

BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

Matthew Barrett. *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023. Pp. xv + 981. \$59.99 (hardcover).

Matthew Barrett, Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has written a new book on the Reformation. Surely, the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses in 2017, which witnessed the production of many histories of the Reformation, should have furnished us with all the books we need for now. Those histories have gone in several directions, including helping us to see that it is better to speak of "Reformations" across Europe and Britain rather than a singular "Reformation" that was unvarying in its expressions and impact. We can grant this point about variegated Reformation—certainly Reformation under Henry VIII was quite different than the Reformation(s) in Zurich or Geneva—along with other points that recent histories have highlighted about matters distinct from but touching on the Reformation (things pertaining to the Counter-Reformation and Radical Reformation, for example). The comprehensive treatment of the Reformation and related topics we've enjoyed in recent years might suggest sufficient treatment of the subject.

This reviewer believes that this new book, however, is well-warranted. The title and subtitle suggest its welcome *raison d'être*. Barrett's big book, almost a thousand pages, argues what I've been arguing for some time in my own teaching of the Reformation: that the Reformation, as varied as it might have been here and there, did have clear unifying elements (especially justification by faith alone). In no small measure, it was a spiritual renewal movement that restored the catholic church for those who embraced it and did not cling to the errors that Rome had come to insist on and that were a corruption of the gospel and, thus, of the medieval church. Barret argues along these lines in this monumental new treatment that all theological students and interested laypersons can profitably read and ponder.

Some of us, as has Barrett, have put the matter provocatively in recent years: Luther did not split the church, as many of us grew up hearing; rather, Leo X, the Roman pontiff in Luther's day, split the church when he refused the call to biblical renewal that Luther issued, and that would be taken up and further developed by Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and others. What Luther and other Reformers called for was not the rejection of the catholic church as such but the renewal of that church to recover and extend its earlier heritage, especially as expressed by Augustine. The genius of Barrett's new book is to argue for more continuity between the Reformation and the ancient and medieval church than many Reformed, evangelicals, and other Protestants have historically asserted and that the Roman Catholic Church has denied altogether.

Many have assumed, in evangelical circles, that the great doctrines of the Reformation, especially as summarized in something like the five *solae*, languished in utter neglect since the time of the apostles, the church having abandoned them throughout her history, and only come “back to the Bible” in the time of the Reformation. Barrett shows, from a variety of theological angles and in all the places that Reformation occurred, that this radical discontinuity did not occur in the fashion imagined and that there’s far more continuity between the Reformation and what preceded it in the earlier church than many have recognized or acknowledged.

Having said that and given Barrett his due in writing a book that properly recognizes the Reformation as the recovery of the church as described in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, let me now proceed to some criticisms. While I do think that the primary note in the development of church history from the ancient times through the magisterial Reformation is one of continuity, even as it is in terms of the covenant of grace in the Old and New Testaments, I think that Barrett overemphasizes continuity and downplays some legitimate discontinuity. Take the area I mentioned above as a unifying aspect of the Reformation—its view of justification. Barrett raises the necessary question of whether Luther’s view of justification involves innovation that imperils catholicity, defending Luther’s continuity here with the earlier church (532).

I agree that Luther and his fellow Reformers who stand with him have not, in their doctrine of justification, embraced a novum that destroys catholicity. However, even as I think that Torrance may have over-argued his case that the Apostolic Fathers are graceless in their soteriology, thus over-emphasizing their discontinuity with the apostles, I do think that he was right to argue for discontinuity, as they minimized Pauline grace, such not being properly reembraced until Augustine. Similarly, Luther goes beyond Augustine and Aquinas in their view of justification; the view of Luther and Melancthon thus has elements of discontinuity with and progress beyond Augustine and Aquinas. Even if Augustine and (the later) Aquinas saw salvation for the elect as all of grace, they also saw justification as a process. Luther and the Reformation came to see justification not as a process but as something punctiliar and definitive, based on the work of Christ, something external to us, and thus as an “act” of God’s free grace to be received by faith alone.

Regarding the definition of justifying faith, Barrett, purporting to summarize Richard Muller, argues that Calvin “sounding a lot like Thomas Aquinas, but also Augustine” delineated “three aspects of faith: knowledge, will or assent, and trust” (179). But this is not quite how Augustine and Aquinas spoke of faith. Augustine regarded those first two aspects (knowledge and assent) of faith as unformed faith. So did Aquinas. And what both of them thought gave faith its form (making it formed faith) was *caritas* (love), not *fiducia* (trust). Luther quite explicitly recognized this and contrasted his view with theirs, with Calvin agreeing with Luther that the Reformation has *fiducia*, not *caritas*, as the final element of saving, justifying faith. *Caritas*, love, means keeping the law, which the Reformers saw as the fruit of true faith, not its essence; introducing law-keeping into the essence of justifying faith betrays its true character and amounts to legalistic subversion of the grace of the gospel.

There has been much debate in recent years regarding the relationship between Thomas Aquinas and those in the Reformed tradition. Barrett comes down squarely on the side of “when the Reformers rejected scholasticism, they did not mean the ‘sounder Scholastic’ Thomas.” I agree that Thomas was a sounder scholastic and that there’s something there to work with from a Reformational viewpoint. However, I am not convinced that there is also not some real discontinuity with Thomas, certainly in terms of eucharistic theology, the beatific vision, and the like. To put it another way, I agree with Lane Tipton’s appreciation of Thomas’s rejection of voluntarism and God accommodating himself to creation (front-door mutualism). I also agree with Tipton’s criticism of back-door mutualism and what can in Thomas threaten the creator/creature distinction in the divinization of man, something avoided in the deeper Protestant conception of a proper covenantal approach (such as Geerhardus Vos evinced). In that great debate about Thomas, I probably come down in the middle of those who, in my view, want to embrace Aquinas too eagerly and those who would prefer to reject him altogether.

So, I believe there is an overall unity from the ancient church to the medieval church to the Reformation of the church. There are also important discontinuities that must be attended to and which we must appreciate. As Fairbairn says in his new book, reviewed herein, “We need to recognize that in the *articulation* (as distinct from the affirmation) of central doctrine, the church got better not worse, as time went along” (10). Another way of putting this for our focus here, the relation of the articulation of doctrine in the Reformation from what preceded it, is that we should not be shy in noting the clear advance in the area of justification and the faith that is justifying that the Reformation represents. As I’ve written elsewhere about Luther’s insights: “Is this anymore discontinuous than in moving from Justin to Origen to Athanasius on God and Christ? Or from Chrysostom to Gregory I to Anselm on the atonement? Or from Tertullian to Augustine on free will?” There is some admitted discontinuity in the development of church history, but only because the church bettered its articulation of foundational doctrine.

Sometimes, Reformed Christians, lamenting all the division in the catholic church visible, long for a recovery of the church of the ecumenical creeds, just wanting to restore or retrieve that “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” We must indeed affirm the ecumenical creeds and see them as necessary. But not sufficient. If they are sufficient, then we should not have had a Reformation. We had a Reformation because some things needed to be said with clarity and conviction that had thus far escaped the church in her doctrinal formularies. They are said in the confessions and catechisms of the Reformation, through which lens we now read the ecumenical creeds. The creeds themselves, because of doctrinal shortcomings and errors, particularly in the late medieval church, needed something more fully to explain them rightly in the light of the Reformation, which, as Barrett rightly notes, was, at its heart, a renewal movement that the Spirit used to retrieve the church as set forth in the four-fold attributes of the Nicene Creed. Barrett aptly demonstrates that the recovery of the reality of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church that the Reformation involved was a true blessing to all the saints, both then and now.

— Alan D. Strange

Nigel Biggar. *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*. London: William Collins, 2023. Pp. xvi + 480. \$34.99 (hardcover).

This is a fascinating book in our post-colonial and even anti-colonial era. Its author, Nigel Biggar, an Anglican priest and theologian, has recently retired as Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology from Oxford University. Biggar writes this “moral assessment” of colonialism not as a historian of the British empire but as an ethicist interested in answering the challenge of the plethora of Marxist and like-minded academics, who, in recent years, have found the whole history of Britain, in its imperial manifestations especially, to be nothing but an interminable train of usurpations of its own colonists and other sovereign nations over the last few centuries.

As one might expect in these radically progressive days, this book, though enjoying a distinguished author who was created a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the monarch’s 2021 Birthday Honours (for services to higher education), almost did not get published. Though initially heartily supportive, the original publisher, Bloomsbury, abandoned the project due to internal pressure from its young progressive staff, leaving Professor Biggar’s work asea. HarperCollins and its London imprint, William Collins, came to his rescue, and this book was published despite demands for its cancellation. Biggar does not explicitly seek to defend the greed, exploitation, slavery, racism, and many other sins that have attended the British empire and its colonialist ventures. He acknowledges that there have been many abuses in the colonialist history of Britain as there have been in all other earthly societies, in all the kingdoms of this world.

As he looks at the motives for colonization, both good and bad (19–44), he notes many of the driving motives were, in their inception at least, innocent (whatever depredations ultimately attended them) and that some of the most prominent motives were even morally admirable, as was the sense of vocation among colonizers to lift local oppression and establish stable self-government (44). He goes on to deal with slavery, racism, conquest, cultural assimilation, trade, nationalism, violence, and other relevant moral matters, finding ultimately that Britain’s commitment to self-examination and an open society that held parties accountable meant that her colonial past, while hardly spotless, fared far better under the ethical microscope than did “illiberal totalitarianism that is incapable of self-correction and results in the likes of Stalin’s purges of 1936–8, Mao’s Cultural Revolution of 1966–76 and Pol Pot’s ‘killing fields’ of 1975–9” (292).

The question of “how bad was colonialism?” thus must always be asked along with the follow-up question, “compared to what?” If one compares colonialism to some utopian ideals that have never existed (all the actual utopian historical instantiations are quite wretched and far more pernicious to humans than anything that ever existed in Britain), then it might come off badly. But Britain, whether in the form of its older Empire or present-day Commonwealth of Nations, comes off far better than almost anything else that it might be compared to, even the United States in certain respects. The US does not come off well, for example, in comparison to Britain, when it comes to racism historically. Frederick Douglass noted in his visit to Britain in the late 1840s a “perfect absence” of the racial hatred he experienced in the US, and

a century later when the US Army arrived in Britain in the Second World War and asked for local British help in accommodating its policy of racial segregation, the native population balked (290).

To put it all in perspective, perhaps a classic observation of Thomas Sowell would be helpful. Since much of Biggar's book deals with the assertion of recent leftists, who see the whole of British imperial history as an extended exercise in cupidity and abuse on the part of the white ruling class(es), Sowell's observation seems particularly fitting: what was wrong and abusive in British imperial history (think particularly of slavery, racism, and classism) was what was wrong in all empires (indeed all nations) throughout human history. The recognition of such wrongs, however, and the determination to do something about them was what was often unique about British imperial history (and American imperial history in its own way).

Trenchant opposition to slavery, then to racism, was not something that characterized other societies in history and other societies at the time that it came to characterize societies in Britain and America, as well as other Western nations. For all of Britain's imperial problems and abuses, she ultimately became a world leader in addressing and seeking to eliminate such problems. One would never know it, however, from the current crop of imperial critics who can only see the bad of the past and generally use that to call for "cures" (like some form of socialism/communism) that have themselves had many past problems and, in fact, have either not worked well, at best, or have been disastrous at worst.

We are all in Biggar's debt for his sound and measured treatment of colonialism's evident problems and, in the British context, the willingness to see and address such issues. Given how the whole world has engaged in empire building and colonialism throughout world history, Britain's colonialist efforts were hardly as bad as the progressives claim and ultimately have yielded much good. One hopes that this can be recognized and that all the good done by Britain historically, in spite of her problems, will not simply be undone by an unwise embrace of what the progressive opponents of colonialism urge upon us now.

— Alan D. Strange

Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower, eds. *Unlimited Atonement: Amyraldism and Reformed Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2023. Pp. 240. \$25.99 (paperback).

In the history of Reformed theology, one of the most complex and disputed points of doctrine is the question of the particularity or definiteness of Christ's work of atonement. In popular parlance, this doctrine is commonly known as "limited atonement." However, this language is misleading and was used by Arminian or Remonstrant theologians to suggest that the Reformed view diminished the value of Christ's atoning sacrifice. In the context of debates regarding the scope of Christ's work of atonement among North American evangelicals, the language of "four-point Calvinist" is often used to describe those who agree with four of the main points of

doctrine affirmed in the Canons of Dort, but disagree with the second point that deals with “Christ’s Death and Human Redemption Through It.”

Among recent treatments of the history of Reformed theology, considerable attention has focused on the diversity of opinion that obtained in the sixteenth century and early Reformed orthodoxy on the scope and design of Christ’s work of atonement. In particular, numerous studies have argued that this diversity included several versions of “hypothetical universalism.” Older studies of the history of Reformed theology often equated hypothetical universalism with the teaching of Moises Amyraut, a French Reformed theologian at the school of Saumur Academy in the seventeenth century. However, newer studies by Richard Muller and others have argued that alternative forms of “hypothetical universalism” were advanced by other French and English theologians of the period. For example, among these theologians, John Davenant, an English delegate to the Synod of Dort, taught a form of hypothetical universalism that was not necessarily outside the boundaries of the Canons of Dort’s consensus statement regarding the universal sufficiency and particular efficacy of Christ’s work of atonement.

At the risk of over-simplifying the complexity of the question, Amyraut’s version of hypothetical universalism posits a twofold will of God in predestination. First, God wills universally the salvation of all people on the condition that they believe in Christ, whose atoning death was designed and intended to provide for the sins of all. And second, God wills particularly to grant the condition of faith to those he elects to save. Amyraut’s view included a doctrine of the covenant of grace that distinguished between a conditional covenant of universal grace and an unconditional covenant of particular grace. In Amyraut’s position, the atoning sacrifice of Christ was designed and intended by God to provide for the salvation of all people, even though it is ultimately only efficacious to the salvation of those to whom God wills to grant faith. What distinguishes Amyraut’s hypothetical universalism from that of John Davenant, for example, is that he posits a decretive will of God, universal and determinative, to provide a universal satisfaction in Christ for all people. John Davenant’s hypothetical universalism more modestly affirmed that God willed to provide in Christ’s work a satisfaction that would be “sufficient” for the salvation of all. In Davenant’s view, there is no suggestion that God’s will to provide sufficient satisfaction in Christ for the salvation of all expressed a determinate will or intention to save all people. According to Davenant, the universal proclamation and call of the gospel are undergirded by the universal sufficiency and value of Christ’s work of satisfaction. But Davenant rejects the idea that those who do not meet the condition of faith thereby frustrate a feature of God’s will of decree, his determinate (and conditional) intention to save all who believe in Christ.

I offer this brief, somewhat over-simplified summary of the debate regarding hypothetical universalism (of whatever stripe) because it forms the background to the book *Unlimited Atonement: Amyraldism [sic] and Reformed Theology*, edited by Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower. As Harrower notes in the book’s introduction, the authors of the various chapters aim to make the case for some form of universal atonement doctrine, including that of Amyraut. More than that, the authors are motivated by a desire to demonstrate the diversity of views on the design or scope of

Christ's work of atonement that has existed and continues to exist in a variety of church traditions, including the Reformed. The authors share the conviction that the usual assumption that Reformed theology does not leave room for a doctrine of universal atonement is biblically, historically, and theologically unsustainable.

To achieve this aim, the book is divided into three parts. In the first part, "Understanding Amyraldism," five chapters are devoted to an explanation of the Amyraldian view of the atonement. In the second part, "Amyraldism in History and Theology," four chapters seek to illustrate that a strand of Amyraldianism can be traced throughout the history of Reformed theology from the time of the Reformation until the present. In the third part, "Amyraldism and Tradition," three chapters consider the presence of Amyraldianism in the Anglican and Baptist traditions, as well as the significance of a doctrine of universal atonement for Christian engagement with the world. The third part ends with a sermon by Amy Peeler, "He Preparest a Table in the Presence of His Enemies," which is only tangentially related to the book's theme. Due to the diversity of the authors and the complexity of the topics covered in this volume, it is scarcely possible to summarize all these chapters. However, several features of the book are worthy of notice.

First, though the aim of the authors (to defend a doctrine of universal or unlimited atonement) is precise, it is not at all clear that they share a common understanding of Amyraldianism or what version of hypothetical universalism they prefer. Perhaps the most straightforward and useful chapter is the one by Oliver Crisp on "Anglican Hypothetical Universalism." Crisp argues for a form of hypothetical universalism that affirms the "ordained sufficiency" of Christ's work of satisfaction for all and the "particular efficiency" of Christ's satisfaction in accordance with God's intention to communicate its benefits to those whom he elects to grant faith. The title of Crisp's essay, however, reflects a common weakness throughout the various chapters. Amyraut's hypothetical universalism is not clearly distinguished from forms of hypothetical universalism that might remain within the boundaries of the Reformed confessions, including the Canons of Dort.

Second, the book's authors tend to blur an important distinction between the diversity of forms of hypothetical universalism advanced in the early period of Reformed orthodoxy and the *confessional consensus* outlined in the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is one thing to argue historically that various forms of hypothetical universalism were espoused by Reformed theologians in this period. But it is quite another thing to argue that *all* of these forms may legitimately be regarded as within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy. This is to confuse a *de facto* diversity among Reformed theologians with the *de iure* norm for the boundaries of acceptable teaching in Reformed churches. Arminius was a Reformed theologian, but his teachings on predestination and unlimited atonement were judged to be outside the boundaries of what is permitted to be taught in the Reformed churches. It is not enough to make a historical argument for diversity on the topic of hypothetical universalism. It is also necessary to show that a particular view is compatible with the confessional determination of what is biblical and Reformed. None of the authors in this volume offer a persuasive argument that Amyraut's hypothetical universalism meets this standard. Though some authors appeal to Richard

Muller's discussion of hypothetical universalism, for example, none do justice to his careful analysis of the significant differences between Amyraldian and non-Amyraldian forms of this position.

Third, though one of the authors of this volume addresses the "double payment" objection to the doctrine of universal atonement, other objections are not addressed. The double payment objection argues that if Christ as a substitute paid for all the sins of all people, then it would be unjust for God to exact a second satisfaction for any of the sins (including the sin of unbelief) of all people. However, perhaps the most important objection to Amyraut's hypothetical universalism is that it entails a duality, even contradiction, within God's determinate counsel and will as to his intention to save all by Christ's work of satisfaction and his intention to save some to whom he grants faith by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Such a view is clearly proscribed by the Canons of Dort, even though the Canons affirm the sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction to provide for the salvation of any sinner who comes to him in the way of faith.

Fourth, it is noteworthy that the authors' arguments are principally historical and, therefore, almost no attention is given to the biblical testimony that bears upon the question of the scope and design of Christ's work of satisfaction. The only chapter that attempts to offer a biblical case for universal atonement (Ch. 2: "Amyraut as Exegete: Building the Biblical Case for Bi-Covenantal Universalism," by Michael Bird) devotes only a few paragraphs to making this case.

More could be said, but this is enough to illustrate why this is not a go-to book on the topic of universal atonement. Better books are available on diverse views of the extent and design of Christ's work of atonement in early Reformed theology, most notably Richard Muller's *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*. Furthermore, though it may seem a small matter, the decision to use the term "Amyraldism" in the book's title and throughout is never explained or defended, even though traditionally, the language commonly used is "Amyraldianism." This book will likely be viewed as a welcome contribution for those already convinced that some form of universal atonement doctrine is preferred. The book will prove a disappointment for others, especially those familiar with better, more historically informed treatments of the topic.

— Cornelis P. Venema

Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto. *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction*. Lexham Academic, 2022. Pp. xxii + 322. \$36.99 (hardcover).

Recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in what is known as "neo-Calvinism." A considerable number of the writings of the two pre-eminent advocates of the neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, are now available for the first time in English translation. These writings include the publication of a multi-volume collection of Kuyper's writings on public theology by the Acton Institute in association with several educational institutions. They also include the publication of Bavinck's four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, a one-volume abridgment of his

Reformed Dogmatics, a new edition of *The Wonderful Works of God*, his heretofore unpublished writings on *Reformed Ethics*, a collection of his writings on *Christianity and Science*, and a new annotated edition of his *Philosophy of Revelation*. In addition to the translation and publication of Kuyper and Bavinck's voluminous writings, many dissertations and other books have given attention to neo-Calvinism. Within the context of recent challenges to the Christian faith in the public square, several evangelical and Reformed theologians have found Kuyper and Bavinck a stimulating resource for articulating a Christian worldview.

The authors of this introduction to the theology of neo-Calvinism, Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, represent this renewed interest in neo-Calvinism. Brock, who is a minister at St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh and lecturer in theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary and Belhaven University in Jackson, Mississippi, is the author of *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Friedrich Schleiermacher*. N. Gray Sutanto, assistant professor of theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, is the author of *God and Knowledge: Herman Bavinck's Theological Epistemology*. Both write as theologians who are deeply conversant and sympathetic with the theological views of Kuyper and Bavinck.

Although most of the interest in neo-Calvinism has focused upon its social, political, and cultural dimensions—what Kuyper and Bavinck termed the “world and life view” of Calvinism—Brock and Sutanto's book fills an essential gap in the literature. They aim to set forth comprehensively the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck, recognizing that this theology provided the foundation for their articulation of a Christian worldview. As one of my colleagues has often lamented, too many contemporary advocates of Kuyper and Bavinck's worldview neglect to consider how it was deeply rooted in their biblical and Reformed confessional theology. The great strength of Brock and Sutanto's book is their focus on the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck that undergirded the neo-Calvinist revival in the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth century. Though Brock and Sutanto maintain that their book is descriptive and not prescriptive, they acknowledge that they are “broadly sympathetic with many of the claims of Kuyper and Bavinck, . . . even while [they] may agree or disagree with some of their theological judgments” (7). In their estimation, “The theologies of Kuyper and Bavinck not only contain promising possibilities for contemporary dogmatics, but are also a significant but sometimes silent influence behind many theological trajectories today: the theological interpretation of Scripture, redemptive-historical hermeneutics, theological retrieval, Christian missiology, apologetics, and eschatology” (2).

In keeping with their focus on the theological contributions of Kuyper and Bavinck, the authors arrange their study by identifying the key topics (*loci*) of Reformed theology that reflect the most significant and distinctive features of neo-Calvinism. Before treating these topics, three chapters are devoted to several characteristics of neo-Calvinism that distinguish it from a mere repetition of the theology of Reformed orthodoxy in the period after the Reformation. According to Brock and Sutanto, Kuyper and Bavinck were motivated by a desire to express the broad themes of Reformed theology in a way that was both “catholic” in its breadth

and, at the same time, “engaged” with challenges posed by developments in modern philosophy and culture. In their estimation, Kuyper and Bavinck were confessional Reformed theologians who desired to reaffirm the major tenets of Calvinism but in a manner that directly engaged the intellectual and moral challenges of the modern world.

The topics that Brock and Sutanto identify as of particular importance to neo-Calvinism are: revelation and reason (ch. 4), Scripture and organism (ch. 5), creation and re-creation (ch. 6), image and fall (ch. 7), common grace and the gospel (ch. 8), and the church and the world (ch. 9). While I will not represent their summary of all these topics, I will note what they observe about several of them.

Regarding revelation and reason, Brock and Sutanto acknowledge that Kuyper and Bavinck embraced the traditional distinction between general and special revelation. In their understanding of general revelation, both Kuyper and Bavinck distinguished between an original and immediate awareness of God given through general revelation and a secondary rational reflection upon this revelation. Through the influence of modern romanticism, Kuyper and Bavinck accented “an affective and implanted knowledge of God quite independently of the exercise of creaturely reason” (96). Though Kuyper and Bavinck affirmed a robust doctrine of general revelation, neither of them believed that a natural theology, based simply upon general revelation and articulated through “natural-theological proofs for God’s existence,” was possible apart from the more fulsome light of special revelation in Scripture (94). Though Brock and Sutanto do not associate neo-Calvinism with the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, it is evident that Van Til’s view of natural theology reflects some of the tenets of neo-Calvinism.

One of the areas where the neo-Calvinists, Kuyper and Bavinck, have played an important role in modern Reformed theology is the doctrine of Scripture. Brock and Sutanto entitle their chapter on this topic, “Scripture and Organism,” to reflect Kuyper and Bavinck’s emphasis on the “organic” nature of Scripture’s inspiration. This language has become commonplace in modern evangelical and Reformed discussions of the inspiration of Scripture due to Kuyper and Bavinck’s influence. An “organic” view of inspiration emphasizes the way the Spirit sovereignly enlists the human authors of Scripture, superintending their writing in such a way that the written word is truly God’s word and, at the same time, fully the word of the particular author. By means of their doctrine of organic Scripture, Kuyper and Bavinck sought to meet the challenge of modern biblical criticism without abandoning the historic Christian doctrine of the inspiration, authority, and infallibility of Scripture.

The most important chapters of Brock and Sutanto’s book address three main tenets of neo-Calvinism. One of the central claims of Kuyper and Bavinck is that God’s work of redemption in Christ does not “supplement” his work of creation but “renews” and “re-creates” the world to the extent that it lies under the curse and is broken through the fall. God’s grace in Christ *perfects nature*. As Bavinck expresses it, “recreation . . . [is] a joyful tiding of the renewal of all creatures” (133). The doctrine of common grace, especially as it was formulated and developed by Kuyper, emphasizes the general favor of God that sustains the creation order in spite of sin. God’s common or preserving grace provides a context within which his work of

redemption is able to be accomplished, and the cultural mandate carried out. Brock and Sutanto note that these tenets cohere with Kuyper and Bavinck's distinction between the church as an "institution," whose special calling is to minister the word of the gospel, and the church as an "organism," the body of Christ whose members are engaged in serving Christ in every appropriate calling in the world.

After offering a summary of Kuyper and Bavinck's theological formulations with respect to these dogmatic topics, Brock and Sutanto conclude the book with a chapter, "16 Theses." In this chapter, they summarize some of the characteristic themes of neo-Calvinism and their implications for contemporary theological reflection.

This book will prove to be a helpful resource for readers who wish to become acquainted with the theology of neo-Calvinism. Brock and Sutanto offer an engaging and thorough treatment of the topics they identify as characteristic features of neo-Calvinism. Perhaps due to their sympathetic and descriptive reading of Kuyper and Bavinck, they sometimes understate potential problems in Kuyper and Bavinck's theologies liable to misinterpretation or misuse. For example, some critics of Kuyper have argued that his doctrine of "common" grace is not integrated adequately with his doctrine of "redemptive" grace. In their chapter on common grace, Brock and Sutanto acknowledge that Kuyper is not always consistent in his formulations of the relation between common and redemptive grace. However, they do not offer an altogether satisfying answer to some of the criticisms of neo-Calvinism on this topic. Similarly, in their chapter on Kuyper and Bavinck's doctrine of Scripture, Brock and Sutanto do not give much attention to Richard Gaffin's extensive treatment of whether they taught a doctrine of Scriptural infallibility or inerrancy. Since a number of contemporary writers have appealed to Kuyper and Bavinck in order to reject the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, it is unfortunate that the chapter on Scripture leaves this issue somewhat open-ended or unresolved. The same observation could be made regarding the neo-Calvinist distinction between the church as an "institute" and an "organism." Here, too, erstwhile followers of Kuyper and Bavinck have taken this position in a direction that seems more a misappropriation of their view than an appropriation of it.

Readers acquainted with the long history of appeals to Kuyper and Bavinck on these and other issues may be a little disappointed that Brock and Sutanto do not address some of the controversies that have arisen with respect to them. But this would no doubt change the character of the book and its focus upon an exposition of Kuyper and Bavinck's views on these topics. Brock and Sutanto stay true to their aim to *introduce* neo-Calvinism to those unfamiliar with its theological underpinnings, not to assess the history of its subsequent development and controversies.

Though Brock and Sutanto's stimulating study of the theological underpinnings of neo-Calvin is not likely to be the last word on the subject, it is undoubtedly the best single-volume treatment now available. Admittedly, their book is not written for a general audience or the casual reader. However, this book is a must-read for attentive students of Reformed theology, whether sympathetic to or suspicious of neo-Calvinism.

— Cornelis P. Venema

Matthew Emadi. *The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical Theology*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 60. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. Pp. xix + 248. \$28.00 (paperback).

IVP's recent addition to its New Studies in Biblical Theology is the work of Matthew Emadi, a Baptist senior pastor serving in Utah. The volume is a published version of his dissertation from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, written under the supervision of James Hamilton. His book aims to trace the biblical-theological developments that led to and flowed from David's description of a royal priest in Psalm 110.

Emadi begins his study with Adam in the Garden. The material in this part of the book will likely feel familiar to those acquainted with the work of scholars such as Greg Beale on the temple or Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum on the covenants. This section is not a mere rehearsal of previous discussions, however, because it functions as the backdrop for Emadi's argument in later chapters. His point is to establish Adam as the archetypal priest-king who rules over God's garden-sanctuary. Likewise, he uncontroversially contends that Noah inherited Adam's royal-priesthood as the mediator for his own covenant.

Emadi's argument becomes somewhat trickier when discussing Melchizedek's relationship to these former covenants and the Abrahamic covenant. This question links his previous discussion of Adam and Noah with the primary topic of his book: Psalm 110. If the royal priesthood began with *Adam and Noah*, why does David describe his eschatological priest as "after the order of *Melchizedek*"? Emadi points out the biblical-theological parallels that place Melchizedek in the line of Adam and Noah as a royal priest (43). He concludes rightly that Melchizedek's priesthood is rooted in the universal Noahic covenant (45). He also notes that Melchizedek's encounter with Abraham suggests the universal implications of the Abrahamic covenant (48).

My concern arises when Emadi mentions that Melchizedek may have been the priest of the Abrahamic covenant (57). First, Emadi himself does not seem to take a firm stance on the question (58). Second, I do not believe the covenantal math adds up. It is true that Melchizedek and his royal priesthood relate in some way to Abraham. The two men, after all, interact in a theologically significant pericope. However, Emadi already states that Abraham, as the patriarch, was himself the priest and king of his own covenant (53). What room then is left for Melchizedek? Moreover, Emadi provides several helpful connections between Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek and Moses's encounter with Jethro. I am convinced by Emadi's argument that the two encounters are typologically parallel. If this is the case, however, how could Melchizedek be priest of the Abrahamic covenant? Certainly, no one would say that Jethro was priest of the Mosaic covenant!

Additionally, I am concerned that Emadi's connections between the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants might not sufficiently distinguish between common and special grace covenants. The Noahic covenant was intended to *preserve* the world, not *redeem* it, like the Abrahamic covenant. Melchizedek is better explained as a royal and priestly representative of the common grace (Noahic) covenant within which the new special

grace (Abrahamic) covenant arises. Nevertheless, by broaching the subject, Emadi raises a helpful and insightful question that I have not seen considered elsewhere. Future research should interact with his discussion and work toward a more precise answer.

Emadi next moves his discussion to the Aaronic priesthood. Here, he first establishes that Israel, considered corporately, stands in line with Adam and Noah as a royal priest. He demonstrates this through typological parallels that will likely be familiar to most covenantal theologians. He additionally contends that the Aaronic priesthood functions as a representation of Israel's corporate priesthood. Emadi rejects the claim that Aaron's priesthood and the Levitical system simply replaced Israel's royal priestly role. Rather, Aaron and his sons were to embody what corporate Israel's priesthood should look like. They were a type and picture. Moreover, the high priest himself especially stands in the line of Adam. The details of his garments are reminiscent of both the garden and regal splendor. Thus, even though kingship was a separate office in Israel, the Aaronic priesthood retains royal undertones.

Emadi then proceeds to focus on Psalm 110 specifically. He begins with the psalm's relationship to adjacent psalms and its place in the Davidic covenant. Emadi points out the repeated use of יָמִין in Psalms 108–110 and reasonably concludes this links the chapters together. Furthermore, he notes lexical and thematic connections between the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and the Pentateuch. These points of contact link the Davidic monarchy to the line of royal priests from Adam to Abraham. My one concern in this chapter is Emadi's chiasmic reading of Psalm 110 (81). His point in asserting such a structure is to make verse 4, where David mentions the Melchizedekian priest-king, the central focus of the psalm. The proposed chiasm, however, seems fairly weak. For example, Emadi is correct to note that the "day of power" in verse three and the "day of wrath" in verse 5 correspond to each other. Unfortunately for his proposed schema, verse 5 arguably corresponds more tightly with verse one and its mention of "right hand." It is best to read Psalm 110 as a two-part text broken into verses 1–4 and 5–7 rather than as a chiasm centered on verse 4.

Emadi next proceeds to verse-by-verse exegesis of Psalm 110. He includes within his exposition brief and helpful digressions regarding the relationship of Psalm 110 to Psalm 1 and 2, its typological parallels with Joshua's conquest, and its thematic connections with subsequent psalms. I mostly agree with Emadi's exegesis, and I appreciate his canonically informed discussion of the psalm; however, I have a few critiques to offer.

First, Emadi rejects the possibility that David wrote Psalm 110 as a new visionary revelation in favor of his suggestion that David was reflecting on biblical-theological themes (91). The two suggestions need not be pitted against each other. Could not David's redemptive-historical meditations be the occasion for a visionary experience? I wonder if the subtext at this point in Emadi's argument is concerned with establishing every element of Psalm 110 as within David's human authorial intent. Such emphasis on human authorial intent is characteristic of some scholarship at SBTS (including that of his doctoral advisor). I am unconvinced, however, that such emphasis is necessary to understand the biblical text accurately.

Next, Emadi prefers the LXX rendering of verse 3, which understands ילדתיך as “I have begotten you.” He argues that this further links Psalm 110 with Psalm 2 and is another point connecting the theme of sonship to royal priesthood (110–111). My primary concern with his suggestion is that such an emendation is unnecessary to understand the Hebrew text, and it undermines the parallelism in the verse. It seems better to understand ילדתיך as “your young men” and to view the phrase as parallel to “your people.”

Additionally, in his discussion of verse 4, Emadi does not comment on the peculiar interpretation offered by David Mitchell, even though his footnotes indicate he is familiar with Mitchell’s work. Contra most English translations, Mitchell argues that the name Melchizedek is actually a vocative address of the messianic priest-king. Thus, the text would read, “You are a priest forever according to my promise, O Melchizedek.” I am unconvinced by Mitchell’s argument, but given the notorious difficulty of the phrase and the importance of Mitchell’s work, I think Mitchell’s position merits at least a footnote.

In his excursus on 1 Samuel 2:35, Emadi adopts an intriguing understanding of the promised faithful priest. He argues that David, not Zadok, is the better candidate for the prophecy’s fulfillment. Emadi supports his suggestion in part by proposing an emendation to the vowels on the Hebrew preposition לפני. Instead of reading the text as “he [the priest] will walk before my anointed,” the text would read, “he, my anointed, will walk before me.” Unfortunately, neither Emadi nor his cited sources note that the Syriac Peshitta supports their proposed emendation. The Syriac ܡܘܩܝܡ (before me) is not ambiguous like the Hebrew לפני (before/before me). The Syriac indisputably has the first-person pronominal suffix attached to the preposition. Future work on this verse should include discussions of the Peshitta in addition to the LXX.

Emadi’s discussion of verse 5 addresses a particularly thorny difficulty: to whom does “the Lord” (Adonai) refer? Is this figure to be identified with “the LORD” (Yahweh) or “my Lord” (Adoni) in verse one? Emadi links him with “my Lord” (Adoni). While I agree with Emadi’s conclusion and am excited to encounter a published work that advocates this position, I would have appreciated a more detailed discussion of why Emadi adopts this reading.

In his discussion of verse 6, Emadi helpfully notes that the ראש על ארץ רבה (“head over the wide earth”) is singular. He is not the first to make this point, but it is useful and should be repeated until it makes its way into English translations. The figure, according to Emadi, is serpentine. This connects the priest-king in Psalm 110 back to Adam and the garden. He additionally notes the argument from Peter Gentry that this Satanic adversary could typologically refer to Chederlaomer from the Abraham and Melchizedek narrative. Emadi adds to these connections and proposes allusions to Joshua’s conquest of Canaanite kings. I agree with all the proposed connections, but in my view, there seems to be a significant omission: what about Goliath? Assuming Davidic authorship of the psalm, what adversary could be more relevant? This is especially true given the final verse’s reference to a brook (David draws the stones that kill Goliath from a brook). Nevertheless, I was encouraged to find someone else who sees an antichrist adversary defeated by the messianic king in this text.

Emadi next includes a chapter surveying intertestamental Jewish literature influenced by Psalm 110 and wrestles with the concept of a royal priest. His discussion is brief (relative to the subject matter) but helpful. This chapter could, of course, be developed into its own book, but Emadi limits his discussion to what aids his readers and advances his argument. I am left wondering why Emadi includes a chapter on intertestamental literature but not later Old Testament books. Why, for example, is there no discussion of the royal priest in Zechariah 6? Such an omission is surprising given that, outside of Psalm 110, Zechariah 6 is the most famous passage related to the royal priesthood in the Old Testament. Moreover, like Psalm 110, that text is eschatological and messianic in its focus. This oversight leaves a gap in his argument.

Emadi concludes the book with two chapters devoted to the use of Psalm 110 in the New Testament. He begins by analyzing the royal priesthood and Psalm 110 in Mark. He argues that the beginning of Mark casts Jesus in an implicitly royal and priestly light and then confirms this picture in later sections via priestly descriptions and allusions to Psalm 110. Of course, no book on the biblical theology of Psalm 110 could be complete without a chapter on Hebrews, and Emadi does not disappoint. He contends that the author of Hebrews's use of Psalm 110 reflects the biblical-theological trajectory of a royal priesthood originating in Adam and transmitted through various figures, including Melchizedek and Abraham, who ultimately culminate in Christ. I remain uncertain of Emadi's claim that οἰκουμένη in Hebrews 2:6 refers to heaven (180), but his position is common. Overall, there is nothing objectionable and much to commend in these final two chapters.

Despite my critiques, I believe this is a solid and accessible book. It blazes a trail and sets a baseline for further discussion. Its most important contribution is its focus on the redemptive-historical trajectories that lead up to Psalm 110's royal priest. Future scholars should engage with this work.

— Scott Willis

Donald Fairbairn. *The Global Church—The First Eight Centuries: From Pentecost Through the Rise of Islam*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021. Pp. xxii + 394. \$39.99 (hardcover).

Donald Fairbairn has a wider lens than many Reformed and evangelical teachers of the history of the early church. I confess that my own teaching of ancient church history has been more occidental than the approach of this excellent new history, which emphasizes what's going on in Eastern Asia and India as well, and not only the Levant, Northern Africa, and Europe (as much church history of this period has tended to do).

Dr. Fairbairn is a chaired professor of Early Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and has done us all a great favor in this book. For one thing, he takes us through 800, which brings us through the rise and spread of Islam, the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and the crowning of Charlemagne as emperor. Most early church histories stop at 600 or so, with the pontificate of Gregory the Great; some end with Augustine (354–430). Fairbairn gives good reasons for going later than that in

his treatment; discerning readers may judge for themselves what they think of his approach here.

Fairbairn—and this may surprise many who’ve not read much in academic church history, particularly in ancient church history—actually believes in the Christian God and the truth of the Christian faith. This means he believes the early church sought to deal with truth in formulating her beliefs (think of the ecumenical creeds). This means that there is such a thing as truth; we believe that it’s based on the revelation of God’s word and that we actually can apprehend it (though it remains incomprehensible because the finite cannot fully grasp the infinite). Many historians of the period, particularly in a post-modern context (or a post-post-modern one), are captives of mere perspectivism and read history through that lens, whether a lens of critical theory, genderism, or the like. Such historians deal with the early church’s beliefs only “from below,” looking at the phenomena of her politics, social thought, economics, etc. Such an approach typically regards the “religious” beliefs of the early church as simply a reflection of the power position of those who successfully seized control, declaring themselves as orthodox and their opponents as heretics.

Many take, in other words, a Marxist or related ideological approach to the church and are unwilling to “take the church on its own terms,” refusing to see or acknowledge that this faith community believed all the articles of her creed. Fairbairn not only believes that the church believed her creeds in good faith (not just to marginalize her opponents) but he, as the historian, shares that belief in the truth. This is not to say that Fairbairn takes a hagiographical approach in which he idealizes the patristics, treating them as faultless saints. No, he looks at them in context, considering all sorts of historical factors (including politics, economics, etc.), but not so as to revise them to be something they were not, something that fits some current political agenda. History these days is full of such advocacy, and to the degree that it is ideologically driven is often tiresome and of questionable value.

Perhaps the most crucial thing that Fairbairn does in this work, however, is properly treat the *one* and the *many*. The *one* is the prime message of the catholic church as contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The *many* is the many cultures to which this *one* message was taken and its vital impact upon the nations (as set forth in the Great Commission, Matt. 28:18–20). Fairbairn intends for this book to be used by college students or seminarians. Its engaging style, timelines, maps, and other illustrations serve well for this purpose, and its down-to-earth approach will interest any who wishes to study the early church. We hope that such a study finds an increasingly welcoming readership.

Fairbairn gears the book to evangelical Protestants who may not know the importance of earlier church history, reckoning that what’s vital for us begins in the Reformation or even not until the modern or contemporary church. He gives an effective apologia as to why we should care about church history, including even the history of the early church, often identified with and attended to only by Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodox. All should care about the earliest history after the close of the canon and the death of the last apostles. Fairbairn does note that church history begins with Pentecost, as if that’s the beginning of the church. I would, of course, say that that is the beginning of the church in its New Covenant manifestation, though the

church has existed since the garden. I do agree, though, that the discipline of church history starts later, though I would put the time after the close of the Canon, in the late 90s, with the rise of what we call the Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, et al.).

Many Protestants, perhaps Reformed ones particularly, might wonder why study the ancient church at all: after all, “real” church history begins with the Reformation, right? Fairbairn addresses this with two observations: one cannot understand the Reformation in its context without understanding what went before and how things came to be as they were (it’s like walking into the middle of a conversation if one has no knowledge of previous church history), and studying the ancient church helps really to understand the global nature of the church from the beginning and save us from our parochial views, our propensity to think that how we “do church” in our own church is how it’s done, or ought to be done, everywhere and that it’s always been done that way, at least when done rightly.

Fairbairn notes that several approaches can be taken to church history, especially by evangelicals or Protestants, once we’ve concluded that its study is worthwhile. One may take “the gradual decline of the church” tact, or one may take “the sellout of the church to paganism” stance. Rather than reveal Fairbairn’s solution to these wrongheaded approaches, I recommend reading his exemplary work to discover what he thinks of these and other approaches. He also treats, as implied above, the “orthodoxy is arbitrary” view of many skeptical scholars and finds it wanting as well.

A demurrer or two: Fairbairn notes that the persecution of the church before the conversion of Constantine and the issuing of the Edict of Milan (313) was intermittent, sporadic, and local (largely). It became more widespread in the middle of the third and beginning of the fourth century, but, Candida Moss argues, and Fairbairn agrees with her, is largely overplayed generally. I agree with much of this but not with the whitewashing of Moss, who asserts “the myth of persecution,” lamenting that this has prompted Christians to posit too strong an antithesis between believers and unbelievers. She is an admittedly leftist advocate of rapprochement and writes from a partisan position in downplaying persecution, which our Lord tells us about and which the church has always, in some fashion, suffered (and will until Christ returns). Additionally, Fairbairn argues that heretics, including arch-heretics (Arius, Eutyches, et al.), were not purposely going doctrinally astray and are not generally malicious. Again, I agree that Arius thought he was not off the biblical mark but was trying to defeat modalism. When, however, the church reprovved him for this and brought him up short, he subsequently proved, in his machinations against what the church had declared as orthodoxy, to be a wolf of the sort that Paul warned the church against in his farewell address to the Presbytery of Ephesus. Fairbairn seems overly generous at points with those who remained obdurate and would not yield to the biblical teaching of the faithful.

Having said that, Fairbairn nonetheless furnishes us with one of the most balanced and thoughtful histories of the early church to emerge in some time. His overall assessments are sound, particularly that the Trinitarian theology and Christology (and anthropology as well, contra Pelagianism) of the early church was ultimately unified and expressed the conviction that God came down for us and our salvation, and we do

not somehow gain the perfection necessary to rise to heaven. The expression that Fairbairn gives to this on pages 223–24 (and in the concluding reflections of some other chapters) is worth the price of the book. While disagreeing with Fairbairn’s supposition that Leo’s Tome, which furnishes the Chalcedonian formulary of 451, might contain Nestorian sentiments, I agree with Fairbairn that a Cyrillian interpretation should be put on Chalcedon (as did the next ecumenical council, Constantinople II, 553).

This work is not only for seminarians or other academics. It is written in an engaging, accessible style that should appeal to the interested layperson who is willing to learn a bit about a most significant time in the life of the church: its beginnings, as it developed from a sect not distinguishable by Roman rulers from Judaism to a more widespread persecuted religion, to the dominant religion of the Roman and Byzantine empires. It’s a remarkable story, excelling all others, frankly, and one with which thoughtful Christians everywhere should be more aware.

— Alan D. Strange

Collin Hansen. *Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023. Pp. xii + 306. \$26.99 (hardcover).

Tim Keller lived a remarkable life, just recently going home to be with the Lord. What was so impressive about his life was that someone coming from the relatively small world of confessional Presbyterianism (Keller was Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City) impacted that city and the nation as he did, becoming far better known and revered than figures in such a small circle customarily do. Even his recent memorial service was held in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, with the mourners receiving a welcome from Timothy Cardinal Dolan, the head of the Archdiocese of New York. Whatever criticism one may have of any or all of this, it is historically noteworthy that a PCA pastor has made such a mark in wider circles. Though it’s too early to ascertain what Keller’s legacy will be, differing views of him and his contributions will likely continue to prevail.

Hansen’s book is not a critical biography but rather an appreciation of Keller and the many influences that shaped him, especially, as the subtitle has it, spiritually and intellectually. Keller never claimed to be an original thinker but a derivative one. Perhaps, but he had a remarkable ability to take in a great deal, both from personal interaction and reading, and to integrate it into his life and thought. He had significant powers of focus and retention. He could synthesize and express, and thus popularize to some degree, the thoughts of others, sometimes complex ones that might have been otherwise not tapped into or accessible to his hearers. He remained, until his death, an inveterate reader, reviewer, and recommender of the wide range of books he read and found useful in some way.

Hansen has organized this treatment of the influences on Keller in four parts, roughly covering his early years (1950–72), his seminary training (three years at Gordon-Conwell), his years in the pastorate in Hopewell, Virginia and the professoriate at Westminster Theological Seminary (1975–89), and, finally, his years

as Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, and beyond, in New York City (1989–). This was written before his death, so Hansen does not seek to take the measure of the man in a way that the biography of one who has died might. Neither shall this review, which occurs too close to his death for a historian to give the kind of assessment that only following years will afford.

Some of the chief influences on his life and ministry: his wife, Kathy; various parachurch ministries that shaped the way he did church (IVCF, L'Abri, Ligonier); historical figures that he looked to (Owen, Edwards, Tolkien, Lewis); preachers who influenced him (Lloyd-Jones, Stott, Dick Lucas); and teachers and colleagues (Roger Nicole, Elisabeth Elliot, Richard Lovelace, Edmund Clowney, Harvie Conn, Jack Miller). C. S. Lewis significantly shaped him apologetically and rhetorically; Ed Clowney formed his understanding of preaching Christ through all the Scriptures; and Jack Miller, his pastor while at WTS, impacted his thinking about sonship and the truth that though we are worse off than we think, God's grace is greater than we've ever dared to imagine.

These and others impacted Keller; still, he labored in relative obscurity, though he had some impact on Manhattan in the 1990s until September 11, 2001, and its aftermath. Many flocked to hear him in the wake of this disaster, and his book that followed, *The Reason for God*, put him on the map. Other books followed, and the opportunity for a wide variety of speaking engagements and media exposure. Through it all, Keller remained a committed pastor in his church, humble and thoughtful (ever well-read and recommending books!), always seeking, as he saw it, to steer a middle course between the Scylla of liberalism and the Charybdis of fundamentalism.

Keller's genius was not only being a master synthesizer of the thoughts and contributions of others but also an ability to speak clearly, calmly, and convincingly simultaneously to seasoned believers and strugglers, even skeptics. He came to New York, described by Tom Wolfe and others as rapacious, hard-bitten, and cynical, and left it a better place. It still has problems aplenty, but Keller sought to address them with the words and deeds of a follower of Christ. Many in confessional circles find him too liberal, and he is too much a fundamentalist for progressives. I had him as a professor at WTS in the mid and late 1980s and benefited greatly from his instruction, especially in gospel communication.

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations of the book is how Keller's involvement with and fondness for various extra-ecclesial (parachurch) ministries shaped his approach to pastoral ministry, to ministry in the church. Keller found, as did Jack Miller, the church often to be parochial, self-focused (if not self-righteous), and ingrown. Keller's involvement in Inter-Varsity, Ligonier, and the like in his early years seemed to have set a pattern for him that he employed in his work in the church, whether diaconally, in preaching, or outreach and evangelism.

Keller was not a conventional churchman but one who identified with the outsider (the marginalized, seekers, critics, etc.), perhaps because he always felt like one himself (extending back into his own upbringing and childhood), allowing that identity and sensibility to shape his ministry. Perhaps this is why his ministry has had such appeal to those who might otherwise find church not so interesting or attractive. Keller himself was always interesting, however, and this fine book should be read not

only by those interested in his life and ministry but also by any interested more broadly in the role and impact of Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

— Alan D. Strange

Timothy Keller. *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?* New York: Viking, 2022. Pp. 272. \$29.00 (hardcover).

In one of his final publications prior to his passing in May 2023, best-selling author and pastor Tim Keller wrestles with the fundamentally important yet frustratingly complex issue of forgiveness. In *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?*, Keller seeks to define the biblical contours of forgiveness and apply its basic teaching within the context of a world obsessed with the claims of justice and the cry of outrage.

Few would dispute that forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Scripture teaches that we are born in sin and naturally inclined to hate God and our neighbor. The cross of Jesus Christ is the basis for the good news of reconciliation between God and man. The atoning death of Christ secures our forgiveness and restores us to favor with God.

But as Keller points out, affirming the biblical teaching of forgiveness does not make forgiveness easy. Honesty requires us to admit that we are often poor practitioners of forgiveness. What's more, there is often a great deal of confusion about the meaning of forgiveness and how it is to be practiced. *Forgive* seeks to sort out these issues from a biblical perspective and in practical terms.

Keller uses the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:21–35) as the biblical paradigm for forgiveness. From a biblical vantage point, forgiving another person involves four specific actions. First, a person must identify the trespass as wrong and worthy of punishment rather than making excuses for the trespass. Second, a person must look upon the perpetrator as a fellow sinner with similar struggles. It is to desire what is good for them. Third, forgiveness involves releasing the wrongdoer from liability by means of absorbing the debt oneself instead of seeking revenge or payback. Fourth, the goal of forgiveness is reconciliation as opposed to a permanently broken relationship.

Forgive also identifies two significant obstacles to biblical forgiveness. The first obstacle is therapeutic forgiveness, which involves a private emotional strategy for the one struggling to forgive. Keller contends that such an approach fails to take the active measure of seeking reconciliation with the other person. In other words, therapeutic forgiveness doesn't go far enough in completing the process of biblical forgiveness.

The second obstacle, and certainly one of the most intriguing issues surrounding forgiveness, is what Keller refers to as the current "shame-and-honor culture." The distinguishing feature of this culture is the belief that forgiveness mitigates the leverage held by those who have been offended, undermining personal outrage and victim status. Keller's discussion of this obstacle is undoubtedly timely and helpful, especially in a day when "social justice" is hailed by many as the highest moral virtue.

Perhaps the most controversial part of Keller's book is his pastoral counsel to those who have suffered unjustly at the hands of the impenitent. Keller calls for unconditional internal forgiveness toward the offender, even if that means absorbing the cost of the offense. Although there is a biblical basis for identifying with the sinner and desiring his good, one might argue that the biblical response to the impenitent is not to absorb the cost personally but to entrust the matter to the God who judges justly. Keller warns his readers against delighting in God's punishment of impenitent offenders. Yet, Scripture often consoles oppressed believers with the prospect of God's final and just judgment against those who seek to harm his people.

In light of the importance of forgiveness and its frequent misunderstanding, even among Christians, Keller's *Forgive* is well worth reading. The lessons learned from this study provide guidance on a personal level and offer insight into our day's larger cultural and societal issues. Now, more than ever, the world needs to embrace and practice the kind of forgiveness that God has first shown to us in Jesus Christ.

— Paul Ipema

Trevor Laurence. *Cursing with God: The Imprecatory Psalms and the Ethics of Christian Prayer*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022. Pp. xx + 396. \$59.99 (hardcover).

Trevor Laurence, Lecturer of Biblical Studies at The King's College and Executive Director of the Catechesia Institute (previously a church planter and pastor within the PCA), has written what Peter Leithart rightly calls in the foreword "*the* book on imprecatory psalms" (ix). This published dissertation is, by far, the most thorough work on the subject to date, written with biblical-theological sensitivity and pastoral awareness.

Laurence's thesis is that "prayerful performance of the imprecatory psalms is an ethically permissible—even obligatory—means by which the Christian church faithfully enacts her God-given calling as a royal priesthood in the world" (14). In this work, he aims to "articulate a vision of ethically faithful Christian enactment of the judgment psalms that is both redemptive-historically informed and Christologically nuanced" (14). It is this redemptive-historical and Christological nuance that readers will find particularly helpful.

In chapter 1, after a thorough interaction with the various schools of imprecatory psalms interpretation, where Laurence gives the impression that he has read almost everything written on the topic (20–88), he suggests a path forward which is founded on a method that is exegetical, theological, biblical-theological, and ethically holistic (94–99). He describes his approach as "an exercise in redemptive-historical ethics" (101) and expresses a debt to Graeme Goldsworthy, Stephen Dempster, Thomas Schreiner, Craig Bartholomew, Michael Goheen, Michael Morales, and G. K. Beale in the biblical-theological method he employs, which focuses on the unifying themes of kingdom and temple in the biblical story.

In chapter 2, he (quite compellingly) makes a biblical-theological case that the imprecatory psalms are rooted in the Genesis 3:15 promise, where the enemies “are the seed of the serpent, striking at the heel of God’s people, ever in enmity with the kingdom line of promise” (135). He says, “Close inspection reveals that the imprecatory psalms interact not infrequently with the imagery and expectations of Gen 3:15, drawing upon serpent-related imagery and themes, in overt and subtle ways, in their portrayals of the enemy” (138; cf. his “Serpent Seed and Son of God: The Enemy and the Imprecator in the Psalms of Vengeance,” *Criswell Theological Review* 17.2, 2020, 93–121). The biblical-theological work in this section (esp. 135–146) is quite illuminating.

He then shows that the innocent imprecators in the world of the psalms are the suffering sons of God (or seed of the woman), petitioning God to do what he has said he will in that first gospel promise. They pray these imprecations out of love for God, love for his temple-kingdom, love for his image-bearers and people, and even love for their enemies (see 163–171). “The justice psalms may thus be heard as the battle-prayers of a royal priesthood engaged in the Bible’s most basic conflict, an element of the son of God’s war against the serpent, his seed, and every corrupting unholiness that vitiates the blessedness, sanctity, and consummation of the temple-kingdom of the Lord” (180). They are prayed in the hope that deliverance is on the way from the divine judge, warrior, and king who fights for his people.

In chapter 3, on the imprecatory psalms and the New Testament, Laurence demonstrates that the imprecatory psalms themselves serve as a frequent source of the New Testament’s Old Testament appeals (198–199), and the New Testament engages in its own imprecatory speech acts (200; his discussion on pp. 241–245 of the widow in Luke 18 is especially helpful). But what is most illuminating about this chapter is how it situates Christ as the fulfillment of the imprecatory psalms.

Indeed, he shows how Christ fulfills the role of each of the agents in the imprecatory psalms: he is the ultimate suffering imprecator (200–209), though not to the exclusion of the church which is united to him; he is the divine judge who will one day answer the prayers of these psalms by coming again to judge the living and the dead (230–240); and, interestingly, the New Testament also applies some of the psalms’ judgment imagery to Christ himself in the judgment that he absorbs (see esp. 227–230) so that he can be said to take the place of his enemies, who turn to him in faith and repentance. This, of course, does not mean the imprecatory prayers may not be prayed, for “the adversaries who persist in their violent antipathy to Jesus and his people” will “reap at the consummation that divine vengeance for which the beleaguered psalmist prayed” (230). But it does transform the tone and posture with which God’s suffering servants pray these psalms—recognizing that they were once his enemies, deserving this judgment too. The imprecatory psalms, then, “usher the supplicant to the foot of the cross and the edge of the age to come—and in so doing reorient the praying heart in a manner that cultivates faith and hope and engenders love” (259).

Chapter 4 argues that the imprecatory psalms, in this way, can be a training ground for virtue and have the capacity to cultivate ethical dispositions in the supplicant. The agents of faithful imprecation are God’s royal priests, while the objects

of imprecation include spiritual enemies, human enemies, human systems, and even indwelling sin in the individual and corporate body (263–271). All of these may be prayed against, Laurence argues. And the content of such imprecation includes not only temporal and eschatological judgment but also repentance unto conversion (271–280). This is explicit in Psalm 83:16–17, implied in Psalm 7:12–13, and grounded in the invitation of Psalm 2:10–12 for such enemies to repent. And Laurence argues, in the New Testament, since the eschatological character of the temple-kingdom has shifted, “this renders appropriate a clearer foregrounding of repentance as the principally intended form of desired divine action against enemies” (280–281). This is not to preclude prayers for temporal or eschatological judgment but simply to foreground what is less explicit in the Old Testament.

As Christians pray these prayers for the conversion or judgment of the enemies of the gospel and of God’s image-bearers, Laurence urges that this Christian imprecatory prayer must be born out of love for God, love for his temple-kingdom, love for his creation, and even love for one’s enemies. In one of the most valuable sections of the book, he demonstrates how imprecatory prayer is not incompatible with the New Testament command for enemy-love, but does, in fact, pursue the enemy’s good (294–305). This also means that imprecations must not be born out of a vindictive desire to inflict pain or harm on the human enemy as an end in itself. As Laurence says, in a modification of Paul’s reflection in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, “If I pray in the words of faithful psalmists and heavenly saints, but have not love, I am nothing” (305).

But when born out of the proper loves, Christian imprecatory prayer in union with Christ who polyvalently fulfills them may serve as a means of grace, destabilizing unfitting affections and generating affections of love, as it also moves the supplicant into a prayerful encounter with Christ. Toward the end of the book, Laurence discusses the potential of such prayerful use of the imprecatory psalms for recovery in the wake of trauma, as it unites the one praying to Christ—the innocent sufferer *par excellence* who is able to sympathize with them in their suffering—but also points them to his vindication in which they share, and even in his crucifixion in which their own sins were judged, allowing them to pray humbly, in love, with regard to their enemy. Such prayer also empowers enemy love by freeing the petitioner from the compulsion to enact violence (319–320) and freeing them for forgiveness (321–323). These pastoral implications are among the most useful of Laurence’s applications. He also includes a useful appendix on the liturgical embodiment of the imprecatory psalms.

Any pastor or scholar working in the Psalms would do well to add this book to their library. Though the book is not a commentary and only gives a framework for interpreting these psalms, it has a thorough scriptural index that would be of use in preparing to preach the various judgment psalms. Those involved in trauma counseling will also be interested in Laurence’s work. However, in some ways, his pastoral implications need to be further developed (he admits this in a closing section on paths for future research). All in all, Laurence has succeeded not only in defending the existence of such a pervasive theme in the Psalter but also in teaching the church

how these psalms provide long-neglected tools for communion with God in a way that shapes the body of Christ for healing, virtue, and witness in a world of violence.

— Ryan Swale

Bruce Levin. *Thaddeus Stevens: Civil War Revolutionary, Fighter for Racial Justice*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021. Pp. 320. \$28.00 (hardcover).

Historians commonly distinguish the American War for Independence and the French Revolution. Though there are different schools of thought on the American Revolution (was it a war merely about home rule and not also about who should rule at home?), almost all agree that the war in America—colonists throwing off imperial rule—was not a revolution in the sense that the French Revolution was—a people rejecting the *ancien régime* and embracing radical political and economic reconstruction. The French and not the American Revolution became paradigmatic for Karl Marx and his theorizing about the place of revolution and the radical reconfiguring of society. It is for this reason, and others, that Christian thinkers like Os Guinness have written that the currents of recent years have witnessed American society at a crossroads, facing the question: are we going to develop in the way of the classical liberalism of the American Revolution or in the way of the radical societal (and explicitly anti-theistic) ethos of the French Revolution?

Many of these same historians who would see the American Revolution as quite different than the French Revolution would say that the truly revolutionary war was the US Civil War. Bruce Levine's treatment of House radical Republican leader Thaddeus Stevens (1792–1868) serves as a helpful microcosm to see that the real upheaval that made America what it was to become finds its roots more in that nineteenth-century internal war than in the earlier rejection of British rule. Stevens serves on the personal biographical level as one in whom this evolution occurred throughout his life, a life of increasing radicalization, particularly as he worked out his opposition to America's original sin, chattel slavery, the bane of the American republic.

Though Stevens's national career is famously played out as a Republican leader in the US House of Representatives from Pennsylvania, he was born in Vermont. He lived out his early years in New England. Many have spoken of his struggle with personal adversity (born with a club foot, abandoned by his father, losing his hair and sporting ill-fitting hairpieces, never marrying, and a dyspeptic personality) and the Baptist faith of his family as character shaping, giving him sympathy with the oppressed and a determination to overcome and impose his will on others. His education, including his BA from Dartmouth, nurtured his liberal capitalist principles, though even here, while an academic leader, he was denied membership in Phi Beta Kappa. He could identify thus with being an outsider, resentful of those on the inside, fighting for others on the margins.

This has led to the historic division among interpreters of Stevens: some have seen him as an acerbic, bitter man, determined to destroy the "haves" (especially the

Southern aristocracy, as well as Northern opponents)—he certainly wielded a mordant wit of which there are many hilarious examples—and others have seen him as a sincere and earnest champion defender and promoter of the “equality of man before his Creator” (244), one of the best friends the slave ever had. Levine does not spend much time in this book, as many other works on Stevens do, psychoanalyzing the subject. Rather, Levine’s book is a straightforward cataloging of the increasing radicalization of Stevens to become a stalwart of the Second American Revolution that the Civil War became (or what some would regard as its first revolution, worthy of the name).

Stevens politically progressed from being a Federalist to Anti-Masonic (in opposition to Andrew Jackson, especially) to Whig to, briefly, a Know-Nothing (nativist) and finally Republican, from the very beginning of the party. Levine sees Stevens’s flirtation with nativism, along with a few other things (239), as counter-indicatory missteps along the way to his becoming the true radical that he became. Generally, though, Levine is happy with Stevenson’s development, seeing him as becoming the champion needed not only to end slavery but to help reconfigure the moral landscape of the nation generally and the South in particular so that the promise of the Declaration, “all created equal,” could be realized and lived out in America.

One may recognize that reading the Constitution through the Declaration of Independence was not only a trait of President Lincoln but of Stevens and many others. In fact, Stevens and the radical Republicans saw themselves as doing it more consistently than Lincoln. Stevens started where Lincoln stayed: a champion of classical liberalism who wanted for the slave what he wanted for the white man—a chance for all to better themselves economically, politically, and socially in a free land in which one might freely grow and develop. Stevens was willing in the War and the Reconstruction that followed not only to give the slave his freedom but to give him, at the expense of his former plantation owner master, forty acres and fifty dollars from the master’s land (and public lands). Most of the Republican party, however, could not go along with such a massive seizure of private property. As the rhetoric of socialism and communism was wafting over from Europe, much of what Stevens wanted to do to dispossess large slaveholders of their property and re-distribute it among their former slaves could be argued, to be a form of socialism, a largely unacceptable plan of reparation to most of the party.

Stevens also differed from Lincoln in two critical ways: the nature of secession and the treatment of seceded parties with whom the union was at war. Concerning the first matter, Lincoln argued that since secession was not constitutionally permitted, it was impossible, and the seceded states thus never properly left the union. Stevens agreed that secession was indeed illegal but found the conclusion that the Confederacy had thus never left the Union absurd, as ridiculous as arguing that since murder and robbery were illegal and societally impermissible, they never occurred. No, Stevens argued, the South has wrongly withdrawn and should suffer all the consequences, including forfeiting all their rights and having no constitutional protection. He argued that they should always be treated as rebels. Here’s the second part: Lincoln wanted to treat the states, certainly upon their return, in accordance with the Constitution. Stevens argued that they should be treated while in rebellion as one would treat any enemy with whom the nation was at war and, upon surrender and return, be treated as

one would treat conquered enemies. According to Stevens, the South should be admitted under draconian terms and treated as defeated enemies who had unconditionally surrendered to their victors.

Stevens argued that the occasion of the War and its victory mandated a Southern reconstruction that would totally recast that society in a way that henceforth it would not be a landed aristocracy with forced labor but, like the rest of the nation, a liberal capitalist society in which the freedman was a citizen, had the vote, and was now a landowner himself. Since the freedman had nothing, the only way the latter could be achieved was to furnish him with land and money from the southern aristocracy, who would be dispossessed for this purpose. Andrew Johnson vehemently opposed this, and Stevens became the leader in his impeachment. This is another place where historians and many others (Stevens's personality has invited all sorts to weigh in with their opinion about what really actuated this fascinating figure) divide over Stevens.

Was he the American Robespierre? Levine thinks so, at least in a measure, though not as a mark of disapprobation. If Stevens was the American analog to Robespierre, one might ask, was it good or bad that he wanted socially and economically to restructure America? Levine thinks it largely good because it was necessary: how else were the long-mistreated slaves to be given any measure of justice if not by the sorts of reconstructive ideas and plans of someone like Stevens? Southern partisans and defenders of Andrew Johnson, among others, have cast Stevens in the very worst light. Love him or hate him, Stevens is someone who, whatever his precise motives were, championed black rights in a way that led the way for others to do so and that augured the emergence of a new nation. America, after the US Civil War, was forever changed. Thaddeus Stevens, as much as any political leader, had no small part in that revolution, which is still going on. Thus, he is an important figure for anyone trying to figure out how we got from where we were to where we are, with all the good and bad that involves. He does appear to have had a genuine concern for the welfare of the slaves and blacks in his own time and in his desires for a much better future for them. That was and is admirable and something we can be thankful for, whatever other assessments one might make of him and his place in and contribution to American history.

— Alan D. Strange

Jeanette Hagen Pifer and John K. Goodrich, eds. *Choose Life: Answering Key Claims of Abortion Defenders with Compassion*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022. Pp. 407. \$17.99 (paperback).

Just prior to the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the ominous decision of *Roe v. Wade* that had enshrined abortion as a federally sanctioned and supported procedure for nearly fifty years, Jeanette Hagen Pifer and John K. Goodrich assembled a team of writers to examine the claims of abortion defenders and provide Christians with cogent answers. But what is significant about this volume is not simply *that* the writers are providing answers, but *how*—what the editors call “compassionate engagement.”

Of course, all who speak out against abortion as murder claim to be speaking compassionately; the very act of defending the life of the unborn and helping women avoid the statistically high rates of mental health problems studied in post-abortive women (as detailed in ch. 16) *are* compassionate, at least in one sense. However, as our culture has increasingly been led to disassociate abortion from murder and instead associate it with freedom and women's rights, defenders of life cannot expect that the truths about which they are passionate will resonate with their hearers. In fact, those very truths are likely to have the *opposite* intended effect unless we have the patience and skill to deal with the preliminaries required for listeners to actually see abortion as murderous and dangerous (to both mother and child).

Thus, the editors argue that while we are indeed called to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (citing 2 Cor. 10:4–5), this must be done with tactical precision and care:

Yet the manner of our engagement is as equally important as the method. If we wish for American society ever again to respect—much less reflect—our cherished biblical values, then Christians must embody not only the boldness but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must engage, but do so peaceably (Rom. 12:18). We must speak the truth, but do so in love (Eph. 4:15). We must bear with the assaults of our critics, but do so with “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12). This is all the more important when we step out from behind our mobile devices and social media pseudonyms and have real-life, enfolded conversations with people we know and love. Indeed, if we ever wish to see our sister, daughter, niece, or neighbor choose life in the wake of an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy, we must arm ourselves with answers as well as empathy. (29)

They conclude: “This book seeks to provide such answers, *and to do so in a tone that takes seriously the anxiety and concerns of real women* [who have been led to believe that abortion is their only option], and that models the way Christians ought to engage in public discourse” (29). The chapters that make up the bulk of the book effectively do just that.

The contributors come from a variety of backgrounds, including New Testament professors, philosophers, family and public policy think tanks, non-profits, medical professionals, and lawyers. Several writers are post-abortive women or the children of women who strongly considered aborting them. Thus, they write with qualifications in various disciplines related to the pro-life cause in the US but not removed from the issue, treating it merely in the abstract or theoretical. Yet their “lived experiences” (to invoke a category bandied about these days) are not used to silence people who disagree but to illustrate their passion and commitment to speaking the truth with compassionate engagement.

The book is structured around the following seven pro-abortion claims that this group of pro-life authors is contesting:

1. The courts have already settled the issue.
2. The fetus is not a person.
3. My body, my choice.
4. I should not have to raise an unwanted child.
5. My circumstances justify ending my pregnancy.
6. Abortions are helpful to women and society.
7. The pro-life movement doesn't care about social justice.

Each of the claims receives at least two responses.

Claim 1 is answered with two chapters. Chapter 1, “A More Excellent Way: Moral Decision-Making beyond Government Law” by John K. Goodrich, discusses biblical morality, including natural law and the law of Christ, which must be used to test various governmental laws critically. Just because an action might be legal—in this case, abortion—does not mean it is moral. Chapter 2, “*Roe v. Wade*: Destined for the Dustbin,” by lawyer and post-abortive woman Catherine Glenn Foster, examines the history and legal aspects of *Roe*, including the legal and political environment necessary for *Roe*'s appeal (a moot point as of 2022).

Claim 2 received four responses. Chapter 3, “Made in God's Image: Personhood according to Scripture” by New Testament scholar Jeanette Hagen Pifer, and chapter 4, “More Than the Sum of Its Parts: Philosophical Reflections on Human Personhood” by philosopher Scott B. Rae, provide a biblical and philosophical survey of exegetical data and philosophical constructs invoked in defending (or denying) personhood. Chapter 5, “Knit Together in a Mother's Womb: The Biology of Prenatal Development” by biochemist and infant mortality specialist Tara Sander Lee, details the physical developments of a child in utero, noting that the significant overlap in physical constituency between pre-born and born human beings further underscores the biblical portrait of personhood. Finally, chapter 6, “Equal Protection for the Preborn: A Case for Prenatal Personhood According to the Fourteenth Amendment,” by attorney and legal scholar Joshua J. Craddock, demonstrates the Supreme Court's faulty definition of the word “person” in the fourteenth amendment which led them to deny personhood as defined in this amendment to the unborn.

Two responses are written to claim 3, both written by medical doctors. Chapter 7, “Whose Body? The Illusion of Autonomy” by D. Joy Riley, notes the profound biological effects of pregnancy on women. Due to a process called microchimerism, women and their unborn children exchange cells, leaving mothers with a “biological legacy” (149) of their child, made even more pronounced in the case of abortion. Chapter 8, “Marvelously Revealed: The Symphony of a Woman's Body,” by Donna Harrison, describes further physical changes experienced by mothers in both pregnancy and—with more destructive results—in abortion.

Claim 4 is answered, first by chapter 9, “The Myth of the Unwanted Child: How Adoption Powerfully Disperses the Lie” by Bethany Bomburger, and second by chapter 10, “Mom, Thank You for Choosing Life: The Perspective of an Abortion Survivor” by a survivor of a failed abortion, Sarah Zagorski. While Bomburger's chapter made an able case that the desire of numerous parents to adopt needs to be shared with and factored in by women who feel that their child has no hope of a safe and loving home,

Zagorski's chapter—profoundly moving and personal—approached the idea of “unwantedness” more obliquely, sharing instead the ways in which abortion providers exploit women's insecurities and fears.

Claim 5 receives answers in five chapters, describing how women in the particular circumstance of teenage pregnancy (ch. 11), financial hardship (ch. 12), rape (ch. 13), and diagnosed disability of the unborn baby (ch. 14) have found resources for choosing life even in the face of tremendous fear, trauma, and abuse. Chapter 15, “Are Abortions Ever Medically Necessary? A Life-Affirming Approach to Complex Pregnancies,” by neonatologist Kendra Kolb, brings this section to a close with a detailed discussion of the kinds of medical situations that can threaten the life of a mother and how preterm deliveries (which benefit from tremendous advances in premature birth care) are a better option than abortion. In the case of babies who are not yet developed enough to survive outside the womb, pre-viable separation is still a better alternative to abortion, not just because it sounds less grisly, but because doctors still make an effort—in spite of almost impossible odds—to “optimize the conditions of the separation so that the fetus has the best possibility to live” (276). This chapter was especially valuable in the face of many pro-abortion choice claims that cite danger to the mother's life.

Claim 6 is answered by a pair of chapters that consider the results of abortion on women (ch. 16 specifically considers the trauma post-abortive women experience) and to society at large (ch. 17). The latter chapter not only details the culture of callousness and brutality that is created as a civilization numbs itself from the taking of the life of those most helpless and vulnerable but highlights the general lack-of-responsibility that is inculcated in citizens, especially men who find even less need to think of sexual activity as an act that requires them to be mature and prepared to give of themselves for women and children.

Finally, claim 7, invoking the ubiquitous concern for “social justice,” receives three responses that argue that the pro-life cause is the cause that is most consistently committed to “social justice.” Chapter 18, written by Charlotte Pence Bond (daughter of former Vice-President Mike Pence), systematically presents the tenets of the pro-life position that meet the criteria of “social justice” better than the so-called “social justice”/pro-abortion organizations themselves. Chapter 19, “The Hands and Feet of Jesus: How Pregnancy Centers Care for Women and Men” by medical doctor Sandy Christiansen, catalogs—in the face of pro-abortion choice claims that Planned Parenthood alone provides “health care”—the holistic care offered by pregnancy centers: medical screenings, psychological care for both pregnant women and post-abortive women, support for men facing “aborted fatherhood” (when a woman gets an abortion against the wishes of the baby's father), and a coordination of resources that will help couples who feel abortion is their only hope. Finally, in chapter 20, Catherine Davis unmasks the racial hypocrisy of pro-choice advocates, noting that 78% of Planned Parenthood facilities are located in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods such that “*abortion is the leading cause of death in the Black community*, taking the lives of more Blacks than the next seven leading causes of death combined” (373; emphasis in original).

In sum, *Choose Life: Answering Key Claims of Abortion Defenders with Compassion* is a timely and comprehensive resource for Christians seeking to defend

the life of the unborn in a detailed, informed, cogent manner. Yet the chapters as a whole remain committed to compassionate engagement and model a gentle, sympathetic, and meek approach that is more likely to resonate with pregnant women feeling afraid and hopeless.

As with any edited volume, some chapters are stronger than others. The writers did not stay consistently in their lane, so to speak, as various chapters started to cover topics more relevant to other pro-choice claims. Some of this is understandable, of course, since the claims themselves, as with human life as a whole, are more integrated and less capable of remaining hermetically sealed off from one another.

Nevertheless, *Choose Life* is a highly recommended collection for a range of educational levels and audiences. It is comprehensive and studied, yet highly readable and accessible. Approaches to the pro-life cause such as this will serve Christians well in this post-*Roe* era when states are increasingly finding resistance to their efforts to restrict abortion. The fall of *Roe* did not suddenly reverse 49 years of abortion-supportive indoctrination and rhetoric. There is much work to do. Yet this book will equip Christians to speak on this topic, one conversation at a time, with knowledge and grace.

— R. Andrew Compton

Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel. *How to Read and Understand the Psalms*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. Pp. 588. \$49.99 (hardcover).

Fred Zaspel, known by many for his work on B. B. Warfield, as the editor of *Books at a Glance*, and adjunct professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has teamed up with Old Testament giant Bruce Waltke to make available the content of Waltke's lectures and teachings on the Psalms in this newly compiled work that is sure to become *the* go-to manual on all things Psalms.

The scope of the book is quite impressive, coming in at around 500 pages before appendices and indices, and is both devotional and academic. The second chapter of the book, after an introductory section on the people of God and the Psalms, helps set the tone for the book in its discussion of interpreting the Psalms as believers. The authors evidence a high regard for the inspiration and authority of Scripture and insist that "until we approach the Scripture with a sense of humble devotion to the God who gave it, we will miss the depths of its message" (28).

That message, with regard to the Psalms, the authors demonstrate is not merely a message concerning "Mr. Everyman" (i.e., us or any pious Israelite), but the "I" of the Psalms is the *king*. Perhaps the most outstanding contribution of this book is its treatment of what the authors call the "royal orientation of the Psalms," explained in chapter 4 yet pervading the whole book, in which the Davidic Covenant and God's promise of a king from David's line (2 Samuel 7) becomes the framework for interpreting the Book of Psalms as a whole and each particular part as it finds its place within the book.

The authors also emphasize a canonical reading of the Psalter, highlighting both its editorial arrangement (how the five books of the Psalms tell a story and how the

individual psalms within it are mutually informing) and also its placement within the larger canon of Scripture in which the grand theme of the storyline is Christ. “We have it on his Word that the Psalms were written about him (Luke 24:44), and so we must look to see just how this is so. To read the Psalms otherwise is to misunderstand them and miss the benefit of an acquaintance with our Lord that is intended for us there” (32). These emphases on reading the Psalms messianically and with an eye toward their editorial arrangement are covered in depth in chapters 12 and 15 but, again, pervade the whole book.

The section on the historical settings of the Psalms (ch. 3) is excellent, providing a solid case for the historical reliability of the superscripts and, therefore, the Davidic authorship of the Psalms. This is not an unimportant point, as it preserves the Davidic, royal orientation of the Psalter that would otherwise be lost. Also of note is the argument that Waltke and Zaspel make, of which some readers may not be convinced, that the expression “to the choirmaster” in its fifty-five occurrences throughout the Psalms should be understood as postscripts to the previous psalms instead of as superscripts to the psalms which follow (appendix 1 provides their full argument for this).

The book also contains a thorough discussion of Hebrew poetry and the various poetic and literary devices one will encounter in the Psalms (ch. 6), which will be helpful to any student of the Psalms or preacher of the Psalms as something of a handbook. And its discussion of psalm forms is quite beneficial as well. Chapters 8 through 11 (which take up almost half of the book) go through the basic elements of praise psalms, petition-lament psalms, individual songs of grateful praise, and songs of trust, helping the reader understand how each form works and then showing examples of dozens of psalms from those categories.

The examples of several psalms at the end of almost every chapter in the book is one of its most worthwhile features. While they do not cover every psalm, they give the reader an idea of how to work carefully through a psalm, especially of how to read in light of the Psalter’s royal and messianic storyline. Virtually every psalm that is covered concludes with a Christologically rich, doxological conclusion, showing the reader how it is that we preach Christ responsibly from the Psalms and how we read them as Christians. Though not all 150 psalms are covered, this work would serve well as a commentary supplement, as many of the pPsalms that are covered are explained in as much or more detail as most commentaries.

In addition to the worthwhile commentary sections, the book is a must-have for any seminary student or preacher of the psalms, as it helps to understand the various forms, poetic devices, editorial arrangement, and liturgical setting of the psalms – and most of all their royal and messianic orientation. Chapters 4, 12, and 15, which cover these themes (along with Appendix 2, which contains Waltke’s famous essay on a “Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms”), are worth the price of the book alone. Any seminary student, preacher, or Christian interested in reading the Psalms more carefully and more Christocentrically would do well to have this book on their shelf and perhaps even on their nightstand. Waltke and Zaspel have done an excellent

service to the church in the publication of this volume, which is sure to become a standard introduction to this most beloved book of Scripture.

— Ryan Swale

Stephen J. Wellum. *The Person of Christ: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 206. \$18.99 (softcover).

For those who study systematic theology, the name Stephen J. Wellum should be familiar, especially those taking up the specific loci of Christology. Wellum has provided two helpful books on the Person of Christ, both published by Crossway. The other volume is a more exhaustive treatment of the doctrine and is titled *God the Son Incarnate*, a part of the Foundation of Evangelical Theology series.

This review is a consideration of the author's shorter treatment of the doctrine of the Person of Christ.

Before stepping into Wellum's work, it is valuable to consider the words of Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin, the series editors: "While the specific focus varies, each volume (1) introduces the doctrine, (2) sets it in context, (3) develops it from Scripture, (4) draws the various threads together, and (5) brings it to bear on the Christian Life" (12). If these are the desired goals of this series, then the systematic study of scripture will advance to another generation of students and scholars. These five goals are, for the most part, five goals of systematic theologians. There may be a sixth goal that Wellum includes in his work, and that is defending the doctrine established from scripture against heresy or current theological errors of the day (127-44; Here Wellum calls them "challenges"; this reveals a proper defense of the doctrine today). Admittedly, the sixth concern could be taken up in the editors' understanding of numbers two or five. Regardless, this general outline is worth following.

Wellum follows the outline set forward by the editors. He presents the doctrine in his introductory chapter of the book (13-17). This is where he begins to set the context, but arguably, this is done throughout the book as well. In Part 1: Biblical Foundation, he develops the doctrine from Scripture. In Part 2: Theological Foundation, he combines the scriptural data compiled while retrieving the historical understandings of this doctrine from the patristic period. He assembles the conclusions affirmed in the historical Christological confessions for the benefit of the church today. Finally, in Part 3, Wellum brings these doctrinal conclusions to bear upon the Christian life by restating what must continue to be confessed in the Christian faith.

One of the strengths of this work is the exegetical conclusions. Careful exegesis ought to govern the theologian, for the Scriptures are the soil upon which this science collects its data. A secondary strength is Wellum's understanding of the Christological tradition established by the orthodox statements from the ancient church's councils and patristic theologians. The following is a helpful guide, ". . . Scripture describes the facts of history with accuracy and explains those facts so we can rightly know Christ and formulate correct doctrine about him" (33). What makes this process, as it has been outlined, so helpful is it gives the proper focus to the Scriptures to define the doctrine. While some of the terms used in orthodox statements of faith originate from

patristic sources, the soil from which they were mined is the word of God. Wellum clarifies, “In doing Christology, then, we move carefully from Scripture’s own teaching (first order) to theological formulation (second order)” (33). The only warranted modification could be changing the first and second order to primary and subordinate standards. The Scriptures function as the primary source of theological investigation, and everything else is subordinate to the word of God. Wellum clarifies this by saying, “Scripture as *norma normans* (‘ruling rule’) has magisterial authority over tradition. Tradition as *norma normata* (‘ruled rule’) functions in a ministerial capacity to aid our interpretation and application of Scripture” (34).

As Wellum masterfully delineates in this book, what we are left with is Scripture being the source and the orthodox tradition found in the ecumenical creeds of the church as the hermeneutical guideposts. He calls it a “hermeneutical spiral” (34). This “spiral” explains the need for the past to help the present not make the same heretical and erroneous conclusions. In the same way, tradition guards and corrects, at times, this hermeneutical investigation, making it safe to continue in this needed study for he who “abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9b).

This book is a helpful introduction to the doctrine of the Person of Christ and could serve as the first step into a bigger pool of theological literature from the past and the present.

— J. P. Mosley, Jr.

Greg Welty. *Alvin Plantinga*. Great Thinkers. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023. Pp. xxiv + 170. \$15.99 (paperback).

This is the latest volume in the continually growing *Great Thinkers Series*. Many of the figures in this series would be regarded as great thinkers by most who give their attention to that sort of thing: Bacon, Hume, Kant, Hegel, et al. How did Alvin Plantinga (1932–) make it into such august company? Not only is he a living figure, Richard Dawkins being the only other person living in the series, but he is personal, unassuming, and self-effacing, quite the opposite of the brash and arrogant Dawkins. Yet, Plantinga has positioned himself over the past six decades as the most influential Christian philosopher and has opened the doors for Christians to have a seat at the table and be taken seriously in the various philosophical disciplines. This is why he deserves and has a place in this series, focusing on and explicating the thought of a handful of Western history’s great thinkers.

Greg Welty, professor of philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been well-trained in Plantinga’s thought and approach. Welty studied at Westminster Seminary, California, and then Oriel College, Oxford. Welty is both sympathetic to and critical of the philosophical approach that Plantinga has taken: he is sympathetic with Plantinga’s insistence that there is no neutrality and that a secularized science cannot account for reality as we know it; he is critical, taking a prime example, of Plantinga’s theological deficiencies that led him to prioritize libertarian free will on the part of man at the expense of God’s sovereignty in considering the question of the problem of evil. In other words, he appreciates

Plantinga as an effective, if not devastating (Thomas Nagel can't answer him), critic of naturalism, secularism, and antitheism, while believing that he both compromises important doctrinal matters and fails to challenge unbelief in as fundamental a way as, say, Cornelius Van Til does.

Welty does not spend long on biography here, as the outward circumstances of Plantinga's life are not nearly as significant or interesting as the development and expression of his thoughts. But a bit on the biography part. Plantinga was the child of a pastor and was brought up in the Christian Reformed Church in its pre-progressive days. Thus, he went, unsurprisingly, to Calvin College for his BA (1953), then to his first encounter with virulent unbelief in his MA in philosophy from the University of Michigan (1955), and then to Yale University for his PhD in philosophy (1958). Plantinga credits Calvin with giving him the framework of a Christian *Weltanschauung*, while Michigan "failed to aim at the big questions" and Yale "failed to seek the right answers" (10). While he learned much at both these latter institutions, he believed that what he learned at Calvin and wished to develop—a thoroughgoing Christian approach to philosophy—was something that he would need to work out with others thus committed (Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Alston, et al.).

He worked out his "Reformed epistemology," as it came to be called with these men, and as he taught at Wayne State University (1958–63), Calvin College (1963–82), and the University of Notre Dame (1982–2010). One might have thought he would never have left Calvin once he returned to teach, given his fondness for it as both student and teacher. However, he realized over time that he preferred teaching graduate students, and Calvin had none in philosophy, while Notre Dame had begun to have one of the leading graduate departments in philosophy that was "both first rate and Christian" (13). He retired from full-time academia in his late seventies, though he remains active in writing, lecturing, and the like. Two of my children have philosophy (and additional) degrees (and another significant philosophical interest), and they've all run into Plantinga in recent years, playing host and helping him in a Society of Christian Philosophers meeting, among other things. They testify to his remarkable humility and understated manner of dress, interaction, etc. He is, in his person, quite unprepossessing and self-deprecating yet devastatingly sharp in his philosophical acumen and ability to reason.

Chapters 2–7 treat with an economy of words and a striking clarity of expression the basic outline of Plantinga's contribution to philosophy and Christian philosophy: faith and reason (2), the problem of evil (3), theistic arguments (4), divine attributes (5), religion and science (6), and Christian philosophical method (8). The last chapter (9) deals with Plantinga and the Reformed tradition, where he departed from and supported it. Overall, one might say, as far as apologetics is concerned, Plantinga's greatest contribution was, negatively, a devastating critique of naturalism that demonstrated conclusively that the conflict is not, as commonly alleged, between science and religion (Christian theism) but between science and naturalism. Unguided naturalism undermines science, rendering its findings epistemically incoherent and unintelligible.

Indeed, Plantinga argued, paralleling this was classical foundationalism, which was self-referentially incoherent and thus manifestly false. On the other hand,

Plantinga argued that Christian belief, produced by the *sensus divinitatis* of which Calvin and others wrote, was as warranted as many other sorts of beliefs as it was properly basic and rational. Admittedly, his positive contribution was not nearly as strong as Van Til's transcendental argument that the truth of Christianity is established necessarily and that, thus, the contrary is impossible. In fact, Welty argues that of the four kinds of degrees of support given to the claim "God exists" (necessarily, certainly, very likely, and with good reason), Plantinga never offers anything more substantial than "There is good reason to believe that God exists" (68).

Furthermore, Plantinga differs from Reformed theology at a number of points. As noted above, he embraces the libertarian free will view of man in his treatment of the problem of evil and toys with Molinism as well, both of which violate the character of God's foreknowledge and sovereignty as outlined in the Reformed confessions and catechisms. He also denies God's simplicity, his being out of time, his absolute immutability and impassability (144–46), and some other soteriological matters (effectual calling as a part of that; 133–36). There are also other problems regarding the divine attributes (76–79), and I am brief here, leaving much uncommented upon and for the interested reader to explore. Welty is quite clear and candid about Plantinga's theological aberrations.

What are we to make of his weak positive apologetic contribution (nothing stronger than "good reason") and departures from the Reformed faith? Welty thinks that Plantinga's body of work has made significant philosophical contributions and that he has "influenced a generation of Christian philosophers to be rigorous and bold in their defense of Christian claims" (147–48), particularly of the sort treated in this volume in terms of faith and reason, religion and science, Christian philosophical method, etc. Welty believes that Plantinga's theological departures notwithstanding, they do not clearly adversely affect his positive contributions and that his approach has sufficient flexibility that one can benefit from it where it is helpful and add in the transcendental approach and reject the bad theology in a way that still nets a very useful Plantinga. Welty's fair and balanced yet candid treatment here will help us all get the most that Plantinga has to offer while knowing how to deal with his errors and not let them sabotage the whole of his contribution to the epistemic justification and warrant of Christian belief.

— Alan D. Strange

C. R. Wiley. *The Household and the War for the Cosmos: Recovering a Christian Vision for the Family*. Moscow, ID: Cannon Press, 2019. Pp. 145. \$14.95 (paperback).

In his book *The Household and the War for the Cosmos: Recovering a Christian Vision for the Family*, author C. R. Wiley presents a genuinely unique perspective on a wholly different family system and household structure. This book presents a compelling vision of the world with the Christian family as the central focus, which is in desperate need of thoughtful discussion and reinvigoration. The Christian household, according to Wiley, is not just a shelter from worldly ills and immoralities, but it is a command center from which the family launches out into the world through

various means—business, education, and mission. While undoubtedly a Reformed thinker, Wiley inclines toward a Kuyperian (although never explicitly stated) theological perspective.

The book speaks to the cosmological organization and originally intended purpose of the Christian household according to Scripture. Wiley contends that the historical Christian vision for the family has been dislocated and derided as antiquated by contemporary society. Wiley presents a counter-cultural view on family, particularly the roles and responsibilities of fathers and fatherhood. While Wiley most certainly offers a complementarian theological vision for the Christian family, emphasizing the meaning, significance, and role of the father/husband, he does not exude patriarchal sentiments, at least overtly. However, theologically egalitarian readers may reject his perspective as certainly complementarian and perhaps even characteristic of the Christian patriarchy movement. Regardless, this book introduces the need for the reformation of the societal structures of the family, a return to tradition, and a reexamination of biblical as well as secular history. Specifically highlighted is the role of the father/husband and the role of the family within society and the greater cosmological order.

Wiley seeks to provide order and structure in the face of the arbitrariness of postmodernity. The reader is transported back to the ancient and classical world when the universe was not seen as a random assortment of time and matter but as an ordered and structured whole—a cosmos. The family was historically understood to be a microcosm of this greater macrocosmic order, something, Wiley contends, that has been lost in our collective cultural memory. He argues that historically, people innately saw themselves as part of an ordered whole, a cosmological system, and as a result, believed they had obligations to those around them. Individuals were not merely autonomous individuals but members of households bestowed with unique blessings, as well as duties and responsibilities to both past and future generations. These primary responsibilities, such as “piety” and “religion,” have become disassociated with their original intentions. These responsibilities did not refer to quiet time activities or solitary pursuits but embodied the seemingly antiquated, although timeless, virtues of “duty” and “honor.”

In true Augustinian likeness, Wiley seeks to “plunder the Egyptians” by fully utilizing the classical tradition, specifically, the pagan mythos of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. He illustrates these values of duty and honor through the myth of Aeneas, exhibiting how Rome’s founding hero inspired and embodied these ancient virtues. However appealing this paradigm, Wiley articulates how the Aeneas myth as an exemplar of virtue failed and was superseded by a greater history and “myth” of the narrative of Abraham and the biblical war for the cosmos between good and evil. Through a truly unique and compelling contrast and comparison, he sets up Abraham and Aeneas not only as national and mythic figures but also as sacred and secular embodiments of these timeless virtues.

Wiley contends that both Abraham and Aeneas contributed to the forming and shaping of the Apostle Paul, a dual citizen of both worlds, being both a physical descendant of Abraham by birth but also a Roman citizen by law. Therefore, Paul and his teachings on the Christian household and family are formulated by the best of

biblical and classical traditions. Providing a window for readers to glance back in time, Wiley returns to the classical world, relying heavily on Virgil's *Aeneid* and the philosopher Xenophon's prescriptions for a successful household, identifying that both the classical and ancient Judeo-Christian worlds built their understanding of the family on cosmological understandings of the universe, like and superseded by Paul's instruction in Ephesians.

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This book is academic and yet pleasantly readable. Wiley provides a timely response to the contemporary crumbling of the historical institution and foundations of the household and the family and serves as an attempt to save them. Wiley carefully exegetes such words as "piety," "duty," "cosmos," and "household." He lays out for the reader their historical origins, biblical context, and implications for the church and the Christian household today. Packaging up his exegesis, Wiley presents a picture of the family that is not a lifestyle choice or a conglomeration of various individuals but rather as an interconnected system and a microcosm of mutually dependent duties and responsibilities, meant to reflect the macrocosm of the church as the household of God operates within God's universe. Wiley's book offers a richer, fuller vision of the biblical family and its place within society, presenting a counter-cultural archetype of the family as a cohesive, collective, and coordinated unit operating as a "household" within and against the cosmos.

Wiley's *The Household and the War for the Cosmos* most certainly presents a restored vision for the family in clear opposition to postmodernity and the continued dislocation of the family in our fractured and fast-paced society. Wiley calls upon the reader to remember that the world, the cosmos, is ordered, meaningful, and God-ordained. He calls upon Christian households to remember the duties their biblical ancestors once knew and the world desperately needs. He accomplishes this serious task in a lighthearted and cheerful way while simultaneously never veering from the seriousness of the topics discussed. Nostalgic in some sense and revolutionary in another, this timely and relevant book provides a guide forward for Christian families that is inspirational, thought-provoking, and definitely counter-cultural. This is certain to facilitate a much-needed conversation about how the Christian family can engage with and flourish within contemporary and secular society.

— Blake I. Campbell

Douglas Wilson. *Mere Christendom*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2023. Pp. xii + 257. \$21.95 (paperback).

Douglas Wilson, in his book *Mere Christendom*, argues that “theocracy” is inevitable. He regards the standard that governs a society as its functional sacred writ; since some such standard governs every society, he argues every society is a theocracy of some sort. Wilson wants the Bible, which actually is sacred writ, to be that standard for our, and every, society. Wilson expects all, not just the church, to adhere to God’s word, with the civil magistrate enforcing both tables of the law. While all persons everywhere are indeed called to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, in this era, only God’s people will ever do that. If people are forced to submit to the whole of God’s law on some basis other than a renewed will, it will have to be coercive, especially in our current culture.

In this world, as Richard Gaffin notes in his seminal piece “Theonomy and Eschatology,” the righteous will continue to suffer, and there is no future golden age before the return of Christ. Wilson, however, calls for “mere Christendom” now; presumably, one shorn of the undesirable excrescences of earlier Christendom(s). Requiring the whole of a pluralistic society like ours, much of which is antithetical to God and his word, to submit to God’s word, however, highlights the problem. Historian Mark Noll notes in his recent masterwork on the Bible in this country that, though the Bible was in earlier years “America’s Book,” we have since witnessed a precipitous plummet, what he calls “the rise and decline of a Bible Civilization (1794–1911).”

Wilson, recognizing the decline, notes that the standard in contemporary culture is some mash of ideologies like Marxism, expressive individualism, and the rest of the beliefs that comprise our reigning secularistic unbelief. Thus, he regards the current reigning religion as “secularism,” the conviction that God must be excluded from the public square, not only in the counsels of the state but also in the boardroom, the classroom, the factory floor, etc. Wilson divides his book into four sections: Critiquing secularism and its concomitants, setting forth the basic dimensions of mere Christendom, clearing up misconceptions about mere Christendom, and the plan to restore Christendom (Christendom 2.0 as Wilson calls it).

In fine, Wilson wants to get back to the time when much of America was at least outwardly Christian and honored the Bible as its guide. But a “better day” for this and any other society cannot be achieved through any fleshly engineering on our part. Whatever we need comes through the church pursuing the ordinary means of grace and not in any way directly entering the political fray, whatever individual Christians may choose to do in the political sphere. Stephen Wolfe, who published his manifesto on Christian nationalism with Wilson’s Canon Press, clearly has no problem with achieving the desired reformation by violence and coercion. Rousas Rushdoony and Greg Bahnsen both made clear that their view of Christian reconstruction was not to be achieved by violence or coercion but rather by “regeneration,” as Rushdoony told me thirty-five years ago during lunch at a conference in Florida.

Though I was not then or now convinced of Rushdoony’s reconstruction project (or his triumphalism), I appreciated that there was no desire on his part to bring about

this restoration by anything other than the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and his servants don't bring it about by fighting (John 18:36) but by preaching the gospel to all the world (Matt. 28:18–20). Wilson may not appear to call for revolution in the same way that Wolfe does, but, in fact, his view of the use of the civil magistrate in coercively enforcing both tables of the law would mean massive societal subjugation in a society like ours that is so openly in revolt against God. Is this what we in the church should be doing? Calling for theocratic martial law? This is what it would take to bring our post-Christian society to Christendom.

Wilson espouses “principled Christian conservatism” (58), with politics seeming paramount (98–99): all the “alphabet agencies” of the bureaucracy must be eliminated (EPA, IRS, and the like), term limits and redrawn ballots required, etc. (72–73). The feel of the whole book is that heaven demands, as reflected in the Bible, a Christendom that is a theocratic libertarian's dream (Wilson self-identifies as a “theocratic libertarian,” 120), and we should all get in line with that. The Puritans of the seventeenth century, however, in Britain or the American colonies were not libertarians (having sumptuary laws, fair price laws, speech/publishing restrictions, prohibiting theatre/fiction, religious holidays, etc.) and did not conceive Christendom as such.

I suppose Wilson's theocracy will put an end to all that inconvenient political debate and disagreement that occurs not only with the ungodly but also with fellow believers who don't think that God mandates libertarianism (even if they prefer it). This is just why C. S. Lewis opposed theocracy: Lewis realized that the worst sort of civil government is one that claims detailed divine sanction, though it really does not have divine sanction as to specifics (119–120). Wilson acknowledges Lewis's opposition but seems completely to miss his point for it. Calvin also did not find the Bible committed to any form of civil government (*Institutes*, 4.20.8) or to carrying out Israel's civil polity (4.20.14). Wilson, however, seems to think that the form the kingdoms of this world must take enjoys divine mandate.

Jesus Christ's kingdom, though, is not of this world, and his servants don't bring it about by fighting, as noted above, which includes insisting that our political views be enshrined in law as if they were divine writ. Many of us well understand the impulse to throw open the window and tell the world how mad we are and that we're not going to take it anymore. Believers have long had to contend with the frustration of the wicked prospering (Psalm 73). Certainly, the disadvantaged, the oppressed, and the dispossessed have. As the psalmist discovered, though, the ultimate solution is not in revolt but in coming into God's presence and realizing the truth of his plan being worked out, resulting in his, and our, ultimate victory, discovered as we worship him (vv. 16–17). We need to call our society to join us in this, to find their lives hidden with Christ in God as we have. Here's the only hope for either end of the spectrum, for those struggling with sexual identity and those who lament the “Rich Men North of Richmond.”

The most any Christian can personally hope for are political, social, and economic views that are in keeping with the principles of God's word, not political, social, and economic positions that embody “thus saith the Lord.” Here's why: the Bible contains

principles that may correspond with different political, social, and economic approaches. It is not the purpose of the Bible to furnish us with a detailed blueprint of many things in life but rather to tell us about the person and work of Jesus Christ, call us to faith and repentance, and walk in union with him in newness of life. Wilson's approach demands more; his "mere" Christendom is not so mere for all that.

As noted above, no part of Wilson's program can be achieved without society-wide personal regeneration; even then, if a large percentage of society were truly renewed, they would not likely want to enact "theocratic libertarianism" by civil decree. I say this because Wilson's case for such is unconvincing (it certainly is to me), especially his view of what civil society "must be" according to God's word. He simply cannot demonstrate biblically that his preferred "Christendom" is divinely mandated and established by a "thus saith the Lord." To push this, without anything like a sympathetic Christian majority desiring his vision of utopia, is not only bound to be viewed as a terroristic threat to a secularized society, but because his vision, I would argue, is not biblically convincing to discerning Christians, it will do nothing among most Christians, even confessionally Reformed ones, but stir up strife and division.

So, for secularists, his militancy will be seen as a declaration of war, literally, and for many of his fellow, even Reformed Christians, his call for Christendom will not unite Christ's church as it ought to be (Psalm 133; John 17), especially in such perilous times for the church, but only sow further seeds of disunity and internecine Christian conflict. Even now, as in this review, it's prompting arguments among Christians, as either I must yield to Wilson's work (he claims to represent a divine mandate) or oppose it, as I am now doing. I take no pleasure in doing so and, frankly, wish that I didn't have to do so. But if I am not merely to yield to it, since Wilson claims divine warrant for the particulars he promotes in the civil sphere, I am compelled to speak out against it as I do not regard it as an article of revelation. I will not yield to political preferences masquerading as divine writ.

Further, and this may be the most serious problem of all since Wilson's particular call for Christendom will be heard by a militant secularist society as a declaration of war, this is a betrayal of the mission of the gospel. The church, though it has implacable enemies (the devil, the flesh, and the world), does not repay the favor to the peoples of the world who see the church as their enemy. The church, in other words, sees no people as its natural enemies but endeavors to bring the gospel to all. The world, as noted, wrongly thinks the church is its enemy in the call that we issue to all to repent and believe. But we are not the enemy of any nation, and we eagerly go to every people group with the great and glorious good news of salvation full and free in Christ.

We know that unregenerated rebels do not want to have this man rule over them. We should not burden those to whom we bring the gospel with extraneous demands that the gospel itself does not require. Thus, to tell them that bowing the knee to Jesus and receiving him as Lord and Savior properly entails the abolition of a host of governmental agencies in civil society and the embracing of particular conservative political views is not only too great a burden for them, it's not even true. This misguided book seeks to impose on the church and the world a burden that must be

rejected, and in rejecting it, I decidedly declare that I am not resisting God and his law. I am resisting what Wilson and others *proclaim* to be God's law but which I maintain is not: it's his own political preference and program preached as if it were the commandment of the Lord God himself. I do not believe that the Bible in either testament demands that civil society be organized along the lines of Wilson's "theocratic libertarianism."

Some readers may be thinking that what Wilson in this book or Wolfe in his book on Christian nationalism calls for is something that our Reformed fathers embraced in the past. My opposition to them now is merely a repudiation of the Reformed worthies. No. First of all, what Wilson calls for is neither the Christendom of the past nor something that our Reformed forefathers would recognize as proper Christendom. But more than this, we've come to some better thinking, frankly, on these matters. We disestablished the church in this country. First on the national level (in the Constitution) and then in the states, leaving the churches free to flourish without the overlordship of an Erastian state, which invariably develops, Covenanter dreams notwithstanding, when there is an established church; the Covenanter opposition to Erastianism, while throwing off the hegemony of the state, tends practically to become its own version of "church over state," the mistake of Rome.

A better version is the Free Church position coming out of the Disruption of 1843 in Scotland, a church that sought to be free of state interference (especially patronage) while not attempting to dictate to the state. The Free Church did come out of the Established Church on establishment principles, seeing the times as unripe for a proper establishment. It hardly needs comment to note that the Free Church has never found the subsequent years to be appropriate for a return to establishment. Similarly, not only has disestablishment occurred among many Reformed in the US and Scotland holding to the Westminster Standards, but also continental Reformed churches holding to the Three Forms of Unity have changed Article 36 of the Belgic Confession dealing with the role of the civil magistracy. This began especially with objections led by Abraham Kuyper in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, redefining his role respecting the *cura religionis* and his use of the sword against heretics. These advances in our biblical understanding are not successfully surmounted in Wilson's work.

Christians certainly may and should seek to have biblical principles, whether expressed implicitly or explicitly (garnered through natural law or the Bible), given societal expression. The need of the hour in our highly politicized and polarized time is for Christians, whether called to preach or simply to witness (1 Pet. 3:15), to hold forth the hope found only in Christ and his gospel. We should not sound like we are promoting just one more political program in a world drowning in partisan politics. The last thing the world needs from us is more hopelessness of that sort. By our word and deeds, we should testify to a king who stands the kingdoms of this world on their head, a king who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

— Alan D. Strange

Stephen Wolfe. *The Case for Christian Nationalism*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2022. Pp. 478. \$24.99 (paperback).

Stephen Wolfe seeks to make the case, as he calls it, for Christian nationalism. Something called Christian nationalism could, doubtless, sound innocuous enough to many readers of this journal. After all, some might take “nationalism” to mean “I love my country”—something akin to patriotism. Surely, there’s nothing wrong with Christians loving their country, and, in fact, something commendatory about it, it would seem, from the Bible. If we are to pray for those of our own land as Paul commands (1 Tim. 2:1–4), surely a love of one’s land seems fitting if not expected.

In lamenting widespread societal decline—and we see that as never before in American culture—we often resignedly say, “Well, much is wrong with my land (this is certainly a common refrain among American Christians) but, at the same time, I love it and want the best for it.” Again, this must be right, as we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and those of our towns, cities, states, provinces, and nation would come first and most naturally in this. This is why we, together with other Christians who are citizens of lands worldwide, often pray for God to bring spiritual blessing (renewal, revival, awakening, etc.) in our lands, especially, as well as to the whole world.

These harmless, seemingly appropriate sentiments, however, fall far short of anything that might be called nationalism. And the problem with the Christian part of Christian nationalism is even more troubling. Patriotism is certainly something that even non-Christians can and do espouse (ultimately inconsistently, though that’s true of everything for those who embrace naturalism, materialism, etc.) and is not troubling but understandable. Not a small amount of what has been called nationalism, especially since the late nineteenth century, however, has had ethnocentrism and racial purity at its heart. Here is the problem with the qualifier Christian in Christian nationalism: not only has such nationalism as described herein not been Christian but has been inimical to Christianity. For this reason, Wolfe’s call for Christian nationalism is, to put it mildly, perplexing and disturbing with this ugly history in view, from which Wolfe does not take sufficient pains to distinguish his view, as if he doesn’t need to. I would argue that the events of the last century and a half require much distinction on the part of Christian nationalists, even as a Christian socialist would need to clearly delineate his views from Marxism.

This review is preliminary, it should be noted, dealing with many of the concerns that I have with this movement more impressionistically without getting into some of the more specific details of Wolfe’s book. I admit, for instance, that not only Wolfe’s use of major 16th and 17th-century theologians like Calvin and Turretin but also his employment of political theorists of those and later centuries, like Junius, Musculus, Althusius, Bullinger, Vermigli, Rutherford, Gillespie, Baxter, et al., warrants fuller treatment than given here. Even then, it is my contention that Wolfe enlists these Reformed theologians and political theorists in his project by decontextualizing them and recontextualizing them in a time and place so different from their own that he puts them to a different and foreign use. There are several other reviews of Wolfe’s book

that go in this direction, some cited herein, and a recent one quite helpful in that regard is Wesley Reynold's (<https://kirkcenter.org/reviews/a-revived-cultural-christianity/>).

Let's briefly describe the book. It has a lengthy introduction, ten chapters, and a rather lengthy epilogue, with said epilogue containing a personal screed that seems calculated to appeal to frustrated young men who feel disposed by many of the currents in our secular culture. The tone of the book would be improved by its omission. Wolfe's work is extensive, coming just a bit shy of 500 pages. Curiously, this book, which positions itself as the chief intellectual apologetic for Christian nationalism, suffers from two odd lacunae: there is no bibliography (though there are footnotes) and no indices. No book claiming serious scholarship should lack such.

Additionally, and many have noted this, the book has no sustained appeal to Scripture or exegesis. The response to this last point has been that "Wolfe accepts the Reformed confessions and catechisms and cites Calvin, Turretin, and others of that sort so that he need not argue for but simply accept their exegeses and theological conclusions." But the book explicitly argues, not from history (as such) but ideologically, from political philosophy. If one is making a case for Christian nationalism, then one must do more than Wolfe does to justify that case biblically. Perhaps someone else will take on this task.

I note these lacks, however, as lacks in Wolfe's volume under review, whatever other partisans of Christian nationalism may do in their works. I will save further summary of the actual contents of the book for any additional work that I may do on this book, only to note now that one of the fairest summaries of the book (and reviews of the book continue to multiply!) may be found in John Wilsey's capable review (<https://thelondonlyceum.com/book-review-the-case-for-christian-nationalism-stephen-wolfe/>).

Citing John Wilsey, author of a book on mainliner (and civil religionist) John Foster Dulles, suggests the irony of many scholars from various fields lasering in on Christian nationalism in the Trump era and even more so after January 6, 2021. The hyper-focus, particularly of mainstream progressive scholars, is ironic because Christian nationalism has been around for some time, particularly in the late 19th and 20th centuries in America (think of those who started *Christian Century* and their civil millennialism). It has not been a feature of fundamentalism or confessionally Reformed Christianity but of progressivism and the ecumenical movement in mainline Protestant churches, of the sort represented by Woodrow Wilson, John Foster Dulles, and many others of that ilk. That's another matter, however, and is not what is in view here, especially as Christian nationalism has come to be cited and appropriated in more recent times.

Just this further bit to be treated elsewhere later: after much discussion about nationalism and the "the good of cultural Christianity" in previous chapters, Wolfe argues for "The Christian Prince" in chapter 7 before continuing to argue about revolution and justifying violence. This argument for the Christian prince is so disconnected from anything in our current (certainly American) reality that one is snapped back to the realization that this book is a work of theoretical political philosophy. Wolfe is arguing for something not yet quite tried ever before, or better, not yet tried or done correctly, like partisans of Marxism that claim it's never been

rightly implemented anywhere and needs to be given at least one more chance to prove itself, with the promise that “we’ll get it right this time.” This merits further discussion and treatment, I readily admit.

I have argued that Christian nationalism is inimical to our faith because Christianity has at its heart the transcendence of tribalism and the ingathering of a people from among all the peoples that have more in common with each other, as a renewed humanity in Christ, than they do with their fellow countrymen who are unregenerated. This reality of a new humanity in Christ being one’s closest kinship group is repeatedly denied by Wolfe, who argues that the closest kinship one has is with those who share the same blood first and then the same soil next. Thus, nationality as a distinct ethnically same people group, taken in the older sense of the term, shapes one’s world more than anything. It should be clearly noted that I offer no objection to the distinctiveness of the tribe being maintained and even celebrated. However, to appreciate the cultural contributions of any given group is quite a different thing from succumbing to *tribalism*. One can properly prefer neither *tribalism* nor *globalism*, desiring instead that what is appropriately local, on the one hand, and universal, on the other, be duly recognized as fits the occasion.

To call for Christian nationalism, certainly in the sense that Wolfe does, is, in a real sense, to call for two things that are not complementary. Wolfe wants to argue that the universal call for all nations to be Christian, means that it is complementary to call for Christian nationalism. The Scriptures, however, make it clear that, though the church is to take the gospel to every people group, excluding none, only those who respond to such a call, as part of all those people groups (the nations), will form the worldwide church. I agree with Warfield that countless numbers will be gathered into the church, not as whole people groups (nations), not as political entities, but as elect persons and their children, in terms of the covenant of grace. This observation may apply to other Christian Nationalists and not Wolfe, who wishes to distinguish himself from this position.

Yes, all are called to Christ in the outward call of the gospel. But few are chosen and thus receive the effectual call, meaning that it is not the nations as nations that constitute the church but those from among the nations who do. God is dealing with his people from among all the nations. He is not dealing with the nations as nations, as he dealt with Israel as a nation. He is not dealing with whole people groups in the manner he was dealing with Israel. This is made clear in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), missed by various Judaizers, like the Ebionites, and those today who think that the judicial law applies to nations (more or less) like it did to Israel, wanting the Israelization of the nations like the Muslims want the Arabization of the nations; this, however, is not the gospel project.

Granted, what I just mentioned may mark the reconstructionist crowd (Wolfe comes more from a natural law viewpoint); the Lord nonetheless is dealing with his people, the New Israel, as they are composed *of those from* every tribe, kindred, nation, and people. Thus, Christian nationalism as a project is fundamentally misguided because God is not saving the nations as such but the peoples of the nations. Again Wolfe in recent conversation wishes to distinguish himself from this viewpoint. That Reformed theology has developed this understanding more fully in recent centuries,

particularly with the rise of a sound (not liberal) biblical theology and redemptive-historical hermeneutic, seems completely lost on Wolfe. It will hardly do simply to cite Reformed theologians of centuries ago and not engage with those of more recent centuries. Even if one rejects the developments of Reformed theology since the time of Geerhardus Vos and others, for example, this must be at least acknowledged and dealt with in some fashion; it should not simply be ignored as Wolfe does.

In defining the nation, Wolfe makes it clear that he does “not argue for the sort of 19th-century nationalism that homogenized the socio-economic classes of people.” Rather, he seeks to make clear his interest is in “a reinvigoration of a collective will that asserts and stands up for itself. Prerequisite to such self-regard, at least today, is a conscious articulation or sense of one’s people as distinguished from others.” Somehow, Wolfe hopes to get back of, and take us back to, a sort of nationalism (he says, “I use the terms ethnicity and nation almost synonymously”) that is not what has existed in the last two centuries, but that used to exist when nations were all discrete people groups, Wolfe asserting, “no nation (properly speaking) is composed of two or more ethnicities” (135).

If someone embraces this project, somehow recapturing the identity of a nation and discrete people group (homogenously ethnic), “Christian,” as we’ve seen, has really nothing to do with it. Even if nationalism were thought desirable as some sort of reasonable political program, Christian nationalism is not in view biblically. And yet, Wolfe insists on Christian nationalism, which he calls “a Christian people, whose good is found both in cultural particularity and in a universal religion” (135). Wolfe ties his view of a collective will that asserts and stands up for itself as something that properly applies only to people as a distinct ethnic group (and this is also what he means by nation). At this point, and I think John Ehrett is right to point this out, Wolfe sounds quite Nietzschean (<https://americanreformer.org/2022/12/was-nietzsche-right/>). Does he add in “Christian” to save from that sort of association? He proceeds to talk about ethnicity, citing Johann Herder and Ernest Renan, among others, favorably. These two promoted the superiority of the German *volk* and the Aryan race in ways that came to have ghastly consequences in the 20th century.

No small part of Wolfe’s project then appears to be his desire to recover tribalism in the face of the globalism that has developed in the wake of Christianity. It is Wolfe’s conviction that many, including many Christians, have mistaken the Bible’s apparent shift from its focus on the ethnic nation of Jews to the gospel being preached throughout the world. Many have assumed, wrongly, that Wolfe thinks that since the Israel of God is now compromised of people groups around the globe, those people groups are no longer important as such and that the particular has given way to the universal. Wolfe wishes to clarify that tribalism existed before the fall and is neither introduced by the fall nor adversely affected by the fall, at least in any straightforward way (including Babel, which he curiously does not address).

The New Testament, however, involves both the “tearing down of the middle wall of partition” dividing Jew and Gentile, as the gospel goes global, and the relativizing of family and tribal connections in the New Covenant context. With respect to the former, the Book of Acts and the ministry (including all the epistles) of Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, are at issue (Gal. 3:28—all one in Christ); regarding the former, all the

teaching of our Lord relativizing family, as in Mark 3:33–35 (his mother and brothers are, above all, not simply those according to the flesh but all true disciples). This could be significantly teased out in passages like Matthew 10:35–37 (enemies being those of one’s household) or Paul’s rebuke of Peter for his hypocrisy respecting the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11–14), which Peter ultimately appears to get as he speaks of all of God’s people, irrespective of natural ethnicity, as being of “one race” composing a “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

Wolfe does not account for or engage this scriptural data about Christ relativizing the family or Paul arguing against ethnocentrism. He insists that since he is engaging in political philosophy, he need not directly address the Bible. This is laudable in one sense, as he has no specific training to do so (as in formal theological education). But he makes no sustained biblical argument for his whole view of the naturalness, pre- and post-fall, for ongoing ethnic preferences that appear to be critiqued in a number of places in the NT—e.g., Jesus is always critical of just preferring your own gang, Matthew 5:43–48, acknowledging it as natural but falling short of what God requires in terms of obedience, the gift of the embrace of the other being something which is supernatural in a post-fallen world.

Concerning the good Samaritan, Wolfe observes that while “people of different ethnic groups” can have some respect for and kindness toward each other, “they cannot have a life together that goes beyond mutual alliance” (148). Neil Shenvi rightly criticizes this and notes that Wolfe’s position “will divide (and is dividing) the church along lines of race, class, and gender, fracturing the people of God into separate camps.” He then tellingly concludes, “Christians who rail against the divisive ideas of critical theory must not soft-pedal [their own] divisive ideas smuggled in under the guise of ‘Christian nationalism.’” (<https://shenviapologetics.com/of-gods-and-men-a-long-review-of-wolfes-case-for-christian-nationalism-part-iii-objections/>).

Surely, as a side note, Kevin DeYoung is right in his criticism that Wolfe, in his contempt for the left thinking that racism is pervasive, “doesn’t make clear how his ideas on kinship are different from racist ideas of the past that have been used to forbid interracial marriage and to enforce the legal injustice of ‘separate but equal.’” DeYoung finds this especially lamentable since “By God’s grace, America has made great strides in overcoming racism in the past 60 years,” concluding, sadly, “I fail to see how Wolfe’s vision isn’t a giant step in the wrong direction.” (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/christian-nationalism-wolfe/>).

Wolfe laments the decline of American (and Western) culture, particularly its descent into the sort of “vicious secularism” that we witness all around us. By “vicious” secularism, I mean not the more benign sort that prevailed in earlier times, when Christians may have been viewed favorably or even neutrally by the culture (as Aaron Renn has argued, though I think perhaps has over argued a bit, as negativity to conservative Christianity was also rife in earlier “progressive” periods); instead, I mean the sort of secularism that openly opposes Christians as detrimental to the agenda promoted by our current culture. In more recent years, particularly since the legalization of same-sex marriage (and the ensuing gender fluidity), the rise of BLM, wokeness, CRT, and the like, the secularized culture of the West has looked upon Christianity and Christians increasingly negatively.

Of course, much of what concerns Wolfe and other Christian nationalists is something that Bible-believing Christians largely share: our culture has darkened, in the way that Aaron Renn and others have noted, and Christianity is viewed neither positively nor neutrally but negatively by many in mainstream America. Evidence abounds from the pervasive gender fluidity and confusion that rules in corporate America and the public schools to drag queen story hour at the local library. This book purports to provide a solution to that, figuring that the pervasive secularism that has arisen in the wake of religious pluralism marks the American experiment as a failure, necessitating the recovery of Christendom. Specifically, Wolfe wants to go back to an older America as he sees it, one that would punish heretics, when necessary,

More specifically, on the question of Wolfe's putative fondness for ethnic sameness: it was one thing to want to maintain a predominantly British Protestant nation in the time of the Know-Nothing Party when the country was still largely homogeneous as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. The American nation has become increasingly heterogeneous and multicultural for some time, especially since World War II. Wolfe laments this as he does our pluralistic society. Many Christians mourn the loss of many Christian values and distinctives that marked our society when we were not so ideologically diverse. There was a time when the Bible was "America's Book," as Mark Noll recently wrote, yet that is no longer the case and hasn't been for more than a century (Noll has 1911 as the cutoff year).

By the way, Noll and others have perceptively noted that Christians themselves helped bring that era of "confidence in the Bible" to an end, in no small measure by claiming that the Bible taught diametrically opposed things (some saying it validated chattel slavery and others arguing that it didn't). In any case, we are quite ideologically diverse, and we can't get to (or get back to) some imagined golden period of ideological agreement (and, in the case of Christian nationalism, explicitly Christian agreement) without coercion. Wolfe as much agrees and justifies violent revolution in the cause of his hoped-for Christian nationalism (326). All can agree that there was in previous times in America a widespread societal and religious agreement, much of it even distinctly biblical and Christian, though not without serious contradistinctions to Christianity (chattel slavery, treatment of American Indians, etc.).

Wolfe wants a Christian nation that seems in some ways gentler than those of the past when Christendom was still intact. The Puritans of the seventeenth century in Britain or the American colonies, for example, had sumptuary laws, fair price laws, speech/publishing restrictions, prohibited theatre/fiction, religious holidays, etc., and did not conceive of Christendom in a libertarian fashion, as does Wolfe's publisher Douglas Wilson, head of Canon Press. Wilson calls himself a theocratic libertarian (in his book *Mere Christendom*), and that's the sort of Christendom he wants to achieve, though that's not the sort we've ever had. There's no apparent reason to think that others repristinating Christendom would necessarily share that view and desire such now.

Wolfe does not typically appeal to biblical law as such for his Christian nationalism, as does Wilson for his revived Christendom. Wolfe tends to appeal to natural law and two kingdom ideology of the older sort, especially arguing frequently that his call for nationalism is quite in keeping with nature in its pre-fall sense, though

Wolfe seems to want, like Wilson, a Christian nation that has freedom of speech and other things that were not considered desirable in earlier instantiations of Christendom. That this Christian nation and instantiation of Christendom should be different in these ways from earlier incarnations of Christendom seems purely arbitrary, whether one takes Wilson's approach, arguing from the Bible, or Wolfe's, arguing from natural law.

Throughout the book, Wolfe argues that nations would have emerged had Adam not fallen. And they would have emerged along lines of kinship, yielding the sort of ethnic purity that he longs to return to. Paul's determination not to regard anyone according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16) seems to give way in Wolfe to something that may well be natural (favoring one's kinship group) but which grace, while allowing what is perfectly good from that (loving those nearest you), transforms it into a love of the brethren that transcends all ethnic boundaries. Perhaps Wolfe agrees with this, but he often writes in what sounds like opposition to it, privileging ethnic kinship above all.

Wolfe assumes that the fall is not the occasion for nationalism, which would have occurred and developed without it. In asserting this, he seems to underplay problems that might obtain with respect to the fall and the development of nations. There were, after the fall, indeed two lines that developed, a believing and an unbelieving one. It is interesting to note that culture (broadly conceived) seemed to have originated and developed within this unbelieving line of Cain. In any case, the particularities that started to appear among cultures were also conditioned by certain commonalities, namely a shared language, one of the primary distinguishing features of ethnicity. This ability to communicate, however, in the post-lapsarian and post-diluvian world proved to be problematic. Man used his ability to communicate as a tool of his rebellion, as we see at Babel (Genesis 11), where mankind combines together to resist God's rule, putting his own in its place. As a judgment, God renders the language multiple, presumably among ethnic groups, so they now speak in mutually unintelligible ways.

The question of how going from a universal language to a plethora of tongues is a judgment on the nations is never considered by Wolfe, particularly concerning how this judgment might impact the nations in their ethnic particularities. He deals with how he presumes nations would have developed in their unfallen state with ethnic particularities intact. I would grant that there are things about ethnic identities that are part of natural development (and thus not simply concomitants of a fallen world—we see this in redeemed humanity in which languages continue to be multiple though all dedicated exclusively to God's glory in the fully redeemed and renewed creation, Rev. 5:9–10). God confused the languages as part of his judgment. The antagonism that grew among nations, disenabling them from conspiring together against the Lord as they had, resulted in other ethnic particularities, especially the common belief that one's ethnic particularities are not only good but render one better than anyone else, contributing to pride, hubris, and the like. This is common among men in accordance with their sinful human nature.

We see in Israel the always unseemly and mistaken notion that God's choice of them meant their superiority to the nations. They typically thought that God's choice of them indicated they were better than the rest of mankind. Rather than making them proud and arrogant with respect to the nations, however, God's choice should have

rendered Israel profoundly humble, grateful that God should have chosen the least, through whom to bring about the best, the Redeemer of mankind. Rather, Israel thought itself “the people” and despised the rest of the Gentile world. This prejudice had some basis in reality inasmuch as Israel was the nation God dealt with in antiquity. His dealing with them exclusively of old, however, was due to no merit on their part but solely to God choosing, in accordance with his own good pleasure, to set his love upon them.

However, with the coming of the Christ and the completion of his work, this restrictive dealing became passe as the Lord intended to bring this message to the whole world, a lesson that Peter and others had to learn even if they preferred otherwise in some respects (Acts 10:9ff.). That God intended this was shown even to the Jews of the dispersion who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 2). They all witnessed the remarkable display of God’s power and grace in that mixed multitude of Jews hearing the one message of salvation in Christ alone, that Peter would go on to proclaim in his great sermon there, in the tongues of all the nations among whom they had been dispersed. This is why Pentecost is commonly referred to by scholars as a reverse-Babel: at Babel, the one rebel message was confused into many tongues, and the nations separated as part of God’s judgment; at Pentecost, that one gospel message was heard in the many tongues whereby from every diverse nation God was to call his own.

I will grant that in some generic sense, the US had a Christian ethos for some time, though even then it was never—I would argue in the details—what some supposed it to be. Given everything else with which Wolfe combines his call for Christian nationalism, one may not properly suppose that he just wants a nationalism composed of many Christians. Rather, Wolfe qualifies the kind of nationalism that he wants, made clear in things like his call for a Christian prince, a strong man of sorts who, as a civil magistrate, can restore not only a favorable Christian ethos but can also rule as God’s conscious sword-bearing minister of justice in maintaining God’s law in both tables.

“Christian,” in other words, is not simply *descriptive* in Wolfe’s vision of Christian nationalism, as in “we are a nation of many Christians and our faith, which has sway in all our lives, should influence our politics.” “Christian,” for Wolfe and others of his ilk, is *prescriptive* so that he expects a distinctly Christian approach to furnish and guide the details of this new Christian nationalism. The problem here, as I’ve made clear elsewhere, is that there is not a single monolithic Christian view of politics, economics, society, and the like. Wolfe in recent discussion wished to distinguish himself from the sorts of Christian nationalists who believe that there is only one proper Christian view of civil government and society; Wolfe claims that many governmental forms are permissible from a Christian perspective (monarchy, republic, etc.), as are a wide array of political, social, and economic approaches. The Bible, indeed, gives us all that we need to know for life and doctrine. The latter means that God’s special revelation furnishes us with all that we need to understand true doctrine, especially the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That it gives us what we need for life means that it contains what is

needed for how we should live and be content as Christians; it does not mean that God's word gives us a detailed blueprint for civil society and the like.

The best, then, that Christians can hope for from special revelation are political, social, and economic views that are in keeping with the principles of loving one's neighbor and do not contradict such principles. Because it is not the Bible's purpose, one cannot expect a detailed plan that all Christians can agree upon. Christians legitimately vary with respect to political, social, and economic programs because the Scriptures do not mandate particular programs for any of these things. This does not mean Christians should not argue in broad, principled ways that our laws should reflect love of God and neighbor. The former can be expressed through allowing freedom of worship in keeping with one's conscience and the latter through allowing freedom of action concerning love of neighbor.

One might then well argue, as Wolfe appears to at many points, that one need not have explicit biblical warrant for the detailed organization of civil society, such as can be ascertained through divine law (Torah), but also through divine wisdom (*hoekma*), reflected not only in special revelation but also in general revelation. Wolfe would seem to look to this sort of broader understanding of natural law for the foundation of Christian nationalism, consonant with the older notion of two kingdoms found in Calvin, Rutherford, and others. While, as I've written elsewhere, I think that there's something to learn from a solid two kingdom/natural law model (as well as other models, like Kuyperianism), none of this is to be done coercively, especially in an age so openly opposed to the gospel and any attempts to do so would be disastrous for all concerned.

We live in a multicultural society, like it or not. The only way that Christians can get anywhere in civil society broadly—not just the state, but business, education, etc.—is to make loving, reasoned arguments that are in keeping with love to God and neighbor, knowing that there is no salvation but in Christ (and thus no utopia of any sort ahead). We should not seek to force our views on others, and if the world will not hear our reasoned arguments that are in keeping with and not contradictory to biblical principles, we should work, pray, and wait for a better day. Such a time may or may not come. We know that in the world we shall have tribulation, but we are to be of good cheer and to take comfort because our Lord Jesus has overcome the world.

There is no realistic prospect, from a sociological viewpoint, of anything like a distinctly Christian ethos being embraced by our highly secularized culture. To set this forth is only to antagonize the world, to whom we are to live as peaceably as possible. Even if there were more widespread sympathy for Christianity, confessional Reformed Christianity is a tiny corner of American Christianity, even among evangelicals. It seems the likeliest result of the call for Christian nationalism will be in-fighting among the confessionally Reformed, with Christian nationalists castigating, as they are currently doing in social media and print, Reformed Christians who disagree with their Christian nationalism; many will bitterly argue that there is some divine detailed blueprint to which the whole of all civil societies everywhere must conform.

Many evangelicals, especially young men who feel disenfranchised and targeted under this now-established religion of secularism, are tired of this continual assault upon the faith and are "ready to fight back." Wolfe's book serves as an intellectual

manifesto for Christians who want to recapture a time when Christians were in charge, as Wolfe perceives it, and not given to a passive, yielding mindset that Wolfe sees as characterizing Christianity and against which he writes this book. Wolfe, then, appears to want his readers to do something like the Howard Beale character from the film “Network,” who urged his despairing listeners to throw open their windows and cry out in the night that they are mad, in vulgar tones, and are not going to take it anymore.

This is precisely what Christians need not do in such perilous times. Given the widespread societal polarization that we currently witness, the best thing that a Christian can do is, as Rudyard Kipling said in a different context, “keep your head when all about you are losing theirs.” The expressive individualism that Carl Trueman has so capably written about (in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*) is irrational, as is all sin, and one wonders how much longer such can sustain itself. Certainly, as is all irrationalism, it is self-referentially incoherent and bound at some point to lead to the dissolution of the society that it currently infests and props up.

The still small voice of the Christian faith needs to remain sober and as the only voice of true reason that it is, always pointing out these irrationalities (the impossibility of the contrary), ready to pick up the pieces at a moment’s notice and consistently proclaiming what all need to discover when *in extremis*, as was Jonah and all of us, “salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:10). This was the only solution for Israel, for Nineveh, and all of us: God bringing the gospel to the nations through the church, gathering and perfecting the saints throughout the earth, until the whole number is gathered, and Christ returns victorious. This is our hope, not some sort of future golden age on this earth, but a true expectation of a new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness. We don’t need to be those calling the world to one more utopia but calling all to live in this age with an eye to what is to come. This is our true and only hope.

—Alan D. Strange

Michael R. Wagenman. *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*. Lived Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. Pp. xxii + 143. \$12.99 (paperback).

In his latest book, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, Michael Wagenman explores the life and practical application of Abraham Kuyper and Kuyperian theology. Historically, within the Reformed theological tradition, Abraham Kuyper is one of the most prominent theologians and one of the most well-known advocates for what has become known as public theology. Kuyper promoted a biblical theology of Christ’s sovereignty over all things and every realm of life, tenaciously advocating that Christians should comprehensively engage the whole world in all its various spheres.

Wagenman asserts that Kuyper’s theological prescription is to follow neither the path of cultural Christianity nor the path of modernist Christianity. Cultural Christianity, according to Kuyper, is faithless, dead, and seeks to achieve a recreation of an idealized, historical church (i.e., cultural relic) that can never return. Modernist

Christianity, on the other hand, sacrifices orthodoxy and grounds itself in the contemporary scientific, political, and cultural developments of society in pursuit of cultural inclusion and societal acceptance. Finding both choices flawed, Kuyper prescribes a third way—"Confessional Christianity"—which grounds itself determinedly in Scripture while simultaneously pursuing relevant engagement with the broader secular culture. This becomes the crux of Kuyper's public theology.

This confessional Christianity is realized in Kuyper's Christology: Christ is the lord of all of life's spheres. In true Kuyperian Christological fashion, the lordship of Jesus serves as the theological premise and structural scaffolding of Wagenman's book. Using Kuyper's own life as an example, Wagenman shows us how the gospel can permeate all aspects of society: identity, public discourse, education, church, society, and politics, in chapters 2–7, respectively. Ultimately, Christians are to engage the world in its various spheres (or arenas) with discerning minds, aware of the societal changes and cultural movements taking place in their own unique time and place. According to Wagenman, Kuyper believed Christians need to shift the focus from personal piety and relational evangelism and unlearn what Wagenman refers to as "sacred-secular dualism," in which Christians separate the secular aspects of their lives from their Christian faith. On the contrary, Kuyper advocated for Christian engagement with the world that must remain relevant and engaging with contemporary societal and cultural issues and movements.

While this short book presents an intimate glimpse into his life and work, the author nevertheless successfully presents the breadth of Kuyper's identity and life. While highlighting Kuyper's commendable qualities, this book does not shy away from exposing his personal flaws. Kuyper often did not attend public worship in his later years (unless scheduled to preach) and did not sustain a healthy and vibrant Christian fellowship. Furthermore, his rigorous engagement in the world of academics, politics, business, and the church, along with his intense rhythm of life, was unsustainable and led to a series of breakdowns and exhaustion due to stress and overwork. Wagenman skillfully highlights Kuyper's strengths and successes and provides a balanced examination of his weaknesses and struggles, giving the reader an accessible glimpse into his life as a man.

Wagenman concludes by attempting to persuade the reader to avoid superimposing nineteenth-century Kuyperian theology upon the contemporary world and highlights Kuyper's life as a model rather than a mold. Kuyper's writings and his life itself should serve as a model and inspiration for Christians to enter the public discourse and engage the world in its various spheres in whatever time and setting they are in. The reader is encouraged to avoid a copy and paste of Kuyper's efforts, which were inherently unique to his time and place. Instead, according to Kuyper, each new generation of Christians is encouraged to engage in their public spheres in what might be considered cultural apologetics, exegeting their own society and setting to determine how best to engage their culture and context theologically.

Michael R. Wagenman's *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* will most certainly appeal to a broad audience of readers from the armchair theologian to the seasoned Reformed scholar and pastor. This book is a wonderful biographical overview and introduction to Abraham Kuyper and his theological journey. It also

serves as a roadmap, or guide, for potential readers unfamiliar with Reformed theology as to the development of Kuyperian theology and a Reformed worldview.

This book is a wonderful introduction to Kuyper and a relevant resource for our troubled times. It is academic and both biographical in nature and practical in purpose. Furthermore, it is a welcome resource to the field of cultural apologetics and an accessible tool for equipping Christians to address the varied and swift societal shifts in modern culture and society. Wagenman has produced an accessible and engaging account of a historical example of an eminent Calvinist theologian who successfully advocated for the gospel in a wide array of dimensions within the public arena of his day and serves as an inspiration for Christians today to clearly articulate and embody the gospel in every sphere of human life.

—Blake I. Campbell