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BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

Greg R. Allison. *The Church: An Introduction.* Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Edited by Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 181. $14.99 (paperback).

One feature of contemporary evangelical theology is the absence of a biblically-informed, theologically-rich, and historically-rooted doctrine of the church. For this reason, I was pleased to discover that the new series, Short Studies in Systematic Theology, includes a distinct volume devoted to the church. The aim of the series is to provide readers with "short studies in theology that are attuned to both the Christian tradition and contemporary theology in order to equip the church to faithfully, understand, love, teach, and apply what God has revealed in Scripture about a variety of topics (Series Preface, 11). As this description indicates, these studies intend to supply their readers with a short statement of the Scripture's teaching on particular topics and to do so in a way that addresses both contemporary theological issues and traditional treatments in the history of Christian theology. Due to the relative paucity of books on the doctrine of the church or ecclesiology, Greg R. Allison's contribution to these studies fills a gap in contemporary theological studies.

In the introduction to his study, Allison makes a programmatic distinction between an orientation toward what he terms "mere ecclesiology" and "more ecclesiology." By *mere* ecclesiology, he does not mean an ecclesiology that "trivializes this doctrine [of the church] or is reductionistic or minimizes differences of perspective on ecclesiology" (16). Rather, borrowing from C. S. Lewis's well-known book, *Mere Christianity,* Allison defines mere ecclesiology as a doctrine of the church that summarizes the "essential doctrines and core practices" that constitute the common conviction of most Christians throughout the history of the church. Mere ecclesiology is a distillation of those aspects of the doctrine of the church that are shared by most Christians and that comprise its "identified essence" (17). Though the ecclesiology of actual churches throughout history includes many divergent elements and emphases, mere ecclesiology describes what they have in common, despite these differences. By *more* ecclesiology, Allison refers to the distinctive or peculiar features that belong to different church traditions. He illustrates what he means by more ecclesiology by noting the distinctive practices and convictions of Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and Episcopalian churches. Though these church traditions differ significantly on matters of polity, the means of grace (Word and sacraments), and the like, they share enough common ground to be recognized as churches of Jesus Christ. Utilizing this fundamental distinction, Allison seeks to present an ecclesiology that is simultaneously ecumenical in its core

aspects and yet sensitive to those areas of historic doctrine and practice that distinguish actual churches from each other.

Interestingly, though Allison makes frequent use of his distinction between mere and more ecclesiology in the second part of his book (entitled: "Mere Ecclesiology and More Ecclesiology"), he begins his study in the first part (entitled: Foundational Issues) with two brief chapters that provide a general overview of the Trinitarian identity of the church and the biblical witness to the gathering of the church in the Old and New Testaments. In Chapter One, he observes that the New Testament form of the church is explicitly Trinitarian in contrast to the Old Testament form of the church. Three of the principal biblical descriptions of the church ("the people of God," "the body of Christ," and the "temple" that God indwells by his Spirit) correspond broadly to the three Persons of the Trinity in their particular or "appropriate" works in the economy of redemptive history. In Chapter Two, Allison makes a case for the unity of the one people of God throughout the entirety of redemptive history. However, he stops short of calling the Old Testament people of God "the church," even objecting to the teaching that the Holy Spirit indwelt the people of God in the Old Testament economy in the permanent manner that he indwells the New Testament church or body of Christ. At the close of the book's first part, Allison notes that the remainder of his study in part two will focus on the "local" church with respect to its identity, leadership, government, ordinances or sacraments, and ministries.

Reformed readers will likely be frustrated with the second part of Allison's study. On the one hand, he provides a reasonably accurate description of the differences in viewpoint and practice among churches on the topics he addresses. Differences in polity between episcopal, presbyterian/Reformed, and congregational churches are concisely described. Controversies regarding the sacraments (the "presence" of Christ in the sacraments, the divergence between paedo- and credo-baptist views of the sacrament of baptism and its proper recipients) are noted. Debates about the number and function of the church's officers or leaders are acknowledged, including the current dispute between egalitarian and complementarian views of the role of men and women in the church.

On the other hand, Allison's distinction between mere and more ecclesiology inclines him to diminish unduly the importance of these differences. It affords him an opportunity to betray, at times, his own baptistic and congregationalist sympathies. Though he tries to remain even-handed in his representation of differing ecclesiological views and practices, discerning readers will detect that his even-handedness does not obscure his congregational leanings. Nor does it conceal his antipathy to a more robust view of the means of grace, including the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism.

Though Allison's study provides a somewhat valuable introduction to the doctrine of the church, it does suffer from the kind of "reductionistic" or "lowest-common-denominator" approach that he explicitly rejects in his introduction.

— Cornelis P. Venema

Herman Bavinck. *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion.* Foreword by James P. Eglinton. Translated and edited by Gregory Parker Jr. and Cameron Clausing. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2022. Pp. xix + 224. $29.95 (hardcover).

Herman Bavinck. *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession.* Translated by Henry Zylstra. Introduction by R. Carlton Wynne, indexing by Charles Williams. Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019. Pp. xxxiii + 659. $49.99 (hardcover).

The second of the two volumes listed above is familiar to an English-speaking audience, for this work was first translated into English by Henry Zylstra and published under the title *Our Reasonable Faith*, perhaps intended to echo the phrase "our reasonable service" from Romans 12:1. The William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. first published this work, and it was later reprinted by Baker Book House in a paperback format. This edition of the Zylstra translation, produced by Westminster Seminary Press, captures Bavinck's original Latin title for the work, *Magnalia Dei*—first published in Dutch in 1907. The publishers of the work in this new format have performed a fine service to all students of theology by re-typesetting Zylstra's translation, a clear improvement over the original printing of this book. The volume is clothbound on high-quality paper, and the binding materials are, likewise, of high quality, all of which make this volume a far more pleasant reading experience than the older paperback reprint of this book.

Many students of theology are familiar with this work. Still, for readers who are new to this volume, it is to be noted that this substantial book, though often seen as a compendium of Bavinck's larger four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, is not quite that—certainly not the way Louis Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine* is a compendium of his *Systematic Theology*. Bavinck's shorter volume, to be sure, covers something of the same turf, but Bavinck allows himself the freedom to express himself in distinct ways from his four-volume dogmatics and to insert insights that can only be had by reading this book alongside the larger volumes. Indeed, this shorter book stands on its own—and, from time to time, Bavinck offers a fresh and winsome presentation of material distinct from his larger four-volume work. This is to say, there is material to be harvested here that is not found or, perhaps, expressed as well in his four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*. The *Magnalia* should not be skipped over. Readers, for example, will want to take note of Bavinck's chapter on "The Christian Calling."

While indices were lacking from the former publication of Zylstra's translation of this volume, this is remedied in the new production, with a very extensive name and subject index and an extensive index of Scripture references. This makes the book open up for readers since it enables them to find Bavinck's treatment of various biblical-theological topics.

The concise introduction by R. Carlton Wynne acquaints the reader both to Bavinck the theologian and the work itself. The translator's preface is also included, offering something of an introduction to readers of Herman Bavinck.

It is most pleasing to have this fine specimen of classic Reformed theology in this serviceable and pleasant format by its best theologian of the last two centuries. My only regret in examining this work is that the editors and publisher chose not to add subheadings to the body of each chapter in this work. While it is true that Bavinck himself did not do this—as was the convention of the time in which he wrote—this book would be significantly more accessible if this labor had been performed. Chapter titles do not adequately capture the contents of given chapters, nor are they adequate to walk readers through the progression and treatment of a topic as such. For example, in Bavinck's chapter entitled "The Covenant of Grace," covering pages 242–261, readers will discover that Bavinck does not formally come to the chapter's title topic until page 253. The previous pages expound on divine election and God's counsel, for Bavinck believes it is quite mistaken to conceive of the covenant of grace independent of divine election. It would have been beneficial for modern readers to have subheadings inserted into Bavinck's text to alert readers of how Bavinck is unfolding his ideas and developing them into subtopics and the like. Admittedly, this criticism is partly personal preference; still, in using this book in its earlier printing, one grows frustrated in needing to read an entire chapter in searching for how Bavinck handles a specific point of doctrine if he handles it at all. The current volume, with its comprehensive indices, will significantly assist in remedying that problem.

Turning next to the first volume mentioned at the head of this review, Bavinck's *Guidebook* (*Handleiding*), arguably better translated as *Manual*, is his short instruction book on Reformed theology and the Christian faith. Readers should be informed that this work had not, heretofore, been translated into English. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if many English-speaking Reformed theology students were unaware that Bavinck had produced such a work, which he published in 1913.

The translators, Gregory Parker Jr. and Cameron Clausing, have ably performed this hard labor. In addition, as editors they have tracked all the places (sections of text) where this *Guidebook* mirrors *verbatim* Bavinck's book *The Wonderful Works of God*. In other words, the *Guidebook* is a compendium of this larger volume. The translators have also authored an introduction for this book, wherein they more broadly treat Bavinck as a theologian and more narrowly examine the reception and purpose of his *Guidebook*.

This short book, roughly one-third the size of the earlier mentioned volume, includes a fine subject and name index, followed by a Scripture index. And like *Wonderful Works,* to my chagrin, the editors and publisher opted not to insert subheadings into Bavinck's text. Once more, especially for lay readers, this is an unfortunate decision—or if not a decision, oversight. That notwithstanding, this book serves as a swell primer in Christian doctrine, besides being an accessible introduction to Bavinck himself. It is quite informative and helpful for mature catechumens, adult study groups, and all who like theology and wish to learn or refresh themselves on Reformed teaching. Indeed, this book offers an open invitation to learn the Christian faith from a sane, sober, and masterful Reformed theologian.

—J. Mark Beach

Kevin P. Emmert, *John Calvin and the Righteousness of Works*. Reformed Historical Theology 67. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021. Pp. 209. $100.00 (hardcover).

From the beginning, Protestants faced charges of undermining the necessity of good works. Yet from the start, Reformation authors countered that good works are essential to biblical Christianity. The questions have always been how and in what sense good works are vital in a gospel of pure grace through Christ. Scholars have often disagreed over how to explain the role of good works in Protestant accounts of salvation, especially in early Reformation authors like Luther, Melanchthon, Bucer, and Calvin. Kevin Emmert's study of John Calvin on the righteousness of works jumps directly into this conversation, offering his own account of how good works related to justification in Calvin's writings. He contends that Calvin ultimately taught a justification according to works that was subordinated to that justification that received Christ's imputed righteousness through faith alone. While this reviewer disagrees with the author's assessment of Calvin's teaching on this issue, this book highlights the thorny nature of the questions involved by drawing from an impressive range of Calvin's writings.

This book brings much clarity regarding Calvin's teaching on two kinds of righteousness. The first and primary one is receiving Christ's imputed righteousness by faith, while the second involves God accepting believers' good works by the Spirit and pardoning what is faulty for Christ's sake. After stating the question in chapter one, the author defends this idea ably and clearly in chapters two through five by examining Calvin's anthropology, his direct teaching on good works, soteriology as bigger and more than justification, and the relation of good works to God's law. In the concluding chapter, Emmert is undoubtedly correct when he asserts that Calvin's views on this subject are more complex than many have recognized (190). Calvin clearly reflected the teaching of Scripture in which sometimes righteousness referred to Christ's imputed righteousness, while other times it described the character of believers. This is a vital point often missed by those emphasizing either justification or sanctification, respectively, in Calvin's thought. The controversial aspect of this volume resides heavily in Emmert's assertion in chapter three that this righteousness of works is not merely God accepting the works of believers but a kind of "double justification" (esp. 83–86).

This reviewer's critique of Emmert's work, revolving around his assertion of a second justification by works, grows out of two related issues. The first is the breadth of context required to understand the development of good works in Reformed thought, and the second is his "exegetical" reading of Calvin himself. First, this research topic requires a broad and wide context. In this light, the author does not fully establish his research methodology and approach to the subject. The acknowledgments page refers in passing to "retrieval" theology (7, and a little on 190), yet later cautions against anachronism in Calvin studies (32, fn 85) and notes that his research is "historical-exegetical" rather than dogmatic (44). "Retrieval" is dogmatic theology, but "historical-exegetical" directs readers more explicitly to expect heavy historical contextualization. However, while mentioning other key

authors like Melanchthon, Musculus, Hyperius, and Vermigli early in the study (20), such contextual background does not factor heavily into his explanation of Calvin's views. By "historical-exegetical," he appears to mean exegeting Calvin's writings. While this has the strength of prioritizing a wide range of primary source material from Calvin, it is not adequately contextual. One's historical case becomes clearer and stronger when contemporary, and even subsequent, authors factor heavily into the discussion. Occasional references to Melanchthon (e.g., 71, fn 194) and Bucer (e.g., 84) appear, but not sufficiently to grasp whether Calvin's views on the righteousness of works fit into broader trends in Protestant thought at the time. Broader contexts like this help establish an accurate reading of Calvin since the recurrence of similar ideas often limits the range of interpretive options in intellectual history. Like a crime scene investigator, historians develop theories based on the scene of the event. When the evidence admits several interpretations, then corroborative evidence becomes crucial. Alibies and circumstantial evidence often rule out suspects and narrow things down to a single suspect. In the case of Calvin's theology of good works, it is simply impossible adequately to grasp what he was saying or not saying without delving into medieval precedents, contemporary Roman Catholic reactions, alternative formulations by Reformed authors, and, to some extent, subsequent developments in Reformed thought. In other words, historians need to show where people came from, where they were, and where their ideas might have been going. All history is provisional and probable, but the broader the context historians set, the less provisional and more likely their conclusions sound.

The second criticism flows from the first. Is it possible to read Calvin's teaching on the righteousness of works without turning this idea into a second justification? The answer is that there is and that corroborating evidence makes the alternative reading more likely. Through other Calvin scholars, such as Mark Garcia's reservations about "double justification" (83), Emmert argues that this was precisely Calvin's meaning. Admittedly, the quotations he supplies from Calvin do not refer to justification by works but to justifying persons by faith and to justifying their works. These seem to be two very different things that do not necessarily warrant two justifications, one by faith and the other by works. The mistake here is that the author seems to equate acceptance with justification (87). Later, on page 91, the long quotation from Calvin explains that justification and adoption precede accepting believers' works. Rather than attributing to Calvin a second justification involving works based on the first, Calvin seems to have advocated accepting the good works of believers in the context of justification and adoption. It is fair to say that accepting good works is part of "saving" believers, but this is by no means the same thing as importing good works into a second and subordinate justification. Emmert establishes well Calvin's views on the place of good works in salvation in Calvin's thought, but his application of these ideas to justification reaches beyond the evidence by conflating justification and acceptance. Though Emmert says that "Calvin defines justification *as* acceptance" (92), it is better to say that justification is the ground of acceptance, both of persons and, subsequently, of their works. In footnote 98, the author admits that conflating these terms is an interpretive move

since Calvin did not do so expressly. The appeal to Calvin's comments on James 2:21 on page 93 does not help Emmert's case since Calvin clearly explains that imputation is the ground of justification, while good works manifest the fact that one is justified. Calvin does refer to righteousness in two senses, inherent and imparted, but he does not refer to justification in two senses, opting instead for God accepting our works because he has already accepted our persons.

Similarly, Melanchthon, Luther, and Bucer distinguished being justified and being approved (94). Even Calvin's statement in a sermon on Genesis 15:6 that "the method of justifying differs" in believers following the new birth (101) does not militate against the above reading of Calvin. Pressing a single statement about two methods of justification is slim grounds to assert one justification by faith and another by works, especially when Calvin's words elsewhere lend themselves towards the justification of the person's works rather than a second justification of the person.

In the end, Emmert conflates righteousness, acceptance, and justification to establish the idea that Calvin taught a form of justification by works. This appears to draw conclusions from the sources that most contemporary and later Reformed authors were unwilling to make. Emmert's conflation of terms seems less likely in light of the fact that justifying believers' works on the grounds of their justification by Christ's imputed righteousness became standard in Reformed thought. For example, Westminster Confession 16.6 states,

> Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God's sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

Both persons and works are "accepted," but in two different respects. The first clause refers to chapter eleven ("of Justification"). By the mid-seventeenth century, connections seemed to be clear and explanations neat and tidy. Justifying works was simply not the same thing as justification by works. God counted people righteous in justification on account of Christ's imputed righteousness. Then God infused or imparted righteousness by Christ to believers in sanctification, meaning God accepted their sincere relative righteousness in good works. It is unwise to impose a seventeenth-century document on Calvin. Yet the fact that it is possible to read Calvin in compatible ways with statements like this one bear on which readings of Calvin are more likely. Contrasting Calvin to authors like Aquinas and Cajetan and comparing him to others like Bullinger, Vermigli, Musculus, Ursinus, and many more could make it even clearer that distinguishing (without separating) terms like justification, acceptance, and two kinds of righteousness did not necessarily entail a second justification of works. Exegeting Calvin's writings is a necessary cause of Calvin studies but not a sufficient cause if taken alone.

This reviewer's criticism of Emmert's method and conclusions is neither meant to be harsh nor fatal. History is hard work, and Emmert chose a complex topic.

Whether or not readers believe that his explanation or others' of Calvin's teaching on good works is the better reading, all should appreciate the sheer volume of Calvin's writings that he brings to our attention. This creates precisely the kind of conversation that makes historical writing fruitful and engaging. Emmert's voice in this ongoing discussion is worth hearing, and his evidence is worth weighing. Debates over Calvin's view of good works likely won't stop here. Later Reformed orthodox formulations of the subject shed light on Calvin depending on how much continuity and discontinuity one sees between Reformation and orthodoxy. Were Reformed orthodoxy statements about good works in relation to justification and salvation a development and perfection of authors like Calvin, or were they a departure from a second justification based on works? This reviewer leans towards the former option, while Emmert's study potentially implies the latter. In any case, Emmert remains abundantly clear that Calvin clearly, forcefully, and unambiguously drove home justification by faith alone in Christ alone without sidelining the necessity of good works.

—Ryan M. McGraw

David E. Graves. *The Archaeology of the Old Testament: 115 Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible.* Moncton, New Brunswick: EM Electronic Christian Media, 2019. Pp. 305. $29.95 (paperback).

The internet has shrunk the world, so to speak, and this is certainly the case with news about archaeological finds from the land of the Bible. Whereas in previous times, information about recent discoveries was chiefly disseminated through academic journals and studies, now lay people can find their social media feeds peppered with news reports from Israeli and other middle eastern media outlets, written in English, announcing the discovery of a new site, building, or tablet claiming to have bearing on the historicity and reliability of the Old Testament.

Frequently these news stories contain comments from key figures in the academic archaeology guild, many of whom offer provisional assessments according to minimalist commitments to the historical value of the Old Testament. As secularism continues to gain ground in the west and increasing numbers of people seek ways to bolster their opposition to the reliability of Scripture, these minimalist views are gaining more and more prominence, causing believers to wrestle with archaeological claims being invoked to undermine the Christian faith. What is a Christian who is committed to the inerrancy and infallibility of God's word to do?

While books have been written in defense of the historicity of the Old Testament, many of them are not easily accessible to ordinary Christians. The writing style is technical, the chapters are dense, and the discourse does not easily keep people's attention. Furthermore, many of these volumes are not specifically dedicated to archaeological finds. They do invoke them and explain them regularly, but primarily these books invoke the artifacts as part of a history of ancient Israel and Judah, such that if one wishes to learn about a particular archaeological find, one will have to fish through a range of pages listed in the book's index. Books like K.

A. Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman's *A Biblical History of Israel*, or James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary's edited volume *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* are tremendous assets to Christians seeking to bolster their confidence in the reliability of Scripture, but they are still clunky for those trying to learn about archaeological finds.

Enter *The Archaeology of the Old Testament: 115 Discoveries that Support the Reliability of the Bible* by David E. Graves. The book is aimed at undergraduate students in order to provide an accessible and collective work (27). It is laid out following the canonical order of the Old Testament (Genesis–Malachi), and the discoveries described are treated in order of their occurrences within each Old Testament book. Thus, locating specific artifacts is not only made easier, connecting their relationship to specific passages of God's Word has also been facilitated.

While *The Archaeology of the Old Testament* is unashamedly opposed to liberalizing, revisionist scholarship, it is not naïve or knee-jerk in its presentation of the biblical material. On the one hand, when situating the work of the famous American archaeologist William Dever within the debate between historical maximalists and minimalists, Graves presents Dever's positions with nuance, showing that one cannot simply say that "Minimalists are theological liberals and Maximalists are theological conservatives" (39).

On the other hand, when discussing conservative responses to liberal claims, Graves is honest in pointing out disagreements among conservative scholars (e.g., 29–30) and is humble in his own reconstruction of debated points (e.g., 32). In general, this volume exhibited considerable and consistent restraint. As an example, in discussing the Egyptian "Famine Stele," a text from around 332–331 B.C., he does not try to freight the find with more than the stele is able to bear but does offer suggestions for how this stele illuminates Genesis 41 in spite of its date much later than Joseph's time in Egypt (98). Similar restraint is exhibited in the treatment of Khirbet el-Maqatir, a site identified by some with Joshua's Ai; Graves's handling of this find exudes a positive curiosity and optimism without "going all in" on the site identification, as do some conservative writers.

The book ends with a glossary, a 50+ page bibliography of significant academic literature, and an easy-to-use subject index. This caps off the overall user-friendliness of the book. Its consistent use of color photography, color maps, and color charts makes this a handsome and appealing volume to consult. Its maximalist and theologically informed presentation is all the more appealing due to this attention to aesthetics. While some might find $29.95 to be somewhat pricey for a paperback book, it really is a reasonable price for a book with this kind of visual presentation.

While college and seminary students will benefit from the details of this volume, it is also commended for interested lay people who are interested in an approachable, engaging, and informative treatment of the intersection between archaeology and the Bible.

—R. Andrew Compton

John L. Mackay. *Ezekiel: A Mentor Commentary*. 2 vols. Mentor Commentary. Genies House, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2018. Pp. 732 + 576. $39.99 (hardcover).

The late John L. Mackay spent thirty years at the institution now known widely as Edinburgh Theological Seminary in Scotland, serving as a professor of Old Testament and as the seminary's principal. He was an ordained minister in the Free Church of Scotland and served for many years as the senior clerk of the General Assembly. His longstanding work as a churchman is evident in his Old Testament scholarship, which is prolific and thoroughly Reformed, theological, and pastoral in its content and application.

Known primarily as an Old Testament commentator, Mackay has written on a range of Old Testament books, from poetry to prophecy to prose. His works have been featured in the ESV Expository Commentary (1 & 2 Samuel) and the EP Study Commentary (2 volumes on Isaiah). However, the majority of his works have been published through Christian Focus, with two popular commentaries written in the Focus on the Bible series covering Jonah–Malachi and seven more advanced volumes in the Mentor Commentary series on Exodus, Hosea, Jeremiah (2 volumes), Lamentations, and Ezekiel (2 volumes). This last commentary is the subject of this review.

Though Mackay entered his eternal rest in 2018, he was able to publish a final commentary only four months before his death, the two volumes devoted to Ezekiel covering some 1300+ pages. Readers of this journal will likely appreciate that the first footnote in this immense analysis references Geerhardus Vos's *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, a staple of confessional Reformed biblical scholarship. His Reformed theological commitments are evident throughout.

While the Mentor Commentary is aimed chiefly at pastors and students, this does not mean that Mackay's Ezekiel somehow lacks academic rigor. He has a keen eye for textual and theological detail. He does a tremendous job aggregating and sifting the extant secondary literature on Ezekiel, particularly the technical commentaries of Daniel Block (NICOT), Walther Zimmerli (Hermeneia), Leslie Allen (Word Biblical Commentary), and Moshe Greenberg (Anchor Bible). This reviewer, whose own work has focused on Ezekiel, is often asked by pastors where they might turn for guidance in preaching this quite challenging prophetical book without undue strain on their wallets and shelf space. While Mackay's two volumes do not render the other commentaries unnecessary, they do serve ably to summarize most of the key themes taken up in detail in the more exhaustive analyses of other writers. Pastors and students can be selective in choosing which other volumes to consult, knowing that Mackay has given them sufficient breadth and mediation of the key contributions of others.

What is more, per the style of the Mentor Commentary series, Mackay's Ezekiel commentary offers numerous "reflections" of a pastoral and homiletical nature. The pastor—indeed, the *confessional Reformed* pastor—will be tremendously helped by these volumes, whether consulting them in an ad hoc fashion, following cross references from other parts of Scripture, or working systematically through the book

as part of lectio continua preaching of the book. This reviewer always consults Mackay wherever his comments are available and has benefitted tremendously from his excellent work on the Book of Ezekiel. These volumes join Mackay's others as highly recommended!

—R. Andrew Compton

Jonathan T. Pennington. *Small Preaching: 25 Little Things You Can Do Now to Become a Better Preacher.* Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021. Pp. 119. $18.93 (hardcover).

This little book consists of a succinct introduction, followed by twenty-five short, easy-to-read chapters. The volume is divided into three parts: the Person of the Preacher, the Preparation for Preaching, and the Practice of Preaching.

The author, Jonathan T. Pennington, is associate professor of New Testament Interpretation and director of research doctrinal studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He is also a preacher-pastor at Sojourn East Church in Louisville. His credentials suit him well to produce this volume, which is filled with countless nuggets of wisdom pertaining to the activity of writing and preaching sermons.

Unique topics covered by the author include handling both praise for and criticism of one's preaching. The former "carefully and gladly"; the latter "humbly." Also unique as a topic for a homiletics book is what Pennington calls "encaustic" preaching, which has in mind a long view of what each sermon should be building toward as an outcome and goal. That is, preachers ought to have larger and broader aims in mind as they produce sermons.

The author also takes up what he calls "Iceberg" preaching, which is a way of saying that our sermons, like an iceberg, ought to have something above the surface—seen and experienced—and something below the surface (supporting the sermon) that is weighty, large, and substantial. Pennington argues that good sermons are straightforward, transparent, and simple (though not simplistic), but they are undergirded by much more than what is presented—like an iceberg. There is gravity and complexity under the surface.

Another unique and "honestly" examined topic in this book is the chapter entitled "This Sermon Stinks." All preachers worth their salt must admit that they preach "stinkers." Often the stinky sermon is first discovered by the preacher himself; he is the one who assesses that his sermon gives off a bad aroma—that is, it is a lousy sermon. More often than not, this assessment happens *before* preaching the sermon—sometimes, the discovery comes *after* the preaching event. Sometimes what is first assessed as a stinker, in fact, comes to be judged fragrant and acceptable. This process is healthy for good preaching and is needed. Preachers should doubt themselves as preachers and work through making their sermons better. There is undoubtedly a subjective dimension to this evolving assessment and reassessment—from *this sermon stinks to 'no, I think it is okay*.' Preachers must learn to be their own best sermon critics!

Many preachers, I would observe, ought to take to heart—seriously take to heart—Pennington's chapter on "The First Minute of a Sermon." You will never catch what you have failed to hook. If the preacher neglects the arduous labor to start strong, grab the interest of hearers, show the relevance of the ensuing message, muck around in the hard struggle or the abundant joys of the Christian's walk with God, then he signals that he is out of touch with the gospel and the congregation. Sermons that start as duds seldom burst into something wonderful. Or, if they do become edifying, does the preacher have the audience's attention when it is so? To start a sermon as a dud is to produce the expectation that it will end that way, too.

A further interesting set of chapters in *Small Preaching* includes, respectively, a chapter entitled "Preaching the Church Calendar" and "Preaching the Cultural Calendar." It is intriguing to see a Baptist author advocate for the church calendar, not as a law to be obeyed but as a beneficial way to organize preaching around Christ's coming and accomplished work of redemption for sinners. Christian preaching that pays attention to the church year—including Advent and Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter, along with Pentecost (besides other days to be considered)—serves well to remind believers to commemorate and reflect on their identity as Christians through what Christ has done for them. Meanwhile, recognition of the church calendar, says the author, need not interfere with or threaten regular preaching through books of the Bible.

As for preaching the cultural calendar, here Pennington has in mind sermons on Mother's and Father's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Sanctity of Life Sunday, and similar nationally recognized days that have a common public observance. Again, this is not about imposing and obeying new rules or requirements. Instead, acknowledging that the cultural calendar is a matter of *adiaphora*, a preacher can, while steering clear of overemphasizing such matters, seize the moment and speak in culturally sensitive ways. Thus, the preacher is afforded the opening to make the most of such opportunities in order to direct the gospel to cultural affairs and circumstances.

As a general observation, each short and pithy chapter in this book serves as a nifty reminder to experienced preachers about basic homiletic methods and preparation or, otherwise, digs into neglected issues that need to be exposed and acknowledged. The final chapter of this book, "Stealing as Sub-Creating," serves as an apt example of this. This chapter echoes a piece of advice I have guardedly given to seminary students for years—which echoes advice I received from a premier Reformed preacher when I was a young buck preacher—namely, "creative stealing" or what was termed reading and studying others for "seed-thoughts."

What does "stealing as sub-creating" mean? Most all sermons are a form of creative thievery—but, to be clear, this is quite different from preachers who plagiarize the sermons of others. Plagiarism is foolish, false, and nefarious inasmuch as the preaching-thief fails to engage the text of the Bible or process the sermon of another through his own heart, mind, soul, and life experience—all of that is skipped over. Sermons pilfered in this way (or significant portions of them or the illustrations used as if they happened to the thief when they did not) are dishonest and robbery. What is in mind with "stealing as sub-creating" is not that! Observing that only God creates *ex nihilo*, Pennington reminds us that humans do not have this ability—and it

applies to making sermons, too. Hard-working, conscientious preachers labor to gain insight from the best sources available to them—both exegetically, expositionally, and homiletically. The last thing a preacher should do upon receiving insight from another is fail to make creative and personal use of it. Instead, the responsible and needed thing to do is to use it responsibly. Sometimes insights gained are from a single author but are shared by multiple authors (i.e., the insight is commonplace). Other times the insight is unique and can be acknowledged as something like "a wise preacher reminds us." Still, other times the insight filters through the preacher's own mind, which produces a different way of saying it, a unique illustration, or a new metaphor to explore—that is, being creative and processing homiletical ideas through one's own mind, soul, life, vocabulary, and manner of expression.

As a sidebar, I have seen seminary students who, being overly bound and subservient to sources, lack any sense of translating ideas into their own idiom or the sensibility to express in their own words what they have learned. They can only repeat what the commentator said and the like. But I have also witnessed seminary students who neglect and ignore wise exegetical and homiletical insight from sources because they are under the mistaken belief that they are obliged to invent, *de novo*, something uniquely their own. This inevitably leads to sermonic disaster.

Pennington pleads for the idea of being "sub-creators" of our sermons—which involves a "creative mashing up of others' ideas and insights." He has this in mind by saying that preachers must "steal like an artist." All our sermons depend on the work, teachings, and insights of others—and that is just fine. Preachers must continually learn from others—happily and wisely. This is part of being members of the body of Christ, benefitting from the gifts of other preachers, scholars, and commentators. Still, it matters that each preacher is a unique soul and personality who needs to find and express himself (preach) in his own voice.

I have discovered that "finding one's own voice" is a learning process. Some novice preachers have not found it when they graduate seminary—but eventually do. Others have found their voice with the first sermon they deliver in preaching class.

A final observation about this book has to do with why Pennington calls this book *Small Preaching.* He does so because, well, the book is small; the chapters are short, and the author seeks to lead his readers along in small, thoughtful steps. Like one's golf game, he says, our sermons will never be perfect. Preaching is a lifelong journey of refinement and growth. Preaching is a journey of small steps. Indeed!

This small book makes a fine addition to one's homiletic library—beneficial for rookie and veteran preachers alike.

—J. Mark Beach

Audy Santoso, *Union with God: An Assessment of Deification (Theosis) in the Theologies of Robert Jenson and John Calvin.* Reformed Historical Theology 69. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021. 298pp. $127.65 (hardcover).

Retrieval theology is an increasingly fruitful venue in recent theology, placing a wide range of ideological options on the table for systematic theology particularly. Seeking to retrieve past ideas and bringing them to bear on the present, retrieval

theologies seek to read Scripture in light of key historical ideas in the Christian church. The danger with retrieval theology is that it is easy to lift ideas out of historical contexts as theologians hasten to apply them to contemporary issues, which can result in losing the past while seeking to reclaim it. Merging ideas from historical into systematic theology is necessary, but it is equally necessary to set historical voices in historical contexts to learn what ideas they actually give us. Retrieval theology is, thus, both fruitful and a bit daunting at the same time. This book evaluates Robert Jenson and John Calvin's views of *theosis*, applying criteria learned from Calvin to assess what elements of Jenson's thought we can incorporate into Reformed theology. While this work raises some substantial methodological questions, it is thought provoking and provides readers with a penetrating analysis, especially of Jenson's metaphysical revisions of God's relationship to time and human destiny.

In introducing the content of this work, two methodological issues stand out. The first issue is the scope of research. The author is concerned ultimately with examining models for deification revolving around the Trinity and the Spirit's work in Christ's incarnation. His research question is, "To what extent can Robert W. Jenson's idea of *theosis* be integrated with the Reformed theology, as exemplified by John Calvin's theology, with regards to the relation between the Triune God as Creator and the created world, the mediatory role of the incarnate Christ, and the understanding of self?" (50). On the surface, this is a tall order. In the five chapters following the introduction, the author seeks to answer this multi-part question through "systematic" analysis, comparison, and assessment, the key word being "systematic" in each case. Santoso reduces the focal point of chapters 2–5 to the Creator/creature relationship, Christ's mediation in incarnation and resurrection, and "the view of self, conceived in the protological and eschatological stages" (51). Chapters 2–3 pursue "systematic analysis" between Calvin and Jenson, chapter 4 shifts to "systematic comparison" of the two authors through the lens of the Lord's Supper, chapter 5 shifts toward "systematic theological assessment" using criteria to evaluate *theosis* (49), rounded off with a conclusion evaluating Jenson's positive contributions to Reformed theology in light of *lex orandi*, *lex proclamandi*, and *lex credenda* (51). The range of material covered in these chapters is almost overwhelming. Though *theosis*, or deification, ties them together, the author covers the Creator/creature relationship, ontology, epistemology, protology, eschatology, incarnation, resurrection, the Lord's Supper, prayer, preaching, and faith. Readers may wonder whether this research question is too broad, reaching too wide. That being said, Santoso's chapters flow logically and progressively, and while complex, his topics treated seem to work, respecting his general theme of *theosis*. Ultimately, he concludes that by collapsing eternity and time, ontologically subordinating the Son to the Father, and making the self one substance with the Son with a tenuous maintenance of individuality in heaven, Jenson has less to offer for *theosis* than Calvin does (276). Both authors are concerned to maintain the Creator/creature distinction, but Calvin's version of *theosis* as renewal in God's image in which we both see and hear God in glory is fuller and more helpful, in his estimation. In the end, the scope of Santoso's research is broad yet mostly manageable.

The second methodological issue is the author's choice of focusing on Calvin and Jenson, who are separated by both tremendous historical and ideological gulfs. Grouping John Calvin with Robert Jenson seems strange initially, given the fact that these authors are distant by nearly five centuries. While such comparisons are not impossible, they are hard. It is difficult to contextualize the ideas of both authors adequately to hear their voices in their own historical contexts. Yet this is precisely what is needed prior to any kind of theological retrieval. In a way, this can be like saying that the Eastern and Western branches of the Christian church split in the eleventh century, and then in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. While seeking to contextualize both authors in the introduction, the author stops short of situating both men in a host of contemporary primary source literature, especially in relation to Calvin. The literature he does cite is ordinarily not from the original languages and texts, making it harder to evaluate technical terms related to a topic like *theosis*.

Additionally, one looming question is why Calvin is the measuring line for Jenson's views (50, 241). Taking up a Protestant conception of authority, should not Scripture be the magisterial judge of both authors, with the Christian tradition serving as a subordinate ministerial filter? Moreover, using Calvin to provide three theological criteria and Jenson to provide categories and terms for evaluation can hardly avoid imposing anachronisms on Calvin. In this reviewer's opinion, this kind of large-scale retrieval and theological evaluation is worthwhile, but that it can only be fruitful after establishing and using distinct methods for historical and systematic theology before merging them into fresh conclusions. His evaluation of Jenson's metaphysics, in which God is subject to time and only becoming himself fully at the resurrection and last day seems to be accurate and penetrating. This is a good entry point into the basic contours of Jenson's views, who was one of the most significant theologians of the late twentieth century. However, Calvin's supposed acceptance of *theosis* represents a considerable debate among Calvin scholars and requires a much broader range of early modern Reformed sources to establish whether or not this is a valid application of this term to Calvin's thought.

The research topic, namely *theosis* in Robert Jenson and John Calvin, warrants a few remarks. Santoso notes that attributing *theosis* to Calvin is a controversial move, with scholars landing in different places (123). While rightly describing Calvin's understanding of *theosis* as restoration in God's image in Christ, resting Calvin's acceptance of the term on his comments on 2 Peter 1:4 is a slender thread on which to hang his "reluctant" use of the term. In fact, in one place, Santoso admits that Calvin's Christology "seems to make *theosis* an impossibility" (245), at least in Jenson's sense of becoming one being (*homoousios*) with Christ. Therefore, he goes too far in asserting that *theosis* "finds articulation in Calvin's theology" in relation to Christ's two natures. While Calvin stressed renewal in God's image and elevation of human nature above our created state, theologians should remain historians at this point by picking up Cavin's reticence to use *theosis* language, especially in light of the paucity of references to it in his works. The fact that this trend continued among other Reformed authors during and after Calvin's time as well only strengthens such cautions. It is one thing to evaluate the ideas of dead authors; it is another thing to impose anachronisms on them to make a contemporary point. Santoso rightly

critiques Jenson's panentheistic tendencies, his ontological subordination of the Son to the Father, and his reduction of communion with God in heaven to hearing instead of sight (276). He also rightly explains Calvin's view of *theosis* as the Spirit renewing us in God's image, bringing us as close to Christ's humanity in heaven as we can. Yet imposing a term like *theosis* on Calvin, whom the author only cites clearly as doing once, results in potential confusion. If Reformation and early modern Reformed authors hesitated to use deification language to describe glorification and the beatific vision, then we should both let their hesitation stand and seek to ask why they were so reticent. Historical theology must precede retrieval theology for retrieval theology to remain effective.

Despite the above methodological cautions, Santoso's study on Jenson and Calvin is penetrating and insightful. Readers desiring a better grasp of Jenson's teaching particularly have much to gain here. While the author's contextualization of Calvin and the risks of anachronism require some revision and augmentation, in the end, he gets Calvin's general tone right. Studies like this one are complex, especially when the chosen subjects are so far apart in time, context, and ideas. Yet systematic theologians need to grapple with such things. This reviewer's main plea as retrieval theology continues to gain momentum is that theologians need to engage this task without swallowing up historical methodology. We need to grasp ideas more fully in their contexts before asking how and why they might be useful (or not) today. Santoso includes many profound insights even in the midst of some important historical gaps.

—Ryan M. McGraw

Robert C. Sturdy. *Freedom from Fatalism: Samuel Rutherford's (1600-1661) Doctrine of Divine Providence.* Reformed Historical Theology 68. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021. Pp. 357. $150.00 (hardcover).

It is increasingly clear that familiarity with medieval sources is necessary to study post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy. Scholastic method was a vehicle among Reformed authors to convey their confessional ideas. They also drew selectively from medieval terms, distinctions, and debates to frame and apply their own arguments and ideas. While post-Reformation contexts gave shape to these ideas, often resulting in their modification, medieval (and early church) sources remain part of their context. Robert Sturdy explores Samuel Rutherford's doctrine of providence, stressing divine and human freedom, with expert skill, incorporating a wide range of medieval and post-Reformation sources. Based on these sources, he concludes that Rutherford maintained divine and independent freedom, as well as a subordinate human freedom, which distinguished his views from mere fatalism. This study is interesting in its chosen subject and serves as a model for historians of intellectual history.

In seven chapters, the author explores these themes in relation to Rutherford's life, God's being, knowledge, will, and power, moving into the relationship between

creation and providence concursus in relation to human freedom. The author's primary research question amounts to, What is Rutherford's doctrine of providence, and how should we understand it in light of medieval and early modern thought? (17). Bringing his material up to date with the lively debates between authors like Antonie Vos, Paul Helm, and Richard Muller (27–29), Sturdy reassesses whether it is proper to label Rutherford's theology as fatalistic. Particularly, he usefully situates Rutherford's teaching in its medieval and early modern backgrounds, giving readers a broad trajectory analysis of Rutherford's scholastic Latin works. As Rutherford argued for a "friendly union" of divine sovereignty and human freedom, Sturdy argued that divine freedom from fatalism secured human freedom and that Rutherford's views did not fit neatly into the categories of "determinism, compatibilism, or libertarianism" (34). Only chapters six and seven address divine providence directly. However, the preceding five chapters still press Sturdy's thesis forward by illustrating that a Reformed orthodoxy author like Rutherford could not treat providence in isolation from the doctrine of God. One's view of providence resulted from one's doctrine of God. As such, the chapters on God's being, knowledge, will, and power develop logically towards creation and providence and concursus and human freedom (310). Along the way, he illustrates ways in which Rutherford incorporates voluntarist elements of God's freedom to exercise attributes such as justice, and intellectualist ideas such as eternity being a necessary good in God. He also shows Rutherford's adoption of Thomistic ideas as modified by Scotist ones in ways that prevent readers from pressing him neatly into one or the other category. While asserting the primacy of the divine will, Rutherford used careful distinctions to retain the freedom of the human will while leaving the nexus between the two a mystery to a great extent.

Sturdy's historical method is sensitive to often neglected seventeenth-century ideas and contexts. For example, he does a good job illustrating that seventeenth-century Arminian theologians pressed a form of agnosticism regarding the doctrine of God, making doctrines like divine simplicity speculative and non-essential (80). This reticence to affirm classic ideas about God among Remonstrants is often a neglected fact among historians and theologians. Allowing Arminians to receive Socinians as brethren in spite of their views of God and the Trinity led Reformed authors to view them as a radical heretical sect, threatening the entire system of doctrine. Sturdy addressed Arminian divergences in Trinitarian theology as well (99–102). However, Sturdy stops short of Simon Episcopius' representative assertion that the Trinity was not a fundamental article of the faith because omitting it made no practical difference to the gospel. Responding to this fact, many seventeenth-century Dutch theologians went to great lengths to show that the Trinity was both fundamental and the most practical doctrine of the Christian faith. While going beyond Sturdy's thesis, this Dutch context and response to Arminian views of the Trinity, moving the doctrine in an increasingly practical direction, still requires further exploration, especially the influence of these authors on British theologians from the time period.

A couple of contextual omissions stand out. Where the author treats Rutherford's doctrine of the knowledge of God (74–75), it would have been helpful

to situate his teaching in broader Reformed trajectories of defining theology as the doctrine of living to God, placing it in the genus of wisdom (*sapientia*) instead of mere science (*scientia*). Such issues were a huge component of Reformed prolegomena, in which the personal knowledge of God through Christ was embedded in the entire theological system. Likewise, when Sturdy outlines Rutherford's defense of the Son's aseity, he bypasses the debates arising from John Calvin's restriction of eternal generation to the Son's personhood to the exclusion of communication of essence from the Father (103–104). This debate was important since most Reformed authors had an eye to defending Calvin's orthodoxy while maintaining the classic view that one could not divide personhood and essence in eternal generation. Sturdy shows that Rutherford maintained communication of the Son's essence from the Father in eternal generation, thus holding essence and personhood together, but he does not set the context of the debate that began with Calvin and carried over into the seventeenth century. Again, while not essential to his thesis on divine providence, such material does relate directly towards explaining ideas that he introduces in the narrative.

Studies like this one continue to deepen our understanding of classic Reformed theology. They also illustrate the catholicity of Reformed thought, filtering good ideas from bad ones through every age of Christian history through a Scriptural sieve. Bypassing this fact by pitting Reformed orthodoxy against Reformation thinkers is no longer a viable means of dismissing this time period. Post-Reformation developments of earlier Reformed thought must envelop medieval, Reformation, and early modern contexts. Sturdy's research on Rutherford's doctrine of providence helps us in this direction by applying the Reformed doctrine of God to the complex doctrine of providence that touches on evil, free will, fortune, and fate.

—Ryan M. McGraw

Mark D. Thompson. *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction.* Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Edited by Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. Pp. 206. $17.99 (paperback).

Mark D. Thompson, who is the principal of Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, is a fine choice to write an introduction to the doctrine of Scripture for this new series of Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Thompson is well known for his earlier work on the doctrine of Scripture, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (InterVarsity, 2006), and has taught doctrinal courses at Moore Theological College for more than thirty years. The aim of this series is to provide readers with "short studies in theology that are attuned to both the Christian tradition and contemporary theology in order to equip the church to faithfully understand, love, teach, and apply what God has revealed in Scripture about a variety of topics" (Series Preface, 11). Rather than seeking to be comprehensive, exploring all the facets of a particular doctrine in its biblical, historical, and theological dimensions, the authors of this series seek to offer a concise and accessible statement of the

essence of their topic. By this standard, Thompson's contribution to the perennially important doctrine of Scripture succeeds admirably.

Thompson begins his study with a consideration of the question, "how should we give an account of the doctrine of Scripture?" In his answer to this question, he notes that such an account must be "Christian" in the sense that it arises out of an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rather than offering a general or formal doctrine of Scripture, Christian theology needs to ask how the Scriptures themselves belong to a proper understanding of who God is and how he reveals himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the course of making his case for a Christian doctrine of Scripture, Thompson observes that his study does not seek to represent the Scriptures and their authority as "simply the Christian alternative to the Qur'an or the Bhagavid Gita" (23). Contrary to approaches to the doctrine of Scripture that are primarily formal and apologetical, demonstrating that the Christian faith is based upon a reliable and demonstrable Word from God, Thompson sets forth the Scriptures from within the framework of an understanding of the person and work of the Triune God.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Thompson offers a further account of what a Christocentric and Trinitarian approach to the doctrine of Scripture requires. Since Jesus Christ is the "centerpiece of God's revelation of himself," a Christian view of Scripture must consider what attitude he took toward the Scriptures in the course of his ministry. In Christ's ministry, the Scriptures constitute the context within which he performed his work as Mediator. Christ came to fulfill all that was promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. For this reason, one of the tell-tale remarks in the New Testament Gospels is the phrase, "it is necessary." According to Jesus' self-testimony, he came to do what was required of him; it was necessary that he should suffer and then enter into his glory (Luke 24:25–26). Consistent with his awareness of his mission as a fulfillment of the Scriptures, Christ expressly identified the Old Testament as the written Word of God, acknowledged the "double agency" of its divine and human authorship, and affirmed its perfections of intelligibility, truthfulness, sufficiency, and efficacy. Thompson argues that Jesus's ministry exhibits an intimate correlation between the Word become flesh and the Word in its written form. Christ's own trustworthiness as the one who reveals the Father and speaks in his name is correlated with the trustworthiness of the entirety of the Scriptures in their witness to him. Furthermore, Christ not only attests the trustworthiness of the Old Testament's witness to himself but also provides for the New Testament's apostolic witness when he promises to gift the church with the Spirit of truth.

In Chapter 3, entitled "The Speaking God," Thompson offers perhaps the most important part of his case for a Trinitarian approach to the doctrine of Scripture. In this chapter, Thompson appeals to Kevin Vanhoozer and John Webster in making the case for a broadly Trinitarian view of God as a "communicative being" who reveals and acts in a manner that reflects his tri-personal being. God communicates himself through the Word that he speaks, whether in creation or in redemption. In doing so, God acts in a manner that corresponds to his own Trinitarian being as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Just as God "in himself enjoys never-ending, fully realized interpersonal communication" (Vanhoozer), so he is in all of his

dealings with the creation (70). Thompson quotes John Webster's statement approvingly that "Divine revelatory activity is God's triune being in its external orientation" (70). God is present in his Word, which is uniquely and finally spoken in the person and work of the incarnate Word to which the Scriptures throughout bear witness. Through his Word, whether spoken or written, God communicates not only information regarding who he is and what he has done, but also establishes and realizes a relationship with his creatures. When God the Father makes himself known through the Word become flesh, he also enables those to whom he reveals himself to receive the Word he speaks through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of truth, who provides for the inscripturation of God's Word, grants the recipients of God's communicative words the capacity to receive and embrace what he reveals. In his self-communicative acts, God enlists human language to make himself known in a manner that is accommodated to our creatureliness. Though God's communicative acts involve accommodation, Thompson argues that this does not mean "that the language God utilized for this communication was flawed, inadequate, or in error in any way" (71).

After establishing a broadly Trinitarian and Christian basis for the doctrine of Scripture, the remainder of Thompson's study describes the redemptive-historical process whereby God's Word was inscripturated in the canonical Scriptures for the perpetual use and benefit of the church.

In Chapter 3, he provides a helpful account of the way God's "speech" or "communicative acts" were preserved in "the Word of God written." At the outset of this account, Thompson pushes back against the tendency among modern theologians like Karl Barth and Colin Gunton to deny that the written Word of God may be regarded as direct revelation or the "actual words" of God. He observes that God himself secured the inscripturation of an inspired record of his words and work. As he puts it, "God himself … gave the written word a place in the life of his peoples, and he did that very early on in his dealings with them" (91). Appealing to Francis Turretin's treatment of the "necessity" of Scripture, Thompson helpfully observes that, though this necessity is not "in respect" to God himself, it displays God's loving recognition of the church's need for a public, recognized, and preserved form of the Word in the Scriptures. By means of God's own provision of his Word "in stable form," the mission of the church in discipling the nations is enabled. In his description of the way God provided for the inscripturation of his Word, Thompson offers a fine treatment of the (verbal and plenary) inspiration, canonization, and preservation of the written Word of God. The burden of his argument is that the Scriptures are the Word of God in the words of human authors. Through the "double agency" of divine and human authorship, the Scriptures are to be received in their entirety and in all their diversity as the written Word of God, given for the instruction and edification of the church in this present age.

In the last two chapters of the book, Thompson treats the "character" of Scripture in terms of four attributes or qualities: clarity, truthfulness, sufficiency, and efficacy. In each case, Thompson offers a clear, concise, and yet nicely-nuanced definition of what these attributes entail and do not entail. Because the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, they reflect analogically the character of their divine

author. As Thompson summarizes it, "God is an effective communicator [clarity]; without ignorance or deception, he always speaks the truth [truthfulness]; he is generous in his provision for his people [sufficiency]; and his sovereign purpose is always accomplished [efficacy]" (122). With respect to the truthfulness of Scripture, Thompson does not hesitate to affirm that this entails "inerrancy." However, he also argues that the inerrancy of Scripture must be carefully qualified in a way that honors the purpose of Scripture and the nature of the biblical writings themselves.

In view of the importance of the doctrine of Scripture, Thompson's short study is a welcome contribution to the literature on the topic. Indeed, Thompson's book is among the best introductions to the topic of Scripture that is available. While clear and concise enough to be beneficial to church members in general, it is also theologically rich enough to be of value to pastors and seminary students as well. Thompson succeeds in his aim to locate the doctrine of Scripture within a Christian and Trinitarian context. But he does so in a way that upholds the orthodox understanding of Scripture's inspiration and provision by God himself for the well-being and mission of the church. Thompson does not flinch from affirming that Scripture *is* the Word of God and is to be read and acknowledged as such. He also provides an excellent exposition of the qualities of Scripture that reflect the character of the triune God who speaks the truth clearly, sufficiently, and powerfully in the words of Scripture.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Shao Kai Tseng. *Karl Barth.* Great Thinkers. Foreword by Robert Letham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021. Pp. xxiii + 225. $15.99 (paperback).

Shao Kai Tseng is research professor in the philosophy department of Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China. (The author was born in Taiwan and raised in Canada.) Besides this volume on Karl Barth in the Great Thinkers Series, he is the author of two other volumes in the series: Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel. Tseng is also the author of *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology* and *Barth's Ontology of Sin.* As a student of J. I. Packer at Regent College and of George Hunsinger at Princeton Theological Seminary, Tseng is well positioned to review Barth's theology as one "committed," in his words, "to historic Reformed orthodoxy as a neo-Calvinist of Herman Bavinck's lineage" (xvi). Tseng is upfront in saying that one of the goals in writing this book "is to convince evangelical readers that once we suspend what we think we already know about Barth and begin to read his writings charitably, with a rule of interpretation of the text from the text itself, we may find ourselves in a position where we can learn many things from Barth and Barthians" (xvi).

Whereas some volumes in the Great Thinkers Series tend to undervalue (if not belittle) the thinker under discussion—leaving one to wonder how the thinker in question is "great"—this work seeks to give Karl Barth a fair hearing, with a balanced, sober assessment. Indeed, it is essential that writers assigned to review a Great Thinker be accomplished scholars on the thinker under review; Tseng well-qualifies as such.

The author begins his book on Barth with an extensive chapter on "Why Barth Matters Today" (1–35). He shows the vast shadow that Barth's theology casts over modern global theological thought, including the ever-growing engagement between modern evangelical theology and Barth's work. The second chapter does not so much present a summary of Barth's theology—a daunting task—as it explores his ideas via a set of misunderstandings and negative caricatures of Barth's views, which offer themselves, then, for correction, and a clearer, more accurate exposition. The third (and final) chapter seeks to engage and assess a number of Barth's ideas from an evangelical-Reformed perspective.

Tseng challenges the early codification of criticism and subsequent dismissal of Barth by a prior generation of Evangelical-Reformed writers, including Cornelius Van Til, Carl F.H. Henry, Gordon Clark, Fred Klooster, Francis Schaeffer, Klaas Schilder, and, to a lesser degree, G. C. Berkouwer. Indeed, among the above-mentioned authors, Barth only recognized himself, if faintly in places, in Berkouwer's assessment of him.

In this regard, Van Til is the center of attention, where Tseng offers a most charitable assessment of Van Til's vitriolic assessment of Barth. He bids us to move beyond Van Til's construal of Barth. And so he urges us to "suspend what we think we already know about Barth, in order to come to a fair and objective reappraisal of his theology" (41).

Rather than attempting to chart Barth's position on various theological topics, Tseng first expounds for readers some key ideas in George Hunsinger's book *How to Read Karl Barth*. For students new to Barth, this can significantly assist their grasp of the Swiss theologian's manner of expression and apparatus of thought. It supplies a big boost into understanding Barth's theological thought. For our purposes, we will forego an examination of this part of Tseng's discussion.

Next, Tseng examines Barth's views by presenting and refuting several popular myths surrounding Barth's theology. He addresses ten such myths—many of which constitute a serious heterodoxy if true. We list them while adding some shorter or longer commentary.

Myth 1—"Barth was a neo-orthodox theologian" (62). The problem here is that at least three meanings are given to the term "neo-orthodox," none of which accurately capture Barth. Myth 2—"Barth teaches that 'the Bible is merely a witness to revelation,' and that this 'depends on the response of men for validity'…" (65). Well, no, since, for Barth, the Bible isn't "merely" a witness to revelation, though it certainly is a witness; but more, it is Word of God (= *God speaking*) and really becomes Word of God (*God speaking*) according to God's sovereign, salvific activity. Furthermore, the notion that revelation depends on human beings responding to it (or acknowledging it as such) for it to have validity is as distant from Barth's program as can be conceived, for revelation is from above, not below. God reveals himself—humans don't authenticate or make revelation happen. No human being "validates" revelation in accepting it as such. The opposite is the case: the act of revelation (*God speaking*) produces faith and makes a person into a believer. God alone, as triune God, does this.

Myth 3—"The historicity of Christ's resurrection is irrelevant for Barth" (71). This is a most disturbing and outright falsehood alleged against Karl Barth. What Barth contends against is that modern historiography, with its atheistic and anti-supernaturalistic assumptions, can prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Given those assumptions, the idea that Christ rose again from the dead is, for such historians, a non-starter. For such historiography, an empty tomb by divine fiat is a miraculous event and is, therefore, mythology by definition. At best, what historians can say, operating under those principles, is that a Christian community *believed* that Jesus rose from the dead; and that that faith-community produced *sacred writings* (sacred to its adherents) proclaiming that the resurrection is true. That said, what Barth rejects is that we can "prove" the resurrection of Christ from the dead through the historical methodology of historicism. Instead, Christ's resurrection, though it is a genuine historical event, is an article of Christian faith, given to us by divine revelation, not by a modern historian. Since belief in Christ's resurrection is a matter of faith, revealed to us by God, though grounded in historical reality, we will not arrive at a knowledge of it under the assumptions of modern historicism. All of that, however, in no way implies that Barth denies the historicity and necessity of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Myth 4—"But Barth undermines the very notion of 'history' as understood by the average historian" (74). This myth is rooted in Barth's supposed distinction between *Geschichte-Historie*, which coincides with Myth 3. Again, Barth is dealing with the problem of historicism and the operative principles of modern historiography—the academic discipline of writing history. Tseng shows (as others have done) that these two German words both mean "history" and are often used as synonyms. Barth uses the words this way as well. When Barth distinguishes *Historie* from *Geschichte*, the former refers to the writing done by modern historians (using historicists methodology) about historical events—the writing of or about history. It relates to past events as they are subject to the objective measures of accepted historical research—that is, external and verifiable events in accordance with typical standards of historiography (which denies supernatural intervention as an explanation for anything). Barth himself protests this *historicism*, for he believes that God enters history and makes himself known in history. God performs miracles. However, as Barth sees it, historians, as historians applying their research methods, are not qualified to offer a final judgment on miracles, including divine revelation. Such historians, with their methodology, allow no room for the supernatural. As for the word *Geschichte*, the term refers to historical events that the methodological strictures of modern historiography may or may not accept, though in any case, such events have taken place in ordinary time and space and give shape to what we call history. Barth has in mind specifically not only events and happenings that are non-miraculous and natural but also events that indeed are miraculous or supernatural in character and which believers embrace by faith. Christ's crucifixion is *Geschichte*—an event in ordinary time and space, about which historians speak in writing about it, *Historie.* The supernatural and divine salvific effect of Christ's crucifixion is something that *Historie* (according to its principles) is ill-equipped to account for,

except to say that early Christians believed that Christ's crucifixion was sacrificial and salvific.

Similarly, to use another example, Christ's resurrection from the dead is *Geschichte*—i.e., an historical event in real time and space, which is acknowledged as true and believed in faith. It is not *Historie* inasmuch as *Historie* (an academic science that denies the supernatural as provable and usually writes it off as fantasy) is incapable of accounting for this miracle—and all miracles. When Barth calls Christ's resurrection from the dead *Geschichte* rather than *Historie*, he isn't claiming that the resurrection is bogus or untrue or that it didn't take place *in history*, in the time and space world of our experience, nor is he saying that it merely happens in our hearts or on some supra-historical, non-factual, mystical plane or realm of faith. Instead, he is claiming that the resurrection, like all genuine supernatural events, is genuinely and factually true, but it can't be proved *as factual* by the methods of historicism, nor do we believe it because the scholarly experts have mounted enough non-biblical evidence to convince us that it is true. Barth doesn't deny its eventfulness; he denies its provability as *Historie*—just as one can't prove as *Historie* that Christ's death on the cross atones for human sin. *Historie*, then, is the historiography of *Geschichte*, but *Geschichte* includes events that *Historie* dismisses as unprovable. Thus, these distinct words do not refer to two realms or levels of reality, as some have alleged. *Geschichte* is not some mystical realm "beyond" where something transpires outside the reach of ordinary time and space, a plane or realm that is in a mystical beyond.

In summary, when Barth was asked explicitly what the difference is between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, he replied: " '*Historie'* is something that can be proved by general historical science, whereas *'Geschichte'* is something that really takes place in time and space, but may or may not be proved. The creation story has to do with *'Geschichte*,' for instance. It has to do with something that happened and therefore something historical, but something that is not open to historiographical investigation."

Myth 5—"Barth holds that nothing historical can be directly revelational, and that revelation is necessarily indirect" (79). This is not so much a myth as it is a misunderstanding of what Barth means by such an idea, namely that revelation is indirect. (Tseng will explore this misunderstanding at length in chapter three of his book.) For Barth, revelation is a miraculous event because it refers to God actively making himself known to human hearts and minds; as God's activity, it can only be successful and victorious. *God speaks* to the target of particular hearts and minds, and those very hearts are changed. Because revelation is miraculous, it cannot be an event captured and made into a commodity. No miracle can be commandeered this way. Thus, the reason that nothing historical can be *directly revelational* is because revelation isn't just information about God and the gospel, for Barth, but it is God's salvific activity. In other words, revelation requires God's '*now*' *action* to be revelation—something akin to what is often called *divine illumination* in standard theology. If revelation were *direct* (as Barth defines revelation), then it would be like a magic wand in human hands. No, it requires God's free activity to qualify as revelation. Humans can't wield *God's speaking* (call it something like divine

illumination!)—thus, it is indirect: from Scripture to the proclamation of the Scripture in the sermon, where God chooses to *actively speak and change souls.*

While it is tempting to explore further and test Tseng's exposition of other Barth myths in this review, we will simply list the five remaining ones that Tseng presents, saving some comments for myth nine. Thus: Myth 6—"Barth holds to a 'fallenness view' of Christ's human nature" (82). Myth 7—"Barth's Christological doctrine of election is an incipient universalism" (82). Myth 8—"Barth's theology is dialectical" (87). Myth 9—"Barth rejects the notion of an immanent Trinity back behind the God who is self-revealed in Jesus Christ" (91). And myth 10—"Barth's 'traditional phraseology' is 'new wine in old bottles' (93).

As for myth nine, the idea is that Barth *wholly* collapses God's being-and-doing into one another (a kind of Hegelian act-being coalescence), and that he is, therefore, a radical advocate of what has later become known as Rahner's rule ("*the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, and vice versa*"). This needs analysis.

First, there is no denying that some modern revisionist scholars seek to read Barth this way, but, as Tseng observes, even they are careful to state that Barth did not do this. Instead, as a corrective to Barth, these scholars assert that he *should have* done this. That move, consistently made, would enable his theology to cohere with his actualism. But a s*hould have* is not the same as *doing it*. Consequently, the revisionists maintain that Barth was *inconsistent* in his theology, for he failed to escape wholly an essentialist ontology for God. Tseng (with many others) challenges this reading of Barth. Indeed, it is easier, says Tseng, and more charitable, to understand Barth as deliberately keeping both an essentialist and actualistic ontology in play, given the reality of the Son's incarnation. Here Tseng follows in the trajectory of a more traditional reading of Barth, in line with eminent Barth scholars like Paul Molnar and George Hunsinger. Second, what Barth feels burdened to counter in his own theological program is the propensity in classic theology to posit a purer God, a truer God, and a more definitive God *behind* God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. That is, what is hidden from view, what is not revealed, becomes more important than what is revealed. The temptation is to look past Jesus Christ, to glance over his shoulder to discover the more definitive will and purpose of God, and to view what is unrevealed as more important than what God has revealed about himself in Christ. Thus, Barth seeks to counter the notion that there is a different God than God as revealed in Jesus Christ. *He who has seen me has seen the Father* (John 14:9)—that's Barth's burden. This is to say, even if Barth is inconsistent in his own thinking or writing (a debatable claim), it is impermissible to ascribe views to him or draw conclusions for him that he did not draw. Even worse, it is impermissible to posit views to him that he categorically rejected, yet some vehement critics of Barth have felt free to do so. As Tseng states: "[Barth] is emphatically unequivocal that God's love and freedom in the immanent Trinity constitute the condition on which God can love us in freedom and be free in loving us in becoming God-for-us without ceasing to be God-in-and-for-himself" (93).

In analyzing Barth's theology, the last chapter of Tseng's book addresses several issues that require further analysis and critical engagement.

In treating "mediated knowledge of God," Barth has in mind the inability of human beings to have "immediate epistemic access to God's essence *ad extra*" (98). Knowledge of God must come from God, and "only through his *ad extra* act of self-revelation in creaturely and historical forms…." (99). That it comes to us in creaturely forms makes it, by definition, "necessarily indirect," which has nothing to do with some species of Kantian allegory or Kierkegaardian dialectics. Rather, it is a classically orthodox affirmation—humans depend upon God's revelation of himself if they are to have "any knowledge of him" (99). Revelation requires God's gracious condescension and accommodation; God has to stoop and communicate with us in human forms, accommodating himself to human capacity—which is a mediated revelation of himself (see H. Bavinck, *Ref. Dog.*, I, 309–10). Both ontologically and hamartiologically, the distance between God and humans requires this divine condescension and accommodation. Here Barth stands on the orthodox side of the divide regarding the question of "God-talk" (or human language for God) and how a univocal view of language for God (as promoted by Carl F. H. Henry and Robert Reymond, among others) falls on the unorthodox side of this divide. Our "knowledge of God can only be analogical," not univocal or equivocal (103). Tseng argues that too many contemporary Evangelical and Reformed writers misunderstand the historic formula of God's essential unknowability—God's triune essence *ad intra.* And this misunderstanding plays out theologically in unhelpful ways.

Tseng also takes us to a discussion of "mediatory and propositional revelation." He argues for "a Reformed-Covenantal approach to general and special revelation" (108). "Against those who directly identify revelation with Scripture without distinction," we need, says Tseng, to be reminded that "revelation and Holy Scripture are logically distinct but not separable" (109). In opposition to a dominant strand within American evangelicalism which views propositional statements as being the revelation of the Bible so that they take on a virtual divinity, Tseng bids us to be more guarded and careful on this question. Although Barth's version of the threefold form of the Word of God (revelation, Scripture, and Preaching) has problems in light of his view of Scripture, nonetheless, his formal distinction between the Word of God revealed and the Word of God written should be honored, for it brings us back to the distinction between Christ's incarnation (the essential hypostatic Logos) and the inscripturated Word (as championed in the Reformed tradition) (110). While Scripture is originally God speaking to us in creaturely language, Scripture does not take on the divinity of a hypostatic union—"distinction" and "inseparability" must be maintained. Tseng argues that Barth does not adequately protect the "inseparability," while evangelicalism does not sufficiently protect the "distinction." Here Tseng points us to the valuable contributions of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the doctrine of revelation (as unveiled by Rich Gaffin), demonstrating how these theologians provide a way forward (see 111–115).

Tseng believes that the Reformed doctrine of the *pactum salutis* protects classic orthodoxy from a *Christless* doctrine of revelation or otherwise from a doctrine of the history of revelation that is not *in Christo.* While I would maintain that a proper

Christological doctrine of revelation is possible without the doctrine of the *pactum*, it is likely impossible where the doctrine of the covenant of works is simply grounded in human nature, as a creational given, and thus as a natural human proclivity, versus seeing it as God's gracious provision toward his human image-bearer, enabling a relationship of fruition with God, inasmuch as God condescends in the form of special (pre-fall) revelation to establish that covenant and to reward (according to the gracious covenant arrangement) already owed works of faith and obedience. Barth reads Reformed federalism, especially the Coccejan species of it, as positing a *tit-for-tat* religion in paradise that is thoroughly Christless and graceless. But the *pactum* opened up a view of Adam in paradise as a type of Christ

For the Reformed, even the beatific vision is mediated to us through the Son as our Mediator, through his incarnation, which means humans "never have immediate epistemic access to God's inward essence." And the payout of this, for Tseng, is "that there is no reason for evangelicals who respect the Reformed tradition to be appalled by the Barthian contention that revelation is indirect, so long as this contention is not interpreted within the problematic framework of (neo-)Kantian or allegedly Kierkegaardian dialectics so often imposed on Barth" (124–125). Tseng proposes that we, in holding to propositional revelation and to Scripture as verbally inspired, should heed Barth's reminder "that our living God reveals himself not through abstract propositions, but rather through propositions concretely determined by the covenantal-redemptive history of his dealings with us in Christ. Barth's insistence on the indirectness of revelation reminds us … [that] we cannot gain unmediated knowledge of God *per essentiam* through propositional revelation. Our knowledge of God's essence is mediated by covenantal-redemptive history, centered on the person and work of Christ. This knowledge is only an ectype of God's archetypal self-knowledge, and the two can never be univocal" (125).

While it would be intriguing to explore further Tseng's analysis of Barth on his use of "saga" in biblical-theological discourse and also the problematic feature of Barth's *actualism* relative to constructing a Christian worldview, we instead land briefly on Tseng's comments about Barth's Christocentrism, which Barth developed into an ontology that compromised his doctrine of sin, and which in turn compromised his doctrine of sanctification. Barth's well-known stance against Hitler and the Nazis, calling the German Christians to repentance, and establishing a Confessing Church, bespeaks an ethical heroism that should not be muted. That heroism, however, cannot mute his own personal moral failings relative to introducing a third party into his marriage, that of his long-time research assistant Charlotte von Kirschbaum. Barth's theology, says Tseng, especially its "Christocentric ontology does not seem to have offered him sufficient motivation for the mortification of sin. His ontological *simul* can easily leave room for excuses to remain in sin…" (142). Barth certainly recognized the seriousness of sin, but his theology did "not adequately encourage the quest for godliness and mortification of sin" (143).

Tseng's book provides a genuine service to Barth and to confessionally Reformed persons who have steered clear of Barth's thought because of its assumed heterodoxies. Tseng gives readers a charitable examination and critical assessment of

Barth while folding into his discussion an earlier generation of Barth interpreters, Reformed orthodox writers, and neo-Calvinistic theologians. This is a valuable book and speaks well for the Great Thinkers series. The book is appended with a helpful thirty-seven-page glossary, offering apt definitions of essential phrases and terms for understanding Barth's thought.

For pastors who are unfamiliar with Barth's writings firsthand (other than the tidbits and warnings picked up from a variety of secondary sources), the question might be percolating in their minds whether Barth is worth the effort, especially given some of his overt shortcomings, and given that his theology does not always track with confessional Reformed orthodoxy. That is a difficult question to answer—pastors' time is precious and how that time is best spent to fuel pastoral labors is undoubtedly individual. But I venture this reply: First, in order to jump into Barth's thought, one is benefitted by the earlier mentioned title of George Hunsinger, along with a number of recent short introductions to Barth's work. Second, beginners wishing to tackle Barth's *Church Dogmatics* likely do better to start their reading at volume II/2 or IV/1 than from the beginning. Third, without theological curiosity and a hunger to be stretched and challenged—iron sharpening iron—a journey into Karl Barth's theology will not go far. Finally, given the resurgence in Barth studies and a renewed evangelical engagement with Barth thought, I judge it better to know Barth firsthand than to trust the shrill dismissals of his theology. Tseng's book, thus, opens a helpful path for those who have heeded the sign long posted at the gate of his *Church Dogmatics*, "Keep Out!" and wish to discover for themselves what all the fuss is about.

As one who has spent many years assessing Barth's theology—like Tseng, from an orthodox Reformed position in Bavinck's trajectory—this book, in many respects, well-reflects my own learned caricatures of Barth (from respected teachers and books) and my own corrected restatement and exposition of many of his theological positions. This isn't to endorse Barth's theology; instead, it is to understand his views, (hopefully) reflecting how Barth understood himself. That is a goal we should wish to achieve in studying any theologian. In doing this well, we find ourselves in a position to assess and censure Barth—and censure him we should. But Tseng is correct in debunking long-ingrained misapprehensions of Karl Barth. This book will prove provocative for some but offers an invitation to all to learn from a profound, thoughtful theologian—despite his evident shortcomings.

—J. Mark Beach