

BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

Owen Anderson, *Benjamin B. Warfield and Right Reason: The Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics*. Foreword by Surrenda Gangadean. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 2005. Pp.xxix + 69. \$23.95.

This book treats an intriguing subject inasmuch as there is continuing debate between the Old Princeton school of apologetics and the Amsterdam school, first articulated by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, and then championed and developed/modified by Cornelius Van Til (commonly known as presuppositionalism). There have been various articles seeking to expound B. B. Warfield's apologetic method, particularly in response to Van Til's characterization of Warfield as one who compromised Reformed principles. At least two major issues (obstacles) confront interpreters of Warfield in this regard: (1) whether Van Til properly understands Warfield and has represented him accurately; and (2) whether self-announced followers of Warfield actually reproduce the Princetonian's methodology and whether their evidentialist approach to apologetics captures Warfield's project. I am inclined to answer, in a preliminary way, that both Van Til and Warfield's (would be) followers are mistaken.

Interestingly, my reason for that assessment centers upon what Warfield meant by "right reason" and his appeal to "right reason." Both Van Til as critic and Warfieldian adherents of strong foundationalism are mistaken about Warfield since they do not understand what is meant by "right reason." Since Owen Anderson's book makes this front and center in his discussion of Warfield's ideas, this slim volume promised to be an engaging work. Indeed, it is engaging; and for all those who wish to explore these issues Anderson's book should not be ignored. However, in saying that, I must also add that I am not convinced that Anderson succeeds, any more than Van Til or the advocates of strong foundationalism, in correctly understanding Warfield's use of the idea of "right reason."

Here we will be brief. Anderson understands Warfield's appeal to "right reason" to be an appeal not so much to a kind of neutrality but to a universality—"reason is necessary and is common ground for all humans" (17). Anderson observes that, for Warfield, "reason ... clearly and necessarily reveals God to the unbeliever" This means that the unbeliever must then either "accept this" or "give up reason." The unbeliever, however, does not accept this, and in order not to give up reason he

must use reason—he must use arguments—in order to protect his unbelief. Arguments assume reason, and so in not giving up reason, “reason” calls him to accept God. “There is no escape from reason” (17). Again, for Anderson, Warfield is claiming that “reason reveals God’s existence” (17). Contrary to Anderson, however, what Warfield actually maintains is that *right* reason reveals God. And right reason is precisely what the unbeliever does not have. To his credit, at another place Anderson correctly writes in expositing Warfield’s view that “right reason reveals God” (20). But the difference between “reason” and “right reason” is crucial for Warfield’s apologetic project and for our correctly understanding that project.

A much better exposition and interpretation of Warfield’s apologetic methodology as a whole and in particular his conception of “right reason” can be found in David Smith’s article “The Scientifically Constructive Scholarship of B. B. Warfield,” in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 15 (2004): 87-123, especially, pp. 95-103. For Warfield, “right reason” is a term rooted in the Christian tradition, not Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, as such; and it is a term defined and circumscribed by prior generations of Reformed theologians who carefully articulated the role of reason in the work of theology. Smith demonstrates that Turretin, whose massive elenctic theology was a textbook at Princeton, gave careful definition to the notion of right reason, which in turn gives the right definition to Warfield’s use of the term. In short form, for Warfield, right reason is not the reasoning of the unregenerate; rather, his appeal to right reason is an appeal to a true state-of-affairs; it is an appeal to what is actually so; right reason is not appealing to an unbeliever to use the measuring stick of his or her unrighted reason to decide what is true. Instead, right reason points to valid reasoning “righted” by regeneration. “Right reason” reasons rightly about the evidence for God and about human nature and about general revelation and about what is ontologically and epistemologically true. An appeal to *right* reason is precisely not an appeal to the unbeliever to be the standard-bearer or measuring rod of what is valid and what is good. Just the opposite. *Right* reason (NB: not abstract reason, which does not exist, and not fallen reason, not tainted and sin-rebelling reason, not suppressing-the-truth-in-unrighteousness reason) shows that the created order declares and affirms God. *Right* human reason supports and confirms what is really true. But unright reason reasons wrongly about God and about much more; unrighted reason does not and cannot recognize evidence as evidence, for it does not reason rightly!

As for what then finally and clearly divides Warfield from his Dutch compatriots, Kuyper and Bavinck, is his conception of what an appeal to “right reason” accomplishes. The difference is captured in how one conceives of the work of the Holy Spirit in the fallen sinner’s heart. Whereas Kuyper and Bavinck conceive of this operation as taking place immediately—unmediated by means of arguments and evidence, etc.—Warfield saw this sovereign operation of the divine Spirit taking place mediately—that is, as mediated through the use of means, like rational arguments and appeal to evidence that only “right reason” discovers and evaluates rightly as valid evidence. This is squarely where the difference rested between Warfield and his Dutch Reformed colleagues. Warfield did not

think for a moment that reasons and arguments, the evidence, converts, regenerates, even convinces. Unrighted reason reasons wrongly. This is why Kuyper and Bavinck abandoned arguments and proofs, etc. But Warfield viewed matters differently, i.e., he drew different conclusions from that state of affairs, for he believed that although reasons and arguments are impotent in and by themselves, wholly unpersuasive to the unregenerate heart, the Holy Spirit can and may nonetheless use such arguments and evidence *as means* (note: the Holy Spirit remains the agent!) unto persuading and convincing and moving the heart and mind of unbelief to faith. Just as the gospel does not itself convert a sinner or bring a sinner to faith, yet it is an instrument that the Holy Spirit uses to move sinners to faith and repentance, likewise Warfield was persuaded that “right reason”—that is, valid and right reasons—can be used by the Holy Spirit to perform his miraculous work of regeneration and conversion.

Admittedly, we have only touched on a small part of Anderson’s book, and readers are encouraged to ponder Anderson’s interesting discussion and presentation of the material. We have, however, focused upon a central issue, pivotal for properly understanding Warfield’s approach. Of course, whether one agrees with Warfield’s apologetic methodology and his appeal to “right reason” is not the concern of this review, nor is it our desire to assess Warfield at this point. We simply note that Anderson’s small book provokes discussion and further reflection. What is still needed for the Reformed community is an informative and comprehensive volume that compares and contrasts, accurately, Old Princeton, Old Amsterdam, Van Tilian presuppositionalism, and the New Reformed epistemology on apologetical methodology. Anderson’s book certainly counts as a player in that discussion.

—J. Mark Beach

David E. Aune, editor. *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. 270. \$24.99.

Even a casual observer of contemporary Christian theology and the church should be aware of the on-going ecumenical discussions of the doctrine of justification on the part of Protestant and Roman Catholic representatives. During the last several decades, a number of significant discussions of justification, which was the central doctrinal point in dispute in the sixteenth-century Reformation, have taken place. Perhaps the most important of these, in addition to discussions in the realm of biblical and Pauline studies, is the discussion that has taken place between representatives of the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Lutheran church represents the first branch of the Protestant Reformation, and since Luther is properly known as the theologian of justification by faith alone, it is a development of no little significance that these representatives ratified a “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” on October 31, 1999. The date of this ratifica-

tion was deliberately chosen for its symbolic significance. What divided the church in the sixteenth century need divide the church no longer.

I mention these ecumenical discussions and the Joint Declaration, because they provide the historical framework for the essays that comprise this volume. As the book's subtitle indicates, the contributions are authored by Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars who have an interest in furthering the achievement of the Joint Declaration and contributing to a "rereading of Paul together." Most of the chapters in this volume were originally presented as papers at a colloquium held February 1-2, 2002, at the University of Notre Dame, entitled "Rereading Paul Together: A Colloquium on the Modern Critical Study and Teaching of Pauline Theology in Educational and Ecumenical Context." Consistent with its nature as a reflection upon recent Roman Catholic-Lutheran discussions of justification, this colloquium was jointly sponsored by Notre Dame, a Roman Catholic institution, and Valparaiso University, a Lutheran school. Some papers originally presented at the colloquium are not included in this volume, while two essays were added to fill gaps in the original program.

The essays that comprise this volume range across the field of these recent discussions, and treat them from a variety of historical, ecclesiastical and confessional perspectives. The first three chapters introduce the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and reflect upon the varying reactions to it among Roman Catholics and (Lutheran) Protestant theologians. The following four chapters offer a synopsis of more recent Roman Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the writings of the apostle Paul. The final three chapters address the history of interpretation of Paul in the early church, the medieval and Reformation period, and in recent biblical scholarship.

Since the editor of the volume, David E. Aune, offers a synopsis of the distinct contributions of the authors in his prefatory essay, I will forego in this review a summary of the book's contents. However, I would like to offer a few observations about this volume and the subject that it treats.

First, this volume will serve well as an introduction to the recent ecumenical and biblical discussions of the doctrine of justification. The importance of these discussions can hardly be exaggerated. For those who wish to enter the discussion in an informed manner, this volume is one of the few works that will repay consultation.

Second, unlike many volumes of this sort, which collect a number of essays by diverse authors, this one stays on subject throughout. This volume is one whose title accurately advertises its contents. Readers will be introduced to the broad scope and various dimensions of the contemporary debates about the doctrine of justification and the interpretation of the apostle Paul.

Third, though the volume includes a select bibliography, together with subject, source and author indexes, the bibliography offered is rather limited and suffers from some serious lacunae. Some of the important sources on the so-called "new perspective on Paul," for example, are not listed.

And fourth, the tone of the various contributors to this volume tends to be cautiously hopeful regarding the likelihood of substantive agreement in our time between Roman Catholic and Protestant views of justification. In my judgment, a persuasive case has not yet been made in this volume or elsewhere for arguing that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification represents that kind of achievement. A careful reading of the Joint Declaration will show that some of the most basic features of the dispute during the period of the Reformation remain in dispute today (see my essay in this volume for an argument to that effect). What has changed, in my opinion, is not so much the doctrinal divergences on the doctrine of justification, but the conviction that such divergences ultimately matter. One of the fascinating features of the reception of the Joint Declaration is that it has been muted and restrained. One might even say that it has been met in many quarters with something on the order of a collective yawn. This may say more about the state of the church and its adherence to the biblical gospel of salvation through the work of Christ alone, than the Joint Declaration itself, whatever its achievement.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Herbert W. Bateman IV, editor. *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. Gareth L. Cockerill; Buist M. Fanning; Randall C. Gleason; Grant R. Osborne; conclusion by George H. Guthrie. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007. Pp. 478. \$29.99.

In the history of the debates between Reformed and Arminian theologians, the book of Hebrews has often been a bone of contention. Since Hebrews presents a sustained argument for the superiority of the new covenant in Christ, and since it contains several warning passages that appear to imply that genuine believers may apostatize and lose their salvation in Christ, it has been adduced by Arminian theologians as a clear biblical testimony against the Reformed teaching of the perseverance of the saints. If true believers within the new covenant can fall away from the faith and irretrievably lose their salvation, one of the pivotal claims of the Reformed faith seems to be imperiled. Furthermore, since the covenant of grace is one of the central themes of Reformed theology, the book of Hebrews is particularly important to the articulation of a comprehensive doctrine of the covenant. The teaching of this New Testament epistle is a special importance to an understanding of the new covenant and the priestly work of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant.

Students of Reformed theology, accordingly, should have a special interest in the publication of this volume. Though written against the background of the traditional debates between Reformed and Arminian theologians, this book aims to take a fresh look at the key warning passages in Hebrews and to illustrate the distinctive interpretation of these passages on the part of contemporary exegetes who defend widely divergent readings of these much-disputed passages. The book itself is a collection of papers that were originally presented to the Hebrews Study Group at the fifty-sixth annual meeting of the Evangelical Society, which met in November of 2004. The four authors represent four different

views, which are denominated as follows: a “classical Arminian” view (Grant R. Osborne), a “classical Reformed” view (Buist M. Fanning), a “Wesleyan Arminian” view (Gareth Lee Cockerill), and a “moderate Reformed” view (Randall C. Gleason). Each of the four chapters begins with an extensive exegesis of the warning passages in Hebrews written by a defender of one of these four views, and is then followed by three brief responses on the part of the other authors. The general editor, Hebert W. Bateman IV, provides an introductory survey of the warning passages in Hebrews, which aims to orient the reader to the four main chapters of the volume. George H. Guthrie then concludes the volume with a number of observations about the tenor of the debate between the four representatives of different views and offers his own tentative suggestions as to how the discussion could be advanced further.

Since the contributions to this volume represent extended, and at times highly technical, expositions of the major warning passages in the book of Hebrews, it is not possible in the space of a book review to do justice to their respective arguments. However, it may be of some benefit to summarize the arguments of the four authors before offering some comments on the usefulness of this volume.

In his opening chapter, Grant Osborne begins with a brief note on the traditional Reformed and Arminian interpretations of the warning passages in Hebrews (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39). Reformed theologians typically argue that these warning passages are addressed to a covenant community that is composed of genuine believers and others who may appear for a time to be truly among the people of God but through apostasy prove to be only “quasi-Christians.” Arminian theologians typically argue that these passages are addressed to true believers, some of whom may fail to persevere in the way of faith and thus lose their salvation. In his interpretation of these passages, Osborne maintains that they must be taken to describe true believers, some of whom may commit the unpardonable sin of willfully falling away from Christ. The Achilles heel of a Reformed interpretation of these passages, according to Osborne, is the kind of description that is given of those to whom their warnings are addressed. To argue that the recipients of these warnings may only “appear” to be true believers does not do justice to what is said about them, especially in a passage like Hebrews 5:11-6:12. As he sums up his position, “Hebrews is describing a very real danger of apostasy that true believers can commit, and if they do so it is an unpardonable sin from which there is no possibility of repentance, but only of eternal judgment” (p. 128).

In the second chapter, Buist M. Fanning offers a defense of a classical Reformed interpretation of these warning passages. Rather than treating each of these passages separately, Fanning distinguishes five central elements that are present in each of them, and focuses his attention especially on the warning of 5:11-6:20. Each of these passages has the following elements: 1) a description of those who fall away (the audience); 2) the nature of the fall or sin contemplated; 3) the consequences of such a fall; 4) the desired positive response (exhortation); and 5) an encouragement to the readers that appeals to God’s faithfulness. When these elements are viewed “synthetically,” Fanning notes that they seem

to present us with a perplexing inconsistency. On the one hand, these passages seem to exhort “genuine Christians” to persevere in faithfulness, lest they fall away from Christ and lose their salvation. On the other hand, these passages also express the confidence that Christ’s work of salvation will not fail to preserve them in the way of salvation. Fanning also concurs with the traditional Arminian claim that these passages are addressing genuine believers, not, to use Osborne’s language, “quasi-believers.” How then does he resolve the apparent inconsistency?

The resolution of this apparent inconsistency lies, according to Fanning, in the “two conditional sentences” found in Hebrews 3:6 (“But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast”) and 3:14 (“We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first”). The common approach of most interpreters is to take these conditional sentences to express what Fanning calls a “cause” and “effect” relationship: “if” the recipients of these warnings do what is required of them (cause), “then” they will be saved fully and ultimately (“effect”). However, Fanning argues that conditional sentences like these are more properly to be viewed to express an “evidence” to “inference” relationship: “if” the recipients do what is required of them (“evidence”), then they will prove to be what they claim to be, genuine believers (“inference”). Within the framework of this “paradigm” or approach to the conditional language that these warning passages employ, Fanning concludes that the purpose of these passages is to urge their recipients “to maintain faith in Christ’s highly priestly work, not to provoke fear that they may lose their standing with God, nor primarily to test the genuineness of their faith” (p. 218). The author of Hebrews takes a “phenomenological” approach to the conversion of those whom he addresses; he describes how a genuine believer looks “outwardly.” However, should a professed believer apostatize, this would only demonstrate or evidence the fact that he was never genuinely or inwardly a believer. For the burden of the teaching of the book of Hebrews is that true believers may be confident of their perseverance in the way of faith, since such perseverance belongs to those things that pertain to salvation and the faithfulness of Christ’s work in them.

In the third chapter, Gareth Lee Cockerill presents a Wesleyan Arminian view of the warning passages in Hebrews that differs only slightly from the view defended by Osborne. After noting that Wesleyans believe that true believers may lose their salvation for a time, only to be restored at some later point, Cockerill proceeds to discuss each of the warning passages in turn. In his interpretation of these passages, he concurs with Osborne that they describe the real possibility of true believers falling away from Christ and losing irrevocably their salvation. The only point of dispute between Cockerill and Osborne relates to the nature of the sin contemplated by the writer of Hebrews. Whereas Osborne tends to view this sin in the strongest terms, as a form of the unpardonable sin for which there is no remedy because of its nature as a willful, knowing, and persistent repudiation of Jesus Christ, Cockerill allows that it may take a lesser form for which the grace of God in Christ remains available as a remedy.

Perhaps the most original of the chapters in this volume is the fourth chapter by Randall C. Gleason. While the first three chapters present rather traditional Arminian and Calvinist interpretations of the warning passages in Hebrews, Randall C. Gleason presents a Reformed view that differs in significant ways from more traditional Reformed interpretations (e.g., those of John Calvin or John Owen). He begins by acknowledging that the recipients of these warnings “are regenerate and not just quasi-Christians” (p. 157). According to Gleason, we may not allow our theological presuppositions to overrule the implications of the language used in these passages to describe their recipients. After making this concession to an important element of the Arminian interpretation of these passages, Gleason attempts to argue that the key to unlocking the door of these warnings is the recognition that the author is addressing a Jewish Christian community. Within this Jewish Christian community, there was a real and pressing danger of a kind of apostasy that occurred in the course of Israel’s wilderness wandering. Like this earlier apostasy in Israel’s history, the “falling away” against which the author of Hebrews writes is not an irrevocable loss of true faith and salvation. Rather, it represents a falling back into an immature faith and failure to build appropriately upon the fullness of Christ’s work as Mediator of the new covenant. Those who commit this sin would not be guilty of the kind of apostasy that leads to eternal condemnation. Rather, like the children of Israel, this lesser apostasy would lead to the loss of “temporal blessings” that God grants to those who mature in the way of faith. Since this apostasy does not lead to the loss of eternal salvation, it would not constitute an objection to the doctrine of the perseverance of faith. According to Gleason, the author of Hebrews provides a rich doctrine of Christian assurance and confidence in the faithfulness of God. It would simply be incompatible with this doctrine to teach that genuine believers could apostatize in some ultimate manner and thereby lose irrevocably their eternal salvation.

Now that I have presented a brief summary of the arguments of the principal authors of this volume, I would like to offer a few observations about the usefulness of this volume.

First, the strength of this volume is the way the reader is invited to take a fresh look at the warning passages in Hebrews. The dispute regarding these passages ultimately will be settled by a careful reading of the biblical texts, and not by a simple repetition of arguments from the past that may have become sterile or fossilized. The size of this volume and the evident competence of its principal authors make it a worthy addition to the literature on this subject. Contemporary students of the book of Hebrews should have this book on their shelf, among others.

Second, the tone of the contributions to this volume is respectful and irenic, yet not at the expense of the respective author’s theological convictions. Unlike the tone of some theological and exegetical interchanges that occur in other forums, the approach of this volume is marked by fairness in the presentation of alternative views and caution in drawing conclusions when the evidence may not be as compelling as might be wished.

Third, like many such volumes, which include authors who defend distinct positions, there is a marked difference in quality between some of the contributions. In my judgment, the two outstanding contributions to this volume are those of Osborne and Fanning. The contribution of Gleason, by contrast, is rather weak.

And fourth, this volume's principal weakness is its failure to provide the reader with a clear statement of the historic differences between the Reformed and Arminian interpretations of the warning passages in Hebrews. Though Osborne's and Cockerill's chapters offer a fairly typical version of the Arminian reading of these passages, the two "Calvinist" writers in this volume offer interpretations that diverge in important ways from the more classical reading of the Reformed tradition. In the case of Gleason, the interpretation presented seems rather far-fetched and unsubstantiated. It also, so far as I know, has little if any pedigree as a Calvinist reading of these passages. Fanning's interpretation, though consistent with a classical Calvinist reading of these passages, is sufficiently divergent from older interpretations that it can hardly be denominated a "classical" Calvinist reading. Since there are contemporary authors who have competently presented an interpretation of these passages that is in the line of earlier Calvinist interpretations (e.g., Wayne Grudem), the volume would be of much greater usefulness were such an author included and the contributions of Cockerill and Gleason excluded. Admittedly, this would not be consistent with the origins of the present volume. But it would enable this book's presentation of the distinctly Reformed and Arminian views to have greater usefulness and longevity.

The weaknesses of this volume notwithstanding, it offers a substantial contribution to the on-going debate about how to interpret the warnings of Hebrews.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: with a Guide to Modern Reprints*. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2006. Pp. xxxvi + 896. \$25.00 (cloth).

For those who wish to acquaint themselves with the Reformed heritage, especially the British side of that heritage, this large volume is a useful tool. Over 140 individuals are treated, mostly English and New England writers, with certain significant Scottish writers (appendix 2) and Dutch Further Reformation theologians (appendix 3) included among the notables.

The methodology used to introduce each person treated in this book follows a basic pattern: a brief biographical sketch is offered of a given author, followed by a survey of *some* of the noteworthy books he wrote, often with a very general summary of the contents of these books. This is helpful to the uninitiated and assists one in deciding whether a given title is desirable for further study or purchase. Generally speaking, books that are available in English as reprints are included. Numerous volumes either unavailable, or not written in English (but in Latin), are ignored.

Unfortunately, this can leave the reader uninformed about a given writer's actual contribution to the theological enterprise and what polemical or ecclesiastical issues he had to face during his life time.

Some of the biographical sketches are very short—no more than half a page—and the consideration of the writings of some authors is limited to one title.

So what led the authors of this volume to decide whom to include and whom to exclude from review. The answer is found in what Puritan titles have been reprinted in the last fifty years, which reveals the purpose of this book. The goal of *Meet the Puritans* is to introduce Puritan authors and their reprinted works to readers so that the readers will *read the Puritans themselves*. The authors want pastors and laypersons to imbibe Puritan writings, which can serve well, as a kind of spiritual medicine, for our troubled times. Consequently, in order to appreciate the aim of this book it is important to read its extended preface, wherein Puritanism itself is defined and introduced, and wherein six noteworthy characteristics of Puritanism are elaborated, and also wherein a "Where to Begin" section is included. This preface should be read in tandem with appendix 5, "The Great Tradition": A Final Word on Puritanism and Our Need Today."

This book does not pretend to be the first introductory volume to the Puritans, and in fact the book includes a biography of secondary sources on the Puritans—first in short form, with editorial comment, in appendix 4, and then an extended list of works is given at the end of the volume. A noteworthy feature of this book is the glossary of terms and events, provided by Ray B. Lanning. This is extremely helpful in bringing readers up to speed in things pertaining to Puritanism.

Users of this handsome volume should be clear on what they are getting and what they are not getting in a book of this sort. They are being introduced, mostly, to a certain stripe of Reformed author, and even that selection of authors is guided largely by modern reprints of available works. This is a far cry from being introduced to the wider Reformed tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Continental Reformed writers are excluded altogether except for some noteworthy Dutch Second Reformation authors. Even among these writers, the kind of literature they produced is limited to certain common books of piety and à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (4 vols.), which is partially edited. This is not to fault the authors of this book, as such, but it is necessary, I think, that we not only seek to recapture the writings of the Puritans but also of the larger Reformed tradition, and rather than be guided by what is available in the way of reprints, we need to rediscover the rich heritage of Reformed resources that have *not yet* been reprinted or translated into English.

In an age of spiritual confusion and compromise, not to mention of "small things" theologically speaking, what is needed is not just the Puritans and their more practical writings (not just that, but, yes, also that), but also the robust contribution of the entire Reformed heritage from Heidelberg, Geneva, Lausanne, Zürich, Basel, Utrecht, Leyden, Montauban, Sedan, etc. We need the contributions of Ursinus, Beza, Olevianus, Musculus, Gomarus, Pareus, Wollebius, Hyperius, Junius, Alsted,

DuMoulin, Diodati, Maresius, Ball, Leigh, Polyander, Polanus, Rivet, Marckius, Spanheim, Trelcatius, Bulkeley, Blake, Barret, Heidegger, Leydekker, Vermigli, Rijssen, Zanchius, Keckermann, Turretin, Rollock, Mastricht, Burmann, Bastingius, Roberts, Bucanus, Pictet, Wyttenbach, DeMoor, etc. To be sure, many of the best works in the Reformed tradition remain buried in the Latin tongue, but many older English translations of such works could be updated or reprinted to serve the church today. Indeed, we would be well served not only to glean the fruits of the more practical writings in the English Puritan tradition and the Dutch Second Reformation, but also to return to the width and breadth of the Reformed tradition by retrieving the writings of its greatest writers, many of whom labored on the Continent, and who expounded the Reformed faith in its most intellectually vigorous expression.

That said, we commend this volume as a very serviceable introduction to the Puritans. It is a wonderful guide to a selection of their writings which have been made available to readers today.

—J. Mark Beach

James V. Brownson, *The Promise of Baptism: An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007. Pp. xiii + 223. \$16.00.

Good books on the subject of the sacrament of baptism in Scripture and the Reformed tradition are relatively rare. This new study of James V. Brownson, who teaches New Testament at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, is therefore a welcome exception to the rule. In a clear and persuasive manner, Brownson manages not only to treat the Scriptural underpinnings of the doctrine of the sacrament of baptism, but also to address many of the pressing questions that recur in the life and practice of the church. Whereas some books on baptism deal exclusively with Scripture or theology, this book also helpfully addresses the questions of practice that often accompany the administration of the sacrament.

In his introductory chapter, Brownson notes that, despite the apparent simplicity of the rite of baptism in Christian worship and practice, it is often the subject of considerable confusion and debate. Those who advocate a credo-baptist view that denies the sacrament to the infant children of believers face difficult questions when such children die before they are old enough to profess their faith. Are we to assume that such children are condemned to eternal judgment? Or should we assume that they enjoy a kind of innocent status that ensures their reception into God's presence? Those who advocate a paedobaptism position often face different, albeit equally perplexing, questions. Was the baptism of persons who grow up to reject the Christian faith ineffective or meaningless? Does baptism effectively communicate the gracious promise of the gospel in such cases? If it doesn't, should we then conclude that baptism is a kind of empty rite, which communicates nothing and is entirely dependent upon the ongoing faith of the person baptized? In addition to the cluster of questions that surround the traditional debates between

paedo- and credo-baptist positions, there are also additional pastoral questions, such as the question of the validity or invalidity of baptisms performed in the Roman Catholic Church. Should all Christian churches recognize the validity of the baptisms of persons who received the sacrament in other communions?

In his approach to the subject of baptism and the many questions that accompany the administration of this sacrament, Brownson aims to present a comprehensive biblical and theological account of the sacrament. Before addressing the particularly contentious issue of the propriety of the baptism of children of believers, he sets forth a general theology of the sacrament, which provides the context for evaluating this practice. Only a fully biblical doctrine of the church, and one that recognizes the centrality of the proclamation of Scripture and the administration of the sacraments, can provide the kind of interpretive framework for addressing this question.

To achieve his purpose, Brownson divides his book into six major sections. The first section, which he notes must be read as a foundation for the sections that follow, treats basic questions regarding the sacrament of baptism (for example, What does it mean to be a Christian? What is a sacrament, and how does it differ from an 'ordinance'? How do the sacraments bring God's grace to us? Why are sacraments necessary and important?). The second section offers a survey of some of the key biblical themes regarding baptism (e.g., What does Romans 6:3 mean when it speaks of being baptized into Christ's death? What is the relationship of baptism to receiving the Holy Spirit?). In the third section, Brownson takes up the difficult but important subject of the efficacy of baptism, and treats a series of questions that often surface in baptismal debates (e.g., Does baptism presuppose faith, or does it call us to faith? Does baptism actually bring about any change in us and in our relationship to God?). The next two sections of the book consider the subject of infant baptism in some detail. In section four, Brownson makes the case for infant baptism, and in section five, he addresses a number of common disputes and questions surrounding the practice of infant baptism (e.g., Can we be confident of the salvation of baptized children who die at a very young age? Does the fact that some baptized persons abandon the faith of their baptism call into question the reliability of God's promise?). The last section of Brownson's study considers a number of knotty pastoral questions that often arise in the context of the administration of the sacrament (e.g., What is 'confirmation' or 'profession of faith,' and what is its relationship to baptism? Can grandparents present grandchildren for baptism if the parents are not confessing members of the church?).

As this brief sketch of the main divisions and topics that Brownson addresses illustrates, this book ranges widely over the field and manages to take up the most important questions surrounding the doctrine and practice of baptism in the church. One especially helpful feature of the book is the way each chapter is structured. Each chapter focuses attention upon a particular question and aims to provide the reader with a clear and concise account of how it should be answered. Though the reader is instructed to read the first foundational section, which is comprised of six chapters, it is possible to read the other chapters discretely.

To aid the reader in reviewing the content and argument of each chapter, Brownson also provides a concluding summary, which is entitled "To Sum Up." In this way, the volume becomes serviceable to pastors and church members who may wish to follow up or consider only one of a number of the questions that relate to the doctrine of baptism.

In my judgment, Brownson succeeds admirably in achieving his purpose. The reader is provided with a clearly written, biblically and theologically rich as well as balanced, treatment of the sacrament of baptism. True to his promise, Brownson writes from a distinctly Reformed point of view, and provides one of the finest defenses of the practice of infant baptism that I have read in a long time. Though Brownson characterizes his book as more pastoral than theological, the theology that undergirds his treatment of baptism is rich and fulsome, albeit presented in an understated manner. Among the books on the sacrament of baptism that Reformed pastors or church members should have on their bookshelves, this volume certainly deserves a place.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006. Pp. 220. \$19.99.

The widespread influence of H. Richard Niebuhr's 1951 classic, *Christ and Culture*, has in recent decades stimulated a veritable genre of critical responses that, taken together, seem to be signaling the end of an era. Ranging from mild suggestions for revision to aggressive demands for rejection, these criticisms arise from the shared conviction that Niebuhr's paradigm has not worked. Today's evangelical Christians look more like their unbelieving neighbors than did their predecessors forty years ago, and today's North American evangelicals suffer just as much from the social and moral trauma that afflicts our age.

To this range of voices belong those of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, John Howard Yoder and George Marsden. Joining his voice to theirs with this volume, Craig Carter issues the call to replace the model of Niebuhrian Christendom-based cultural transformationalism with the non-violent approach to culture modeled by people like the Quaker William Penn, the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., and apartheid opponent Desmond Tutu.

The author, who teaches religious studies at Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, argues that all of Niebuhr's typologies (Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ and culture in paradox, Christ above culture, and Christ transformer of culture) were based on and presupposed the theory of Christendom. With the Edict of Milan in AD 313 emperors Constantine and Licinius opened the way for religious liberty within the Roman empire, something they saw as vital to the security of the state. As the institutions and prerogatives of Christianity came under the protection and sponsorship of the state, a Christendom developed like a torso with two arms—a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (the state)—both of which are united in their adherence to the Christian faith. The principal defect of Christendom is

that it identifies Western civilization with Christianity (14). To the extent that it still dominates Christian social ethics, Christendom must be rejected, for it depends entirely on violent coercion and leads the church inevitably to accommodate to its surrounding culture. Attempts to implement Niebuhr's recommended typology, then, have transformed the New Testament message of radical discipleship into either liberal individualism or conservative exploitation of the poor through global capitalism.

The book has two parts. Part 1 seeks to make the case for "Rethinking Christ and Culture after Christendom." Here Carter provides a full-length summary of Niebuhr's book, together with an analysis of its structure (chapter 2), followed by a theological evaluation of Niebuhr's arguments, one that is highly influenced by John Howard Yoder's critique (chapter 3). With Yoder's help, the author critiques Niebuhr's doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Next, the paradigm of Christendom is explained and evaluated (chapter 4); Christendom's commitment to coercion in any and every form (in evangelism as well as in social ethics) renders it incompatible with the gospel.

The author delivers his alternative in Part 2: "A Post-Christendom Typology of Christ and Culture."

Niebuhr's project of Christ transforming culture has failed in two important ways. First, it has sought transformation in such a way that it has lost touch with the gospel and thus has surrendered its claim to be an authentically Christian witness. Second, because it tends to move away from the authentic message of the gospel, it tends to confirm the world in its rebellion, rather than transforming the world by repentance and conversion.

The church's main calling in the world, however, is to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in her life and testimony, realizing that the transformation of the surrounding culture will be a secondary by-product, not its primary goal. Let the church be church. This is Carter's appeal and alternative. In line with the Apostles' Creed, the church must be truly one (refusing the imperial way of participating in this world's power structures), truly holy (refusing to persecute others, especially those who disbelieve the gospel), truly catholic (subordinating political loyalties to Christian fellowship), and truly apostolic (preaching the gospel to rulers too).

In chapter 6 Carter introduces a post-Christendom paradigm for the relation between Christ and culture. "Violent coercion," he writes, "is the key to dividing Christendom from non-Christendom types because it [is] at this point that the dividing line between the church and the world is either maintained or blurred" (114). The cross is the alternative to the sword. Six types or six approaches to the Christ-and-culture relationship are explained in chapters 7-10, three of which belong to Christendom and are characterized by use of coercion, and three of which belong to non-Christendom, which rejects violent coercion.

Understanding the Sermon on the Mount as the church's constitution, Carter sees the church as a foretaste of the kingdom of God, called not to bring in the kingdom but to bear witness to the kingdom. To be sure, living in the world by the Sermon on the Mount confronts with di-

lemmas Christians radically committed to following Jesus. “There is little doubt that someone is going to wield the sword in this fallen world; the doctrine of sin assures us of that fact. The question is whether Christians should be the ones to perpetrate the violent coercion necessary to prevent anarchy and injustice” (181). The choice between Jesus or Constantine entails two kinds of messiahs, two views of power, two views of the cross, two kinds of church, two kinds of eschatology, two kinds of discipleship.

Many of the colors in Carter’s portrait are familiar from the paintings of others: his manifesto for pacificism, his extolling of the Quakers and the Anabaptists as models for post-Christendom discipleship, his assessment of Constantinian Christianity as the centuries-long surrender of the gospel, his identification of non-violence as the virtual essence of Jesus’ life and work. All of these hues and tints belong to an identifiable school of thought. But the texture of his brush strokes and the composition of his subject are new and worthy of careful reflection. As we see Christianity being quarantined to the church parking lot, isolated from influence in public life and popular culture in the West, Carter’s analysis provides an important opportunity to reflect on the church’s unique calling and identity within culture.

Commitment to the comprehensive unity and message of Scripture, however, together with disagreement about his restrictive use of the Sermon on the Mount, will prevent many from fully endorsing either his diagnosis or his remedy. Such hermeneutical considerations also affect one’s view of whether the church’s gospel-driven and Spirit-empowered generation of culture must exclude Christian *participation* in surrounding culture. For example, if, as he claims, there is little doubt that someone is going to wield the sword in this fallen world, then why, in light of Romans 13:3-4, would a Christian not be authorized, in the context of civil government, to employ the coercion necessary to prevent anarchy and injustice, and to do so as θεοῦ διάκονος, God’s servant?

In sum, current developments in Western society and the perennial need to understand and proclaim the biblical relation between Jesus Christ and human culture, obligate us to participate in this conversation.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*. Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis, David M. Howard Jr., series editor. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006. Pp. 231. \$19.99.

This book is the first in a series of handbooks (David M. Howard, Jr., series editor) that are scheduled to come out with a twofold goal: “to present the reader with a better understanding of the different Old Testament genres (principles) and provide strategies for preaching and teaching these genres (methods)” (p. 17). Other writers in this series include Peter Vogt, Richard Schultz, Mark Futato, Michael Grisanti, and Richard Taylor. Thus this series holds the promise of contributing another evangelical perspective to the matters of Bible survey as well as principles of

interpretation, or exegesis. The volume under review is a worthy start to this series.

David Howard points out in his preface to the series that each of the volumes in this series will be built around “the same six-chapter structure”: (1) The Nature of the Genres; (2) The Big Picture: Major Themes; (3) Preparing for Interpretation; (4) Interpreting the Text; (5) Proclaiming the Text; and (6) Putting It All Together.

It must be pointed out that each author in this survey-interpretative series is given the freedom to entitle the chapters in his own way, but the general topics covered will be gathered around the six areas noted above. This should lead to greater facility in use of the books as the series makes its appearance in print.

This volume’s author, Robert Chisholm, Jr., is the chair of the Old Testament department and professor of Old Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. His earlier work, *From Exegesis to Exposition: a practical guide to using biblical Hebrew*, has already proven to be very helpful in making the necessary transition from working in the original language of the Old Testament to the proclamation of the Old Testament’s message. The title of this work is somewhat misleading in that by identifying the “historical books” as Joshua through Esther it might suggest that the Pentateuch is not historical. Of course, that is not the case! The Pentateuch is covered in another volume. Chisholm discusses the books that in traditional consideration reveal the history of Israel from the conquest of Canaan to the post-exilic period. Therefore, this book gives an historical survey of the Former Prophets (the so-called “Deuteronomistic history”), Ruth, the work of the Chronicler (including Ezra and Nehemiah), and, last of all, Esther.

Chisholm shows that he is very conversant with the discussions of genre and rhetorical criticism that have become very popular in the last several decades. His first chapter is devoted to consideration of what narrative literature is. God gave us stories in these books, and one must read them as stories, literary compositions that will have a setting, plot structure, characters (protagonist and antagonist) that are developed and not so well developed, discourse structure, and dramatic structure. Chisholm reminds us that theology is important to keep in mind as we read these stories of God’s interaction with his covenant people. But he issues this caveat, “When we open Scripture, we discover that the very first book contains stories, not a systematic theology. These stories are not so much concerned with making philosophical pronouncements about the divine character as they are with revealing a personal, dynamic God who longs to relate to his people and move them toward the goal he has for them” (p. 32). Geerhardus Vos, among others, said things along these lines already in his *Biblical Theology!* The Bible is not a dogmatic textbook, but a history book full of dramatic interest. But to appreciate the drama of God’s redemptive work, we must read the written text as a text with all that the inspired authors brought to bear in writing down God’s Word.

Chisholm defines and explains the various rhetorical elements that are employed in the narrative literature of the Bible. Such elements include discourse types, the use of story gaps and ambiguity, and intertext-

tuality (and with that, parallelism, typology, allusions, and echoing). He frequently illustrates the points being made with reference to biblical stories themselves, especially from the book of Judges (including the Gideon cycle and the Israelite-Benjaminite civil war). Chisholm uses Hebrew fonts in his discussions, but he also provides English translation, thus allowing readers who know and who do not know Hebrew to follow his analyses. He concludes this important chapter with seven interpretative principles (87). These principles are not novel, to be sure, and they have been described in many other books on exegesis. Yet the summary helps to tie things together for a chapter that has illustrated well the principles employed in reading narrative.

The second chapter is a “bird’s eye” look over the books of Joshua through Esther. Here the author basically summarizes the books by means of the “primary themes” that appear to be at work in the historical books. He also notes the “overall purpose” of each book. Following that he presents the bigger picture of what thematic matters are found in the Deuteronomistic History (128, 129) and in Post-Exilic literature (129, 130). This is further summarized in the “overall thematic synthesis of the historical books” (130, 131). Chisholm finds two major themes in these historical books. First is that of God’s *covenantal relationship* with his people Israel. This is at the heart of the matter. Second, the theme of *kingship* “dominates the landscape of the historical books” (130). The conquest under Joshua held forth great promise for Israel, God’s people, but “a tragic turn” takes the history of God’s people in a disastrous course because of their sin and rebellion. Yet God is committed to “overcoming all obstacles, even the moral failures of his people, and to bringing his plan for them to fruition in fulfillment of his ancient promises” (131).

Chisholm provides a basic walk through the steps of exegeting an Old Testament passage, including determining the text (“textual criticism”), translating the passage, being aware of polysemism in word use, and use of grammars, introductions, lexicons, and other helpful literature. By giving examples in each instance, the author makes each point clear for the reader. In his recommendations of other works that may be helpful to the exegete and preacher, the author does not restrict his recommendations only to evangelical authors, but he also refers the reader to works by Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Meir Sternberg, and Phyllis Trible. He also provides a sampling of useful commentaries (160-166).

At the same time, Chisholm fully realizes that exegesis of Scripture, including historical narrative, is not a matter of mathematical precision or rote literary mechanics. He writes, “It is important to remember that interpreting the text is just as much an art as it is a technique” (186). One interprets the Bible by sensitive and obedient listening to the text, always comparing Scripture with Scripture, being appreciative of the literary tools employed by the biblical authors themselves. One must always read with respect for the text and the author (73). In submission to Scripture itself, Chisholm calls upon the exegete to engage in “close reading” (e.g., 104), not in the vain pursuit of discovering different “traditions” or sources behind the canonical text.

The chapter entitled "Proclaiming Narrative Texts" is an especially helpful discussion. Chisholm directs his readers away from an atomistic approach to historical narrative in the Bible in which one may be tempted toward a moralism or creation of "principles" about God based on only one or two biblical stories. Keeping larger contexts in mind is of critical importance. His discussion reminds us of the issues that S. Greidanus and C. Trimp (to name only two) have raised in their several books that deal with the interpretation of biblical narrative. One area that could have received even more development and discussion than it currently does in this volume is noting the Christological focus in the historical narratives covered in this book. But that is a large topic, already addressed in several other works.

This book would serve very well as a text for pastors to refresh their memories of the seminary courses that they took in exegesis and biblical interpretation. Chisholm's work is also very valuable for Bible college students and seminarians who want a quick, non-technical, overview of Israel's history from the Conquest to the post-exilic era, as well as those who need to have a succinct explanation of basic interpretation that seeks to honor the historical-grammatical approach to interpreting the Bible.

The book concludes with a very helpful glossary of terms used in the book. It lacks a textual index that may have been useful. Some readers may want to explore the exegetical and hermeneutical topics raised in this book in sources that are more academically oriented. But this book has accomplished its purpose admirably as a handbook to get the primary matters of survey and exegesis before its readers. I recommend this volume, and I look forward to the appearance of the other volumes in this series.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

John R. Franke, *Barth for Armchair Theologians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 183. \$16.95.

This is probably the best short introduction to Barth's life and work available in English. Franke excels at capturing the burden of Barth's ideas in clear prose. The author repeatedly exhibits a thorough and insightful understanding of Barth's massive project and the secondary literature surrounding that project. For the newcomer to Barth's work, whether reading his Romans commentary or tackling volumes in the *Church Dogmatics*, Franke is a reliable guide. Indeed, I have not read a better brief analysis of Barth's views than what is served up in this modest volume.

Franke's work is particularly valuable in introducing the reader to Barth's life and theological journey. Whereas some books only treat Barth the theologian, this book gives one a sense of Barth the man. For pastors or theologians wishing to gain a reliable acquaintance with the life and thinking of Karl Barth, Franke's book is a gem.

—J. Mark Beach

Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 volumes: Volume 1 – Introduction/Bible; Volume 2 – God/Creation; Volume 3 – Sin/Salvation; Volume 4 – The Church/Last Things. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2002-2005. Pp. 2755. \$34.99 per volume (cloth).

Dr. Norman Geisler is one of the most prodigious authors of recent times. He is the author or coauthor of more than sixty books, as well as hundreds of articles. He has spoken, lectured, and debated in every state in the Union and in twenty-six countries around the world. He holds three earned degrees (BA, MA, and Ph.D.) and currently serves as the President of Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Geisler has taught theology and philosophy for very nearly fifty years at the university and graduate levels. By all accounts his academic pedigree is self-attesting.

The present work under review, his four volume *Systematic Theology* (Introduction/Bible; God/Creation; Sin/Salvation; and The Church/Last Things), is billed as, “The culminating work of a lifetime of study and research.” Indeed it is. This work is massive in size, covering some 2,755 pages. The four volumes cover, in greater or lesser detail, the main topics of Christian systematic theology.

To put the matter in context for a largely Reformed readership and for the general, Baptist and Evangelical world, Geisler’s *ST* is the rough equivalent, in terms of its size and scope, to Dr. Herman Bavinck’s four volume *Reformed Dogmatics*. The quality of Geisler’s work relative to Bavinck’s work is another matter. Geisler follows the same basic wording as Bavinck in the titles of each of the individual volumes, though perhaps only fortuitously, and so this is not to suggest that Geisler has simply “cut and pasted” Bavinck’s work. There is a vast difference between the two, but this observation might be helpful as a reference point for the ebb and flow of the present work under review.

In terms of the strong points in these volumes, let attention be called to the following items.

1. Key definitions to various theological terms are given throughout the work, and are easily identified.

2. The formatting of these volumes is handsome and well laid out, making the volumes more accessible and user-friendly, not to mention pleasing to the eye. The terse table of contents at the beginning of each volume does not actually do justice to the fine format which follows. In each of the chapters, the combination of bold face capitals (section headings), bold face type (main points), and *italicized words* (sub points), all serve to provide the reader, at a passing glance, with the structure of what is supplied in each section.

3. The chapter-ending bibliographies form a list of recommended reading for further study. A full-scale bibliography is included at the back of each book, the longest of which is nine double-columned pages (vols. 2 and 4). Many may consider this as valuable as the material in the body of the book.

4. An amazingly extensive Scripture index follows the bibliographical information at the end. This kind of an index, of course, is helpful when

the reader wants to look up a specific citation of Scripture. It, too, will likely prove to be of great value.

5. Another valuable feature is the subject index. This index in particular is helpful in tracking down some of the vague references which are found in some of the footnotes.

6. One last feature that deserves special attention are the appendices at the end of each volume. Here, some of the most interesting discussions which Geisler brings to our attention are put forward. For example, naming just a few (one from each volume), we are treated to titles such as: *Objections Against Theistic Arguments* (vol. 1); *Various Views of the "Days" of Genesis* (vol. 2); *Was Jesus a Physical Descendant of Adam?* (vol. 3); and *The General Councils of the Church and the Development of Roman Catholicism* (vol. 4).

It must also be noted that Geisler's *ST* simultaneously serves (without losing its distinctive feel as a work of systematic theology) as a four volume work covering the disciplines of philosophy, apologetics, and historical theology. Throughout the course of the entire project, these other fields of study are on display as they are woven into the material. Citations and allusions to one or more of these respective departments are found on nearly every page. In this way, Geisler's methodology in the present task is reflective of the kind of work which he has been involved in throughout his academic career. The blending of these varied, yet related, ventures all serve to provide this set with a distinctive flavor. It's not just systematic theology that one finds on these pages, but it's systematic theology as it interacts with and takes into account the several other branches of related study. All of this makes for exciting reading. And while the Reformed reader will certainly not agree with all of Geisler's conclusions, scarce will they be able to say that they were bored with the content of this labor. Instead, stimulating, thought-provoking discussion will be found as folio follows folio.

The content of the theological formulations in this *ST* is Bible-based, baptistic, evangelical, dispensational, and Arminian. However, I have little doubt that Geisler himself would take issue with the last of those five appellations being applied to him or his writings. Throughout the four volumes, the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments are repeatedly referenced as the basis upon which all matters of faith and life are to be rooted and grounded. For this, Geisler is to be commended. Surely, as heirs of the Protestant Reformation we can appreciate his desire to be biblical in his theological formulations and reflections. In his discussions on the sacraments, church government, and the like, Geisler's baptistic bent comes through without apology. In addition, the broadly evangelical way in which he writes in each of the volumes, will be quite appealing to many in the current climate of North American Christianity. The right emphasis is in place, even if the right conclusions are not always reached. The dispensational underpinnings which Geisler possesses are most clearly exposed, of course, in the fourth volume, where the subject of eschatology is given consideration. In this volume, he treats the millennium, the rapture, the covenant, and the second coming of Christ from a decidedly dispensational viewpoint. It should also be mentioned that, true to the methodology he established beginning

in volume one, Geisler also interacts, in survey-like fashion, with the other positions which have been promoted in the history of the Christian Church with regard to these various matters. In terms of Arminianism—which we'll look at more fully immediately below—for some odd reason Geisler appears to be unaware that such a label could rightly be attached to his viewpoints. How this is possible, is not certain.

While most of the attention in this review will be given to a few particularities (but not peculiarities) found in volume 3, a brief word or two ought to be spoken about the other three volumes.

Volume one, *Introduction/Bible*, is by far the strongest volume in the entire set. Here, with the topics of introductory matters pertaining to the doing of systematic theology and with the doctrine of Holy Scripture, Geisler is at his best. Volume two, *God/Creation*, is strong as well. Geisler's philosophical and apologetic methodology aid him greatly in his discussion of the existence and attributes of God. And while not presuppositional in his apologetical approach, his material in this section is stimulating and should prove helpful in more ways than one. Volume four, *The Church/Last Things*, is characterized by its baptistic, dispensational bent. While the discussions are easy to follow, they are predictable, being standard fare for North American Christianity of this ilk.

Geisler's Arminian doctrines are set forth most abundantly in volume three, *Sin/Salvation*, particularly in the discussions of the origin and impact of sin upon the human race, and the doctrine of salvation. This is regrettable, since these are areas where Christian theology ought to be the sharpest—that is, where Arminianism ought to be combated, not embraced.

In chapter 5 (of volume 3), which treats "The Effects of Sin," the section heading "The Effects of Sin on Adam's Descendants" appears. A few pages in, the main point entitled "The Volitional Effects of Adam's Sin" comes into view. In the second sub point under this main point, Geisler takes up his discussion of *Free Will After the Fall* (emphasis in the original). The opening sentence says, "Even after Adam sinned and became spiritually dead and thus a sinner because of '[his] sinful nature,' he was not so completely depraved that it was impossible for him to hear the voice of God or make a free response" (128). What a contrast this is to the confessional Calvinism expressed by the Heidelberg Catechism. In Q/A 8 the Catechism asks, "But are we so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil?"; the answer has us say, "Yes, indeed; unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." As he makes clear later in this volume, Geisler would not affirm what our sixteenth-century tutor teaches us in that answer.

The very next point, *Fallen Descendants of Adam Have Free Will*, makes Geisler's position plain. Here the opening sentence says, "Both Scripture and good reason inform us that depraved human beings have the power of free will" (128). In order to seemingly ward off any accusations of Arminianism, a distinction is drawn between fallen man *initiating* salvation and *accepting* salvation (see 129). Having framed the discussion in these terms, Geisler deftly denies the former and affirms the latter. However, Geisler puts this distinction into place so that he can affirm *fallen* man's natural ability to believe and accept the promise of gospel.

This is nothing less than traditional Arminianism. Geisler makes the mistake of thinking that an affirmation of man's volitional ability generally, even as fallen, also means that man's volitional ability with specific reference toward God has somehow not been affected by his fall into sin. In this regard, Geisler notes what he calls a *vertical freedom*. As he says, "Unsaved people have a free choice regarding the reception or rejection of God's gift of salvation" (129). Nothing is mentioned with regard to the slavery of man's will to sin. Nor is there any affirmation of the effects of Adam's sin on the human race as being so severe that apart from a gracious work of God's Spirit through the gospel in opening the sinner's eyes, in enlightening the mind, and in renewing the heart that there would be no hope for anyone to be saved. Instead, the insipid claims of Arminianism are repeatedly set forth. As he says in one of the concluding comments to this sub point, "God sets morally and spiritually responsible alternatives before human beings, leaving the *choice* and *responsibility* to them" (130). Again, the confessional Calvinism of the Canons of Dort speak differently. With regard to the regenerating grace of God, it says, "But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work... As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe" (III/IV.12).

The next main point heading is entitled, "*Answering Extreme Calvinism on Human Free Will*." Here, Geisler unashamedly argues against traditional, historic, confessional Calvinism. This reveals his ingrained Arminianism as well as anything else. A noteworthy main point under this section-heading asks the question, "Can *Anyone* Believe Unto Salvation without God's Special Grace?" (italics in original). Obviously, one's answer to such a question will go a long way in revealing what they believe with regard to the debate between Arminianism and Calvinism. This applies to Geisler as well. With his opening comments, Geisler indeed sounds like he might fit his own self-described label of choice: "Moderate Calvinist." After all, despite the readily apparent deficiencies in the following statement, he does say, "Even though *faith* is possible for the unsaved, nonetheless, no one can believe *unto salvation* without the aid of God's special grace" (136, italics in original). John 6:44 is even quoted in the next sentence as a proof text. However, at the beginning of the very next paragraph he writes that, "...although no one can believe unto salvation without the aid of God's saving grace, the gracious action by which we are saved is not monergistic (an act of God alone) but synergistic (an act of God *and* our free choice). *Salvation comes from God, but it is completed by our cooperation ...*" (136, italics in original). As disconcerting as those words are, they have been cited accurately. Could a better example of traditional Arminianism be found anywhere? To argue that "the gracious action by which we are saved is not monergistic ... but synergistic," as Geisler clearly does, forbids any claim that he might want to make about being a moderate Calvinist. The doctrine he articulates in this chapter regarding fallen man's free will is patently Arminian. And the doctrine he espouses with regard to salvation smacks of Pelagianism.

There is nothing even remotely Calvinistic about his teaching on these matters. A close look at the “Refutation of Errors” that follows the III/IV heads of doctrine as found in the Canons of Dort is more than enough to see that this is the case.

In chapter 16, *The Condition for Salvation*, Geisler discusses the role of saving faith. This eerily entitled chapter, coupled with the discussion of saving faith under such a heading, does not bode well for Geisler’s desire to be known as a moderate Calvinist. It should be noted at the outset that Geisler mistakenly believes that the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide* means that salvation is caused or conditioned upon fallen man’s act of faith. A comment made back in Chapter 5 is relevant in this regard. There he wrote, “The main point of the Reformation was, at its heart, that ‘the just shall live *by faith*—and by faith alone.’ Therefore, the exercise of faith is the one condition (action) necessary for a person to receive justification before God” (133). Those words not only reveal a misunderstanding of what *sola fide* meant for the Reformers but, sadly, they also reveal a serious misunderstanding of the nature and role of saving faith. Listen to the words of the Belgic Confession, Article 23, which says that saving faith “is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness.” The consistent testimony of the Reformed confessions is contrary to what Geisler says justification by faith means, namely, that it means “justification because of/on the basis of faith.” While it is true that there is a proper place to speak of the acts of saving faith—even as the Westminster Confession of Faith does, saying, “...the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace” (24.2)—Geisler fails to understand such a proper place, for Geisler does not grasp the Reformation’s rich and robust understanding of the necessity of the saving faith: as flowing to undeserving sinners by the free grace of God. As the WCF also says, “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts...” (24.1). This aspect of saving faith, namely, that it’s a gift of God’s grace, is missing from Geisler’s theology. For him, fallen man already possesses the ability to accept and to believe the promise of the gospel, even apart from the supernatural, miraculous, and powerful operation of the work of God’s Holy Spirit. Thus, as long as Geisler operates under that false assumption, he will maintain saving faith as a condition or ground of salvation, and not see it as it properly is: a gift of God’s grace whereby the Lord’s elect lay hold of Christ and of all his treasures and gifts.

As proof of this, note that Geisler goes on to say, “Ironically, while one of the central principles of the Reformation was justification by faith alone (*sola fidei*), some who strongly claim to be heirs of the Reformation (i.e., the Reformed) do not believe there is even one condition necessary for a human being to receive salvation” (475-476). Further, Geisler says, “In brief, according to strong Calvinists, one is not really justified *by* faith” (476). Of course, Geisler says this because he thinks that the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith means “justification because of/on the basis of faith.” That’s simply not the case. He is correct, how-

ever, to say that the Reformed don't believe in justification because of/on the basis of faith. That's definitely not confessional Calvinism.

For the next thirteen pages, Geisler outlines his case against Calvinism in great detail. Numerous arguments are set forth; many Scripture passages are cited; and many Calvinist writers, pastors, and theologians are cited. In the end, though, while Geisler wants to be known as a Moderate Calvinist, his words reveal him to be an ardent Arminian. At the end of this section heading, he writes words in which one can hear him wanting to sound Calvinistic, while all the while maintaining an Arminian emphasis. Listen carefully to these words, "Finally, extreme Calvinism often mistakenly assumes that the exercise of faith as a condition for receiving the gift of salvation must mean they can do this unaided by God's grace. As noted earlier, *no one can believe unto salvation without the aid of God's grace*. Although not all these verses refer to prevenient grace, the point is the same: In the final analysis, no one can believe unto salvation without God's gracious initiative. However, while salvation comes from Him, it is actualized in our lives by our cooperation" (489). With teaching like this, Geisler stands on the side of the Remonstrants, not the Reformed. And while he maintains that "extreme Calvinists have denied one of the central tenets of the Reformation, namely *faith alone*." (489), on this point, as already demonstrated above, Geisler is simply and grievously mistaken.

—Dan Donovan

Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*. Emory University Studies in Law and Religion, John Witte Jr., general editor. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006. Pp. x + 310. \$38.00.

With this expanded version of his dissertation written on a subject in the field of historical theology, Stephen Grabill lends important assistance in the current efforts to rehabilitate the place and function of natural law in Reformed theological ethics. The author serves the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty as theological research scholar, and edits the Institute's *Journal of Markets and Morality*.

Three factors, according to the author, explain why a growing number of writers today are endorsing with caution the natural-law tradition.

First, their endorsement arises from a renewed interest in public ecumenism among Protestants and Roman Catholics, such as that being promoted in the coalition movement known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together. The Acton Institute itself, with which Grabill is associated, is another example of current Protestant-Roman Catholic collaboration in the areas of economics and political morality. Spurred by such interest, a growing number of Protestant and Roman Catholic thinkers are seeking to replace the allegedly subjective theory and approach of basing public moral arguments on isolated Scripture passages with a moral theory and moral arguments possessing greater stability, objectivity, and catholicity. Realizing this ecumenical desire requires finding compatibility between Roman Catholics and Protestants regarding the doctrine of post-

lapsarian total human inability. “The Reformed doctrine of total inability teaches that, in matters pertaining to justification, people are unable to perform any saving good; however, in nonsalvific matters, some vestiges of natural light remain such that good and evil are distinguishable and virtue and good works are preferred forms of human behavior” (8). After citing the entirety of Canons of Dort III/IV.4, regarding the existence and dysfunctionality of certain glimmerings of natural light after the Fall, Grabill adds the non-sequitur that “. . . ecumenical engagement has led to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the precedent for natural-law ethics that existed at an earlier stage in the history of Protestant doctrinal development” (9).

A second factor explaining why this new endorsement is qualified and cautious is the Protestant concern with Roman Catholic theological and philosophical presuppositions. In his day, German Lutheran theologian Helmut Thielicke gave prominent expression to this concern by insisting that genuine moral self-knowledge requires God’s special revelation in Jesus Christ, that a human being acquires true self-knowledge only in relation to God. Thielicke objected as well to the variability and instability of the content of natural law. If the human self-understanding apart from Jesus Christ, and along with it human moral knowledge, suffers inevitably from variability and contingency, then what can be known concerning moral good suffers the same defect.

The third factor perhaps best accounts for the negative assessment of natural law throughout much of the twentieth century, namely, Karl Barth’s epistemological criticisms of natural theology and natural law. Barth’s views are today being criticized as historically incomplete.

Clearly Grabill’s concern to see natural law rehabilitated within Reformed theological ethics arises from more than theological interests. He writes, “The privatization of religious belief and the impoverishment of public moral discourse provide the backdrop for the renewed interest in natural law. The natural-law tradition supplies an antidote to these cultural trends because, according to it, there is a universal law to which people of all races, cultures, and religions can have access through their natural reason. Natural law thus provides moral knowledge that all people can grasp without the aid of special or divine revelation. Natural law is particularly advantageous in terms of political discourse and Christian engagement in the public square because it seems to provide a moral vocabulary that can function for both religious and secular interlocutors” (7).

What follows, then, are chapter length treatments of important representatives or participants in the history of natural law thinking.

Beginning with Karl Barth (1886-1968), chapter one documents Barth’s criticisms of the epistemology of natural law, his use of John Calvin as the preeminent spokesman and codifier of Reformed doctrine, and his commitment to a divine command theory of ethics.

The 1934 exchange between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner regarding natural theology yielded two long-term results. First, it called into question the legitimate and qualified use of natural law in Reformed ethics by identifying it as Thomistic. Second, it contributed to the neglect of the modifications of the medieval natural-law tradition that were introduced

by Protestant orthodoxy. Central to the Barth-Brunner debate was their divergent understandings of the *imago Dei* and the knowledge of God possible after the Fall. Barth was highly critical of any attempt to locate an independent, normative source of revelation apart from the self-revelation of Jesus Christ. The epistemological effects of sin, according to Barth, included the loss of any point of contact between human understanding and divine revelation. In the realm of ethics, especially political ethics, basing human obligation on natural law would inevitably lead to a dualism between the public, secular sphere of human life and the Christian sphere of existence.

According to Grabill, it was especially the widespread misunderstanding of the relation between the theology of the Reformers and that of post-Reformation orthodoxy that accounts for twentieth-century Reformed objections to natural law. Already in the 1934 debate, Barth nurtured the "Calvin against the Calvinists" strain of theological interpretation. Those following in Barth's line failed, according to Grabill, to assess adequately the continuity or discontinuity between Calvin and his contemporaries with their medieval predecessors, on the one hand, and between Calvin with his Reformed orthodox successors, on the other hand. With this, Grabill has set the stage for his analysis of how the Reformers appropriated medieval doctrinal and philosophical premises within their own systems.

Interestingly, a significant number of Reformed theologians after Barth sympathized with his rejection of natural theology and natural law, although for quite diverse reasons and without endorsing either his theological anthropology or his view of revelation. These theologians also shared the general Protestant understanding that a natural law ethic is tied theologically and philosophically to Roman Catholic presuppositions, especially its deficient view of the scope and results of the human fall into sin. These post-Barth Protestant theologians include thinkers such as Jacques Ellul, Carl F. H. Henry, Helmut Thielicke, Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, G. C. Berkouwer, Henry Stob, and Richard Mouw.

The medieval antecedents undergirding the Reformed understanding and use of natural law are discussed in chapter two. Here the reader is introduced to an important but dense discussion of the realist and nominalist views of natural law. Both positions see natural law as grounded in God's will, but they diverge in explaining how God's will, natural law, and eternal law relate.

The teaching of John Calvin (1509-1564) on natural law is explained in chapter three, where Grabill sets forth Calvin's understanding of the *duplex cognitio Dei* (similar to that found in Pierre Viret [1511-1571]), and his view of the function of conscience in fallen humanity. Throughout the book and again in this chapter, Grabill seeks to correct the widely held view of Calvin as the chief or final codifier of the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Reformation, since both contemporaries (Bullinger, Bucer, Melancthon, Vermigli) and successors (Zanchi, Turretin) developed aspects of Reformational thought in ways different from Calvin. This becomes important when we consider Calvin's assessment of natural law. For with regard to the epistemological consequences of sin and natural law,

Grabill notes that Calvin argues that although God is revealed in nature, unregenerated fallen people misperceive this revelation, which ultimately leads them to suppress, distort, and abuse the knowledge of God and his will that is available in creation. The fruit of Grabill's insistence that Calvin should not be seen as the chief or final codifier of Reformed orthodoxy appears in the author's claim that "in relation to Peter Martyr Vermigli, Calvin's emphasis on the epistemological consequences of sin is exaggerated, and thus slightly far afield of the very Augustinian tradition he is attempting to uphold" (81). Later we are told that "the most developed aspect of Calvin's natural-law doctrine in the *Institutes* is its purpose"—which purpose is "to render humanity inexcusable" (96). Despite this assessment of the negative and limited role of natural law in Calvin's thought, Grabill offers the stunning conclusion, with minimal demonstration, that "Calvin still considers humanity's corrupted natural endowments to function competently in matters related to the earthly sphere (such as politics, economics, and ethics)" (96).

In this context, the question arises whether it is the case that only regenerate people can have genuine knowledge of God. The author suggests that if approached from a broad, natural, or intuitive sense, Calvin's answer would be negative. Yet, according to Grabill, the presence within fallen humanity of the *sensus divinitatis* and the *semen religionis* points to "a certain [kind of] understanding" and an "awareness of divinity" and "a firm conviction about God." Our question remains, however, whether these remaining traces and sparks can be identified with true or genuine knowledge of God.

Our difficulty with this approach intensifies when the author continues: "Yet, for all of Calvin's epistemological hesitations, he ascribes both positive and negative functions to the role of God's natural revelation in his mature theological system. The positive function concerns the universally implanted awareness of divinity and morality and the usefulness this has to preserve order in a fallen world, while the negative function concerns the establishment of human inexcusability for breaking the moral law" (84-85).

One can agree regarding Calvin's view of the negative function of natural knowledge of God and natural law. The author's interpretation of Calvin's view of the positive function of these phenomena, however, yields confusion of two sorts.

The first kind is a serious terminological confusion, since the first sentence cited above refers to the function of *divine revelation*, whereas the second sentence shifts to speaking about the function of the universally implanted *human awareness* of divinity and morality. These are not at all the same, and this terminological confusion fortifies a central objection held by some who remain dubious about contemporary efforts to rehabilitate natural law within Reformed ethics. That objection involves the frequent mistaken identification by natural law advocates between the *divine revelation* of law in nature (affirmed) and the *human operational apprehension* of this law by those who remain unregenerate (denied).

The second kind is a logical confusion. Were we to grant the premise about the existence of a universally implanted awareness of divinity and

morality, the conclusion that *this awareness* is useful to preserve order in a fallen world does not follow at all. This is so for two reasons. First, this conclusion begs the question, by asserting without demonstration that this *awareness* of the law (as distinct from the law itself) can function positively. Second, this conclusion ignores the possibility that what accounts for preserved order in a fallen world is not universal human *awareness*, but rather the continually powerful *law* of God. In other words, the nature of God and the nature of his law account for preserved order in a fallen world. God's law belongs enduringly to his living, sovereign, creation-sustaining Word. That Word underlies the divine providence whereby God continues to interact with his creation powerfully and preserveringly, all of which accounts for whatever order remains in creation after the Fall.

Finally, this reviewer finds perplexing how the synopsis of Calvin's view cited above (the mature Calvin ascribed both positive and negative functions to natural revelation) comports with the author's own summarizing conclusion that "the most developed aspect of Calvin's natural-law doctrine in the *Institutes* is its purpose," which purpose is strictly negative to render humanity inexcusable (96).

Chapter four presents an analysis of the views of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), whose formulations regarding the knowledge of God are characterized by the author as broadly Thomistic with a strong Augustinian accent (102). His formal training in the *via antiqua*, together with the distinction developed between contemplative and practical knowledge, supplied Vermigli with a more internally consistent and sophisticated understanding of natural law than that of Calvin (121). Vermigli taught that the unregenerate person is capable of a partial knowledge of and obedience to God, apart from salvation.

We are introduced to the Reformed jurist and political theorist Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) in chapter five. The author provides an informative sketch of the influence and thought of Althusius, noting especially his dependence on the "Calvinist Thomist" Jerome Zanchi (1516-1590), who set forth the relation between various types of law. The moral precepts of the Decalogue derive from the logically prior *lex naturalis*, the universal knowledge of morality that God implanted in the human mind at creation (132). Positive law applies natural law to particular circumstances. Althusius applied Zanchi's doctrine of natural law to political theory, holding that the precepts of the Decalogue are a renewed and re-enforced subspecies of the logically prior general precepts of morality found in the natural law or the natural knowledge of morality God inscribed in the human mind at creation.

The sixth and final chapter focuses on Francis Turretin (1623-1687), a representative of the high orthodoxy of the post-Reformation era. According to Turretin, although God supplies true knowledge of himself in creation and providence, this knowledge functions for fallen unregenerate humanity in a manner that is nonsalvific but morally indicting. Turretin's theological system evidences a high degree of doctrinal sophistication, in comparison to that of earlier Reformers, along with a more full-some integration of the doctrine of God with ethics.

The author's ultimate conclusion, then, is that, in contrast to current scholarly opinion, "some of the most formative voices in the Reformed tradition thought the diminished natural human faculties still function sufficiently to reveal the general precepts of the natural moral law" (191). In our view, claiming that *human faculties* function to reveal natural law strikes us as a confusing formulation.

As might already have been surmised, our concluding estimate of the arguments presented in this volume is mixed.

Symbolic of our disappointment is the deep irony of the book's cover. That cover presents the well-known 1621 painting of the Synod of Dort by Pouwels Weyts de Jonge, housed in the Dordrechts Museum. Although Grabill cites what is perhaps the single most relevant and significant article from the Canons of Dort (III/IV.4), he nowhere in this book offers a sustained analysis of the content of this article or of its implications for his thesis.

This review would itself be incomplete, then, without the citation of that article in full: "There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness. In doing so he renders himself without excuse before God."

Space permits only this brief observation. It is astonishing to observe how frequently Reformed writers defending natural theology and natural law cite only the first sentence of this article without the second and especially without the third sentences. (To his credit, Grabill cites the entire article.) Though astonishing, such omission is nevertheless understandable, since in the context of today's discussion, the latter part of the second sentence and the entire third sentence can hardly be understood in a way compatible with current attempts to rehabilitate the function of natural law within Reformed ethics.

All of which culminates in this concluding perplexity. In an otherwise competent historical theological investigation of the place and function of natural law within Reformed thought, why is there no attention to the *confessional tradition* that expresses the official ecclesial understanding of these matters? Surely confessions like the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, together with the Westminster Confession and Westminster Larger Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession, belong to the historical period being investigated and comprise essential source material for any thorough analysis of both the period and the subject. Moreover, these confessions are the fruit and flower of the theological reflection that occurred throughout this period and as such ought to be given priority in mapping the coordinates of this discussion.

Our disappointment, however, does not detract from the achievement embodied in this volume. For those who wish to participate in the cur-

rent discussions within Reformed ethics about the place and function of natural law, this volume is an indispensable source of historical information. The writing style is naturally academic, yet rarely tedious. Despite the fact that the author's analysis and judgments require careful parsing and reflection, he has contributed a significant addition to the literature dealing with this historical period and with this theological subject. The use of endnotes is regrettable, but the fulsome bibliography compensates well for that annoyance.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey, P&R Publishing, 2007. Pp. 288. \$24.99 (cloth).

Another volume by the frequently collaborating duo of D.G. Hart and John R. Muether is nothing new. What is new, and quite welcome, about this volume is that Hart, an expert on J.G. Machen, and Muether, the denominational historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, have written a general history of American Presbyterianism. Such a general history, written for the 300th year of American Presbyterianism, has rarely been undertaken, especially by confessionally committed men like our authors. This is not, as has so often been the case with histories written by conservative Presbyterians, a parochial history which treats the time preceding the OPC and the PCA as mere prelude to the formation and development of those bodies. Rather it is a confessionally-informed, introductory survey of the whole of American Presbyterianism. This is written in a popular style, well-suited for use in any of our churches, colleges or seminaries as a conservative general introduction to American Presbyterianism.

Hart's and Muether's account could never be charged with triumphalism. They note again and again in this volume that Presbyterians in America have never lived up to their highest ideals and have never been fully at home here. Such completeness is reserved for heaven; here below, we are strangers and pilgrims, looking for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God. So many histories of denominations and particular movements tend to be triumphalistic, and in being such perhaps betray that we fail to understand the depth of our sin and failure and the richness and wonder of God's free grace. Historians must take care not to write even the history of their own denominations from a little Jack Horner viewpoint, touting what good boy and girls we in our small corner have been and are. Triumphalism about our heritage has marked both conservative and liberal treatments of Presbyterian history, even in some admittedly useful histories like Rian's *Presbyterian Conflict* and Loetscher's *Broadening Church*. At best, we are a ragtag bunch, a motley crew of sinners saved by grace, struggling here below as we seek to serve our King and to tell other beggars where bread may be found. Hart and Muether are right to recount Presbyterian history in a way that seeks to give God, and not man, all the glory.

The book chronicles the beginnings (including pre-1706 ones in Scotland and America), rise, establishment of identity, growth, peak, and decline of Presbyterianism in America. Among the significant items covered: the first presbytery and the first synod (1706, 1717) and the composition of the earlier church, culminating in the Adopting Act of 1729 and all that followed in the 1730s and 1740s with the Great Awakening, the Log College(s) developing into Princeton (1746), the Old Side/New Side split and reunion (1741-1758), and the first GA of 1789. The 1801 Plan of Union and the debates in the teens about slavery, voluntary societies, the role of the church, New England Theology, *inter alia*, led to unrest that resulted in the Old School/New School Division of 1837-1869. The 1869 reunion was arguably not without problems that manifested themselves not only in doctrinal trials at the end of the nineteenth-century but in confessional revision (1903), reunion with the Arminian Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1906), the Plan of Union (1920) and the Auburn Affirmation (1923). This created a revolt among the conservatives, many of whom were forced out of or simply left the church in the later 1930s. The OPC (1936) and the PCA (1973) were both expressions of convictions of those who wanted (North and South) a "true Presbyterian" church, though seeing such perhaps differently. All this and much more is recorded herein.

The decline of Presbyterianism in America can be seen, in one respect, from a purely numerical perspective. In 1776, 25% of the population of the nascent American nation was Presbyterian (260). In 2001, there were 5.6 million Presbyterians of all stripes, which number composed only 2.7% of the population. What happened? Many Presbyterians, as the above paragraph suggests, proved unfaithful, embracing liberalism, rejecting God's Word, allowing themselves to be shaped by a secularizing culture. Hart and Muether would argue that the church lost its spiritual focus and failed to grasp what it was called to be as a spiritual institution. The church is not called to be the Republican, or Whig, or any other party, at prayer. It is called to be that particular agency given for the gathering and perfecting of the saints. The church ought not to conform itself to any worldly influences, no matter how noble or necessary such might be. It is true, as Lloyd-Jones said, that the more that the church seeks to be like the world, the least good she is to the world. Hart and Muether grasp the necessity for the church to be the church: what is central to its life is not some form of social gospel but that gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which is to be ministered by the means of grace to needy sinners.

By way of criticism, it might be said that Hart and Muether can tend to slice that which informs true spirituality in the church too thinly. This can be seen, e.g., in their view that not only ought the church to be Old School but Old Side (in every sense of those labels). To dismiss out of hand legitimate contributions of the New Side, and perhaps even the New School, might cut off some streams that served truly to nourish the spirituality of the Presbyterian Church. One can be Old School and have Old Side sympathies without rejecting everything that those from the other side brought to the table. Such an approach would render this history somewhat more catholic and less provincial.

Furthermore, the view that Hart and Muether take on the spirituality of the church can so narrowly circumscribe the church as to ghettoize her. Perhaps part of the problem here is that it is assumed that the church exhausts the kingdom and that there are no broader dimensions of the kingdom. The church, to be sure, is the kingdom, first and foremost, but to refuse to recognize kingdom dimensions beyond the institutional church is to render Christians operative as Christians only in the church, with no Christian distinctives when operating in the family or the state or the school. How Christians ought to live and operate in the family or the state or the marketplace is something that Presbyterians have always rightly concerned themselves with. To be sure, those concerns have been allowed to swamp the spirituality of the church and Presbyterians have too often been quite politicized.

Hart and Muether well grasp the imperfections, the weaknesses, and the pilgrim character of the church. They are right to do so. The church, nonetheless, in all her weakness is the most powerful and significant institution in the world. When we are weak, then we are strong, a strength that stands the world's strength on its head, a strength that appears to the world, indeed, as weakness (as does the cross), but ultimately conquers the world. One is loathe to criticize this fine work, but it seems that Hart's and Muether's criticism of the Presbyterian church in its engagement with its culture (here in America) reveals a desire for a kind of separation that sounds at points like marginalization if not irrelevance. I agree that the church should not be dictating or seeking to dictate some political agenda to the American nation. But it ought to be preaching the gospel with all the vigor that it can to as many as will listen, not confident in the flesh but confident in Christ, whose purposes will ripen fast, giving us cause for hope. This reviewer would want to see this as the first of a wave of thoughtful analyses of Presbyterianism in America.

—Alan D. Strange

Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. First paperback, 2006. Pp. x + 438. \$45.00.

This is the finest collection of essays pertaining to Calvin's theology since Richard Muller's *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (2000). Like the Muller volume, this one consists of previously published essays and articles. Helm however has refined and expanded most of this material, so it is not a superfluous purchase. After an introductory chapter, Helm unfolds Calvin's ideas under thirteen chapters, treating subjects as diverse as "God *in Se* and *Quoad Nos*," "Providence and Evil," "Free Will," "Natural Theology and the *Sensus Divinitatis*," and "Equity, Natural Law, and Common Grace."

In expounding upon these multiple themes, Helm interacts with the most important recent scholarship on Calvin and uses his powerful analytical skills to unfold and explain, oftentimes to defend, Calvin's ideas. One of the most interesting chapters of this book is entitled "The Angels" wherein Helm explores the question whether God is *ex lex*, beyond or

outside the law, and the late medieval discussion concerning *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. In back of these questions is whether Calvin taught that God can override his justice as revealed with a secret justice more rigorous or simply different from that which is known to us. In other words, Is God free to violate his own revealed standards of justice and righteousness? Helm convincingly demonstrates that Calvin did not teach that God is *ex lex*. For God exercises his infinite power according to all the perfections of his nature; God does not exercise an absolute power that sets aside standards of justice in order to secure a freedom of capriciousness. Such a conception of God is abhorrent to Calvin, even blasphemous since it turns God into a tyrant and renders him lawless and arbitrary.

An interesting component of this chapter is how Calvin conceived of human “merit” in relationship to God. For Calvin, as Helm expounds the Reformer’s position, humans only merit before God on the presupposition of divine ordination—that is, by a divine arrangement in which the work and acts of a person obtain unto a sort of reward because God has allotted to him or her a power of action and because God willingly and freely attaches reward or blessing to such action. God establishes the mode and measure of human capacity; and so God is never beholden to his creature except he intend to bless certain actions. Human merit as such, however, is repulsive to Calvin.

But if this is so, what becomes of Christ’s merits for sinners? In the chapter that follows, entitled “The Power Dialectic,” Helm explores the weighty and significant question whether Calvin adhered to a voluntarist position pertaining to God’s actions, meaning that God’s arbitrary *will* determines the rightness or wrongness of something, so that ethics is grounded upon Divine Command, which, by definition, is mutable and arbitrary. This is really a continuation of the question from the previous chapter whether God is *ex lex*. Helm shows how wide of the mark such a reading of Calvin proves to be, for it is one thing to affirm that Calvin believed that “God commanded certain laws under the Old Testament dispensation which he formally abrogated under the New Testament dispensation,” but it is another to affirm that Calvin taught that “God could decree what is formally self-contradictory” (315). Most Divine Command ethicists insist that God’s command is sufficient to make what is commanded morally right. The highest good is whatever God commands, and his commands can be arbitrary.

This brings us back to the question of absolute and ordained power. This distinction, as Helm explains, dates back to a dispute between Abelard and Lombard on this topic. In large measure, one side of the debate argues for contingency, positing divine freedom as a conceptual abstraction, but actually affirming that God does not and will not go back on what he has ordained to come to pass. It is a hypothetical freedom that is posited: that God could have willed otherwise than what he in fact willed or ordained. However, later Duns Scotist took a more radical view, and conceived of God’s absolute power as the ability to act outside of already ordained law, to supplant the ordained rule of law with another. Thus, ordained law is mutable. Helm shows how Calvin will have none of this.

Helm also rebuts Alister McGrath's mistaken conceptions relative to this topic, and offers a corrective to the interpretation of David Steinmetz.

As for Christ's merit, Calvin affirms the infinite and intrinsic worth of Christ's atoning work, for Christ is a divine person—although the incarnation is not an absolute necessity, but hypothetical only. Calvin grounds merit in the being of God, in Christ as a divine person, not in the divine will. He is not Scotistic. Moreover, there is no proportionate merit between Christ and creature, for Christ, as divine, has infinite merit, whereas creatures have no merit at all. And Christ's infinite merit is applied to creatures only according to God's will. By God's grace, Christ is given to God's people, and Christ's merits for them are of infinite value.

As I hope is apparent by some of my comments and summary remarks, Helm's expositions of Calvin's ideas are thoughtful, well-argued, philosophically astute, and immensely helpful. This stimulating volume belongs on the shelf of any pastor or theologian interested in the work of Calvin, and promises to be fruitful in aiding scholars in assessing the development of Reformed theology from its first codification to its seventeenth-century orthodox articulation.

—J. Mark Beach

Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters, editors. *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*. Foreword by David F. Wells. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007. Pp. 219. \$17.99.

No other subject has aroused greater controversy among Reformed and Evangelical communities within recent memory than the ongoing debate regarding the historic Reformed doctrine of justification. The contributing authors of *By Faith Alone* address the most recent attempts to revise and reformulate the biblical doctrine which Luther famously described as the mark of a standing or a falling church.

In his article, "What did Saint Paul Really Say?," Cornelis Venema critiques the teachings of N. T. Wright, the Anglican scholar who is perhaps the most distinguished and influential proponent of what has been termed the New Perspective on Paul (NPP). Venema notes the crucial link between Wright's theology and the earlier work of James Dunn (and others), who asserted that the fundamental problem with the so-called Judaizers in the NT period was their attempt to employ the works of the law as a means of excluding Gentile membership in the covenant community. In addition, Wright's interpretation of the Pauline phrase, "the righteousness of God," as a description of God's covenant faithfulness is shown to be a serious misinterpretation of Paul's writings. As Venema correctly observes, "the older perspective on Paul's doctrine of justification ultimately provides a more satisfying and comprehensive interpretation of the gospel" (35).

T. David Gordon also addresses some of the more controversial aspects of Wright's theology in his article, "Observations on N. T. Wright's Biblical Theology." Gordon takes issue with Wright's biblical theology in that "Wright understands the New Testament primarily as a fulfillment of

the promises to *Abraham*, not as a fulfillment of the redemptive pledge embedded in the *Adamic curse*" (61). As such, Wright's understanding of the *judicial* aspect of justification is notably different from that espoused by the reformers. Furthermore, Gordon notes the absence of God's wrath in Wright's formulation of justification. Finally, Wright's reinterpretation of Paul's phrase, "the righteousness of God" does an injustice to the predominant usage in Paul's letters, namely "his unwavering commitment to judge his creation uprightly" (66).

As the titles of the articles by Richard Phillips ("A Justification of Imputed Righteousness") and C. FitzSimons Allison ("The Foundational Term for Christian Salvation: *Imputation*") indicate, both authors address a fundamental criticism relating to both the NPP on Paul and the so-called Federal Vision (FV) theology. Phillips affirms and rigorously defends the historic Protestant understanding of imputed righteousness over against the longstanding challenges of Arminian theology, as well as more recent attacks from N. T. Wright and certain advocates of the FV theology. Allison draws a sharp contrast between the biblical and, in his judgment, foundational, doctrine of imputed righteousness and the doctrine defended by Rome at the Council of Trent, some of which bears striking similarities with certain features of NPP and FV theology.

T. David Gordon contributes another article in this volume entitled "Reflections on Auburn Theology." Gordon accuses proponents of FV theology of engaging in biblicistic methods of biblical interpretation, ignoring centuries of biblical-theological reflection, and employing confusing terminology in their theological formulations. What may be surprising to some readers is the connection Gordon draws between FV proponents and the "mono-covenantal" theology (Gordon's term) of the late Professor John Murray, whose opposition to dispensational theology led him, in the author's opinion, to undervalue the *discontinuities* between the Old Testament and New Testament. Gordon bluntly states, "I wish us to stop regarding Professor Murray's recasting of covenant theology as we do the drunk uncle, as something we cannot discuss openly" (123). Sadly, the author would have made his case against FV theology much stronger had he interacted more extensively with the documentary sources of the FV proponents.

David Van Drunen's "To Obey is Better Than Sacrifice: A Defense of the Active Obedience of Christ in the Light of Recent Criticism" not only affirms Christ's perfect obedience to the law, but also defends the teaching that he "fulfilled all of the positive obligations of the law on their (His people's) behalf" (127). Appealing to several centuries of historical theology, Van Drunen makes a compelling case for the imputation of the active obedience to Christ over against the more recent claims of writers such as Wright and certain proponents of FV theology. The author then proceeds to develop a thorough and powerful argument in favor of the imputation of Christ's active obedience through an extensive exegetical study of relevant texts, including Genesis 1-2 and Romans 5, among many others.

In the article "Covenant, Inheritance, and Typology: Understanding the Principles at Work in God's Covenants," R. Fowler White and E. Calvin Beisner contend that both the NPP on Paul and the FV theology have

undermined the historic understanding of justification by means of redefined terms or employing traditional terminology in non-traditional ways. In short, the authors seek to argue that “two contrasting but compatible principles of inheritance—namely, personal merit (i.e., merit grounded in the heir’s own works) and representative merit (i.e., merit grounded in another’s works)—are at work in each of these covenants (redemption and grace: PI) and that these principles of inheritance have existed side-by-side through all of history (pre-fall and post-fall) until Christ, with the former always subserving the latter” (148, 149).

In the opinion of this reviewer, the article by John Bolt, entitled “Why the Covenant of Works is a Necessary Doctrine,” was the most illuminating and helpful in understanding recent criticisms of the so-called covenant of works. Over against those who reject the historic formulation of the covenant of works (including his own predecessor at Calvin Seminary, Anthony Hoekema), Bolt writes, “We therefore make a serious error when we dismiss the notion of a covenant of works simply on the basis that it fails to meet the standards of modern biblical exegesis. Even if true, and the point is debatable, the case for the doctrine never depended solely on the exegesis of a few ‘proof-texts’ ” (175). Although recognizing the difficulties and limitations of the terminology associated with the doctrine of the covenant of works, Bolt correctly concludes, “If we deny the covenant of creation with Adam we unravel the tapestry of God’s redemptive plan in Christ” (184).

The final chapter by Gary Johnson, “The Reformation, Today’s Evangelicals, and Mormons: What Next?” seems oddly out of place within the context of the entire volume. The author identifies several recent publications by those outside the pale of Evangelicalism (one publication by a Roman Catholic, another by a Mormon) which have been treated by some evangelicals as evidence of true, evangelical faith. As Johnson (and others) have convincingly proven, such attempts to broaden the umbrella of Evangelicalism render the term “evangelical” meaningless.

Obviously, *By Faith Alone* will not be the final word in the ongoing debate over the doctrine of justification. But the authors have provided the church with a strong and compelling biblical-theological defense of the doctrine that lies at the very heart of the gospel of Christ Jesus, who is our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

—Paul R. Ipema

Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007. Pp.142. \$15.00 (cloth).

In the ministry you are always in need of inspiration and growth in preaching God’s word. Steven Lawson has provided just that in this book which is part of a new series of books by the author entitled “Long Line of Godly Men.” In this series he will not only survey all of history from Moses to the present time to set before us the long line of spiritual stalwarts who have upheld the doctrines of grace in five volumes (the first volume published in 2006 with the title *Foundations of Grace: 1400 BC–AD 100*), but a series of profiles in which he will focus on specific men

especially gifted and used by God to inspire God's servants today. This volume on Calvin is the first profile, with the promise of more to follow on Martin Luther, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and others.

Lawson longs to see the church again understand and elevate the preaching of God's Word. He is of the opinion that "we live in a generation that has compromised this sacred calling to preach. Exposition is being replaced with entertainment, preaching with performances, doctrine with drama, and theology with theatrics. The modern day church desperately needs to recover its way and to return to a pulpit that is Bible based, Christ centered, and life changing. God has always been pleased to honor his Word—especially his Word *preached*. . . . As the pulpit goes, so goes the church. Thus, only a Reformed pulpit will ultimately lead to a Reformed church. In this hour, pastors must see their pulpits again marked by sequential exposition, doctrinal clarity, and a sense of gravity regarding eternal matters. This, in my estimation, is *the* need of the hour" (xi-xii). So to help meet the need of the hour and to raise the bar for the next generation of biblical expositors, Lawson wrote this book examining the preaching of John Calvin.

After introducing us to "Calvin's Life and Legacy" in chapter one, Lawson sets forth Calvin's preaching in the next seven chapters by looking at thirty two distinctives which marked him out as a biblical expositor and preacher. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with Calvin's approach to and preparation for the pulpit (Distinctives #1-7), while chapters 4 through 8 focus on the sermon itself; its introduction, the exposition of the text, the delivery, application and conclusion (Distinctives #8-32). Although it is not feasible to list all the distinctives here, a sampling from each chapter would suffice to whet the appetite: #2 – Divine Presence; #6 – Devoted Heart; #9 – Extemporaneous Delivery; #13 – Exegetical Precision; #19 – Vivid Expressions; #28 – Loving Rebuke; #31 – Pressing Appeal.

Lawson's writing style is clear and engaging. The frequent references and illustrations from Calvin's own sermons drive home the points illuminated. I can highly recommend this book as an introduction to Calvin's preaching and as a call for all who must preach the Word to recover or maintain a faithful pulpit ministry.

—Jacques Roets

A. T. B. McGowan, editor. *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007. Pp. 368. \$26.00.

This book is a collection of ten essays covering various topics within the traditional theological loci, written by a variety of contemporary Reformed and evangelical authors. A. T. B. McGowan is the editor of this volume, with a preface written by John Frame.

McGowan, in an introductory essay, tells us that the Reformed churches embrace the necessity of *semper reformanda* (always reforming), hence the title of this book. (It would be nice if someone would document, from the Reformation era, that this is actually and genuinely a Reformed motto, if it is.) Unfortunately, this motto has often been com-

mandeered in modern times to defend and render legitimate every sort of doctrinal novelty and theological aberration. Thus, some have argued that in jettisoning creedal Christianity or the doctrinal formulas of the Reformed confessions they are showing themselves to be more faithful to the Reformers than those who merely mimic what the Reformers wrote and defended—that is, genuinely *Reformed* theologians ought to find themselves parting ways with the Reformers, and in so doing they are being faithful to the Reformers. McGowan, to his credit, is not unaware of this abuse. But his passion lies elsewhere: he mainly cautions against the failure to take *semper reformanda* seriously and the tendency toward rigid confessionalism. McGowan doesn't demonstrate, however, who is guilty of this, or how that manifests itself.

The vital task of theology, urges McGowan, is ongoing, and so he argues that a healthy sense of *semper reformanda* is required. He offers four reasons in defense of this affirmation: (1) God speaks today—meaning, God continues, by means of his Spirit and Word, to reveal himself to the church; (2) theologians make mistakes—we haven't arrived on every theological topic; (3) new issues require new thinking—this is reflected in the Reformation itself and the twenty-first century has given us many complex issues that need to be addressed; and (4) Scripture must have priority over confessions—which is to say, the confessions ought to be updated and that Scripture must ever be given priority over confessions. Meanwhile, in embracing *semper reformanda*, McGowan offers the reminder that theology is the servant of Scripture, that theology is for the church and takes place within that context, that we are not the first to read and interpret the Scriptures, so balance is needed between respect for the past and concern for the present; and that *semper reformanda* must be pursued in the right spirit and manner. We are not to be theological iconoclasts, and we must disagree with others graciously, gently, and prayerfully, with an eye to our own weaknesses and prejudices. These, remarks, of course, are directly on target and serve as a useful reminder to everyone engaged in the task of theology.

Of course, the litmus test of reform is Scripture, and the essays in this collection aim to survey some of the areas within the field of dogmatic or systematic theology and consider the continuing normativity of the Scriptural witness to traditional doctrines. The task of each essay, in McGowan's words, is "to assess the current state of scholarship in that area, before indicating areas where further work, development, restatement or clarification is required." In short, the intention of this book is the help set an agenda for future work and scholarship.

Thus Robert Reymond takes up issues and debates surrounding classical Chalcedonian Christology, mostly defending it but zealously rejecting the idea of the Son's eternal generation from the Father, which Reymond believes is subordinationistic. A. T. B. McGowan defends atonement as penal substitution à la J. I. Packer, and so he endorses Packer's reforms of more classically Reformed articulations of that doctrine. Richard C. Gamble treats biblical theology, in a Vosian expression, in relationship to systematic theology. Henri Blocher wishes to *reform* Reformed theology by offering a different conception of the relationship between old covenant and new covenant, and a revised covenant theology as such.

His essay easily qualifies as the most misinformed, unhelpful, and deflating in the collection, though it is provocative. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. treats, not surprisingly, union with Christ, interacting principally with John Murray and John Calvin. Gaffin offers some cogent observations relative to imputation and union with Christ. Along the way he commends Mark Garcia's dissertation on union with Christ in relation to justification and sanctification in Calvin but seems totally unaware of the superior work of Cornelis P. Venema on this same topic. What continues to baffle me is why Gaffin fails to interact with Lewis Smedes's thorough work on the topic of union with Christ, *All Things Made New*. If one is to assess the current state of scholarship on this question, Smedes's work is of major significance, and Gaffin's essay disappoints in its failure to consider and evaluate Smedes's findings. Gaffin likewise does not document or survey a classic Reformed statement of this doctrine, say, from A. A. Hodge, John Dick, or Louis Berkhof. In other words, if the Reformed doctrine of union with Christ is to be *reformed*, what features or facets of the doctrine as it has reached a classical or collective form needs correction?

Meanwhile, Derek W. H. Thomas takes up the doctrine of the church. Oddly, he first treats the attributes of the church under the heading "The marks (*notae*) of the church," before proceeding to discuss biblical preaching and the right use of the sacraments. The practice of church discipline is not included. Thomas also takes up worship wars and the regulative principle of worship, employing the familiar slogans that more recently have framed those debates.

Stephen Williams offers observations on the future of system in systematic theology, using Charles Simeon and G. C. Berkouwer as his chief models. Williams's reforms diminish, but do not relinquish, the traditional task of systematic theology. Although he does not deny the human drive toward coherence, and so toward system, he is concerned that biblical concerns and the texture of redemptive history not be lost in this project. What is missing in Williams's presentation are stronger safeguards against biblicism on the one hand and an understanding of the role of polemics within systematic theology, for it is never the case that systematic theology simply transpires in the calm of right-believing and right-living. On the contrary, the progress of systematic theology is almost always in the face of error and the consequent heat of polemics. That Williams presents Berkouwer as a model systematic theologian misses the point that Berkouwer was not convinced about the legitimacy of a "system" of theology and that is why he wrote *Dogmatische Studiën*—dogmatic studies on topics of theology, not a system of dogmatics. Certainly Berkouwer is a model to follow in weaving together contemporary theological discussions, historical and confessional testimony, and biblical-exegetical presentation to form a broad presentation of biblical truth—even exhibiting irenic polemics—but Berkouwer's work is philosophically weak and less than clear from a pure order of presentation, not to mention the vague and flat out erroneous conclusions that mark some of his work. Williams's essay would have been more persuasive if he had included some mention of types of systems in the question of sys-

tematic theology and also the types and/or genres of presentation that can characterize systematic theology.

Gerald Bray takes up the doctrine of the Trinity. He is pleased that the modern discussion has resulted in liberating theology from the stranglehold of “alien philosophical systems” relative to this doctrine. This “has brought the concept of divine personhood to the fore in a new and often compelling way.” God is conceived as one who relates to us not as a distant Deity but “in a personal way.” For God himself is “a community of personal relations” who wants us to enter into “community with him” (23). Personal relations within God triune, then, have replaced divine substance as “the locus of God’s inner unity.” This allows for the personhood and role of the Holy Spirit to blossom and take a more central place in the doctrine rather than the traditional diminished role he occupies. Bray, however, is not pleased with all things modern in the trinitarian reflections. He laments the lack of attention to Scripture—what he calls “the virtual absence of serious consideration of the Bible as the source of trinitarian doctrine.” He also laments that the abandonment of “traditional classical theological distinctions and categories” has led to “confusion rather than to deeper understanding.” The impassibility debate serves as an illustration since writers do not properly distinguish the persons of God and the nature of God. Indeed, “divine substance” language has been jettisoned without anything to take its place. Bray rightly warns that “we need to consider our theological inheritance as a unity, and not seek to create divisions in it that may correspond to some ecclesiastical allegiance or temperamental preference today ...” (28).

In turning to discuss the challenges to Reformed theologians today, Bray states that it is no longer possible to form a doctrine of the Trinity that can claim to be “exclusively Reformed,” which is a most peculiar statement, for when did the Reformed ever do this or desire to do this? Bray appeals to theologians like Torrance, Moltmann, and Gunton, who were each also appreciative of Barth. These writers have opened the way, according to Bray, to a synthesis between Eastern and Western trinitarianism. This means that we must follow the East and conceive of God as “primarily a communion of persons whose unity is manifested in complete coinherence.” Thus, for Bray, *perichoresis* must carry the freight of divine unity. How Western trinitarianism, in its burden and focus, can play a significant role in the formulation of a doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly indicated by Bray’s discussion. Meanwhile Bray bids contemporary Reformed writers to ground the doctrine of the Trinity in biblical theology, but it is not clear what is intended here, except that modern writers on the Trinity often fail at this. Acknowledging that divine unity is called into question with the loss of “substance” language, Bray also acknowledges that the divine perfections are called into question in this way.

Bray’s agenda for the reforming of the doctrine of the Trinity, then, is articulated under six points, namely that a future Reformed trinitarian theology (1) be solidly biblical, (2) be integrative of different traditions, (3) seek definition and clarity as far as possible, (4) reexamine the divine attributes in relation to the concept of mutual coinherence, (5) be deeply

spiritual in its approach, and (6) show how the work of the different persons relates to the Trinity as a whole.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer treats the very idea of a theological system. In doing so he proposes what he calls the methodology of triangulation, which we will define below. Vanhoozer's essay is the longest in the book (more than twice as long as some contributions) and certainly one of the most intriguing, not to mention the most intellectually rigorous. His composition excels in its interaction with contemporary writers. He first introduces readers to Paul Ricoeur, Michael Dummett, and Karl Barth on the question of systems. From here he considers three challenges to the idea of systematic theology, namely that it is modern and therefore reductionist; it is Western and therefore imperialistic; and it is wissenschaftlich (an academic specialty) and therefore impractical. Next comes an account and examples of scientific (systematic) theology from three contemporary practitioners: Alister McGrath, Stanley Grenz, and Donald Bloesch, with Charles Hodge, George Lindbeck, and Karl Barth serving as foils, respectively. Vanhoozer offers cogent critiques of each of these thinkers. McGrath's approach doesn't make clear how to appeal to and use Scripture as authoritative and normative; Grenz fails to safeguard "collapsing the Bible into the Spirit's speaking through tradition and contemporary culture" (145), and so he fails to account, in any adequate way, for theology's norming norm; and Bloesch so divides the written Word of God from the living Word of God, i.e., the inner Word of the Spirit ministering to our hearts, that he divorces the historical meaning of the text from the spiritual meaning of the text, with the consequence that, for Bloesch, what the Bible says is not God's final authoritative Word but what the *God says to us* in the Bible. What God says to us in the Bible is the spiritual meaning of the text, the living, inner Word of God to us. This last view certainly takes on Nestorian-like traits.

Thus each of the above mentioned writers no longer view the Bible, its text and its verbal meaning, as the object of theology, since what the Bible nakedly says is not what the Spirit says. Each writer follows Karl Barth in insisting that revelation happens not in the speaking but in the hearing, not in the directing of words but in the receiving of them, in faith. In short, revelation is a dynamic gift bestowed by God; it is never simply and objectively available "in" a text. Neither is revelation a matter of exegeting one's way to a knowledge of God. As a consequence, classical foundationalism must be rejected. But, then, where does that leave us?

Vanhoozer explores an answer by next introducing his readers to Bruce Marshall's appropriation of Donald Davidson's philosophy, resulting in "the Marshall-Davidson critique of methods that rely on evidentialism and conceptual schemes" (153). Specifically Marshall uses Davidson to attack the "scheme-content" dichotomy—i.e., when theology tries to demonstrate the truth of biblical claims and Christian teaching in terms of extra-biblical conceptual schemes. Bultmann is a stark example, when he used existentialist philosophy as the scheme to explain biblical content. But other theologians have used other schemes, like Neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, Marxism, feminism, process philosophy, etc. The content is corrupted and reinterpreted via a scheme. So Marshall proposes as alternative his "epistemic independence thesis." Instead of using a

scheme, we must proceed by assuming the truth of the biblical narratives as written. In other words, the biblical narratives trump all epistemic schemes and is its own epistemic scheme. Davidson proposes a way out of the subject-object dichotomy by means of what he calls “triangulation.” Triangulation is a way of understanding, requiring three sorts of knowledge: (1) knowledge of our own minds; (2) knowledge of other minds; (3) knowledge of the world. In brief (I fear too brief), “*Triangulation is the project of coordinating subjectivity, objectivity and intersubjectivity via communicative interaction*” (161-162). Applied to the discipline of systematic theology, via Marshall, triangulation means an interplay between the theologian in communicative interaction with others about the biblical text. As Vanhoozer notes, for those with Reformed or evangelical sensibilities, the biblical text must have first place in this triangle, along side of what the Christian community as a whole has held to be true, evident in its words and deeds, which, for Marshall, cannot be divorced from the Holy Spirit’s work. But triangulation can come in a variety of forms (as manifested in the methodologies of McGrath, Grenz, and Bloesch), and therefore not just any form of triangulation will serve. This leads Vanhoozer to propose what he calls “theodramatic triangulation.”

Theodramatic triangulation, succinctly stated, seeks to honor Scripture as the supreme authority for theology. Thus we must honor “the epistemic primacy of the gospel (the formal principle) and the nature of the gospel itself (the material principle)” (163). The gospel is something God says and does; hence it is a theodrama. His actions are on the world-stage. It is God’s activity. It is drama because drama involves both “spoken action” and “action that speaks.” God’s drama forms the subject matter of theology.

Vanhoozer is convinced that God’s triune triangulation is a better description of God’s revelation of himself than the old subject-object dichotomy. Instead of subject-object, the key idea is *communicative interaction*. But we might ask in this connection: Isn’t such communicative interaction between *distinct* persons? Doesn’t this interaction involve an I-thou relationship—hence an acting subject toward one other than him- or herself (an object), and vice versa? As long as we are not God, can the subject-object distinction be jettisoned? And inasmuch as revelation is a sovereign act of God, can’t God reveal himself as subject to human objects of his love, who are also called to act? And insofar as humans think of God as an object, isn’t that possible only because God is the Subject who has revealed himself to them? Perhaps this is all that Vanhoozer means by communicative interaction—if so, Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed federal tradition, dating back to the seventeenth century, had long ago solved that question. The fruit of theodramatic revelation for systematic theology is that doctrine must also be directly theodramatic—i.e., it is not mere theoretical knowledge of God that is the goal of theology, but a performance knowledge of God is the goal. In short, theology must have this practical purpose and outcome, a “fittingness,” which is a result of triangulation (Scripture, church, cultural context). Biblical habits of speaking and thinking and acting are carried into the modern world and its situation.

Vanhoozer's essay would have been more satisfying if he had interacted with Herman Bavinck's thorough work on prolegomena and sacred Scripture and the first two volumes of Richard Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. If we are to *reform* Reformed theology, it would be helpful first to be sure we know what we are reforming. In any case, what Vanhoozer is after, so far as I can tell, is the traditional Reformed model recast in modern dress. His essay should not be missed and deserves careful and thoughtful reflection.

In my opinion the essay that best achieves the assignment of the book is the essay by Cornelis P. Venema on justification, wherein he considers the ecumenical, biblical, and theological dimensions of current debates. Venema first orients the reader to historic Protestant and Roman Catholic views on justification before launching into the teaching of this doctrine in recent ecumenical dialogue, particularly between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Next comes an insightful analysis of the views set forth by certain proponents of the New Perspective on Paul, namely E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. From there Venema offers evaluative observations on the current debates pertaining to the doctrine of justification and demonstrates that sometimes what is needed in the church's effort to be *always reforming* is for it to first know where it has been and to grasp what its own tradition is in order to make a biblical evaluation of proposed changes. This is a trait missing from some (certainly not all) of the essays in this volume. Reforming can in fact take place, at times, by recapturing what is not faithfully or thoughtfully embraced, though confessed perfunctorily. Venema's contribution to this collection is a model of the methodology I wish more of the authors contributing to this book would have used in pursuing their own enquiry of a topic.

Finally two general observations are in order about this volume.

(1) The editor and some of the authors of this collection of essays seem to be a bit too preoccupied with the idea of "system" in systematic theology. The term needs definition, for system can conjure images in our minds of a container into which something is poured and made to mix with and find a place among everything else in the container. System can also connote orderliness and clarifying arrangement, both logical, chronological, thematic, so that, typically and classically, a systematic theology attempts to set forth weightier topics in relationship to topics of lesser weight, etc. In fact, some of the contributors show little awareness that the nomenclature "systematic theology" might not be the best designation for this field of study. After all, historically, among the Reformed, there have been numerous terms and titles have been used in an attempt to capture this academic/practical discipline of study. Preferred terms have included Institutions or Institutes (instructions), *Loci communes* or Commonplaces—meaning major topics—disputations or discussions, Compendium or Synopsis or Substance or Marrow of the Christian Religion or of Christian Theology, although there are also titles like *Syntagma* or *Systema breve* or System or Body of Divinity. Admittedly, the term systematic theology has long been the preferred designation in the North American setting for this field of theological inquiry; nonetheless, dogmatics or dogmatic theology better captures the burden of the discipline,

for it was never the goal of Reformed theology, not even in its most scholastic codification, to first and foremost create an abstract *system* of theology from Scripture; rather, the burden was to identify from Scripture major topics and themes, in distinction from topics of lesser weight and significance, to consider these topics biblically, within a given historical, ecclesiastical, moral, and polemical or elenctic context, in dialogue with the established dogmas of the church and the theological work of prior generations, in order to enable pastors and layperson alike, to better understand the Scriptures and live the Christian life. Thus, dogmatic theology aimed to help believers understand the Bible better, so that when believers came to Scripture, with their quests and concerns, and worries and burdens, they could more fruitfully and faithfully examine and apply particular texts of Scripture. In this way, dogmatic theology provided a valuable service. It oriented believers to major topics derived from Scripture: God as Creator, Lord, Sustainer, Provider; humans as created and fallen, and in need of rescue; Christ as the long awaited answer, a gift of grace and the fulfillment of promise; the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of life, who applies all that Christ has accomplished; the church as institution and agent of the work of the gospel and the living embodiment of the new humanity, the fruit of the saving work of the triune God; and what awaits us, the end of the story, the happy and terrible ending for the human race, the narrative of a new heaven and a new earth. Reformed dogmatic theology has always told the story of Creation, fall, redemption, consummation, and it is quite false to suggest otherwise. Thus, systematic theology is certainly an ordering of topics derived from Scripture. But to conceive of it as a tight system of deduced doctrines, to the neglect of Scripture, is (frankly) an Enlightenment aberration, and not something that has ever defined Reformed theology from its inception to its mature confessional expression. Dogmatic theology's aim is simple: to assist the church in her work of teaching and preaching the gospel to those within the fold and those afar off, for teaching and preaching are the life-blood of the church.

(2) Some of the essays in this volume attempt to do the work of *semper reformanda* while (seemingly) entangled in an Enlightenment agenda and therefore laboring to overcome Enlightenment presuppositions, partly with a nod in the direction of postmodernism. But a nod to postmodernism simply reveals that one is a child of the Enlightenment after all, and that one is removed from the tradition of dogmatic theology as practiced by the Reformers and their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century heirs. In order to reform Reformed doctrine, all pastors and theologians should first know what they are reforming; and this requires more than a nod in the direction of Hodge and Berkhof. Many of the essays in this book would have been improved with a serious effort to contextualize Reformed teaching and then demonstrate where Reformed teachings need remedy or a new elucidation or where traditional Reformed teachings are simply erroneous and must be abandoned.

—J. Mark Beach

Iain H. Murray, *Wesley and the Men Who Followed*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003. Pp. 272. \$27.00 (cloth).

Those familiar with the author and publisher of this book might find it strange that a Calvinist publisher and writer would write and publish a biography of a pronounced Arminian and critic of Calvinism. Yet Murray succeeds in writing a very balanced and inspirational yet critical work on the “founder” of Methodism and those who followed him. This sympathetic, yet critical, work begins with an overview of the life and work of John Wesley. Chapters one and two set forth his conversion and transformation “from Oxford Don to Open-Air Preacher” and show the amazing impact his preaching had. In the remaining three chapters in “Part One” Murray deals with understanding key aspects of Wesley’s theology; explaining something of his “Collision with Calvinism,” in particular his dispute with George Whitefield; and his leadership and guidance in the formation and governance of the Methodist societies.

In Part Two Murray gives us three mini-biographies of “Men Who Followed” John Wesley. After Wesley’s death it was thought that the Methodist societies would fade away. Iain Murray shows why this did not happen by bringing out the extraordinary dedication and godliness of those leaders who came after John Wesley. William Bramwell, Gideon Ouseley, and Thomas Collins exemplify the spirit of early Methodism well. The lives of these three men are most inspirational, and this section alone makes the work of Murray worth reading.

In the Part Three the writer critically focuses on two areas in which John Wesley deviated from biblical teaching; the first is his understanding of justification and the second his teaching on Christian perfection. The writer not only sets forth Wesley’s teaching in these sections but also something of the development and the historical situations that led Wesley to formulate his view. Murray sufficiently shows how these teachings of Wesley depart from Scripture. Although the chapter on justification does not make any references to the modern questions raised by the New Perspective and the Federal Vision, for those who are familiar with these views this chapter will be enlightening because it will bring out the clear resemblance between these views and those held by Arminian theologians (Wesley in particular).

Iain Murray concludes his book with a reflection on the contrast between earlier Methodism and Methodism today, showing how a departure from Scripture has led to a Christianity without the power of the Holy Spirit. He concludes this sad chapter with these encouraging words: “Apostasy is not the end of the story ... the great lesson of Wesley and the Evangelical Revival is that sin and unbelief are not in control of history. Millions now in heaven attest that truth. ‘God is sovereign’, said Wesley. More: he, and all men whom we have considered in these pages, would remind us that God’s love for the world remains the same. Jesus is the Saviour ‘high over all’ who lives to give repentance and forgiveness ... the Spirit is sent to convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. And whenever and wherever that work of grace is found, men and women will cry, ‘O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God’ ” (262-3).

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson's words on the back cover of the book capture my sentiments as well: "Thrilling history and biography; the bringing to light of forgotten men of extraordinary faith and energy for Christ; shrewd analysis; challenge to contemporary church. *Wesley and the Men Who Followed* has it all. I enjoyed it greatly—a breath of spiritually fresh air and vitality comes though wonderfully. I found it uplifting, challenging and gratitude-creating—and a great read."

—Jacques Roets

K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons {for Faith}: Philosophy in the Service of Theology*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006. Pp. xv + 363. \$24.99.

Scott Oliphint, Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, has penned a book needing to be written. Oliphint brings to this volume the strengths commonly associated with a Van Tilian approach, particularly the conviction that all knowledge is and must be rooted in God's revelation of himself. Professor Oliphint does not, however, succumb to the temptation which beguiles some followers of Van Til: he refuses to embrace a biblicism that dismisses the validity of the use of other disciplines in the theological and especially the apologetical task. Oliphint is well aware of how philosophy, for example, has been (mis)used, particularly in the post-Enlightenment context, to trump theology. His response in this volume, though, is not simply to dismiss philosophy but to make, as did the Reformed of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a right use of it. Oliphint, then, in this significant beginning (many more volumes need to be written along these lines) wants to recapture and develop an earlier approach in which philosophy was properly used in the service of theology.

Perhaps a closer examination of the problem, particularly in the modern era, of relating philosophy and theology will prove useful. Since the time of Hume and Kant, an "enlightened" intelligentsia has looked at theology "from below." This means that the Enlightenment approach to theology has not been to seek to understand in a systematic way the revelation of God, particularly the Bible, but has been to study the expression given to Christianity and the other world religions as these are lived out in various societies. In other words, since the noumenal realm—in which God, the self, and the thing-in-itself reside—is inaccessible to scientific reasoning, upon which the highest premium comes to be placed in the modern world, what was previously the discipline of theology has been replaced by philosophy of religion, comparative religions, and the like. The study of theology thus is reduced to its phenomenological manifestations and is not about clearly expressing the truth revealed by God in a comprehensive way, but rather about understanding how man orders and expresses himself religiously.

Inasmuch as theology has been decoupled from the revelation of God, philosophy, which the Reformers of the sixteenth century and the Reformed of the seventeenth century (pre-Enlightenment) used in the service of theology, has likewise been unshackled from any scriptural

considerations. Certainly philosophy no longer holds the place of pride that it did in the pre-Reformation days when Aquinas and others regarded it as that which could lead even man in his sin to the vestibule of faith, as if philosophy could do its work and then let theology take over. The Reformation, at least in principle, pointed away from such an approach, teaching the necessity, as did Calvin, of the glasses of Scripture rightly to understand even general revelation. Reason does not lead to faith (medieval), nor does reason sit in judgment on faith (Enlightenment). Rather, reason is a tool, to be used by man in a ministerial and not a magisterial fashion. Calvin and Turretin, to take two great exemplars from the Reformers and their codifiers, saw reason as a handmaiden to be used in our theologizing. In other words, they saw philosophy in the service of theology.

In this volume, Oliphint, while calling for a return to such a role for philosophy, does not call for such as if the modern world, and the post-modern after it, did not exist. Oliphint appreciates the advance that the Reformation represented over the medieval approach, particularly as the Reformed rejected a certain scholastic approach which exalted philosophy over theology. He understands that the Enlightenment sought to subject everything to the scientific methodology, debasing theology *and* philosophy (as part of its anti-metaphysical bias), exalting autonomous reason as the arbiter of all that might claim to be truth. He also understands that post-modernism, in its disappointment over modernism's failure to solve man's problems, has, at least formally, rejected even reason and has called for a kind of relativism in which one's preferences are all that matters (since truth is either unattainable or non-existent).

Specifically, in the twentieth century, following the rejection by Nietzsche and his followers of the attempts of Hegel and his followers to immanentize the noumenal by bringing it down into the phenomenal, philosophy and reason itself have fallen on hard times. Post-modernism, in rejecting modernism, has so embraced (mere) perspectivalism that it has also rejected the possibility of knowing truth, except as an expression of the position of the empowered. In the face of all of this, Oliphint calls for a return to philosophy in the service of theology, not as if such can be done just as it was done in the pre-Enlightenment world of Calvin and Turretin, but as we are called to do it in a world that recognizes the limits of reason but has no foundation for truth.

Unlike many orthodox Christian theologians, Oliphint, in the face of all this, calls for a return neither to a medieval view nor a modern view of reason and philosophy, as if we need to repristinate Aquinas on the one hand, or Hume and Kant on the other. We do not need the foundationalism of rationalism or empiricism. This does not mean, however, that we are left simply with post-modernism. Rather, we who have learned the lesson that there is no neutrality (and post-modernists are supposed to get that part) need to return to Scripture for our theology, and using the tool of our God-given and now sanctified reason, not reject philosophy but employ it in the service of theology as the earlier church professed but often failed to do when it forgot, as its best thinkers always knew (Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, etc.), that faith precedes understanding. Oliphint engages these best thinkers along with a host of others, including

some of the most trenchant modern critics of the Reformed approach and of Christianity and theism altogether.

Oliphint's book is simply organized. He begins, in part 1, with an introduction to and survey of the problem of the relationship of theology to philosophy in the history of philosophy. In parts 2 and 3, he offers major sections on two of the largest concerns of philosophy, epistemology and metaphysics, respectively. In part 4, he applies the insights of philosophy in the service of confessional Reformed theology, particularly to the problem of evil. Oliphint well understands the various approaches that have been taken throughout the history of human thought to the questions of how we know (epistemology) and what is real (metaphysics). He appreciates the struggles and failures of philosophers in relating the one and the many and in using empiricism, rationalism, and various post-foundationalist epistemologies to seek, albeit unsuccessfully, to answer our questions about knowledge and reality and then apply that to ethics.

Oliphint deftly treats how we know what we know by developing Aquinas's and Calvin's insights into the *sensus divinitatis*: we have true knowledge of our Creator, and thus of ourselves as those in his image, because such is written in all of creation (Romans 1) and on the human heart (Romans 2), suppressed in unrighteousness by unregenerate man. Oliphint keeps up a (gentle) running debate throughout this volume with Alvin Plantinga, father of "Reformed epistemology." Oliphint makes it clear that Plantinga does not properly employ philosophy in the service of theology. Rather, Plantinga, who would respond to such a charge firstly by claiming to be a philosopher, not a theologian, nevertheless modifies Reformed theology to fit his philosophical approach, denying, in his treatment of the problem of evil, the aseity and sovereignty of God by privileging a libertarian notion of free will on the part of humanity. Oliphint, having developed an *eimi/eikon* approach to God and his creation, shows how that a covenant God condescends to his creatures and how that providence, while perhaps not answering every objection that critics might raise, provides a framework to deal with the problem of evil.

In his treatment of theodicy, Oliphint employs an analogy to the Incarnation: if the divine Second Person of the Godhead can remain fully God and add humanity to that, so as to change neither and remain fully both in one person, such covenantal condescension that we see in the mystery of the Incarnation can also be used to see how God remains fully sovereign and man fully responsible, and how that is involved in answering the problem of evil. Perhaps, at this point, one might argue that Oliphint's approach serves more as polemics, strictly speaking, than as apologetics, but there is much here for fruitful engagement with those in other Christian traditions (polemics) and unbelievers (apologetics). This book should be obtained and carefully studied for the significant insights that it offers into rightly reasoning about our theology in a post-modern age.

—Alan D. Strange

Gerhard Sauter, *Protestant Theology at the Crossroads: How to Face the Crucial Tasks for Theology in the Twenty-First Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. 188, including indexes. \$24.00.

The author of this volume is professor of systematic and ecumenical theology and director emeritus of the Ecumenical Institute at the University of Bonn, Germany. The occasion for several of the chapters in this collection of essays was the Warfield Lectures, which Sauter gave in March 2000 at Princeton Theological Seminary. Though not as well known in North America, Sauter enjoys a reputation in Europe as among the most outstanding of contemporary Protestant (Lutheran) theologians.

As the title of this book intimates, it contains a series of essays on a range of theological topics, which are loosely connected by the theme of the distinctive challenges that presently face Protestant theology. Starting with a chapter on the theme, "What Dare We Hope—at the Beginning of the Third Millennium?," Sauter describes the contemporary context for Christian theology, which is one of a world of dashed hopes and waning optimism. In subsequent chapters, Sauter addresses a diversity of themes, including what he terms the "art" of reading the Bible (hermeneutics), the legitimacy and task of the discipline of dogmatics, the challenges of contextualized theology, the new political landscape of Europe, the crisis of contemporary American religious sensitivity, the problem of "public theology" or theology that is undertaken outside of the setting of the Christian church, and the current state of Reformed theology. A cursory reflection on these wide-ranging topics confirms that this volume offers the reader a window into Sauter's thinking on the serious challenges facing Christian theology today.

Due the nature of this volume as a somewhat ad hoc collection of Sauter's essays on various topics, some readers will be disappointed that many of his arguments are inconclusive or merely suggestive. However, Sauter's arguments do provide an interesting sketch of the state of contemporary Protestant theology, particularly within the broad tradition of confessional (Lutheran and Reformed) Christianity in Europe. Throughout his essays, Sauter evidences the continuing influence of the neo-orthodox theology of the twentieth century. Sauter insists, for example, that dogmatics is properly a discipline to be pursued within the setting of the church, though not without an eye to the broader, public arena in which its labors are also tested. On the one hand, Sauter follows Barth in rejecting the approach of "biblical fundamentalism," which interprets the Bible not as a living revelation of the faithfulness of the Triune God but as a repository of divinely-revealed truths. On the other hand, he is clearly dissatisfied with the approach of a "public theology" that is disconnected from the life and ministry of the church. In my judgment, Sauter is unable to answer satisfactorily the challenges facing contemporary Reformed theology on the basis of his neo-orthodox doctrine of Scripture and undue tentativeness regarding the church's confessional inheritance. Nonetheless, his reflections are often insightful and offer a helpful roadmap to the state of Protestant theology today within those vestiges of

the confessional Protestant tradition in Europe that still take seriously the task and responsibilities of Christian theology.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*. Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, edited by Richard M. Muller. Translation of *God in het midden. Calvijns theologie van de Psalmen*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. Pp. 304, bibliography and index. \$29.99.

The author, who is professor of church history and church polity at the Theologische Universiteit in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, serves as a theologian-pastor in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Christian Reformed Churches) in that country.

The emerging modern consensus of Calvin scholars suggests that the *Institutes* should properly be read in the light of the commentaries rather than the other way around. In that light, Calvin's commentary on the Psalms, written near the end of his life and thus comprising the fruit of his mature theological thought, may be understood as his pastoral commentary on the *Institutes*. By combining theology and biography, Selderhuis illustrates throughout his study how knowing something of Calvin's own *Sitz im Leben* opens a useful avenue for appreciating and using this commentary. Calvin's subjective involvement in the biblical text belonged to his exposition of the Psalms. We must keep in mind that "while commenting on the Psalms, [Calvin] is himself wearing spectacles, namely those of his own experience. In Calvin's case though, they are sunglasses: even bright things acquire a dark shade" (30).

Busy pastors looking for a book that offers multiple cross-disciplinary benefits will enjoy in this volume a well-written story of Calvin's interaction with—his living with—the Psalms in the context of his own personal, ecclesiastical, and political struggles. They will find here a readable summary overview of Calvin's thought, in terms of its interrelationship, texture, emphases, and commonalities with other Reformers. In short, without ever getting lost in the details of theological exposition, Selderhuis uses this palette of Calvin's commentary on the Psalms to paint a fresh portrait of Calvin's *theological* spirituality and his *spiritual* theology.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

Corwin Smidt, Donald Luidens, James Penning, and Roger Nemeth, *Divided by a Common Heritage: The Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America at the Beginning of the New Millennium*. The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, No. 54. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006. Pp. 240. \$24.00.

Among several different approaches that might be taken to the assessment of a denomination or communion of churches, this study opts for a sociological approach. As the authors of this volume indicate in their introductory chapter, they are interested in discovering the present

state and the past history of two closely-related denominations, the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. The study is not simply a history of these denominations, nor is it an analysis of their distinctive confessional and theological identities. Based upon a sociological analysis, the study aims to provide a sketch of the make-up and characteristics of these two denominations, which are so closely linked by a common heritage but also facing something of a crisis of identity at the present time.

Part of the context for the study, which lends to it a particular interest, is the question whether these two denominations are at a point in their respective histories that would allow them to merge together into one denomination. Written by members of these denominations—two of the authors are members of the RCA, two are members of the CRC—this book aims to contribute not only to a right understanding of the present state of their denominations, but also to an appraisal of their future vitality and unity. As they put it in an introductory chapter, “The primary purpose of this book is to provide an examination of the religious life of the Christian Reformed and Reformed churches at the turn of the millennium and to assess the changes that have been evident in both bodies over the past twenty-five years that may inform the discussion of greater partnership” (2). Contrary to what the authors term “secularization theory,” which asserts the inevitable decline of religious commitment in the modern period, the authors argue for the contemporary vitality of religious commitment. Moreover, despite the challenges of the contemporary world to denominations and denominational commitments, they also maintain that it is possible for denominations like the RCA and the CRC to “adapt” to (rather than “accommodate” or simply “resist”) the currents of contemporary culture and society.

In order to achieve their purpose, the authors begin with a brief history and description of the RCA and the CRC (chapter 2). Thereafter, in a series of chapters that comprise the substance of their study, they consider the theological views of RCA and CRC clergy and parishioners (chapter 3), the nature and content of the religious commitments among members and clergy of both denominations (chapter 4), the social and political engagement of parishioners and clergy within the two denominations (chapter 5), the characteristics of congregational life in the two denominations (chapter 6), and several important contemporary issues within the denominations that have been source of considerable controversy (chapter 7). The findings of the study are based upon a variety of sources of data: surveys of RCA members over the past twenty-five years; several surveys of CRC members by church agencies over the past fifteen years; surveys of clergy of the two denominations in 1989, 1997, and 2001; and the data obtained through the coordinated Faith Communities Today (FACTS) research project. With respect to the last of these sources, the authors note that responses were received from 399 RCA congregations and 514 CRC congregations. Though the data upon which the authors base their conclusions may itself require interpretation and sifting, it does represent a significant source of information for their limited purpose.

Those who have an interest in the RCA and the CRC will undoubtedly find the results of this study fascinating, albeit not surprising. Among the conclusions that the authors reach is that the two denominations are closer in their religious commitments and characteristics than at any time in their long, and often hostile, history of inter-relationship. However, the convergence of these two denominations has largely occurred through a process of diminishing loyalty to the Reformed confessions and growing attachment to broadly evangelical commitments (including a more “individualistic” view of the church). Though the authors appear to be sympathetic to the prospect of a merger of the two denominations, their conclusion on this subject is rather modest, even pessimistic. After distinguishing between three possible courses of action—each denomination “staying the course,” which means continued decline in numbers and confessional identity; the two denominations “merging for survival”; and the two denominations “merging for purity”—the authors conclude that none of them seems viable at the present time. Some differences between the denominations are sufficiently intractable (e.g., the promotion of Christian schools) to prevent the likelihood of merger in the near future. Consequently, the authors encourage an ongoing process of finding “common cause” where possible, short of a full-fledged merger of the two denominations.

Though the approach of this study has its obvious limitations, contemporary students of the CRC and RCA should read and reflect upon its findings. Among more recent studies of these two denominations, this study constitutes a unique and indispensable resource.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance*. Invitation to Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007. Pp. 375. \$29.99 (cloth).

This book is one of the earlier volumes to appear in the “Invitation to Theological Studies” series, produced by Kregel Publications. The *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: a Beginning Grammar*, by Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi, is already in print. At this point in time, most of the rest of the volumes are forthcoming, and when the series is complete, there will be eleven volumes in print that will serve as a potential curriculum base for seminary and Bible college students. The author of this volume, Donald Sunukjian, is the professor of preaching and chair of the Christian Ministry and Leadership Department at Talbot School of Theology.

His book is divided into two large areas of discussion: “Look at What God is Saying ...” and “Look at What God is Saying ... to Us!” Thus the author spells out the traditional *what* and *so what* that goes into sermon preparation.

The strengths of this book include the very careful attention Sunukjian gives to all the elements of the sermon. In preparation of the sermon the preacher must produce a “passage outline” before moving on to the

“truth outline.” That latter is that “timeless truth” statement that the preacher wants his hearers to take home with them. From there the preacher can move to the “sermon outline,” the actual configuration of statements that develop an exposition of a portion of Scripture.

Sunukjian forces the reader to think carefully through all the portions of the sermon (what he calls “hunks,” a rather idiosyncratic use of that term when describing parts of a sermon, in my estimation!), including when to approach constructing the sermon and its “take-home truth” (the theme) deductively or inductively, how to integrate the application and where in the sermon it should come, and what constitutes an effective introduction and conclusion. Sunukjian’s text makes the preacher act with full intention as he crafts the sermon.

Actually, one of Sunukjian’s most important statements about moving toward the development of the sermonic theme (the “take-home truth”) comes in footnote 8 on page 73. He writes: “Don’t attempt to form the take-home truth until after you’ve completed the sequence we’ve been talking about—thoroughly study the passage, anchor yourself to the author’s flow of thought through a passage outline, and then turn this passage outline into a truth outline. Speakers sometimes make the mistake of reading the passage and trying to come up with some single sentence without first having a solid grasp of the flow of concepts in the passage. You can’t accurately determine an author’s central truth until you’ve first crystallized his progression of thought.”

On the other hand, at the risk of being accused of idealism, it is disappointing to read Sunukjian’s recommendations for how to proceed in terms of textual study in preparing a sermon. Reading over several English versions *before* working through the Hebrew or Greek text of Scripture is to put the proverbial cart before the horse. Many busy preachers may very well fall into that routine, in any case, but the busyness of the pastorate may result in the loss of checking on and working through the original languages. The busy pastor just did not have the time to work with the Hebrew and Greek. Furthermore, reading the English versions and some commentaries may very well predetermine the pastor’s understanding of what the preaching text says. Is the preacher still able to *hear* what the text is saying?

One of the biggest disappointments in this book is this: if his frequent sermonic examples are any indication of the kind of preaching that he advocates, then it seems to this reviewer that “biblical preaching” can be done without much, if any, reference to Christ. This becomes painfully clear in observing Sunukjian’s handling of historical narrative passages, including those from the canonical Gospels. Abraham is Every Believer, and the disciples in the boat during the storm are just like the church member today who experiences life “when the bottom drops out.” Superficial identifications with the pew sitter today, easy moralisms, and the scandal of God’s grace moving through history get completely short-changed. While this reviewer does not doubt that the author is committed to the evangelical gospel, preaching Christ from the entirety of the Scriptures does not seem to function in the approach advocated by Sunukjian. As we are sometimes reminded in homiletics class, some sermons preached today in Christian churches could pretty much be

delivered in a Jewish synagogue ... and they probably already have been heard there!

At least one error stands out: on page 313 the sentence “they still doesn’t *know* anything” should read, “they still don’t *know* anything.”

—Mark D. Vander Hart

Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. 320. \$29.99.

One does not have to make the case for the importance of Jonathan Edwards as an American theologian. That has been done countless times elsewhere. Sweeney and Guelzo rightly argue, however, that a case does have to be made for the importance of the “New England Theology” that developed during Edwards’s own day up through the mid-nineteenth century. “New England Theology” was coined by Edwards Amasa Park in 1852 to define what Jonathan Edwards the Younger in his day had begun to describe in an essay entitled, “Clearer Statements of Theological Truth, Made by President Edwards, and Those Who Have Followed His Course of Thought” (124). Up until the late 1970s, New England Theology, in all its richness and diversity, received little attention in the academy. While New England Theology has still not received the extensive treatment that Edwards has, this volume seeks to do its part in the revived interest in New England Theology. Sweeney and Guelzo, both first-rate historians in this field, provide us with a carefully selected anthology of original source writings, beginning with Edwards himself and ending with Park and Stowe, just before the U.S. Civil War.

After setting both the historical and historiographical plates for us in a helpful general introduction, Sweeney and Guelzo, in Part 1, begin with selections from Jonathan Edwards. They select out of the vast Edwards’s corpus a few things which they believe typify his contributions to our theological understanding and which his followers developed as part of New England Theology. Sweeney and Guelzo give us an Edwards’s sermon that speaks of the necessity for and reality of divine illumination, followed by a selection from Edwards’s *Religious Affections* that asserts that one can discern the presence of true religious affections by charitable Christian practice. Edwards found no higher exemplar of such godly Christian living than in the zealous young missionary David Brainerd, whose diary is here excerpted. Finally, it is in Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will* that his famous distinction between natural ability and moral ability appears, with Edwards teaching that unregenerate man enjoys the former but lacks the latter. While it is true that later generations of Edwards’s followers among the New England Theology used this distinction to de-emphasize, if not to deny, that man as fallen possessed a sin nature as part of total depravity, it does not appear that any such intention could properly be attributed to Edwards himself.

The question of whether something can properly be attributed to Edwards because the New England Theology developed it claiming Ed-

wards as progenitor is ever at hand in this volume. In other words, whether the New England Theology was faithful to or departed from Edwards is a hotly contested matter. In general, our authors see more continuity and development in the New England Theology than many orthodox partisans of Edwards have acknowledged. Who is right? Many would agree with Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, who saw Edwards as a staunch defender of their brand of Calvinism. Others would argue that the New Divinity (Part 2), the New Haven Theology (Part 6), the Andover Theology (Part 8), *inter alia*, all of which comprised New England Theology, truly stemmed from Edwards. In this volume, even Finney and the New Measures that he employed in the later part of the Second Great Awakening, while differing from Edwards, are viewed as also continuous with Edwards in some important respects. Though this reviewer may agree with Warfield in his assessment of Edwards more than our authors do, Sweeney and Guelzo argue their viewpoints in a gentle, good-natured style, likely pointing to more affinities between Edwards and his New England followers than many of us would like to believe or care to admit.

Each of the eight parts that follows this first part that treats Edwards (there being nine parts all together) has its own introduction by the authors and each of the original source selections (sermons, addresses, essays, fiction excerpts, poetry, etc.) also has an introduction. There is a fine bibliography identifying where the major manuscript collections of the different figures reside and furnishing an extensive list of published original and secondary sources (all almost worth the price of the volume if one does not have this information readily available elsewhere). The volume as a whole enjoys a coherence often lacking in such anthologies. Part of what gives the book such coherence is the thread woven throughout the book: the attempt of the authors to show that the New England Theology does indeed flow from Edwards while at the same time being both an extension and a transformation of his theology.

Perhaps at this point it would be most useful simply to enumerate the notable theologians and others (in addition to Jonathan Edwards) whose excerpted works appear in this volume: Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Nathan Strong, Nathanael Emmons, Jonathan Edwards the Younger, Stephen West, John Smalley, Asa Burton, Timothy Dwight, Nathaniel W. Taylor, Charles G. Finney, Edwards Amasa Park, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The last, Mrs. Stowe, had a bit of a love/hate relationship with the New Divinity and New England Theology more broadly, seeing it as the source both of spiritual angst and social action (particularly informing the anti-slavery movement, see Part 4, 149). Bellamy and Hopkins were ministerial students who lived with Edwards and were the founders of the New Divinity. Emmons, Edwards the Younger, and others developed Hopkinsianism (as some derisively called it) into something that the reader should carefully read and ponder as to whether or not it tracks faithfully with Edwards; so too with Dwight and Taylor at Yale (the New Haven Theology), Smalley on the governmental theory of the atonement, Finney on revivalism, and Park at Andover-Newton (the Andover Theology).

Emmons, then Taylor, and even more so, Finney, came to reject a sin nature and Finney any distinction between natural and moral ability. A

careful reading even of the excerpt in this volume of Edwards on the will (57-68) might prompt one to observe that Edwards's distinction between natural and moral inability in unregenerate man is quite similar to the rather prosaic observation that the Fall did not involve an ontological but an ethical alteration. Man in no way ceased to be man but the narrower image was effaced and needed restoration in regeneration. That Finney turns this into a rejection of inability altogether seems to be something rather different than what Edwards was about.

Some have observed that there is a clear distinction to be made between revivals and revivalism: Edwards saw revivals as supernatural and Finney developed revivalism as something mechanical and able to be manipulated (Part 7, 219). This is just one area in which scholars argue whether Edwards and the New England Theology properly correspond. This reviewer believes that significant differences do obtain between Edwards and the New England Theology, far more than a short review can treat. Sweeney and Guelzo advance a rather different thesis. They do so deftly and ably, however, and the volume remains of immense value, filling a lacuna that has existed in readily accessible original source material for the New England Theology.

—Alan D. Strange

John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007. Pp. 169. \$16.00.

John Witvliet is enthusiastic about the Psalms and their use in Christian worship. One senses this enthusiasm while reading this book, which is part of a series of theological, historical, liturgical, and pastoral studies of Christian worship. Several of these studies have been produced by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Witvliet is the director of this Calvin Institute as well as serving as associate professor of worship, theology, and music at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The author divides his work into two parts: part I deals with "The Psalms and the Basic Grammar of Christian Worship," and part II is entitled, "Praying the Psalms in Christian Worship." He declares that his intended audience in this book "consists of people who would be drawn to at least one of these four bodies of literature" (xv): (1) students of the Old Testament, liturgy, preaching, or church music; (2) worship leaders in local churches; (3) scholars and teachers in these areas; (4) musicians and artists looking for worship strategies; and (5) librarians. Each of these audiences will find in this book many ideas and references to use in enhancing the place of the biblical Psalms in worship.

Furthermore, Witvliet's motivation in writing this book, he says, arises from three observations (xiii, xiv). First, the "Psalms are a font of inspiration, encouragement, and instruction in the life of both public and private prayer." Second, he notes that there is "relatively tepid enthusiasm for the Psalms in worship throughout vast stretches of North American Christianity." While there may be in evidence some interest in a par-

ticular Psalm in a musical or dramatic setting, there is sadly lacking “a sustained attempt to pray the Psalms over time....” Third, in recent years there is now available an “unprecedented access to vast amounts of information about the Psalms, as well as copious resources for using them in worship.” This book sets about to discuss why the use of the Psalms is a key element in Christian worship, and it describes a variety of ways by which the Psalms can be used in creative and imaginative ways in worship.

Witvliet labors in the continental Reformed tradition, but he hopes to appeal to a wider audience. The biblical Psalms are not the parochial property of any one Christian tradition, and, truth be told, some of the Christian traditions that are more formal in their observance of the church year have a much greater integration of the Psalms in their liturgy and devotional practice. Witvliet thus discusses how those traditions that make use of a lectionary system can implement some of his ideas. At the same time, one does not sense that the author insists on the lectionary system as “the only way to go.” His goal is an increased use of the Psalms in our Christian worship of God, whether our tradition is formally liturgical or not.

Witvliet intersperses throughout this book “testimonies” that have been gleaned throughout Christian history in which Christian leaders and writers comment on the place of the Psalms in the worship and devotion of the Christian church. We get samplings from such people as Basil, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Athanasius, etc., from the early church; Luther and Calvin from the Reformation era; and Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, D. Bonhoeffer, and Eugene Peterson from the modern era. These testimonies help to fortify Witvliet’s desire to bear witness to the fact that the Psalms have provided the principal voice in Christian piety and especially its worship throughout Christian history.

It is obvious that Witvliet is literate in the world of music, something that is (sadly) not true for all pastors and preachers. Knowing musical terms, as a background, would be helpful for any reader of this work.

I commend Witvliet’s agenda in this book in the sense that increased use of the Psalms in worship can only enhance, with God’s blessing, our devotion to God and to his entire counsel. His observations are very accurate when he says that by involving people in reading or singing a Psalm, “we are placing words of prayer on their lips. We are inviting the congregation to make the prayers of the Psalms their own” (72). In an age of growing biblical illiteracy and increasing spiritual superficiality, the use of the Psalms in worship in the form of song, chant, prayer, exposition, etc., can only be welcomed. Further, Witvliet believes that we cannot wait until biblical literacy increases before Psalm singing may be revived. He suggests that “it can be pastorally wise to revitalize Psalm singing in local congregations and to undertake whatever education is necessary to make it successful. Patient, winsome promotion of Psalm singing in contextually appropriate ways remains one of the most expedient ways to promote worship that is at once vital and faithful, both relevant and profound” (132).

One area that Witvliet touches upon, ever so briefly, is that of the imprecations (covenant curses) in the Psalms. Disappointingly, he rele-

gates it to a footnote (73, fn 40). He notes that this is a “difficult question” (which it is!) and that the imprecations must be “handled with care” (which is truly the case). Regrettably, Witvliet does not provide any real guidelines for how we might handle such imprecations. Still, Witvliet does not object to them as “sub-Christian,” or anything of the kind, a characterization that one occasionally encounters in some circles today. Indeed, imprecations in the Psalms “might function poignantly in liturgy as a source for meditation or exposition,” especially in the light of the New Testament testimony that the Christian church today is engaged in a battle against “powers and principalities” (cf. Eph. 6:10ff.).

Another area that Witvliet could have expanded is the intriguing area of “Christological framings of Psalm texts” (74-75). Of course, the entirety of the Old Testament testifies to Jesus Christ in some shape and fashion, including the Psalms (cf. Luke 24:26,27,44). Perhaps Witvliet could address this in a future volume.

One image that Witvliet uses with good effect to depict Christian worship is that of hospitality. “Faithful Christian worship is, at its core, a place where the practice of hospitality should flourish” (133). He elaborates on this idea by saying that God serves as the host who welcomes all kinds of people to join together in worshiping him, where he addresses more than our *felt* needs, but even more than that, our *ultimate* needs. The biblical Psalms in worship are so useful here since the full range of human experience is articulated in them. Worship leaders should keep that in mind as well, namely, that they are hosts who are guiding the worshipers through “the feast of worship” so that they feast on God’s Word and can be richly nourished in the process. Obviously, this requires thoughtful planning of worship and not a haphazard throwing together of songs that are someone’s favorites. To that end, the author gives a seven-point “checklist for preachers” on page 84 that serves as a guide for the preacher and/or liturgist to consider in planning how to use the Psalms in a given worship service. In addition, Witvliet spells out his ideas (coupled with resources in print) for using Psalms in solo or choral reading, responsive or antiphonal readings, readings with musical refrains, chant, etc. Many valuable ideas and suggestions are set forth here (although his advocacy of visual imagery in worship on page 124 does not receive universal endorsement in the Reformed tradition).

Witvliet offers us in this book a very useful tool with a generous assortment of resources on the Psalms, including lists of works that describe the Psalms usage throughout church history, guides to their use in worship and in monasticism, books that make the case for exclusive psalmody, as well as books that provide commentaries and curricular guides to the Psalms. More could have been included since the Psalms have been the subject of an immense amount of study and comment in the history of the Christian church. Witvliet’s list provides merely a sampling of that study and comment.

The book concludes with indices for names, subjects, and the Psalms that were discussed in the book. Obviously a book like this will date itself, as Witvliet himself acknowledges at several points (xiv, xv, xvii). More resources will be produced as time goes on. But for now, because of the author’s positive advocacy of the Psalms and for his many imagina-

tive ideas, this book is highly recommended for pastors and all others who have the calling to plan worship services that seek to glorify God, also utilizing the inspired words of the biblical Psalter.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

Paul F. M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2007. Pp. xi + 267. \$18.00.

This book's theme is the kind every pastor thinks about deeply—or should: How does grace work?

Saturated with provocative maxims, the book's argument is often fortified from pop culture while always firmly grounded in deep pastoral insight. Though its title is the author's theme, its subtitle is the author's passion.

The stage is set in chapter one with three questions: What is law? What is grace? And what is the relation between them?

For Zahl, law is any form of external command. As absolute demand, the law functions powerfully but without pleasure, for imperatives always produce their opposites. The law calls for perfection, but stimulates rebellion. At one point, the author asserts that “[t]he law is a curse” (77), it always and only accuses and attacks. The problem with the law is not its substance, but its instrumentality, or how it works.

The maxim, “Paul taught what Jesus did” (Ernst Käsemann), opens the way for seeing the radical difference between the view of law and grace for Jesus and Paul, on the one hand, and the view prevailing within the Judaism of their day. At the same time, it expresses the essential unity between Jesus and Paul. With legal concepts like justification and acquittal, Paul interpreted the significance of Christ's life and death. Through obeying the law and dying under the law, Christ killed the law.

In contrast to law, grace is one-way love that provides and creates what the law demands. The gospel is about the relation between law and grace, the good news that guilt has been atoned and sins are forgiven, such that grace has overcome law by creating what the law could not. The “how” of the law (unable to produce what it demands, and therefore always and only attacking) is met by the “how” of grace. Grace works by giving, never by demanding; by forgetting, never by keeping score; by creating, never by confining. Under grace, all imperatives become indicatives. Jesus Christ is the end—not merely the goal or terminus, but the finish—of the law. Grace provides what the law demands, so the law falls away.

In everyday life, law and grace are absolutely separate, for there is no grace in law and no law in grace. Christ's substitutionary atonement has solved the otherwise irresolvable conflict between law and grace, but the result is like today's divided Ireland: “Divided we stand.”

The four pillars of a theology of grace (chapter two) include anthropology, soteriology, Christology, and Trinity. The author supplies a stimulating discussion of original sin and total depravity, including an

extensive and pastorally relevant analysis of the unfree human will. The connection he draws between an allegedly free will and human self-righteousness belongs to this pastoral relevance. The soteriology of grace portrays how one moves from atonement to imputation, or how the work of Another comes to belong to the believer.

With chapter three, Zahl begins applying his theology to a number of pastoral and moral issues, beginning in the home and extending to politics, society, and church. Grace in families affects every relationship, and this chapter explores how grace works in singleness and marriage, with children, parents, and siblings. This tour of grace working in all of these situations and relationships is guided with insight born of the author's experience and observation. Any pastor could profit from reflecting on these moving and insightful pastoral applications of grace.

Politics, war, criminal justice, social class, and economics are also radically affected by grace (chapter four). By the author's admission, grace-directed politics looks a lot like socialism; following an ethic of grace leads to absolute pacifism; grace-governed criminal justice practices mercy rather than punishment, seeking renewal rather than rehabilitation. Grace-fueled economics is "Luddite" and minimalist, eager to avoid idolatry and enslavement.

When we come to what might be considered the home and hearth of grace—the church—we are told that no ecclesiology is better than any ecclesiology. Writing as an Episcopal cleric with more than thirty years experience, Zahl is convinced that ecclesiology aims at power, control, and structure over practice and beliefs. In churches everywhere one hears the law rather than the gospel: try harder, follow these steps, just do it. The main feature of pastoral care, including that pastoral care administered from the pulpit, that is rooted in grace is its *non-proactivity*. In serving people who are suffering sinners, the pulpit must not get them to do something, but proclaim that in Christ they are somebody.

To pastors and preachers I would seriously recommend this book because its author treasures grace, profoundly and passionately. His heart cry to evangelical and Reformed Christians, and churches, must be heard, because "grace in practice" lies so close to the heart of the Christian message. But at the same time I would express my displeasure with this book because its author trashes the law altogether.

Without a positive understanding of law before the Fall, it seems to me, one cannot properly map the coordinates for the functioning, after the Fall, of either law or grace. Zahl argues that with his command to Adam and Eve in Paradise, God's "thou shalt not" spelled disaster; the result of the law (notice: *of the law*) was disobedience, punishment, and expulsion. "All was well before the articulation of law, but at that point the goose was cooked" (5). For Zahl the law is always adversarial and accusatory; law attacks; all laws are negation. Christ abrogated the law.

Zahl's theology is zero-sum theology: any addition to law is an inherent subtraction from grace, and vice-versa. This is a regrettable reduction of the Reformational insights regarding the relation between law and gospel.

Zahl properly rejects any dichotomy between two kingdoms of law and gospel, but he avoids falling into that mistake by committing an-

other, namely, immanentizing and absolutizing now the coming eschaton of full perfection. Between Christ's ascension and his second advent, however, we live in a mixed situation, which means that sin and grace continue to operate alongside one another. This helps explain why God has given the power of the sword to the state, to punish evildoers and to reward those who do good.

Finally, what must we make of all the positive things that Scripture says about the law? About the reality that the Decalogue was given to God's people Israel in the context of grace? About the psalmists' celebration of the law, the apostles' declarations concerning the law's holiness, and the Bible's portrait of the coming kingdom not as a kingdom of lawlessness, but of law-fulfilled-ness?

Indeed, grace provides what the law demands but is unable to produce. Whether pre-Fall or post-Fall, the law could never produce obedience. Only divinely supplied faith enables the Father's child to walk with him in humble gratitude, which is to say: in lawful obedience to the law of Christ.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman