediterranean tales of cosmic chaos, sea monsters, and deities exerting their control over nature. With reference to the “great fish,” Niditch neither gives direct commentary for דג־הַיָּם nor imposes any preference over its potential true identification. Instead, she appears to yield to the original author’s ambiguity, stating, “The author leaves room for the imagination, and his use of a general term need not be attributed to his lack of precise or taxonomic knowledge concerning sea life” (55).

I highly recommend the procurement of these two commentaries into any serious student of religious studies’ personal library due to their inclusion of new hermeneutical approaches to the text, intertextual motif comparisons to folklore, and Jonah’s reception over time within Jewish and Christian traditions. These are not insignificant contributions to scholasticism.

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Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald. *The Craft of Research*. Fifth edition. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2024. Pp. 368. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-226-82667-7. \$19.00 (USD).

Research is both an art and a science. It is an art because researchers must know their intended audience so that they are able to anticipate and answer the questions and objections their audience will make toward the claims being made. It is a science because the researcher must know and apply the proper mechanics that produce the preferred arrangement, which their particular audience expects to see the assertions presented in. *The Craft of Research* has as one of its aims to teach this art and science to the beginning researcher and the advanced alike (xiii).

The authors acknowledge there are already many excellent books that offer a

method for achieving valid research (xiv). However, they insist that a research gap remains (xiv). Experienced researchers will agree that research is not performed in a strictly linear process, but rather one that “loops back and forth, moving forward a step or two, going back while at the same time anticipating stages not yet begun, then moving forward again” (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2000, ix). Other books often neglect to address how to overcome this. Based on this, the authors of *The Craft of Research* find it necessary to include a demonstration of how each individual process influences the others separately and as a whole, as well as how the researcher must work on these various processes individually and simultaneously.

The preface of the book gives a description of the fundamental objective each edition of this book purposes to accomplish, namely, to help readers develop skills in research, critical thinking, and how to present research findings (xiii–xiv). It also explains how the delivery of information and an increased diversity of a global audience have necessitated an updated edition (xvii–xviii). Excluding the introduction, there are five parts to the book.

The “Introduction: Your Research and Your Audience” identifies for the beginning researcher what research is and the need for an honest dialogue with the intended audience. Part I, “Asking Questions, Seeking Answers,” teaches the researcher how to begin a research project by discovering a topic of interest, narrowing that topic by formulating questions about it, and then turning those questions into a research problem. Part II, “Sources and Resources,” shares how to discover relevant sources of data for answering research questions as well as how to engage them in a manner that draws out one’s best thinking. Part III, “Making Your Argument,” reveals the necessary criteria for assembling a valid argument in support of a thesis. For instance, all arguments contain five elements: (1) a claim, (2) reasons, (3) evidence, (4) warrants, and (5) acknowledgments and responses. Part IV illustrates the essential components for producing a research paper or presentation. Part V encourages the reader to conduct research in an ethical manner and offers advice for those teaching the “craft of research” to others.

The book concludes with a chapter to acknowledge those to whom the authors are indebted. Finally, there is an appendix of bibliographical resources listed by subject (301–306) and an index (307–14). The lack of an author index does not detract from the usefulness of this resource because of its inclusion of the subject bibliography, which is designed to be a “curated collection of tools for conducting, writing, and presenting research” (301). In addition to suggested databases, websites, and print materials, resources both generic and particular are organized into wide-ranging categories.

The authors recognize that research is no longer restricted to the library, nor is the end goal limited to a presentation of a paper before one’s peers (171). They

assert that “increasingly, undergraduate and even secondary-school researchers share their work ... beyond the classroom” (272). A new generation of researchers is conducting research by means of search engines, digital libraries, and AI—then uploading and streaming it through various application platforms to instantly reach global audiences. This evolution in research has prompted the addition of a new chapter focused on presenting research. It also motivated the authors to change terminology and update illustrative examples.

The newest chapter, “Research Presentations” (272–82), aims to draw the distinction between an audience of readers versus a live audience, designated as auditors (272). The importance is “unless you know and respect the difference between these two types of audiences, your presentation will be tiring and hard to follow” (272). Consequently, the fundamentals of giving live presentations that keep the attention of auditors are explained. They suggest a conversational reading to include eye contact and speed of speech (273), using various means of communication that engage visually and aurally (273–74), and preparing discussion questions for a “Q&A” immediately following the presentation (277).

While this subject is a welcome addition to the book, it gives little indication that it is attempting to address the new generation who is uploading and live streaming their research vis-à-vis social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook or collaboration platforms like MS Teams and Zoom. Instead, it reads more like a lost chapter from the past, which for reasons unknown were never included in the previous editions. In other words, the information regarding live presentations reads more as timeless than contemporary because those items addressed are fundamental for any presenter at any time, such as the previously mentioned eye contact, not speaking too fast (especially in a monotone voice), or simply reading a manuscript to one’s audience. This criticism seems fair even in light of the authors’ acknowledgment that only “principles to guide online research” (xv) would be discussed while refraining from any effort to “describe the vast array of specialized search tools and databases” (xv).

Another criticism of the book is that swapping terms such as “paper” for “report” or “reader” for “audience” does not deliver on “a refreshing of its presentation” (xv). Additionally, only a few illustrations from previous editions were changed. Changing the first three illustrations for “What Is Research” from 1) looking in the yellow pages to find a head gasket for a ’65 Mustang, 2) Googling Michael Jordan’s birthday, and 3) searching the internet for newspaper articles—instead to 1) asking friends for a good place for pizza, 2) Googling LeBron James’s birthday, and 3) asking AI for suggestions—was an improved modernization (3). Including remote work as an illustration was also an improvement (116–17). However, illustrations such as Franklin D. Roosevelt as an admired historical figure (121) and Crick and Watson’s discovery of the helical structure of DNA (121–22) could

detach a younger audience unfamiliar with them. This was a missed opportunity to present examples in ways that would appeal to and hold the interest of a younger generation or new audience. Those familiar with any of the previous editions will likely agree that this edition feels more like a reread than a “refreshed” read.

The book’s reordered structure, renamed terminology, and the addition of a new chapter and illustrations did not deliver as great a significance as what was expected. This is slightly disappointing since there is a high probability this would have been well received. Also, it is uncertain whether the new chapter alone constitutes a repurchasing of the book. In light of this, it is hard to recommend the purchase of this newest edition over picking up an earlier edition (especially edition four) at a used bookstore. Nonetheless, the book itself, in any edition, remains an essential resource for understanding how to do research, making valid argumentation, and presenting these to others in a meaningful way. Whether one is just learning how to do research or has been doing research for many years, there is value to be gleaned in these pages for all. When it comes to teaching the science and art (craft) of research, one will find many time-honored methodologies offered in this book.

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Brian Brock. *Joining Creation’s Praise: A Theological Ethic of Creatureliness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2025. Pp. 1192. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-5409-6326-0. \$74.99 (USD).

“Where are you?” and “What is this that you have done?” calls God to Adam and Eve after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. God knows their location and what they have done; the query probes something more fundamental, namely, “their moral orientation in the world” (30). Brian Brock, in *Joining Creation’s Praise: A Theological Ethic of Creatureliness*, presents a similar question to readers: “What does it mean to be at home in God’s works and to hear and join creation’s praise?” (66). A theological ethic of creatureliness is one that recognizes that we as humans are “both *in* creation and *of* creation” (1, italics original), and that “Christian ethics is, in the end, a matter of knowing and loving God” (136). Brock has given an exemplary account of what theological ethics can look like, particularly when it presses beyond “culturally mediated pictures of the good life” (198), emphasizing instead how our creaturehood embeds us in an environment and in relationships with God and other creatures.

Contemplating our creatureliness directs us to the question “Where are we at home?” (239). Taking this question as basic, Brock returns to the protological

narrative of Genesis, organizing his work as a commentary, albeit a nontypical one, on the opening chapters of Genesis. As creatures, we, like Adam and Eve, must find how we are morally oriented in this creation “by awareness of, and an outspoken responsiveness to God’s works and claims” (147), which is why part 1 centers on the theme of praising God. Learning to worship well requires attuning ourselves to creation around us. We are oriented through our relationships with nonhuman aspects of creation, whether that be in the task of naming animals, whereby in attending to animals, humans discover themselves (415) or in matters of vocation and work that ratify the goodness of the material world (378). Likewise, we are attuned with other humans in matters of kinning, which is a form of traditioning and broader than just parenting (793), and in the task of co- and counter-hearing in the church (650) and between spouses (486). Situating ourselves in creation draws us to “faith and external worship,” which Brock says, “are the heart of right action because they organize the perception and comportment that allow moral discernment *to even take place*” (277, *italics original*).

Having found our orientation—our home—we can consider another question: “How are we to respond to the place—including all its creaturely inhabitants—that we have been given?” (239). Brock suggests that we should “respond faithfully to the materiality of the world, not imposing our designs on it and dominating it, but seeking forms of life that receive with welcome the goodness that creation has independent of our action” (575). He does so not only by addressing various ethical issues but also by embodying an argument for what ethics should be. In the over 1,000 pages (including appendices) that comprise this work, Brock addresses a wide array of topics—questions of vocation, work, and economics (part 2), issues of dominion, human-animals relations, sexuality, and desire (part 3), the matters of sin and dying (part 4), and concerns around kinning, killing, the polis, and the church (part 5). Calling this work comprehensive, however, would miss that Brock eschews a view of ethics that progresses through sequences of arguments leading to closed and settled conclusions. The goal is not to figure “out how an abstract idea applies” (200) to various contexts. Instead, Brock emphasizes developing discernment, a form of “wayfinding” where we “seek out events that we cannot know beforehand” but rather “know as we go” (59). Thus, if one expects Brock to lay out an abstract principle or position and then catalogue topics where he justifies his stance, this work will sorely disappoint. It is not that Brock does not make specific claims, but he holds as a commitment that Christians on opposite sides of moral arguments should be able to “reason together within the terms of a shared confession” (197) avoiding the fate of “a church that has become ensnared in the politics of negation and culture war [that] undermines any genuine liberating word of gospel to its age” (887). Brock, it seems, is suggesting that the purpose of ethics is not (only) to outline what a person should do

in a particular situation but to cultivate the facilities needed to discern how to live well where we have been placed.

Undoubtedly, theology is the grammar underpinning Brock's work, which leads to a final question: "What is our part in God's story?" (239). Where we find our home ultimately is in the work of the Holy Spirit, as Brock concludes this project by drawing a link from Babel to the birth of the church at Pentecost. The church is, due to the Holy Spirit, incomparable to all other social bodies. Our ontological foundation is not, after all, in creation but in the Trinity. As Brock says, "the Spirit validates the work of the Creator of human bodies in order to configure them as a polity whose very functioning to edify and build up each of its members becomes a dynamic revelation of Christ" (657).

Brock has accomplished a remarkable feat in the nuance with which he addresses a breadth of topics in stunning prose. The chapters, which each clearly outline the thesis and organization at the beginning, are designed for the potential to be read individually, though the reader will likely benefit more from engaging an entire part, a collection of five to seven chapters, as that provides time to see the more profound aspects of Brock's work unfold. The chapters are not introductions to specific topics, though they cover historical developments at times. In each, Brock attempts to make interventions for how to find one's way through the topic. Even so, the entire work is a coherent story of creation in which we find ourselves and the moral task set before us.

Following the creation narrative opens remarkable insights, though at times it leads to certain organizational oddities. For instance, Brock addresses important issues around race throughout the work, such as monogenesis and racism (666–70), the story of Ham (766–71), or renaming adopted children (420–22), but there is not one particular place that catches the sweep of his treatment of the topic. Likewise, while Brock deals with technology and building (chapter 26), nowhere is there an extended consideration of artificial intelligence, an interesting omission given the relevance of creatureliness to the discussion. Omitting a particular topic, however, is not a shortcoming in achieving the task that Brock set out to do. Brock's aim is not to catalogue comprehensively what *the* ethical thing to do is in all possible scenarios but to draw the reader into the creation narrative such that in orienting ourselves to our home and how to respond to it we learn to make our way through God's story and "discern the good work that God has prepared for *me* to do, *today, here*" (957, italics original).

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Mark R. Sneed. *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan*. Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 12. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. Pp. xiii + 288. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-11-057931-4. \$125.99 (USD).

“You’re off the edge of the map, mate. Here there be monsters!” Thus intones Hector Barbossa in the hit 2003 Disney film “Pirates of the Caribbean.” In a somewhat similar fashion, Mark Sneed’s *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan* takes his readers “off-grid” into the various traditions surrounding Scripture’s most formidable “larger than life” creatures, which effectively inhabit a liminal space between God’s (created) order and chaos.

In the introduction, pp. 1–3, Sneed astutely observes—though with a note of lament—how Behemoth and Leviathan (more or less) “form relatively little part in current Christian theology. Exceptions are fundamentalist creation scientists, who see the beasts in the second divine speech [of Job] as dinosaurs and the best biblical evidence for human cohabitation with dinosaurs” (3; cf. 221).

Sneed concludes (252–55) by judiciously opining “*Chaoskampf* is here to stay!” (255) and “Monsters remind us that we all have dark sides, sides that enable the very construction of our identities—a la Kristeva. Recent films ... focus on the monstrosity of humans over against the ostensible ‘humanness’ of the actual monsters” (254). Sneed also notes here “the Other,” i.e., the “monster” which, in medieval Europe, was often the Jew, heretic, and Moor (254).

Aside from a remarkably up-to-date and helpful bibliography (256–77), the book rounds off with a thorough Ancient Citations Index and robust Subject Index, which also doubles as an Author index. Unfortunately, however, several people that Sneed cites in the text itself do not appear within the index, thus somewhat hampering the volume’s utility as a reference tool.¹

Taming the Beast covers a staggering variety of topics in a total of fourteen (!) chapters. These ideas include the Etymology of Leviathan and *Tannim*, Jonah’s *Dag* as Leviathan, The Beasts as (De)-Stabilizers: Axis Mundi Tradition, and the Incarnations of Leviathan (and

Behemoth) in Films. Sneed is to be commended for the sheer wealth of information he provides!²

Perhaps the most engaging component, though, of *Taming the Beast* is the drawings. To be clear, there are over twenty-five illustrations (!) in total, including

1 One scholar also notes that merging the primary/secondary sources in the bibliography can be confusing at times. See Lukasz Popko’s critique of Sneed in *Revue Biblique* 130 (2023): 608–12 (NB: this comment is found on p. 611).

2 More space could, perhaps, “have been devoted to Islamic receptions ... (beyond a couple of short paragraphs on 166–67 [cf. 7]).” See Peter Joshua Atkins, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47 (2023): 113.

Baal Upon the Sea, Zig, the Giant Bird, Behemoth, the Huge Bull, Leviathan as Huge Fish, Marduk upon Tiamat, Adad Domesticates the Sea, and various depictions of deities defeating Dragons. Among my favorite depictions (due to the unique images and the fine nature of the shading) are “The Devil upon Behemoth,” “St. George Slays the Dragon,” and “The Antichrist upon Leviathan.” Interestingly, Lauren Rachel Sneed, Mark Sneed’s “multitalented” daughter, did each of the illustrations (see p. xi, cf. 15). Superlatives scarcely do justice to the exquisite nature of each of the renderings (not to mention the careful attention to detail). They alone could justify the price of the volume.³ That said, however, one might wish for clearer descriptions and some better source tagging.⁴ To critique, not all readers will agree with Sneed’s varied and sometimes conflicting conclusions, nor with his somewhat distinctive style of presenting research.⁵ Veritably, his goal is to trace the reception history of some of Scripture’s most controversial figures by examining their interpretation in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. As such, Sneed does not evaluate the approaches. He catalogs or challenges opposing hypotheses, which has its own pros and cons.

Those individuals looking for a close reading of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the LXX, i.e., the Septuagint, or the New Testament should understand that *Taming the Beast* is not the traditional type of “commentary.” By way of example, even though Hebrew does appear, see, for example, pp. 47, 56, 66, 67, and 92, there are no references to any lexicons/grammars.⁶

One should also be cognizant of the rather long footnotes that can often extend to two, three, and (shockingly!) even four pages in length (see, for example, footnote 52 pp. 62–65).

Finally, I am quite impressed that though Sneed himself was once a Young-Earth Creationist, lived close by Dayton, TN (home of the infamous Scopes or “Monkey” Trial), and distinctly remembers being taught that the only accurate

3 Contrast this with Dan Cooper’s critique of Sneed, in which he notes the “steep price” of the volume. *Religious Studies Review* 49 (2023): 64. As something of an aside, perhaps, it is well known that many volumes of this nature are prohibitively expensive for most students and/or researchers. Stanley E. Porter opines: “I personally focus on writing hard-core academic articles that appear in technical journals or books, and books in monograph series that mostly only academic libraries can afford.” Porter, *Inking the Deal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 2. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “Three Reflections on Evangelical Academic Publishing,” *Themelios* 39 (2014): 428–54.

4 This solecism was also noticed by certain other scholars. See, for instance, Popko’s review of Sneed (610).

5 See each of the reviews noted above alongside any other publications that I have not formally recognized here.

6 For more details on the current state of commentary writing see *The Genre of Biblical Commentary: Essays in Honor of John E. Hartley on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday* edited by Timothy D. Finlay and William Yarchin (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015) and *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday* by Stanley E. Porter and Eckhard J. Schnabel (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See, too, the sage comments that Stanley E. Porter makes within the (aforementioned) *Inking the Deal* volume.

interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan is that they were “dinosaurs,” seemingly a core value of the Church of Christ, of which Sneed remains a member of, these things did not seem to affect his ability to do effective research (204–213).⁷

To conclude, while some readers may quibble over certain infelicities, Mark R. Sneed’s *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan* invariably succeeds in doing exactly what the Studies of the Bible and Its Reception series promises: it offers a rich, critically engaged exploration of how biblical texts have been received across centuries, cultures, and traditions. Sneed may not chart every path perfectly, but for those willing to venture “off the edge of the map,” there is treasure here—and it is worth the hunt for students and scholars alike!

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7 For even more details on some of these matters, see Marcus R. Ross and Dustin G. Burlet, “The Indomitables: Beyond the Dinosaur Debates over Behemoth (B.) and Leviathan (L.) in Scripture” (forthcoming).

Matthew Barrett, ed. *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024. Pp. 832. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5140-0034-2. \$74.99 (USD).

Classical Theism is having its day again, along with the Trinitarianism it includes. Renewed interest in Trinitarian theology during the late twentieth century proved to be a laboratory for dubious experiments with various Social Trinitarianisms. This sometimes led to Trinitarian formulations which would have been unrecognisable to previous centuries of orthodox thought. *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God* is an answer to all that, a reassertion of the Classical Trinitarianism that resounded in the Patristic, medieval, and early Reformation eras. Matthew Barrett, professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Seminary, has edited a formidable collection of essays from a diverse cast of authors. Each contributor champions the relevance and reasonableness of Nicaea’s Classical Trinitarianism—just in time for the 1700th anniversary of the Council.

The book is divided into three broad parts. The first, “Retrieving Nicene Trinitarianism” is a largely historical investigation. Contributors delve into the aspects of the formation of Nicaea’s findings as well as individual Patristic (Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, the Cappadocians, John of Damascus, etc.) and Medieval (Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, etc.) authors who grappled with the Council’s implications. Historian Michael Haykin concludes part I by describing the fading of the Council’s influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Part

II, “Trinitarian Hermeneutics and Nicene Dogmatics,” is a deep dive into the theological grammar that emerges from Nicene readings of Scripture. The various essays engage with Classical articulations of divine attributes and properties such as incomprehensibility, impassibility, immutability, simplicity, the unbegotten-ness of the Father, and the begotten-ness of the Son. The *ad intra* works of the Trinity, such as the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, are capably described as well. Part III, “The Renewal of Nicene Fidelity Today,” tackles issues of present concern, where contemporary controversies are directly addressed. It is also a rallying cry for recommitment to Nicene principles. Barrett shows in his introduction that for previous Trinitarian thinkers, some of these principles were hermeneutical, some metaphysical, some theological, and still others were canonical. Yet, he says, “we should not assume each of these precommitments operated in isolation, as if they were segregated from each other and affirmed at random” (xix, Introduction). Throughout the various essays in *Classical Trinitarianism*, readers will see these principles shared from East to West and across contemporary church traditions, appreciated in their earlier articulations, and reaffirmed for the present.

What is remarkable about *Classical Trinitarianism* is the variety of contributors Barrett has been able to gather. The book is a truly ecumenical achievement. There are low church Evangelical authors such as Ronni Kurtz and Gavin Ortlund, as well as Lutheran and Presbyterian representatives like Carl Beckwith and Carl Trueman. Classical Theism is a bridge that spans even the great divide of the Reformation. A number of Roman Catholic authors are also featured, such as Matthew Levering and Thomas Weinandy. What other subject can bring Southern Baptists and Capuchin friars together? If this project has a foil, it is the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries’ experiments with Social Trinitarianism. Various versions, in their own ways, sought to reconceive the Trinity’s Three Persons as three centres of consciousness. Their internal relations were reconceived as a model for human community. Karen Kilby’s essay “Perichoresis and Projection” takes aim at these efforts (582–593). While the rest of the book’s forty essays are new pieces, Kilby’s was originally published as a journal article back in the year 2000.¹ The piece’s reappearance here is appropriate. Her central critique is that internal relations of the Godhead ought not to be projected upon human relations. The appeal of doing so is to make the doctrine of the Trinity relevant and applicable. But Kilby believes this quest for relevance and application is “where the whole thing actually starts to go wrong.” If the Trinity even needs to be relevant, she asks, “What *kind* of relevance does it need to have?” (591–592, italics original). Her critique, published 25 years ago, was an early rumbling of the current

1 It was originally published in *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 957 (November 2000): 432–445.

renewed interest in Classical Trinitarianism. What if the Trinity's primary doctrinal application is just to allow us to proclaim, "Behold Your God" and not some mere organizational principle?

This hefty volume is a work of theological retrieval, but it also has a polemical edge. All forms of Social Trinitarianism are rejected by the authors of *Classical Trinitarianism*. The twentieth century's latter decades saw efforts to reimagine human society in ways that reflected the Trinity: nonhierarchical, communitarian, and so on. This was the Social Trinitarianism Kilby criticized. More recently, though, attempts have been made to deploy the Trinity as doctrinal rationale for hierarchy. Known as Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS) or Eternal Submission of the Son (ESS), this variation of Social Trinitarianism took the example of the Son's obedience to the Father as rationale for distinction, mostly of gender roles. What we have within the pages of *On Classical Trinitarianism* is protest. Various authors, such as Carl Trueman, Samuel Parkinson, and Michael Horton, express very "conservative" critiques against this more "conservative" deployment of Social Trinitarianism. Most of the essays are irenic in their opposition to various forms of Social Trinitarianism, although Glen Butner's essay "The Need for Nicene Dogmatics" borders on scathing when he evaluates the views of EFS/ESS advocates Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware (706–729).

All of the essays are fairly brief. Most are between twelve and twenty-five pages. Select readings could be assigned as classroom readings. A committed reader could profitably read and absorb one per day and get through the whole book in about six weeks (this is how I read it). But it could also be well used as a reference book, to be dipped into as needed when Trinitarian controversy arises. Matthew Barrett has assembled an impressive mini library of writers who explore the different angles and facets of Classic Trinitarianism. For those of us buoyed by renewed interest in Classical Theism, Barrett's is a most welcome contribution. The essays are diverse in their topics but unified in their advocacy for a Doctrine of the Trinity that reaches further back than the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A diverse community of writers yet unified in a singular effort, just like ... but wait, we're not supposed to model things on the Trinity anymore, right?

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Mitchell L. Chase. *Walking the Way of the Wise: A Biblical Theology of Wisdom*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2025. Pp. 192. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5140-1091-4. \$26.00 (USD).

Mitchell L. Chase sets out in his book, *Walking the Way of the Wise: A Biblical Theology of Wisdom*, to provide a biblical theology of the Christian idea of wisdom outlined through the biblical canon. Chase carries out his study by not limiting himself to the wisdom literature of the Bible. Instead, he argues that the entire biblical canon showcases a narrative of wisdom and how human agents in the Bible grow in wisdom through their stories within the broad narrative of the Bible. Through his study, he determines that a definition of biblical wisdom “is believing what God has revealed and seeking to live in light of it” (2). Chase effectively outlines for readers a foundation for understanding biblical wisdom through the narrative stories throughout Scripture that contribute to a unified biblical theology.

Chase organizes his book into twelve chapters. These twelve chapters walk the reader through the grand biblical narrative, beginning in Genesis and ending with reference to the eschaton. The first chapter remains critical to this study as Chase outlines several key themes that will continue throughout his work. According to Chase, Genesis shows God placing humanity as his image bearers to serve as his representative on earth and take part in “subduing the world owned by God” (8). Through Chase’s lens of study, he incorporates the idea of wisdom into the fall narrative, where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would bring about earthly wisdom; however, Adam and Eve sought this wisdom through a lack of trust in God, which makes the action unwise (13). Another example of this comes from the Cain and Abel narrative when Cain does not heed God’s command to rule over his sin and kills his brother. Chase establishes the idea that abandoning God’s commands leads to consequences because individuals act foolishly.

Building upon this idea established in the first chapter, Chase explores the story of Job in chapter 2. This section shows how the Bible also shows righteous people as sufferers in life, and how Job presents an example of a human trying to comprehend his suffering while still attempting to honor God. Chase highlights how this story shows examples of the folly of human wisdom when compared to the knowledge of God.

Chapters 3–5 follow Abraham and his descendants. Chase shows how Abraham is wise because he listened to God and obeyed. Chase follows this idea of wisdom through Abraham’s descendants. He shows how Joseph acts with wisdom through various events that occur, including his “self-control with Potiphar’s wife” (37). Chase’s scholarship here would have greatly benefited from engaging Lindsay Wilson’s book, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom*

and *Covenant in Genesis 37–50* (Paternoster, 2007). Consequently, Chase's book lacks engagement with scholars throughout the book, which may display a confirmation bias of taking biblical stories and making them fit Chase's biblical theology lens to outline core principles that he applies to the lives of his readers, while seemingly choosing scholarship that confirms this avenue of study. His book would benefit from critical engagement from scholars who deny wisdom appearing in certain narratives, such as the work of J. L. Crenshaw's article "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence Upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88.2 (1969), 129–142, where he denies wisdom's influence on the Joseph narrative.

Upon Chase's examination of the descendants of Abraham, he concludes that biblical wisdom "is hearing with a readiness to obey" (41). This directly applies to God's commands to the Israelites and other individuals throughout the biblical narrative. Chapter 5 highlights David's heart for the Lord. Chase shows how David turns to the Lord with his prayers, which, according to Chase, "show us how and why and when we should turn to the Lord" (72). The Psalms show how wisdom expresses praise for God's love and faithfulness with his covenant while also turning to the Lord during times of sickness and hardship.

The next four chapters analyze the story of Solomon and what led to the Israelites' exile. Solomon's story shows how "wisdom is necessary" (75) for him and the nation. Proverbs shows how "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (78). Solomon shows how living a wise life comes from "the overflow of a heart that seeks to know and walk with God" (80). Chase concludes that Ecclesiastes illuminates how "Life is short, so they need to remember the inevitability of death and the future judgment. This perspective is necessary for true wisdom that they might fear the Lord and turn from evil" (115). These chapters show the consequences of abandoning wisdom while highlighting the blessings that come from following God's wisdom.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 express the continuation of wisdom through the ministry of Jesus, who stands to be greater than Solomon. In light of Christ being presented as wiser than "the wisest man who ever lived" (134), Chase displays the importance of walking in the way of the wise. His final two chapters present a call to renewed image bearers to grow in the wisdom of Christ while taking steps to bring others into the way of the wise, such as raising children in the "ways of the Lord" (147). The book ends with a call for Christians to seek godly wisdom.

For Chase's work, readers would have benefited from a brief introduction to the purpose of the book. His introduction provides a clear trajectory of the book. However, the book seems to go back and forth between exploring a biblical theology from an academic study and then providing devotional-like feedback for the reader. Chase seems to intertwine an academic study of a biblical story with a

direct application to the reader. Page 33 shows a specific example where Chase speaks about the obedience of Abraham, and then in the same paragraph, states, “Faith is our response to God’s revelation” (33). Despite this statement remaining true, it sidetracks the scholarship into a reflective book at times. Although this does not take away from the content of the book, it may distract readers from the academic content when they encounter these reflective questions and statements.

Chase’s work adequately presents a contribution to developing a biblical theology of wisdom throughout the canon of Scripture. Due to the niche topic, this book does not appear suitable for most seminary classes unless the course developer wishes to incorporate a biblical theology of wisdom into a biblical theology course. Chase’s book presents readers with an easy-to-read book that remains accessible to any adult reader who wants to see the unfolding story of wisdom throughout the biblical narrative. This study allows readers to engage different areas of Scripture beyond the wisdom literature corpus to see how the Lord rewards and honors those who seek his wisdom while punishing those who act out of folly and a rejection of wisdom. While Chase’s study remains broad in nature, it pushes an idea for studying Scripture through a renewed perspective. Therefore, I recommend this book to scholars seeking to deepen their understanding of wisdom or to identify areas of further research, specifically analyzing how wisdom functions within a biblical narrative. Finally, I do recommend this book for pastors who wish to survey how wisdom functions throughout the biblical narrative, as this study will greatly inform their sermon preparation.

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Andrew Barron. *Human Difference: Reflections on a Life in Proximity to Disability*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2024. Pp. 168. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-6667-7923-3. \$24.00 (USD).

The development of disability theology is a continued and growing field, not only in the reflection upon the multitude of experiences of those with disabilities, but in the constant negotiation of what constitutes disability itself. This very question presupposes a state of normalcy, such that those with disabilities are considered abnormal compared to the standard existence of human beings. It is amid this challenging—yet vital—question that Andrew Barron’s book, *Human Difference: Reflections on a Life in Proximity to Disability*, serves as just the sort of reflection to help propel disability theology forward by bringing deep and challenging questions to the forefront of conversation. Barron’s work here is deeply personal in his reflection of living with and raising his son Rafi who has Down Syndrome. Through these reflections, the author centers Rafi’s experience as an example of

“human difference” that ultimately challenges readers to rethink their own views of what normal human experiences are.

True to the subtitle of the book, *Human Difference* is largely a collection of topical reflections related to Barron’s life with his son. Barron’s work here is short, consisting of twelve chapters and an introduction, each only comprising around ten pages. Additionally, each chapter includes concluding questions for individual or group reflection based upon the subject matter of that chapter. The personal dimension of the book is brought to bear upon the many subjects discussed and is combined with the primary concept of the book—difference—which is introduced within the first chapter. Barron explains the summation of his project as such: “[C]loseness to people who are different from you—in disability, in worldview, in faith, in any of the myriad ways that humans are different—teaches you things you could not learn otherwise.... Being in proximity to difference transforms our mental categories: how we see and think about the world and how we think, how we ask questions and how you reflect on stories” (4). It is this desire to see the beauty in human difference brought about by Barron’s own experiences with his son Rafi that pervades the entire book.

Each subsequent chapter discusses either a unique aspect of Rafi’s relationship to various concepts such as time, death, and sexuality, or Barron’s own reflections upon the challenges of inclusion, suffering, and the hospitality of God while caring for his son. Added to this are chapters 7–9 which offer some (limited) biblical reflection upon disability throughout the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and the Pauline writings. These aspects of difference are all around us, not limited to the often misunderstood and pejoratively utilized term, disability. As such, this work challenges readers to rethink their own presuppositions about what constitutes normalcy among human beings, and the ways in which differences in thought, belief, experience, and life are all around us.

Barron’s work here, though brief, is an important step forward in disability theology in several ways. The personal and deeply relational nature of the book reminds scholars that reflection upon disability cannot be divorced from the real experiences of those with disabilities, nor can it remain a subject whereby disability (and difference) is a mere object to be discussed and analyzed. Additionally, Barron reminds us of the necessity to both expand our understanding of what constitutes disability and to always seek to reevaluate and contest our ideas of what is normal or expected, particularly with concepts that are often taken for granted, such as the perception of time and its passage. To this point, where this book shines are in Barron’s topical reflections related to disability, which provide serious, honest, and personal discussions on topics that are at the forefront of questions of disability theology. However, while Barron’s reflections offer an important blend between personal experience and theological sensitivity, the

analysis of disability within the biblical material is comparatively weaker. For example, in the context of Jesus's healing of the demoniac in Mark 5, Barron comments that "Soldiers would often terrorize local communities and villagers would feign madness as a way of protesting" (80). Unfortunately, no evidence is given for claims such as this throughout Barron's reflections upon the biblical text. While the brevity of the book certainly limits how detailed each chapter can be, the general lack of citations throughout does negatively affect the book. It is also the case that, depending upon the theological tradition of the reader, they will likely disagree with chapter 11, given Barron's affirming connection between LGBTQ and the conception of human difference. That being said, even with such disagreement, Barron is right to remind us that difference cannot be isolated or contained to where we can expect or anticipate its existence.

One exception to my criticism of the author's biblical reflections is in the attention to Paul's counterintuitive theological claim that divine power is in fact found in the weakness of the cross. The implication here extends to all areas of life, including the weakness of disability. As Barron argues, "For Paul, faith is hypocognitive. Faith lives under, beneath, or below the cognitive realm. Rafi's faith is a clear demonstration of this ideal. Unable to access words for certain concepts, he cannot communicate cognitive and linguistic representations. But despite his communication lacks, I have every confidence that the Holy Spirit has a full understanding of what is going on inside" (101). Such observations and their development are but one of the many important points addressed in this book.

Ultimately, *Human Difference* is an important and personal theological contribution to the ongoing work of disability theology. Barron reminds us that difference is all around us; it is not only those with visible disabilities who constitute such difference. The continued theological reflection upon disability must take such experiences into account, always resisting the temptation to view difference as a mere object to be studied. Despite its weaknesses, I certainly recommend this book to disability scholars. Additionally, given the accessible prose and discussion questions of each chapter, both students and general audiences would have much to gain in reading this book. I fully expect that, should scholars follow similar trajectories as Barron, future work on disability theology will be quite fruitful indeed.

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William Lane Craig. *Systematic Philosophical Theology, Vol. I: Prolegomena, On Scripture, On Faith* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025). Pp. 368. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-394-27873-2. \$65.00 (USD).

William Lane Craig. *Systematic Philosophical Theology, Vol. Ila: On God: Attributes of God* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025). Pp. 576. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-394-27877-0. \$65.00 (USD).

If these two volumes are representative of the entirety of Craig's *Systematic Philosophical Theology* (and I see no reason to think they are not), then this is a truly monumental work—perhaps the best that Craig has ever done. The *Prolegomena* in Vol. I alone is itself a truly impressive philosophical achievement as it concisely lays out the philosophical groundwork for everything that is to come while also being rigorous. It should be considered required reading for anyone attempting to do theology and/or Philosophy of Religion within the Christian sphere. Here Craig argues that “the most interesting and important work in exploring philosophical issues in systematic theology is done, not by traditional theologians, but by analytic philosophers of religion.”¹ He then outlines how analytic Christian philosophy has spent the last several decades advancing its arguments and ideas to the point that things like Verificationism and the logical problem of evil are effectively dead, but to their own peril, Continental thinkers and theologians have resisted and/or remained ignorant of these advances. If theologians, especially Continental ones, made an effort to adhere to the philosophical rules and guidelines he lays down here, a large number of theological errors would be cut off before they started.

Craig's basic method here is to first explain why the issue/view he is exploring is important. He begins by examining what the scriptures have to say and treats that as basic evidence. He continues by exploring alternatives and variations of the issue/view by way of various interlocutors. He uses these other scholars to engage with the various approaches to the issue and narrows the field down until he finds an answer that he thinks is acceptable. Along the way, he explores the philosophical implications and assumptions of the various views as well as evaluating the arguments and objections for the same. The main criteria he is looking for are adherence with the scriptures, philosophical and theological coherence (both in particular and with the other views he takes), and where it is reasonable and appropriate adherence to the evidence. It's quite likely that this is the only work in philosophical theology that appeals to the theory of relativity to justify a

1 William Lane Craig, *Systematic Philosophical Theology, vol I: Prolegomena, On Scripture, On Faith* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025), 13–14.

view of God's relation to time, but Craig makes it coherent. There are also points where he will do a targeted historical survey of what the Church Fathers, such as Augustine, Aquinas, and so on, say on the subject. While doing these surveys, Craig warns against reading our own views back into the Church Fathers (as well as Scripture), as he cautions that they frequently used terminology differently from contemporary scholars and each other.²

Craig uses a historical-grammatical method to interpret Scripture and the Church Fathers.³ I think it's probable that some other scholars will dispute him in a few areas, but his interpretations are plausible and reasonable.⁴ He also takes pains not to get lost in side issues and weed out the philosophical questions and issues to what is immediately relevant. For example, in relation to God's Incorporeality, he comments that only arguments for physicalism that would have application to God as an immaterial mental substance need to be considered, as this "prevents our being sucked into the black hole of the literature on the mind/body problem."⁵

In vol. I, Craig outlines his project. He explains that a philosophical theology is needed as "contemporary systematic theologies tend overwhelmingly to be philosophically deficient."⁶ In the *Prolegomena*, Craig argues that, with a few hedges, "Christian philosophy of religion and Christian systematic theology seem to be very much the same."⁷ He then covers the philosophical issues that arise from the nature and reality of Scripture. These are well-known issues like inspiration, inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture. And the third section of this volume is on the nature of faith and its relationship to reason. The issues here are also well known, but Craig has some original points.⁸ In vol. IIa, Craig covers the attributes of God, and he attempts to define and justify the coherence of the transcendental attributes of God. These are incorporeality, necessity, aseity, simplicity, omniscience, eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and goodness. This is an even greater project than vol. I, but a few minor objections aside, he managed to deal with all the major issues and respond to nearly every objection.

The positions Craig takes are nuanced, sophisticated, and generally conservative

2 William Lane Craig. *Systematic Philosophical Theology, vol IIa: On God: Attributes of God* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025), 105, 196.

3 While he doesn't explicitly lay out his hermeneutical principles, he alludes to some of them when he describes the failure of a naïve hermeneutic that fails to recognize that the Bible is not a philosophy or theology textbook. Craig, *vol IIa*, 196.

4 I'm sure Craig will get accused of misreading Aquinas, as it's impossible to engage with Aquinas and not get accused of that. But as someone who went to a Catholic seminary and studied under Thomists, I found no issue with his readings of Aquinas.

5 Craig, *vol IIa*, 28.

6 Craig, *vol I*, xii.

7 Craig, *vol I*, 59.

8 For example, he notes that most Christian philosophers "largely neglect the teaching of Scripture concerning faith." Craig, *vol I*, 206.

theologically and philosophically, and thus should not be controversial to other orthodox Christians (mostly). Craig argues that the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant word of God, that while faith and reason don't conflict, Reformed epistemology shows a way to have rational belief in God absent arguments and/or public evidence, and while he nuances things, argues that God is necessary, immaterial, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, good, eternal, etc. He does argue that God is simple in the weak sense rather than a strong sense, à la Aquinas and others, but his arguments that strong divine simplicity (DS+) is incoherent, if not absurd, and not supported by Scripture, are quite compelling.⁹

Craig does make liberal use of Molinism, rejects the need for truthmaker theory (in order to overcome the grounding objection to Molinism), and takes an anti-realist perspective on abstract objects (as he sees this as the best solution to the challenge abstract objects present to God's aseity). I suspect that these positions will prove to be quite philosophically controversial. Craig has argued extensively for all of these views before. There is nothing surprising here. I make note of this simply because these philosophical views (mostly Molinism and anti-realism) carry heavy weight for many of the arguments he makes.¹⁰

Further, this is a high-level work of philosophy.¹¹ Among many other things, Craig makes significant use of possible world semantics and relies on the internalist externalist distinction in Epistemology. He only offers a brief explanation of possible world semantics toward the end of vol. IIa and doesn't explain internalism and externalism at all.¹² So if you are unfamiliar with analytic philosophy of religion, you may want to brush up on it first.

With that caveat, even if you are entirely against Craig's Molinism and anti-realism, I still recommend that you read these books as Craig has accomplished something extraordinary here. He has, in effect, given us mini-encyclopedias on each of the issues he is working through. Because he takes such pains to engage with so many scholars, if you read his entry on *Eternity*, you'll walk away from it knowing what the major positions are that philosophers and theologians have taken on God's relation to time, what most of the relevant arguments and objections for those positions are, and who some of the major scholars in that area are. So you'll know what Craig thinks, what many other scholars think, and why. I don't think I can state more emphatically just how valuable this is.

While there were many places where I could offer minor quibbles with Craig's

9 This section will certainly spark lots of cries that "Craig doesn't understand Aquinas!"

10 I'm not attempting to argue against or for them here as even if I wanted to there is not space for it. I'm quite sympathetic to Molinism being what my friend Tim Stratton calls a "mere Molinist," and while I remain skeptical of anti-realist positions and think that there might be a need for truthmakers, Craig's arguments for these positions are quite strong.

11 But Vol IIa is significantly more technical than Vol I.

12 Craig, *vol IIa*, 478.

arguments (I am a philosopher reading books by another philosopher after all), I had only two criticisms that are worth mentioning. The first is that Craig didn't directly deal with the problem of evil (POE) in vol. IIa.¹³ The POE is one of the strongest objections to God's transcendental attributes as often the first response is to drop or weaken one of those attributes.¹⁴ But Craig says nothing on it here. Now it's entirely possible this is not an omission, but rather me anticipating what is to come as there are still three more books to come in this series, and the next one will be on Natural Theology, so perhaps Craig will address this there.

The second is that I think Craig missed out on engaging with the best counter-arguments in the first part of his section "The Content of God's Moral Character."¹⁵ I'm grossly simplifying, but Craig argues that claims that God's wrath follows from His love are misguided and don't line up with scripture. I'd argue that the best counter view here is from R. Zachary Manis in his books *Sinners in the Presence of a Loving God* and *Thinking Through the Problem of Hell*.¹⁶ Manis argues, among other things, that to love someone is to both desire the best for them and to desire appropriate union with them. This does not prima facie fit with purely retributive models of God's wrath, and Manis spends a great deal of effort showing how to make it work. Further, in much of the rest of vol. IIa, Craig argues, rightly, that the Biblical authors anthropomorphized God and we must be cognizant of this fact as we interpret scripture. Given that, he owed us an argument as to why verses that speak of God's wrath are not likewise anthropomorphized or metaphorical, and he made no such argument. To be fair, it's entirely possible that Craig was unaware of Manis's work as both books are relatively recent and did not get the attention they deserve.

Still, these are the only substantive criticisms I could find in over 800 pages of extremely thorough, rigorous, and high-level philosophy. I highly recommend these books for theologians, philosophers, and other scholars, but not for popular level readers. They will probably be lost. Craig gave himself a massive and highly ambitious task, and my few criticisms aside, he has pulled it off. I'm eagerly awaiting the other volumes.

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¹³ There are a few places where he alludes to it but nothing direct.

¹⁴ Usually omniscience, omnipotence, or omnibenevolence.

¹⁵ Craig, *vol IIa*, 453–461.

¹⁶ R. Zachary Manis, *Sinners in the Presence of a Loving God: An Essay on the Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); and R. Zachary Manis, *Thinking Through the Problem of Hell: The Divine Presence Model* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024).

Bruce Chilton and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds. *Targums and Rabbinic Literature*. Ancient Literature for New Testament Studies, Vol. 7. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024. Pp. 464. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-3104-9573-4. \$64.99 (USD).

Ancient Literature for New Testament Studies is a new series from Zondervan, edited by Craig A. Evans and Cecilia Wassén, that aims to provide both students and scholars with detailed introductions to the most important textual corpora for understanding the New Testament in its original historical setting. As of this writing, three of the ten projected volumes have appeared.¹

Targums and Rabbinic Literature (hereafter *TRL*) covers two vast and inter-related bodies of literature that provide evidence of the reception of the Hebrew Bible from the time of the composition of the New Testament to several centuries afterwards. Since the table of contents for *TRL* is curiously absent from the publisher's website, the structure and chapter contents will be reviewed here.²

The main body of the volume is divided into two halves. The first half covers the targums and begins with an overview chapter by Bruce Chilton. It contains four parts, each part beginning with a short introduction to the subcollection at hand. Part 1, "Targum Jonathan," contains chapters covering the Targums of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Minor Prophets, and the Former Prophets. Part 2, "Targumim of the Pentateuch," contains chapters covering Onqelos, Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan, and the Fragment-Targums. Part 3, "Targumim of the Writings," contains chapters covering the Targums of Psalms, Job, Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Esther. Part 4, "Targumic Receptions," contains chapters covering Merkavah and the "Targumim from the Cairo Genizah."

The second half of *TRL* covers rabbinic literature and begins with an overview chapter by Günter Stemberger. It also contains four parts (numbered continuously from the first half). Part 5, "The Tannaitic Period," contains chapters covering the Mishnah, Tosefta, Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael, Sifra, Sifre Numbers, and Sifre Deuteronomy. Part 6, "The Documents of the Earliest Amoraim," contains chapters covering the Talmud of the Land of Israel, Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Lamentations Rabbah, and the Song of Songs Rabbah. Part 7, "The Documents of the Later Amoraim," contains chapters covering the Babylonian Talmud, Deuteronomy Rabbah, Avot deRabbi Nathan, Pesiqta Rabbati, Pesiqta deRav Kahana, and Ecclesiastes Rabbah. Part 8, "The Period of the Geonim and Beyond," contains chapters covering Seder Eliyahu, Exodus Rabbah, Hekhalot, Midrash

1 The full series description and a list of planned volumes are available on the publisher's website: <https://zondervanacademic.com/promotions/alnts>.

2 <https://zondervanacademic.com/products/targums-and-rabbinic-literature>, accessed August 6, 2025.

Tannaim, Commentaries, and Codes. The volume ends with a bibliography, followed by indexes of Scripture, ancient sources, subjects, and authors. Twenty-two different scholars contributed essays to this book. In keeping with the niche nature of these fields, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of the authors wrote more than one chapter.

Avery-Peck and Chilton's "Editor's Preface" succinctly identifies the key problem the volume aims to address: "despite this long history of the use of rabbinic literature in the study of the New Testament, no consensus reigns in regard to how the New Testament and rabbinic literature relate to one another as bodies of literature. To what extent ... and in what ways does either legitimately serve as a source for the interpretation of the other?" (ix). They highlight Sandmel's warning from 1962 against merely comparing passages without considering their larger literary and ideological contexts to drive home the importance of "evaluating ... [each] work on its own terms" (x). They explain that this key principle was determinative for the organization of the volume (as seen above), with its emphasis on chronology and the cataloguing of the discrete details of individual texts rather than painting larger corpora with a broad brush. Avery-Peck and Chilton additionally note that although "intersections [of rabbinic texts] with the New Testament are very far from being evenly distributed ... comparisons are often instructive, even when no finding of an intersection emerges" (x).

Chilton's "Targums: Overview" chapter at the beginning of the first half of *TRL* lays a crucial foundation for the remainder of the volume. Besides providing an invaluable orientation to the language, purpose, historical development, and original usage of the Targums, along with a list of NT and targumic passages with notable parallels of expression (17–21), Chilton sets forth a four-part taxonomy for the comparison of the NT and rabbinic literature that is used throughout the rest of the volume. The first class, "strong analogy," involves places where the targumic and NT texts have comparable phrasing and contexts while interpreting the same OT passage. A subcategory of this first class involves places where the phrasing and contexts are similar, but a shared OT referent is absent. The second class, "weaker analogy," is used for cases when the same OT text is discussed by both sources but without shared phrasing. The third class, "verbal similarity," covers cases "when characteristically targumic phrases appear within the New Testament" (22), and the fourth class, "thematic similarity," involves shared themes with no lexical overlap. Chilton reminds readers that the literary relationships identified above are separate from the questions of historical relationship or direction of influence.

The main chapters throughout the body follow a consistent format, providing an introduction to the text under investigation, a summary of content focusing on major themes, an overview of issues involved in its interpretation or relationship

to the NT, and a selection of case studies of NT texts that can be connected to this targum or rabbinic work in some way.

Several points can be made concerning the evaluation of the content presented in *TRL*. First, readers who previously may have pigeonholed Zondervan as being restricted to introductory textbooks will have their assumptions challenged. This is a detailed resource that will be useful for serious scholarship and not just for assigned reading for students. Second, *TRL* undoubtedly fills a crucial gap between the single-chapter overviews of the Targums or Rabbinic corpora as a whole found in many works covering (for example) the history of biblical interpretation, the literary world of Second Temple Judaism, or NT “background,” and the denser treatments that are less accessible for those whose primary interest in these texts is their relevance for NT interpretation.³

Third, readers who previously have only a passing familiarity with the texts covered in *TRL* will be greatly equipped with a basic understanding of the multi-layered nature of these works and the diverse ways they can be related to the NT. For example, Chilton’s explanation (12) of the differing theologies of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, and how these theologies are often interspersed throughout the same text, is tremendously illuminating for the immense difficulties involved in simply reading these texts as unified compositions or making judgments on materials that could reflect Jewish beliefs during the time of the writing of the books of the NT. Fourth, readers wishing to conduct further research in this area will surely appreciate the bibliographies throughout. The individual chapters document the necessary critical editions and secondary sources for each text under investigation, and the bibliography in the back matter is also divided into “Editions and Resources” and “Critical Contributions,” allowing interested students to locate materials for going deeper. Fifth, while the series title and focus throughout obviously indicate that this volume was assembled with NT specialists in mind, *TRL* will be appreciated by many Old Testament students and scholars as well.

As should be clear from the description above, anyone interested in the relevance of the targumic and rabbinic corpora for biblical studies will find much to appreciate in *TRL*. It does an exemplary job of treating the historical and social backgrounds of these bodies of literature as well as providing challenging case studies of ways that they and the NT can be compared to one another. It would be an ideal starting point for both NT exegetes concerned with these convoluted textual relationships as well as OT specialists interested in reception history.

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3 An example of this latter category would be Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

Scot McKnight with Cody Matchett. *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023. Pp. 312. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-310-13578-4. \$36.99 (CDN) 29.99 (USD).

As implied by the title, Scot McKnight and Cody Matchett's book, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, seeks to critique a common approach to Revelation, namely, the futurism made popular by the Scofield Reference Bible and the "Left Behind" series (6–9, 263). Together they argue that Revelation is not a map of future events but a manual for discipleship in the midst of worldly political forces (15–23). Their emphasis on the need to discern "Babylonian" influences in political and economic systems (including current trends in America) is what makes this book distinct and unique from other idealist commentaries on Revelation. McKnight and Matchett reinforce this point when they state: "This is not a commentary on Revelation. It is rather a theology of political discipleship rooted in Revelation and how best to read it" (293).

The book is divided into two main units. Parts 1–3 essentially describe how best to read Revelation, while parts 4–5 unpack what the authors mean by a theology of political discipleship. These five major sections are broken down into twenty-two chapters (about 10–15 pages each). This is followed by twelve brief appendices, a short (non-annotated) recommended reading list, and the "After Words" where McKnight makes clear that Matchett was his graduate assistant whom he desires to acknowledge as a coauthor of this book, given the import of his work (293).

The book also begins with a short introduction where McKnight shares some of his personal testimony and how the failed predictions and speculations of "traveling evangelists" shaped his current outlook (xi–xiii). The book itself contains no footnotes or indices, but the sources cited in each chapter are listed on pages 295–312 in a final section titled "Notes."

As alluded to above, parts 1–3 of *Revelation for the Rest of Us* highlight five interpretive principles (repeated on pages 33, 94, and 168) to help guide a reader of Revelation (and *Revelation for the Rest of Us*) away from speculation and escapism towards John's practical call to follow Jesus as a discerning "dissident" disciple" (12–14; see too the subtitle of the book).

Principle 1 is that "Revelation is not written for speculators" (3–14). According to McKnight and Matchett, "speculation" means reading Revelation as "a roadmap of who does what and when" (5). Speculators might, for instance, suggest that the Pope is the Antichrist, or that the European Union is the "Ten Horns" of the Beast, or that Armageddon is imminent since Russia is working on new

military technologies. The main point of the book of Revelation often becomes “you don’t want to be there when it happens. So get saved and get ready” (7).

In contrast to this approach, *Revelation for the Rest of Us* suggests that Revelation is written to inspire Christians to be dissident disciples (principle 2) who recognize that Babylon is a clear and present danger, rather than a future capital city for the antichrist (15–23). Such dissidents should notice and resist the “spirit of Babylon” when it is beginning to creep into their governments, economies, families, and churches (47–50, 167–84). Practically, a Christian must learn to properly use their imagination (principle 3) to understand the symbolic nature of the characters in John’s vision (principle 4) and the way those characters fit into the dramatic narrative of Revelation (principle 5). Using a helpful chart on pages 38–39, the authors explain the “playbill of Revelation” comprised of “Team Dragon in Babylon” and “Team Lamb in New Jerusalem.” They argue that without a sense of this bigger picture (especially the nature of Babylon as described in Rev 17–18), it is difficult to properly understand the earlier chapters of Revelation (33).

Readers are also urged to avoid “flat-footed literalism” (94) and told that it is a mistake to view John’s allusions to the Old Testament in terms of prediction and fulfillment (121). Rather, McKnight and Matchett believe John is “re-actualizing” famous OT images, that is, infusing them with new meaning that correlates to his own time, citing Acts 2:14–21 and Mark 13:14 as other NT examples of re-actualization (122).

Parts 4 and 5 represent a transition in the book “from criticism of bad approaches to reading Revelation to exploring the living reality of John’s vision of *discipleship*,” which is essentially a call to “*dissidence* in the midst of Babylon” (167, *italics original*). Christians living in the Roman Empire in the first century needed to heed this call (part 4), and Christians living in North America today need to heed this call (part 5). McKnight and Matchett refer to Babylon as “a *timeless trope* for empires and nations and powers that systematize injustices, oppress the people of God, and suppress the truths of liberation” (209, *italics original*).

North American readers will probably not be offended by the authors’ case studies of the Babylonian tendencies of the Roman Empire (167–84), or the Nazi regime (200–02, 234–36), but their critique of America (including American evangelicalism and Christian nationalism) is sure to touch nerves and spark some important dialogue (209–32). To be clear, they define Christian nationalism as “a new iteration of wannabe Christendom” (227) that blurs Christian identity with American identity, and they suggest that the term “evangelical” is becoming synonymous with “Republican” (222). Such trends hinder Americans from “thinking Christianly” about the good and the bad of any government or political power (233, 239).

Whether you agree or disagree with their assessments of American evangelicalism, it is easy to appreciate their practical advice about how to live in a world consumed by the values of Babylon. McKnight and Matchett effectively argue that “the major habit of the book of Revelation is worship” (188). And true worship forms a new imagination (a new faith) that enables Christians to stand up and speak out against the temptations and pressures of Babylon—even if it hurts their reputation or their retirement plans or, in some cases, leads to imprisonment or martyrdom. This kind of worship demonstrates our allegiance to the Lamb who also suffered and was slain (202).

An important question for readers to consider is whether the biblical authors (including John) are really “re-actualizing” past prophecies. When Paul speaks of God’s future plans for ethnic Israel (Rom. 11:25–29) or tells the Thessalonians that the clearest sign of the arrival of the Day of the Lord will be the man of lawlessness taking his seat in the temple and proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:3–4), is it not reasonable to argue that Paul is legitimately reading the Old Testament in terms of prediction and fulfillment? Since John himself speaks of his visions as depicting the “fulfillment” (ἐτελέσθη) of what God had announced through his prophets (Rev. 10:7), shouldn’t one be extremely careful of minimizing the *significance* of Revelation’s links to OT prophecies about the second coming of the Messiah?

For example, their insistence on a nonviolent return of Christ (76–81) because the Lion of Judah has morphed into the slain Lamb in Revelation 5 seems unnecessarily reductionistic (cf. the “wrath of the Lamb” in Rev 6:16) and can create an uncomfortable dichotomy with certain Old Testament passages that speak of the Messiah as a Davidic Warrior bringing salvation by destroying the enemies of God’s people (Isa. 11; 63:1–6; Ps. 2; Dan. 7; Zech. 12–14). If God crushed the actual armies of Egypt in the Red Sea, or slaughtered 185,000 Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem in a single night, is it so hard to believe that something similar could happen at the second coming?

A second question is whether the authors have over-generalized their critique of futurism (particularly dispensational premillennialism). Does this interpretative approach to Revelation inevitably lead to speculation and “newspaper exegesis?” Might it be possible for Revelation to predict the future, *and still be applicable* to the seven churches or to Christians today? The fact that a dispensationalist commentary (Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020) was in the recommended reading list (289) is an interesting foil to McKnight’s jibe on p. 9 (“Dallas, we’ve got a problem”) and one of the few hints in the book that he believes there are at least *some* futurists out there who are not “speculators.”

As something of an aside, the authors’ sense of humor and informal writing

are a fun part of the book. For example, on pages 180–81, they state that in His words to the church of Laodicea, Jesus is “riffing off their geographical location” and that “Babylon is creeping into the seven churches because ... Babylon gonna Babylon. Always.” Readers will also encounter some thought-provoking translation choices and terminology. Instead of “beasts,” “judgments,” “Son of man,” and the nine “songs” of Revelation, the authors speak of the “wild things” (14, 65–66), the “3 x 7 divine disciplines” (128–31), the “Colossus of Christ” (170) and the nine “spirituals” of Revelation (188–91), respectively.

To conclude, *Revelation for the Rest of Us* by Scot McKnight and Cody Matchett convincingly argues that it is a tragedy to read Revelation and miss John’s call to be a “dissident disciple” who can discern the ideology of Babylon in their world. It is a poignant reminder for all interpreters of Revelation to do a better job of proclaiming this timeless truth, and to keep asking themselves whether they are recognizing and resisting the presence of Babylon in their own lives and particularly in America. The authors are writing for the layperson (especially those frustrated by failed predictions of futurists), but pastors, Bible College/Christian University College students, and seminarians will find plenty to chew on as well.

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Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024. Pp. 372. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-3102-3438-8. \$49.99 (CAD) \$39.99 (USD).

Over two thousand years of biblical interpretation have produced a range of hermeneutical methods, yet biblical studies and theology often fail to read Scripture in a meaningful way that resonates with its intended purpose. Kevin J. Vanhoozer seeks to address this issue with his book, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*. Vanhoozer engages key historical hermeneutical and theological developments for studying the complete revelation of Scripture. He suggests that Scripture’s ultimate purpose is to enable communion and “covenant relationship with the triune God who bespoke it and about whom it bespeaks” (13). Scripture, according to Vanhoozer, ultimately points to Jesus Christ and God’s saving work through the cross and resurrection that provides an underlying theological expectation of hope for the future eschaton. Through his well-organized work, Vanhoozer effectively presents scholars with a must-read to evaluate and reflect upon their own studies of Scripture.

Vanhoozer organizes his book into three parts, which effectively build upon one another to walk the reader through the discussion leading to, what Vanhoozer

calls, a “mere Christian hermeneutic” (17). This mere Christian hermeneutic appears throughout the book and continues to unfold in a way that brings the reader into a deeper understanding of Vanhoozer’s proposed hermeneutical methodology. He outlines his work in a metaphorical way that he refers to as climbing the mountain of the knowledge of God (357). Part 1 sets up the beginning of his climb by surveying developments in the field of biblical studies and theological readings of the Bible. Part 2 begins the ascent by critiquing and forming definitions for the “letter of the text; the literal sense and its interpretation” (358). Finally, part 3 leads the reader to an alternative path up the mountain of the knowledge of God by utilizing Vanhoozer’s “mere Christian hermeneutics” (358).

Part 1 begins with a survey of biblical scholarship, which Vanhoozer uses to bridge gaps between various reading cultures that interpret Scripture. These reading cultures are groups that “*instill certain interpretive intuitions and practices, training readers to use certain frames of reference rather than others*” (78, italics original). Vanhoozer notes how the Reformation presented an example of how diverse reading cultures can change the world. He even points out limitations found in the reading culture of the Nicene Creed, stating that the Holy Spirit “spoke ... by the prophets” (9). Vanhoozer argues that the Holy Spirit is still speaking through the prophets in the Bible; thus, contemporary readers must acknowledge the work of the Spirit to know the things of God (9–10). The reading cultures of Antioch and Alexandria present a fruitful discussion for Vanhoozer’s work. Vanhoozer outlines the school of Antioch’s focus on the grammatical literal text and Alexandria’s focus on the spiritual reading (57–70). Through this discussion, Vanhoozer acknowledges similarities between the two reading cultures and concludes that “Mere Christian hermeneutics must not pit theology against history or doctrine against grammatical-historical interpretation” (91). Instead, Vanhoozer seeks to provide a unifying hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

In contemporary scholarship’s quest for a literal reading of Scripture, Vanhoozer critiques the literal sense within the discipline of biblical studies in part 2. Through his criticisms, Vanhoozer establishes multiple meanings behind reading Scripture literally as it refers to the narrative story within and behind the text and meaning that appears “under and through its literary form” (119). Vanhoozer uses Han Boersma to establish that the “*literal sense is ‘the starting point (sacramentum) of a search for the greater, more christological reality(res) of the gospel’*” (131, italics original). Vanhoozer’s mere Christian hermeneutic follows a *trans-figural* reading of the text that “follows the way the biblical words run across or beyond figures to the realities those figures foreshadow and anticipate” (169). This approach allows for understanding the literal sense of Scripture, which Vanhoozer acknowledges as “*the meaning of the letter, viewed as human-divine authorial discourse, when read in canonical context with an eschatological frame*

of reference” (179, italics original). This exegesis propels the discourse into part 3 where Vanhoozer shows the methodology in action.

Part 3 showcases Vanhoozer’s methodology in practice. He begins by analyzing Genesis 1:3, the history of hermeneutical and scientific findings of the text. In opposition to these readings, Vanhoozer shows that reading the passage within the biblical canon establishes that God himself is light. Thus, through the creation of light, God “makes known and creates the means for further making known” (222). The passage shows a literal divine action that also displays creation as displaying the glory of God, which shows the “driving force behind creation and redemption alike” (221). This conversation, which Vanhoozer describes as the economy of light, expands to the transfiguration of Christ in the Gospels, which shows Christ showcasing the divine light of God. Vanhoozer states how his transfigural interpretation “does not change but, rather, glorifies the literal meaning” (268). Vanhoozer’s methodology allows for reading these passages within their literal context and faithfully within the theological outline of Scripture, which ultimately points to salvation through Christ throughout the biblical narrative.

Vanhoozer acknowledges that his work is not the end-all method of hermeneutics. Instead, he remarks that this method “calls churches and seminaries to foster reading cultures that can overcome the modern division of biblical scholarship and theology” (193). His book achieves this goal by challenging the grammatical-criticism approaches to Scripture while challenging allegorical readings that ignore the intended meaning. An example of irresponsible allegorical readings of Scripture stems from Vanhoozer’s example of Innocent III’s interpretation of Genesis 1:14–19, which claims that the greater and lesser lights indicate the papal and kingly authorities established by God (61). *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* “helps readers find glory in the letter of the text, not in their own vainglorious interpretations” (355). Thus, Vanhoozer’s method allows readers to reflect upon their literal readings that divorce theology and utilize theology in a way to inform Scripture.

Mere Christian Hermeneutics effectively challenges scholars to revisit their hermeneutical principles; however, the work still has its limitations. Vanhoozer acknowledges such limitations when he states that his work cannot “explain satisfactorily the origins of the modern world” of biblical studies (77). Therefore, this book appears most beneficial for well-read scholars who can use this book to supplement their research in biblical studies. Another critique stems from his idea of reading all Scripture within the biblical canon. Since Protestant and Catholic reading cultures have different canons of Scripture, a brief discussion on the canon would benefit his work. However, his book does greatly contribute to the overall hermeneutic corpus, advocating for a spiritual reading of Scripture.

Mere Christian Hermeneutics challenges readers who are well-read in biblical

hermeneutical methods and theological principles. This challenge renders the book inaccessible to young Christians in undergraduate studies. However, Vanhoozer's ability to navigate the conversations with scholarship from the Church Fathers to contemporary studies makes the book an essential read for scholars and doctoral-level students. Therefore, this book would be an incredibly influential text for PhD programs to incorporate into their curricula, as well as find a pivotal place on the bookshelves of scholars.

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Rachel Toombs. *Reading the First Five Books: The Invitation of the Pentateuch's Stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024. Pp. 192. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5409-6590-5. \$24.99 (USD).

The Pentateuch has much to offer the reader in the 21st century, but much of its style can be foreign to a modern audience. Rachel Toombs in *Reading the First Five Books* seeks to provide helpful hermeneutical tools for those interested in reading the Pentateuch and the Hebrew Bible at large. Toombs clearly states her purpose for the book, along with the book's outline, in the final paragraph of the introduction:

In this book, I invite readers into the imaginative and transformative work of the stories we find in Scripture's first five books by looking into three general features of bare-bones narration: brevity, pacing, and characterization. We will also look at two more narrow but intriguing aspects of biblical Hebrew: complexity in characterization and the use of the grotesque. (xxi)

Her book is divided into seven chapters. She begins with "The Invitation of Reading," which frames hermeneutics as an invitation to meaning-making. Toombs describes reading as an event, and the purpose of this event should be centered on the transformation of the reader over the domination of the text into the reader's hermeneutical paradigm. This idea, stemming from Gadamer, is fueled by her view of the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and Biblical Hermeneutics," which she says portrays Scripture as a "modern 'scientific' text employed to do work that it did not set out to do in its historical context" (7). Seeing Scripture as an invitation pulls the modern reader into an ancient context, seeking to be shaped by the text in the way the original recipients were.

In the next few chapters, she then speaks about three features of the concise narrative style of Hebrew storytelling: brevity, pacing, and characterization. Within each of these features, she carries out a case study, noting how that characteristic

of biblical narration is present in the Pentateuch. She first notes the brief, “matter-of-fact” tone of the biblical narration, leaving many details to the imagination as a way of creating a wrestle between the text and the reader, which raises questions. When the reader is not supplied with everything in a story, they are left to consider the *why* and discern how the missing pieces in the text might be leading to the imaginative act of wonder, or if it is centering their focus on the given details. For this, she analyzes the deaths of Nadab and Abihu before the Lord in Leviticus 10:1–7. Because this story is sparse in detail, Toombs turns her focus towards the imaginative description of the event behind the text (an act of wonder, as she previously stated). While this is a beautiful retelling of the story, I find that it stops short of the rest of the commands from the Lord in Leviticus 10, which could give the reader the detail needed to provide some background behind the strange fire and the censers in verse 1.

After brevity, Toombs explores the second storytelling feature of pacing, which is a wonderful exposition on exposing factors within biblical narrative that are harder to see for the modern English reader. For example, she notes how geography can act as a tool for pacing a story; however, when modern people do not know where ancient locations are, it can be difficult to feel the distance of a character’s travel and how that may affect the pacing of the story. She also notes how the disjunctive *waw* and *wayiqtol* affect pacing, with the disjunctive *waw* “alerting the reader to a change either in scene or setting or in the action of the characters” (61), and the *wayiqtol* acts as the simple connector between clauses and scenes of various sizes, calling it the “drumbeat to a story” (74). She notes the use of the *wayiqtol* in her personal translations within the Pentateuch as “AND ... AND ... AND ...,” bringing clarity to the English reader what Hebrew narration looks like.

The third storytelling feature that she notes is characterization, whereby an author directly or indirectly portrays a character throughout a narrative. In biblical narrative, many characters are not given physical descriptions, which means we are left to see other aspects of their person as important: their obedience/disobedience to command (often from God), their consistency/unchanging nature (flat) or their dynamic nature (round), and only occasionally their physical characteristics. What Toombs does see as important is the inherent complexity of many core characters in the Pentateuch, each acting as a kind of mirror for insightful personal reflection due to their relatable, complicated portrayal. Chapter 5 continues on the topic of complexity in characterization by looking at Jacob, Isaac, and Rebekah’s complex natures through this lens within Genesis.

Chapter 6 focuses on what Toombs calls “The Grotesque.” Within the Pentateuch are many jarring stories that have become increasingly difficult for modern readers to engage with, so this chapter is of much help to many who are in that

place. Before doing a case study on Numbers 16, Toombs looks at the bloody sacrifice of Leviticus, the widespread circumcision of Genesis 17, the attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, and Jacob's hip injury as he wrestled with God in Genesis 32. Through each of these stories, the grotesque is not for entertainment value, but they are meant to shock us and make us uncomfortable in order to view God or ourselves in a fresh way. Toombs' influence from Flannery O'Connor's unapologetic view of Abraham and Sarah's relationship sets the stage for how she thinks we can view the often uncomfortable but essential stories in the Pentateuch.

The final chapter, "Deuteronomy, Eat These Stories," is named after Peterson's *Eat This Book*, and in it, she focuses on the role of Deuteronomy within the Pentateuch. In the retelling of the law, Deuteronomy is a reminder to meditate on God's love for his people again, which Toombs sees as a core function of not just Deuteronomy but the act of reading Scripture in general. She notes how the book retells stories like the Passover, the destruction of the Egyptian army, the giving of manna from the heavens, and the golden calf, all from the frame of remembrance and meditation on God's love and mercy amid human failure.

Reading the First Five Books is a helpful narratological study, as it synthesizes earlier scholars working in biblical narrative, such as Alter, Berlin, Sternberg, and Bar-Efrat (among others), while also providing original scholarship to the field. Because of this, I would recommend Toombs to anyone interested in how the style and shape of the Pentateuch affect our transformation through the reading event.

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Beale, G. K. *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Pp. xviii + 576. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-5409-6042-9. \$49.99 (USD).

G.K. Beale's *Union with the Resurrected Christ* continues from his *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2011) to concentrate specifically upon the doctrine and implications of the Christian's union with the exalted Christ. This monumental work is founded in Beale's conclusion that union with Christ is a central New Testament theme pivotal to the Christian life.

Beale relies heavily on Richard B. Gaffin's work including but not limited to his *Resurrection and Redemption* (P & R, 1987). Beale borrows Gaffin's idea that redemption and the subsequent elements of the *ordo salutis* are not distinct aspects but are of the single act of being raised from the dead. Concluding that most publications about union with Christ explore this union from the point of

view of Christ's atonement and neglect his resurrection, he then extensively demonstrates his central thesis that believers participate in Christ's resurrection life, so that what is true of him is true of the believer.

Throughout, Beale organizes his work around an image of a diamond with the facets being the attributes of Christ at his ascension as a visual cue. The introduction (1–17) makes clear the author's thesis, namely that "Christ's resurrection and ascension place him as the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of the new-creational kingdom" (1). This thesis is revealed in two main sections containing seventeen chapters in total within a "redemptive-historical" context.

Beale consistently begins each chapter with a summary of previously addressed topics, transitions to connect what is said with the subject of the following chapter, and then provides biblical support for his argument. Typically, he begins with the Old Testament promissory motif and then demonstrates its fulfillment in the New Testament.

Section one, comprising the first two chapters, outlines the biblical-theological storyline of the Old and New Testaments as he points to an inaugurated eschatology. Beale walks the reader through the Adamic significance of this storyline and outlines the eschatological references in the New Testament. As he moves into chapter 2, he connects the resurrection to the end-time new creation and kingdom in the Pauline corpus.

Building from the biblical-theological storyline of the first two chapters, the second section (100–514) explains how Christ, in his resurrection and ascension, is at the center of the eschatological fulfillment of the anticipated glorified kingdom. Each chapter, using extensive biblical support, outlines a characteristic of the resurrected Christ, and in turn how this facet of the Saviour is also present in each believer. Beale concludes his chapters by providing implications for practical consideration. For example, in regard to sharing Christ's suffering, Beale writes, "So when believers come into union with the resurrected Christ, they also take on his suffering status and are, consequently, identified with his suffering" (268). Through this conclusion, he gleans from Philippians 3:10 the comfort for believers that through their fellowship with Christ's sufferings, they are able to endure "by means of participating in 'the power of his resurrection'" (268).

Beale's work is a commendable volume, but it is not without its shortcomings. First, it is laudable that he provides a description of union with Christ, but focusing on the definition provided by Constantine Campbell without spending time beyond a brief mention of Kevin Vanhoozer's proposal is a weakness of this work. To be clear, Campbell in *Paul and Union with Christ* (Zondervan Academic, 2012), does not provide so much a useful definition as four descriptors: (1) union, (2) participation, (3) identification, and (4) incorporation. These demonstrate how union with Christ is experienced but lack clarity on what it means. With union

being the central outcome for the believer that Beale wishes to convey, he has done his work a disservice by not pausing in his efforts to attempt a more robust explanation of union with Christ. This manifests itself in several ways. One is that although Beale strongly communicates the believer's participation with Christ as union with him, he mentions not once the doctrine of theosis (sharing in the divine nature), nor explains its legitimacy outside of Eastern Orthodoxy nor examines it theologically in his treatment of 2 Peter 1:4. At least in his conclusion (510–514) he recognizes the mystical aspect of this participation and that Christians are not deified as they share in Christ's divine nature. It would have been helpful for him to demonstrate how theosis was not another way of stating union with Christ but is a result of this union. Also, the doctrine of the tripart union is not explained when regarding his definition that "union with Christ is an umbrella term for or has overlap with the concepts of 'participation with Christ,' 'incorporation into Christ,' and 'identification with Christ'" (6).

Much of his work focuses on the vital or experiential aspect of union with Christ without providing what he only states with clarity as three temporal stages of union with Christ in his conclusion (510–514). Beale's treatment of Romans 6 and Ephesians 1:3–4 would have benefited from introducing these three aspects of union with Christ earlier in his volume.

Second, his work suffers from unnecessary repetition and conceptual overload, which can leave the reader overwhelmed. This does not facilitate Beale's hope that this work would serve the church not just the seminary (16).

The criticisms of Beale's work are limited compared to the many positive contributions that he provides, of which this review can only supply a few notable examples. First, the comprehensive nature of his work could have been unwieldy, but his ability to take several strands and synthesize them provided a holistic framework valuable for teaching and preaching. His methodology for his argument, which presented his subject matter, provided Old Testament support and then demonstrated how those texts pointed to Christ and to New Testament Scriptures, made for a convincing argument and provided a transferable outline for teachers wanting to incorporate Beale's work into their own.

Beale correctly evaluates that while there are commendable works that provide doctrinal and theological understanding to biblical scholarship, few overtly provide practical applications. Beale deliberately moves from exegesis to exhortation as he applies union with the risen Christ to Christian ethics (186), the importance of missions (263), persevering through suffering (265), and the lure of idolatry (414–415). His efforts to apply his work make his work accessible for pastors and lay Christians for discipleship. Union with Christ is difficult to implement in the Christian life, considering its mystical nature, but Beale's applications help to mitigate that difficulty.

To conclude, G. K. Beale's *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* has offered an expansive treatise on the believer's union with Christ that is exegetically sound, theologically robust, and pastorally applicable. Its primary audience will likely be pastors, preachers, and Christian ministry leaders. Students from Christian universities, seminaries, and Bible colleges will also benefit immensely.

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Adrian Langdon. *Barth and Ecotheology: The Electing God and the Community of Creation*. Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies. Routledge, 2025. Pp. 272. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-0326-3925-3. \$190.00 (USD).

Adrian Langdon examines a conversation between the emerging field of ecotheology and the theology of Karl Barth, in a form he refers to as constructive reinterpretation. He aims to take the concerns of ecotheologians seriously and introduce others to the conversation. He looks to post-Barthian interpreters for approaches beyond Barth's scope of engagement with the natural world.

Chapter 1 engages the Anthropocene, the history of ecological degradation, and a human response that echoes Barth. Conversation partners include Moltmann, Pannenberg, McFague, and Ruether, as well as decolonializing perspectives and indigenous viewpoints. Believing that Barth's theology offers a foundation for affirming the natural world, Langdon brings these conversation partners to expand or revise Barth's work in response to the current crisis in the creation. This was a helpful chapter, mapping the road from the industrial era to the present—a story of progress marked by violence and exploitation, which created a profound shift in attitudes towards humans and the world. God was marginalized as the will of human progress came to dominate the world and its story.

Langdon advocates for practical reasoning that will restore the relationship between people and land. He looks to Barth for insight and proposes five. First, we must recover the connection between God as creator and reconciler. Second, nontheological perspectives need to be added to theological knowledge. Third, doctrine needs to be recentered away from political power and back to humans and the land. Fourth, a theology of nature needs to refocus on God's will and freedom for His creation. Ultimately, we require a shift from domination to stewardship.

The second chapter explores methods in a theology of nature. Barth's christological method is paired with Pannenberg's interpretation of modern science. Langdon insists that we must have faith, but also the integration of science and practical responses in response to Progressive Dominion Theology (PDT). A

theology of nature must begin with faith in God, proceed with nontheological knowledge, and end with practical projects. The question is how to keep faith as the lens for the investigation and not stray into other agendas. Pannenberg offers a post-Barthian perspective, attempting to integrate methods that might overcome the displacement and domination of the world.

Chapter 3 examines an interpretation of Barth's doctrine of election and its scope in relation to all of creation. Bruce McCormack's "ontological receptivity" of the Son introduces a revision that encompasses the fullness of creation, extending beyond Barth's doctrine of election. Langdon extends Barth's election to the whole community of creation, defending Barth against Moltmann's critique, while revising to address the current situation in light of Pannenberg and McCormack's revisions.

In chapter 4, the Son is utilized to articulate the differentiation of creation from the Creator and the work of the Son in creation. Langdon explores how we understand Jesus the Creator in relation to creation in which He is embedded, providing evidence of His distinction from the Father, shaped by His human life, drawing on McCormack's ideas and the concept of the immanent *incarnandus*, modified from Pannenberg.

Chapter 5 shifts to the work of the Spirit, following Pannenberg in connecting the Spirit, seen as the force field of creation, encompassing all things in the presence of the triune God. Langdon calls for a deeper connection between the Spirit and Creation, suggesting the Spirit empowers Jesus and the livingness of the world. He goes a step further, proposing a "new Animism," recovering insights from indigenous cultures. Pannenberg and McCormick are again presented as correcting Barth, integrating theology and science with field thinking.

Human embeddedness and embodiment are considered in chapter 6. Clarifying the relationship between humans and the living world reveals a complex interrelationship and challenges in engaging with it. Langdon hopes to avoid natural theology and to present a Jesus not only for humanity but for the rest of creation, including dialogue with indigenous approaches. Humanity is often abstracted out of the world and needs reintegration. We need an I–Thou relationship with all living things in an inclusive social theory, drawing on Bonhoeffer for insight. Humans are called to lordly stewardship as we are embedded in the world. The whole cosmos is under God's covenantal care. We need to be servants of creation, in an ecological mutuality that respects all.

The final chapter attends to animals and God's concern for their place in the atonement of God. Following the thinking of "deep incarnation," interpreting the place of Jesus's atoning to be for all living things. He focuses on whether animals participate in fallenness, are victims or agents of suffering, and their place in shared space and time with us in a relational perspective. What is the concern of

God for the natural world, and is it expressed in Jesus's death to include all living beings—are "all things reconciled in Him"? What is our ethical response to them? What is the scope of God's concern in space and time?

Langdon structures the book well with the Introduction and conclusion stating and reflecting on his argument in concise paragraphs. His final challenge is for the church to rethink its role as an embedded partner in creation, the ethical implications of a theology of nature, and the need to be a voice outside the church and seminary walls to address the world where the crisis is occurring.

My concerns are several. The conversation begins by providing an overview of the problem addressed by ecotheology. Barth never begins with the problem and then looks for a solution in the life of God. While all the persons of the Trinity were addressed, they were not engaged in the leading work of the God who loves in freedom, accompanies His creation, and reconciles the world by His covenant love. The emphasis was on the human possibility to meet the human problem.

Following revisionists of Barth's theology, especially Pannenberg and Moltmann, is to divert from those Barth felt were misguided. T. F. Torrance was briefly mentioned and would have been a more constructive voice. Gunton was seen answering the revisionists but could have been helpful as a guide. The inclusion of liberation and feminist theologians would have been beneficial to bring in after the course was set, but instead became the cultural chorus for the discussion at the start.

The book would be appropriately titled "Ecotheology and Barth in Conversation." The problem came while searching for answers. There was a constant concern not to appear to be following Natural Theology nor departing from Barth's methodological priorities. Yet revision inevitably wanders. The closing comments called for a revival of the church to form practical projects that participate in the Community of Creation, anticipating the Kingdom of God.

Langdon wrestles with the distinction between natural theology and a theology of nature, which is primarily a question of sequence—what drives the logic? Langdon begins with a world in ecological crisis and looks to Barth through the eyes of others to create a response to the crisis. Some of the strategies work (the community of creation, embodiment and embeddedness, and the relatedness of all things). His revisionary interpreters begin with human concerns that are present within the field of natural theology, making sense from a human perspective. I did not sense the *Dues Dixit*, God speaking, in addressing the concern of this book that I consider the mark of a theology of nature following Barth's unwavering christological commitment.

Langdon ends by clarifying that he has reviewed Barth's work to revise and situate it within the context of the Anthropocene. The context dominated the conversation, and Barth was minimally the authority to be followed, as he was regularly

revised and reinterpreted. This does not mean the conversation is not worthwhile, only that it ended feeling like an ethical concern in search of a theology to solve the problem. His final imperative is for the livingness of the world, rather than a recovery of a dynamic theology that listens to the triune God. The reader will need to decide its hopeful prospects.

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David J. Atkinson. *The Message of Genesis 1–11*. Revised Edition. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. ISBN 978-1-5140-0451-7. Pp xiv + 178. Paperback. \$27.49 (CDN) \$21.99 (USD).

Despite its ancient origins, the book of Genesis continues to speak with divine authority on today's most pressing matters. Originally written in 1990 with InterVarsity Press as part of the eminently poignant *Bible Speaks Today* (BST) series, David J. Atkinson's *The Message of Genesis 1–11* was exceptionally well received for its intended audience(s) and purpose(s).¹

Prior to elaborating on the content of the book itself (or its mostly minor revisions), a basic overview of the BST series is in order. According to the editors (Alec Motyer, John Sott, and Derek Tidball), *The Bible Speaks Today* is characterized by a three-fold ideal: (1) expounding the biblical text with accuracy, (2) relating Scripture to contemporary life, and (3) readability. In this sense, therefore, the BST volumes are not “commentaries” per se. Said otherwise, most commentaries seek to “elucidate the text rather than to apply it” and tend to be reference works rather than distinct literature (ix). This is unlike the BST volumes which are intentionally designed to be read cover to cover. Finally, each of the contributors to *The BST* series is “united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient—yet ever modern—Word” (ix).

David J. Atkinson is honorary assistant bishop in the Diocese of Southwark and was formerly Suffragan Bishop of Thetford in the Diocese of Norwich. He is also the author of the volumes on Ruth, Job, and Proverbs in *The BST* series of commentaries.

1 See, for example, the (disproportionally) positive comments made by Owen C. Thomas in *Churchman* 107 (1993): 83; Gregory J. McBride, *The Theological Educator* 48 (1993): 115–16; J. N. Boo Heflin, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 34 (1992): 35–36; and Tom Gledhill, *Churchman* 104 (1990): 353, alongside the astute notes that are made by John F. Evans within *A Guide to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works* 11th Edition (Zondervan, 2025), 71. Cf. C. E. Colton, *Criswell Theological Review* (1991): 304–05; Donald B. DeYoung, *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1991): 119; and Peter J. Gentry, *Baptist Review of Theology* (1992): 50–52.

Quite interestingly, Atkinson divides Genesis 1–11 into six major units: (1) Majesty and Mystery (1:1–2:3), (2) Expelled from Eden (2:4–3:24), which is further subdivided into two more sections, namely part A. Life in the Garden (2:4–25) and part B. “Adam, where are you?” (3:1–24), (3) Envy and Gratitude (4:1–26), (4) The Eye of the Storm (5:1–8:22), (5) Rainbows in a Fallen World (9:1–29), and (6) God is our Hope and Strength (10:1–11:32). An author’s preface (xi–xii) and select bibliography (xiii–xiv) round out the volume. There are no indices.

Atkinson approaches the text as a “literary whole,” explicitly stating:

Whatever views some of us have about the author or authors and editors, the fact remains that it is this text in its canonical form which Christian people have from the beginning received as the opening chapters of their Bibles. It is this text as a whole which the writers of the New Testament had before them. It is this text through which the divine Word comes to us. (xii)

Given the age of the volume at hand, it is unnecessary to delineate its contents at length. Suffice to say that the (aforementioned) accolades are all well-deserving. With respect to sexuality in general, including aspects concerning singleness, divorce, and (even) the LGBT+ community, the author astutely affirms that the *Imago Dei* “is not seen without distortion in any of us” (59) and that we are all “made for fellowship, and whether in marriage and family, or in a life of celibacy, or community, we need to find ways of dealing with the fact that it is not good to be alone” (60). Atkinson also believes that the so-called Nephilim (Gen 6:1–4) are “demonic” fallen angels (119) and rightly challenges certain misunderstandings of the impassibility of God.

To be clear, Atkinson judiciously opines:²

Can there be anything more poignant than the phrase *the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart* (6:6)? God is affected by what people make of themselves and do with his creation. God suffers.... Here is the wounded spirit of the artist whose work is rejected, the broken heart of the lover whose love is not returned ... Genesis 6 points us to the suffering God. “The tears of God are the meaning of history.” (120–21)

2 Do note, however, that I disagree with Atkinson wherein he states (120): “*It grieved him to his heart* could mean ‘he felt bitterly indignant’—a mixture of rage and bitter anguish.” To be clear, I agree with the latter but not the former. See Dustin G. Burlet, “Impassible Yet Impassioned: The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility in Conversation with the Noachian Deluge of Genesis,” *Didaskalia* 28 (2017–2018)” 96–128. Cf. Eli Randolph, “Impassibility, Divine Suffering, and Theodicy: Ancient Answers to Contemporary Concerns,” *Journal of Christian Studies* 3 (2024): 29–43.

Even the (oft-controversial!) topic of evolution (in general) is handled quite well in my opinion. To be clear, Atkinson notes that the term itself is somewhat “loaded,” noting:

Some writers use the word “evolution;” in a further sense ... to mean more than biological processes. It becomes a shorthand for “evolutionism,” which is really a philosophical worldview about the nature of reality.... Clearly, if “evolution” is lifted out of the sphere of biological hypothesis, where it is open to scientific investigation, and is elevated to the status of a whole worldview of the way things are, then there is direct conflict with biblical faith. (18)

There are also some exceptionally adept turns of phrase, such as, with respect to the Flood, “the power of God is not dimmed by the power of the sea” (131). Another is: “God’s initiative of grace towards Noah is mentioned before there is any references to Noah’s faith and righteousness (6:9). And that is important ... ‘grace found Noah’ ... Perhaps we could suggest that, in contrast to Descartes, the Velveteen Rabbit would learn, through relationship, gradually, with pain and struggle to say, ‘I am loved, therefore, I am.’ That is part of the meaning of grace” (121, 124).

The revisions themselves, however, are (abysmally) minimal. For example, instead of using the Revised Standard Version (1973), all references are from the NRSV Bible text (1995). Direct quotations of Scripture also use in-line citations (versus footnotes), thereby “smoothing out” one’s reading at times. While the back cover claims the redesigned edition has been “sensitively updated with more current references,” I could not identify anything that was actually “new.”

For those encountering David J. Atkinson for the first time, *The Message of Genesis 1–11* is a deeply enriching read—pastoral, wise, and surprisingly fresh despite its age. As noted above, however, the revisions are disappointingly sparse. One wonders if IVP might have served its audience better by rebranding this edition as part of a “BST Classics” line rather than a “Revised Edition,” thus making room for some new voices alongside the time-honored ones.

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