

BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

Lanier Burns, *The Nearness of God: His Presence with His People*. Explorations in Biblical Theology. Robert A. Peterson, series editor. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2009. Pp. xi + 254. \$17.99

J. Lanier Burns (Th.M., Th.D., Dallas Theological Seminary; Ph.D., University of Texas, Dallas) is senior research professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. Since 1973, he has served as the president of the Asian Christian Academy in Bangalore, India.

This volume might best be described as an autobiographical exploration of the idea of divine incarnation, in terms of personal experiences with the presence of God, as illuminated by selected Scripture passages.

Chapter 1, "Incarnation as Presence," sets forth the theme of the book, captured most clearly in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The author opens up this theme in terms of its relation to a number of ideas, among them the ideas of salvation, perseverance, tabernacle, the law, and our world. Subsequent chapters provide discussions of God's presence in the time of the patriarchs, of Moses, of the tabernacle and temple, of the prophets, of the New Testament, and of the New Jerusalem.

The book concludes with questions for study and reflection related to each chapter, and a list of resources for further study.

As a beginning study that cites in full a wide array of Scripture passages, *The Nearness of God* may provide a helpful introduction to the central significance of the divine incarnation. Informed readers, however, will want more than this book offers, especially in terms of setting forth the integrated unity of God's presence in history and in creation that begins already with Genesis 1. They will want to learn how the notion of divine incarnation relates to the Bible's own story line, the history and flow of redemption narrated throughout Old and New Testaments. Readers would also be expecting some discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church through the means of grace as the very means whereby God is present among his people in the world today.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

Thomas J. Davis, *This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. Pp. 203. \$26.00

Students of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth-century are aware of the fierce debates that occurred regarding the presence of Christ in the

sacrament of the Lord's Supper. For Luther and Calvin, as well as the other magisterial Reformers, the sacraments were effective instruments that were appended to the Word of God as means of grace whereby Christ was communicated to believers. Unlike many of their ecclesiastical progeny for whom the sacraments play little or no role in granting believers a participation in Christ and his saving work, the Reformers held a high view of the sacraments. Hence, the sustained Reformation debates about the presence of Christ in the sacraments were not the ecclesiastical equivalent of shadow boxing. They were debates about the way believers come to share in Christ and all his saving benefits.

In this recent study of Thomas J. Davis, professor of religious studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), students of the Reformation will discover a rich and balanced treatment of Luther and Calvin's views of Christ's presence in the eucharist. Though there is a considerable body of literature on the topic, Davis writes as an expert in Calvin's eucharistic theology and exhibits a broad familiarity with the primary and secondary sources. While Davis thoroughly canvasses Calvin and Luther's positions, he respects the boundaries that Calvin affirmed when he spoke of the "mystery" of Christ's presence in the sacrament. In the course of his exposition of the Reformers' views, Davis considers the relationship of Word and sacrament, the conceptions of Christ's "body" and "presence" that undergird their understanding of Christ's presence, and the efficacy or power of the sacrament as a means of grace.

After an introductory chapter, Davis treats Luther's view of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in two chapters. In Davis' reading of Luther, the primary emphasis does not lie in his understanding of the "ubiquity" of Christ's body but in his understanding of the primacy and power of the Word of God. Though Luther undoubtedly stressed the ubiquity of Christ's body, which undergirded his doctrine of Christ's bodily presence "in," "with," and "under" the sacramental elements, Davis maintains that his real concern was with the Word. The fact of Christ's presence in the sacrament derives from the "truth of the divine words." For Luther, the Word of God points to and reveals the hidden body of Christ, the incarnate Word, and in doing so the Word speaks the truth with power.

In comparison to his relatively brief treatment of Luther's eucharistic theology, Davis devotes no less than six chapters to an extensive treatment of Calvin's position. In these chapters, Davis demonstrates an extensive grasp of Calvin's eucharistic theology and appeals to a wide range of sources in Calvin's theological writings, commentaries, and sermons. The topics treated in these chapters include: the role of knowledge in Calvin's eucharistic thought (chapter 3); the importance of the human and divine body in Calvin's thought (chapter 4); the role preaching plays in the Christian life, especially in relation to Christ's presence in the sacrament (chapters 5 & 6); the relationship of the absence and presence of Christ's body to the sacramental presence (chapter 7); and the proper view of the power and efficacy of the sacrament signs of Christ's presence (chapter 8). The burden of Davis' argument in these chapters is that Calvin, far from being a "spiritualizer" of Christ's presence in the sacrament, was as insistent upon Christ's real presence as Luther.

After these chapters on Luther and Calvin's views of Christ's real presence, Davis concludes his volume with three chapters on what might broadly be described as the "hermeneutics" of the debate regarding Christ's presence, particularly the interpretation of Christ's words of institution ("this is my body"). In the context of the Reformation debates regarding Christ's presence, there was a shift, Davis argues, to a more literal interpretation of the biblical text. As the older tradition of allegorical exegesis began to wane, the tendency of the Reformers was to maintain the single meaning of texts, and to posit a one-to-one correspondence between the words (which are themselves signs) and the thing that was signified. Though these concluding chapters are not unrelated to the primary focus of Davis' study, they do take the reader rather far afield of the specific topic of Luther and Calvin's eucharistic theologies.

Davis' study is an important contribution to our understanding of the Reformation view of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. While there are many studies available on the topic, Davis' book is among the best. Not only does Davis provide a rich tour-de-force through Luther and Calvin's writings, but he also writes as a believer who has a keen interest in upholding a high view of Christ's presence in the sacramental practice of the church today.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. Pp. xvi + 205. \$19.99

Living at the crossroads of the story of Scripture and postmodern culture requires a basic, accessible introduction to Christian worldview that this volume presents.

Michael Goheen is the Geneva Professor of Worldview and Religious Studies at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia. Craig Bartholomew is the H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and professor of religion and philosophy at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

Their previous volume, *The Drama of Scripture*, laid the groundwork for the present work by unfolding the story of Scripture as it moves from creation, to humanity's fall into sin, to redemption in Jesus Christ, to its final consummation at his return. As such, the prior work is highly recommended as companion reading to the work under review.

The premise of *Living at the Crossroads* is that people live out their stories—faith-stories and cultural stories. For several centuries, the story shaping Western culture has been a narrative of progress promising expanding freedom and material prosperity, a promise able to be fulfilled by the application of science to all of human life. Two contemporary forces are challenging the validity of this story, to wit, postmodernity and globalization. Today the Christian church is living at the intersection of the Christian story and this modern cultural story, and faces the choice either to live missionally, calling people to conversion, faith, and obedience to the biblical story, or to accommodate to the prevailing cultural story. Confronted by this choice, the church can

learn to articulate and apply the biblical worldview to new questions emerging from the contemporary encounter.

Readers will obtain clarity about the history and meaning of the concept of worldview in chapter two. Brief but careful responses to criticisms of the concept are followed by a concise definition of worldview, capped with a discussion of the relation between Scripture and worldview. Chapters three and four set forth a presentation of the biblical worldview in terms of creation, fall, restoration, and consummation. The story of modernity (chapter five) cannot be told apart from the history of Christianity, which contributed the categories and impulses that have provided the framework for modernity's development from the classical period, through the medieval period, followed by the Renaissance and Reformation, culminating in the Enlightenment. In a real sense, the story of modernity is our story (at least for Western Christianity); it is not an alien intruder, but the familiar bedding for the development of our own social, economic, and political habits and values. In the West, Christians of all "stripes" have not always succeeded in differentiating gospel values from surrounding cultural values. Moreover, once-triumphant secular humanism is being toppled from its throne by the attacks of postmodernity, generating significant questions whose answers will need to occupy the contemporary church at every level. These questions include: Does humanity have the ability to renew the world? Can scientific reason give us certain knowledge? Are we capable of mastering nature as we search for a better world? What is the nature of the future toward which we are heading?

Particularly useful is chapter seven, with its discussion of four signs of our time which mark a massive change in the Western cultural story, signs that can help us chart a course as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century. These signs include postmodernity, consumerism and globalization, the renascence of Christianity (especially in the southern hemisphere), and the resurgence of Islam.

With the help of several case studies, the authors illustrate and explain the route of critical participation in modern culture, recommending a posture where both solidarity and separation operate in creative tension and balance. This posture lends a missional quality to cultural activity, because it recognizes both the creational structure of such activity and the gospel transformation of this activity under the lordship of King Jesus. Such a posture is not without its dangers, which the authors candidly identify and assess carefully.

The concluding chapter offers a discussion of the application of worldview analysis to the arenas of business, politics, sports and competition, art, and scholarship/education.

A better primer for introducing people to the relevance and contours of Christian worldview we have not found. Linking effectively with *The Drama of Scripture*, this modest and accessible book, *Living at the Crossroads*, is useful for classroom, youth groups, church Bible studies, and book clubs. Its style mixes charity with candor, invitation with correction, and hope with realism. Its content articulates what is perhaps the church's most needed challenge today, especially the church in the West. Warmly recommended!

— Nelson D. Kloosterman

T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009. Pp. 112. \$9.99

David Gordon, formerly of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and more recently a professor of religion and Greek at Grove City College, has long wanted to say what he finally does in this book. Recovering from an illness that might have proven fatal, Gordon became convicted that certain things should no longer be left unsaid. And the burden of this book, delivered with verve and clarity, is that what mostly passes for preaching these days is “ordinarily poor.” Gordon sounds many variations on this theme, reflecting on a lifetime of training preachers, preaching sermons himself, and being a pew-sitter.

Who could disagree that much preaching, both as to content and delivery, is not done well these days? A simple survey of radio or TV preachers is disheartening. Because of such poor preaching, not to mention other aspects of the worship service, attendance at many, if not most, evangelical churches (think of vacations in remote places) is hard to stomach for Reformed folk. Beyond all that, however, it is not only Joel Osteen and Pastor Billy Bob who don't preach well, many of our Reformed and Presbyterian pulpits challenge hearers to be and remain engaged during the sermon.

Gordon has taught courses not only in New Testament and Greek more narrowly and religion more broadly; he has also taught in the humanities and in media ecology. Media ecology is a discipline developed particularly in the post-War era that addresses, as Marshall McLuhan put it, the media and the message. McLuhan rather fatalistically concluded that the medium was the message. Gordon is more nuanced than this, following Neil Postman, sensitive to the way in which various media shape and influence messages and those who are the messengers.

Specifically, Gordon contends, preachers today fail as pulpiteers because they lack several necessary skills. He writes, “to preach the Word of God well, one must already have cultivated, at a minimum, three sensibilities: the sensibility of the close reading of texts, the sensibility of composed communication, and the sensibility of the significant” (106). Lacking these, a preacher will preach sermons not based closely on the text, perhaps moralistic, how-to ones, morbidly introspective ones, or social gospel ones (for those on the left) or culture war sermons (for those on the right). In other words, some agenda other than the redemptive historic focus of the text may emerge. A preacher lacking the sensibility of composed communication is one who, in addition to being unable to read, cannot write. It follows naturally that Johnny who thus cannot read or write cannot preach, having, lastly, no sensibility of the significant so that his themes will be pedestrian, jejune, or otherwise trivial as compared to the grandeur and majesty of the Divine writ.

Gordon continues, “Without these [three sensibilities], a person simply cannot preach, any more than he could if his larynx were removed or he were utterly illiterate. But our present current culture does not cultivate any of these sensibilities, and pre-ministerial candidates, or ministers themselves, must undertake their cultivation if preaching is to be rescued from its present moribund state” (106). Notice that Professor Gordon does not call for the cultivation of these sensibilities merely in seminary; he calls for “pre-ministerial

candidates” to cultivate such. How can one foster such sensibilities? By a liberal arts education, or its equivalent, which is to say, by reading great literature and by attending to its study in which careful exposition occurs and careful attention is paid to each word.

No endeavor demands more careful attention to each word than poetry. Gordon particularly commends the study of poetry to preachers and would-be preachers. Poetry is the most precise use of a language, crafted so that every word tells and carries weight. Careful reading and exposition of poetry fits one for careful exposition of the Word of God. To aid the ministerial candidate in this task, Gordon recommends, among other things, the 1940 Stone Lectures given at Princeton Theological Seminary by Charles Grosvenor Osgood, later published under the title *Poetry as a Means of Grace*. Gordon notes, “Osgood did not argue that poetry is a means of grace in the technical, theological sense; rather he was giving lectures to seminarians on how to prepare for their profession, and his thesis was that the sensibilities necessary to preach well were best shaped by reading verse” (100).

Gordon would counsel all interested in preaching not to be neck-deep in our digital culture, tweeting, googling and facebooking. It is the media-dominated culture in which we live that has crippled preachers and they need to cultivate the sensibilities of an earlier more literate age in which men could maintain focus for more than a few minutes, a skill necessary both to preparing to preach and preaching itself. Some good old-fashioned reading with pen in hand and paper nearby, time away from the madding crowd and the demands of the urgent that face us everywhere, is what is needed for a man to be able to compose and preach sermons that are not only informative and interesting but communicate the heart of the text to the heart of God’s people. The gospel is the good news of Christ, told over many sermons, and does not flourish in the atmosphere of the sound-bite.

To summarize, Gordon sees Johnny as unable to read (a text closely) and write (a sermon carefully and clearly) and thus unable to preach. Johnny is ill-educated and thus incompetent when it comes to the task of preaching; he needs to remedy this by a liberal arts education before seminary (assuming that he goes) that will better fit him to the task of the preacher. Does the sermon warrant this much work? It does because the sermon is that which the Spirit is pleased to make especially effectual in the salvation of God’s people. The Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) 155-160 highlights the importance and role of preaching.

Preaching is not merely the word of man but, faithfully done, an administration of the Word of God. WLC 160 makes it clear that the people of God are to receive the Word faithfully preached as God’s Word, citing as proof text 1 Thessalonians 2:13. This is why Gordon’s diagnosis of and prescription for the problem is so needed and so important. Preaching is central to the spiritual welfare of God’s people and too important a means of grace to be left to wither and die because of ministerial incompetence. What about preaching that is faithfully but poorly done? Is that still an administration of the Word of God? Unless we are Donatists, we would have to insist that even poorly constructed and delivered preaching, if faithful to God’s word, can and does still act as a means of grace to God’s people.

Perhaps the greatest danger of this book, then, is two-fold. First of all, there is a danger that the identification and criticism of so much poor preaching might engender in some pew-sitters a dismissal of much of the preaching that they hear, even if that preaching is faithful to the Word of God. We must not let the lack of the best, or even of better, preaching prompt us to dismiss preaching that is deficient: given the nature of the task and all that is involved in good preaching, whose preaching is all that it should be? And secondly, there is a danger that some might think that the remedy to poor preaching is merely for preachers to be better educated. Surely, our preachers need all the education and skills that Gordon calls for in the book. Such education is necessary for better preaching, but it is not sufficient. We need preaching that is in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit (unction) and we need hearers who will receive all faithful preaching, even if poorly done, in meekness, bringing forth the fruits of such in their lives.

Preachers have no excuse for poor preaching. They must endeavor with all their being to do all that they can faithfully and ably to preach the Word of God. And hearers must do all that they can to receive faithful preaching submissively even if it falls woefully short of all that preaching ought to be. Both preacher *and* parishioner must wait upon the Lord and seek the Spirit's blessing upon speaker and hearer.

—Alan D. Strange

Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. Pp. 367. \$24.99

Paul G. Hiebert (1933-2007) was Distinguished Professor of Mission and Anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and previously taught at Fuller Theological Seminary. He also served as pastor and missionary to India. This posthumously published volume represents the capstone of his life's work, and constitutes a worthy contribution to the expanding scholarly literature on biblical missiology.

Perhaps the most useful dimension of Hiebert's discussion is the way he distinguishes between behavior and beliefs, and the worldview that underlies both of these. While acknowledging possible problems with the term "worldview," the author retains the term, defining the concept as "the 'fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives'" (15). As a map of reality used for living, a worldview combines the mental, emotional, and moral dimensions of the human journey.

The unique contribution of Hiebert's analysis lies, however, in the contribution of the science of anthropology to our reflection on the nature and function of a worldview. Worldviews serve cultural and social functions, in addition to intellectual functions. A worldview answers ultimate questions, like: Why are we here? Who are we? What is right? What is true? What is real? With its answers to questions like these, a worldview provides emotional security. Think of rituals and customs associated with birth, marriage, funerals, and similar markers of life in creation. These worldview answers also supply war-

rants for cultural norms and values. A worldview by definition also provides an integrated, coherent explanation of ideas, feelings, and values that constitute reality. The power of worldviews, then, lies in their function in organizing the defining themes or categories. Cognitive themes include a view of time, a view of space, and the relation between the individual and the group. Affective and evaluative categories are also inherent to worldviews.

All of this has significant implication for missions and evangelism, for, as Hiebert argues, conversion to Christianity cannot suffice with change in behavior or change in beliefs, but must penetrate to the core by changing a person's worldview. Analyzing the concept and characteristics of worldview prepares the way for identifying worldviews that have operated in small-scale oral societies, in feudal and peasant cultures, and in modern times. The reader will benefit from the chapters describing the modern, the postmodern, and the global worldviews. Contemporary skeptics who disparage worldview thinking will likely be challenged by Hiebert's claim that "To say that there is no biblical worldview is also to say that conversion to Christ is essentially [nothing more than] a change in behavior and rituals or of beliefs and attitudes. This history of missions shows us that conversion on these levels is not enough. If worldviews are not also converted, in time they distort the explicit message of the gospel and turn Christianity into Christo-paganism. The behavior and beliefs are Christian, but the underlying assumptions, categories, and logic are pagan" (267).

Ignoring or neglecting the need for transforming cultural worldviews as part of the church's mission in the world arises in part from emphasizing the priority of evangelism as the central message of the gospel. According to Hiebert, this emphasis tends to result in shallow Christianity, one that arises from a flawed ecclesiology because it defines salvation in terms of modern individualism.

What we need, argues Hiebert, is a combination of emphases on evangelism, church planting, and the kingdom of God—harvesting the strengths of each emphasis in order to overcome the weaknesses of each. Beginning with a focus on King Jesus, we receive a vision of his cosmic already-not yet kingdom, which comes to historical yet imperfect expression in the pilgrim church of Jesus Christ on earth. This church exists not for the well-being of its members, but because of and for Jesus Christ and his program/mission in the world. Led by the Savior's example, the church will experience, as something essential to its mission to the world, continual suffering as the body of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, placed as it is amid the conflict of the powers now exposed by Christ's lordship and victory.

Very interesting is the author's discussion of the nature of transformation as including both conversion and discipling. Divorcing conversion and discipling from each other really arises from divorcing justification from sanctification. The reader will pardon this lengthy citation when, after reading it, one realizes how astonishingly relevant to contemporary ecclesiastical discussions this warning really is. "We must reject this divorce [between justification and sanctification, embedded in the divorce between conversion and discipline, NDK], for if we divide the two, we excessively emphasize the role conversion plays in making a person a Christian, and in so doing we make it inappropri-

ately difficult for many to be included. On the other hand, if we reduce the level of the essential transformation, we introduce cheap grace and a church open to syncretism and heresy. Only if we reconnect justification and sanctification as a single process can we avoid these two problems and the prioritization of one over the other. Combining the two, we realize that people can enter the kingdom with a minimum of understanding, but also that this is only the beginning of a lifelong process of growth in understanding and godly living. Both are part of the same process—turning around and following Christ as the Lord of our lives” (326).

Transforming Worldviews challenges us, in other words, to think about how the gospel works in changing people from the inside out, from the center of personal identity to the arenas of cultural life, as they express culturally their personal and communal answers to life’s fundamental questions. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to an important discussion!

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God’s Transformation of the World*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2009. Pp. 278. \$23.00

Something always happens. Whenever a human being, Bible in hand, stands up before a group of other human beings, invites the gathered assembly into a particular text of the Bible and as faithfully as possible tries to say again what the living God is saying in the text, something always happens. Something transformative, empowering, life-giving happens (7).

With this bold claim Darrell Johnson begins this very engaging and instructive book on preaching.

The key word in the title is participating. Johnson chooses this word for two reasons: first, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news by which he invites us to participate in his life because of what he has already done (11); and second, in preaching we are participating in the activity of God himself. As Johnson states: “as we preach, we participate in Jesus’ preaching of his Father... And as we preach, we participate in the Father’s preaching of his Son... And as we preach, we participate in the Holy Spirit’s preaching of Jesus... We participate in a divine work, in a Trinitarian work, the end results of which are not on our shoulders” (12-13). With this statement he brings out the glory of preaching.

In the rest of the book Johnson works out the wonder of our participating in God’s work of transformation in three parts. Parts 1 and 3 (consisting of chapters one through four, and chapter ten respectively) look at the theoretical foundations for our participation in this great work of God. Part 2 (comprising chapters five through nine) discusses the human mechanics of participation, dealing with the practical issues of sermon writing.

In the first three chapters Johnson digs deeper into the three foundational convictions which guide him in this book, namely: “1) When the living

God speaks, something always happens.... 2) When the preacher speaks God's speech, God speaks.... 3) Therefore, when the preacher speaks God's speech, something always happens" (10). In chapter one he examines Ezekiel 37 to help him reflect on "Why does it Happen?" The following paragraph based on Ezekiel 37:9-10 captures the heart of his argument: "When we preach, when we dare to say again what the living God says, the Word and Spirit make something happen. The going forth of the Word and the breathing by the Spirit are God coming to make something happen, to make salvation happen. As the Dutch pastor and theologian Jacob Firet put it, 'The word of God is not just a vibration in the air; it breaks into a situation and creates a new one. Bone came to bone, breath come into them, and they come to life'" (31).

Darrell wrestles in chapter two ("Does It Really Always Happen?") with the problem of preaching often seeming ineffective. To help think through this "mystery" he turns to Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13). Johnson's discussion here is rather provocative, but in the end it leaves things a little unclear. The focus of his understanding of the parable is set forth with a question: "Is Jesus telling us that when we preach, only one out of four hearers is going to truly hear? Or does Jesus' parable help us see what needs to happen for the kingdom to be more fully realized in our hearts, thus helping all hearers fully hear?" (50). Of the two options here presented, the second is obviously the more attractive. However, perhaps these two options do not exhaust how the parable of the sower might explain the effect of preaching upon the hearers. It is clear that Johnson wants to focus on the positive effects of the Word of God. After quoting 1 Thessalonians 2:13, he says: "When anyone stands under God's word, something happens. Not because of the condition of the person's heart, but because of the life-giving power of the word. The word itself (or, himself) softens hardened hearts, deepens shallow hearts, integrates cluttered hearts and flourishes in receptive hearts" (51). It is hard to argue with this. But the parable of the sower does not show how the Word "softens hardened hearts, deepens shallow hearts," and "integrates cluttered hearts"; rather, it shows us the opposite. It shows how each of these hearts/soils in its own way rejects the Word of God.

Johnson's footnote to the last quote better gets at the complexity of the working of God's Word, when he acknowledges: "Yes, it seems that the preaching of the Word can serve to deaden and deafen the heart, suggesting that the listener play an important, vital role in the Word-bearing fruit. The texts [Isaiah 6:9-10 and its quotations in the New Testament—JR] suggest preaching can play a role in God's judicial hardening of the heart" (51, note 22). This understanding is vital in my opinion since it helps the preacher to know that God is always at work through the Word even when the preacher is not aware of it, or better stated, when it seems to have the complete opposite effect of what the preacher longs for. As Paul so clearly expressed this sentiment in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, God is always working through the Word: "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life." This sobering reality is extremely important

for preachers to keep in mind so that they do not lose confidence in preaching the gospel.

Johnson's encouragement at the end of the footnote should be taken to heart: "At this point I encourage preachers to put their weight on the awakening, softening, opening power of the Word. We preach and leave it to God to do what he wills with the hearers." This should indeed be the main focus and point of departure in all our preaching. But in my judgment, the human rejection of the Word in its various forms, as set forth in the parable of the sower and the divine judgment of hardening, is too important to be relegated to a footnote. In this reviewer's opinion, the problem of the seeming ineffectiveness of the proclamation of the living Word of God ought to be given more direct and manifest attention.

The third chapter deals with the question, "Where Does It Happen?" Johnson's answer: "in expository preaching." He elaborates on this: "It is the only place I know where I can stand and have any confidence that what I say is what the living God is saying" (54). Johnson offers a very provocative and engaging explanation of what constitutes expository preaching. He begins with this presupposition: "expository preaching is not about getting a message out of the text; it is about inviting people into the text so that the text can do what only the text can do" (58). The preacher is therefore not an expert; rather, he is a guide directing or pointing out essential aspects of the reality about which the text is speaking. "As the preacher does this, something happens: the preacher and congregation begin to participate in what the risen Jesus, through the Spirit, is doing in and with the text" (59). Johnson maintains that in any given text of Scripture the Holy Spirit is doing at least five things: (1) engendering an encounter with the Jesus of the text, in which (2) he speaks news, good news which (3) causes a shift in worldview, (4) calling for a new step of the obedience of faith that (5) he himself enables us to take (59).

Expository preaching, in one way or another, participates in all five these actions. In the rest of the chapter Johnson expounds on each of these.

Chapter four reflects on how we, in preaching, participate in the divine transformation of the Word. He does this by exploring seven key verbs that are used in the Scriptures for preaching: to evangelize, to herald, to teach, to exhort, to prophecy, to confess, and to witness. Although "God speaks in all these verbal ways" and "transforms human lives through all these ways of communicating the gospel," one voice should be behind every sermon. How do we decide which one? The choice of preaching text decides! "The preacher, under the authority of the text, is to communicate in the verbal bent of the text" (99-100).

In the second part of the book Johnson touches upon human mechanics involved in our participation in God's transformation of the world. Chapters five through seven deal with the actual process of sermon preparation. Chapter five focuses on "Moving from Text to Sermon"; chapter six on "Moving into the Sermon"; and chapter seven on "Walking the Sermon into Everyday Life." These chapters are filled with wonderful practical insights and helpful ways of digging into God's Word in preparation for preaching. Chapters eight and nine move from the sermon to the preacher as an individual. The first discusses

issues about "The Person of the Preacher" and the second "The Life of the Preacher."

Chapter ten returns to a reflection on the theoretical foundations of preaching by reflecting on the act of preaching itself under the title, "Standing in the Mystery." Here Johnson brings home again to preachers that when they stand up to preach they are standing in the mystery of God's work of transformation. In particular he highlights three dimensions of this mystery which should be kept in view. The first is the mystery of the human person. "When we stand up before other human beings, what do we see? The answer determines so much of what and how we preach. When the authors of the New Testament look out at other human beings they see persons made by Jesus, for Jesus, held together in Jesus, longing for Jesus, only finally human when in relationship with Jesus" (234). It is in this "mystery" that we take our stand before others.

The second dimension of this mystery which he discusses is the "altered structures of reality." "When we stand up before other human beings we know that the gospel we are about to announce has drastically changed the reality in which we stand" (236). Although sin, evil, and death are still at work, they no longer have the place they once had. According to Colossians 2:13-15 and Hebrews 2:14-15 Jesus has radically changed the world. Therefore the influence of evil, sin, and death is not what it once was and their end is in sight.

The final dimension of this mystery in which we stand is the divine work of the Holy Spirit. When we stand up to preach we are not alone; the Holy Spirit is always present. This dimension is the most mysterious and most wonderful. It ought to give preachers hope and confidence in preaching. The Spirit inspired the Word. The Spirit has been working in the preacher, helping him to understand the Word, helping him organize his thoughts and words, and so much more. The Spirit has also been working in and with the hearers, preparing their hearts. He is the one who will make the text real for God's people. "He will make the Jesus of the text real to them. He will be suggesting ways they ought to live the text, ways the preacher never even considered. He will be offering the very life of the living God to them!" (240). In drawing these things together we see the glory of preaching, for we are standing in this great mystery of God's active transformation of the world. Johnson makes us see what an incredible privilege it is to preach the gospel and to be under that preaching. On the back cover of the book, one author gives expression to the impact Johnson's book made on him: "Reading it makes me glad I have preached, wishing that I had preached better and excited about preaching more! Read it and you will feel the same."

Johnson ends this volume with a sermon written on Matthew 11:25-30, demonstrating some of the principles of his approach.

One aspect which some readers of this journal might find a little disconcerting is Johnson's embrace of female preachers. Although the issue never surfaces outright in the book and therefore to my mind does not diminish the value and benefit of this book, it does come through enough so that I feel compelled to alert the readers of it.

In conclusion I highly recommend this book since it leads the reader to marvel in the wonder of God's grace to draw sinners into his great work of transforming the world! This is "The Glory of Preaching"!

—Jacques Roets

J. Gordon McConville and Stephen N. Williams, *Joshua*. The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. Pp. xii + 257. \$20.00

In this work, Gordon McConville and Stephen Williams bring to bear in this analysis on Joshua the expertise of the Old Testament scholar and the skill of the dogmatics professor, respectively. Other works in biblical studies in recent years have looked at canonical and rhetorical approaches (among others), but this series very self-consciously looks at Joshua from a theological point of view, specifically, as a book in the canon of the Christian Bible.

The commentary section of this work (about 80 pages) represents a basic summary of what is in the text, giving little time to critical questions that could be raised in connection with it. In the next major section Williams looks at a variety of topics that are suggested by the narrative of Joshua itself, including the issue of land, genocide, idolatry, covenant, and "miracle and mystery." These are all set within a larger canonical context of the Christian Bible. McConville then takes up the discussion as he looks at the book of Joshua from the perspective of biblical theology, specifically as it relates to the books of the Torah. McConville very ably shows how the slice of narrative recounted in Joshua fits in with the larger redemptive-historical purposes of God.

Readers will appreciate how Williams responds to issues raised by McConville, with a surrejoinder by Williams. In this way readers listen to the authors' interaction and sharpen their own viewpoint. One of the great strengths of this book is in showing how history and theology are not to be set at odds with each other, since Christianity is a faith that claims a real God actually entered this creation and its real history.

The book concludes with a very extensive bibliography as well as helpful author and Scripture indices. This work is a worthy addition to the corpus of studies on Joshua. We look forward to similar works in this series.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

Thomas J. Nettles, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009. Pp. 616. \$29.99

This is the fourth volume to be published in the *American Reformed Biographies* series, edited by D.G. Hart and Sean Lucas. The author is a professor of historical theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, the same school of which Boyce was primary founder more than 150 years ago. This is the second volume in this series devoted

to a Southerner, albeit a Baptist (the other being on the Old School Presbyterian Robert Lewis Dabney), an interesting companion to the volumes on Van Til and Nevin (Dutch and German Reformed, respectively). In comparison to the other three biographies in this series, this one is sprawling and repetitive, especially when it comes to describing Boyce's attempts to justify theological education to the Baptists.

Boyce is important for a number of reasons. If nothing else, Boyce serves to remind us all of the Calvinistic sympathies of many Southern Baptists at the time of the formation of that denomination in 1845. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) came into being after Baptist abolitionists insisted that Baptists could not work in mission endeavors with those associated with slavery. So the Baptist Church split North and South, but the SBC did not suffer, going on to become the largest Protestant denomination in the country (numbering more than sixteen million).

J.P. Boyce, remarkable Baptist preacher and scholar, founder of the SBC's flagship seminary and its greatest systematician, was a Calvinist. This story is especially important to tell now that the SBC, beginning with the election of Adrian Rogers as its president in 1979, has rejected the creeping liberalism that was infecting her seminaries, including Southern. Southern no longer has liberal faculty members and has returned to the legacy of J. P. Boyce. Al Mohler, Southern's current president, reflects that commitment as a part of the Founder's Movement, an organization dedicated to restoring the Calvinism of Boyce and many others to the SBC. It is interesting to note that now that the liberals have been expelled from the SBC seminaries, SBC leaders like Paige Patterson, who is not Reformed, have opined that it is now time to get rid of the Reformed folk among the Baptist ranks.

Boyce furnishes many important lessons for us all, not the least being the abiding value of a good theological education for those who would serve the Lord faithfully and ably. Boyce also, though a wealthy slave owner (having twenty-three at the outbreak of the Civil War) and a CSA politician, also had a strong doctrine of the spirituality of the church and opposed the SBC intermeddling with matters of state. He, like many others of his era, was a loyal Southerner while at the same time an ardent Union man and opponent of secession. He fought numerous battles for orthodoxy, particularly with respect to the inerrancy of Scripture, some of which presaged battles of more recent years at confessional Reformed seminaries. Boyce remained, like the Princetonians with whom he studied, charitable yet firmly doctrinally sound.

This is a big volume. So much more could be said about it and its subject. Rather than do that, I here urge readers to investigate this helpful volume for themselves. If nothing else, it is salutary for Baptists and non-Baptists to be reminded how central Calvinism once was among them and pray that it might become so again.

—Alan D. Strange

Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. Pp. 212. \$25.00

Mark Noll, formerly of Wheaton College, now the Francis McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, is one of the ablest and most prolific students of American church history. Though this reviewer has found himself at times differing from Professor Noll in his assessments of matters ecclesiastical, I believe that Noll remains one of the most important observers of the American evangelical scene. Noll's work of late has particularly focused on capturing the genius of the American experiment with respect to the hands-off policies of the state vis-à-vis the church. That project continues and is extended here in *The New Shape of World Christianity*.

The work under review attempts to distill the essence of American religion, particularly evangelicalism, with a view to examining how that has impacted and shaped world Christianity. Noll recognizes that the American experiment in disestablishing the church has markedly shaped the church, perhaps, one might say, for better and for worse. For better the disestablished churches in America flourished in the nineteenth century in a way that the established churches of Europe did not. The American church in general grew quite a bit faster than did the population, going from less than a quarter of the population in 1815 to more than forty percent a century later (111). America has, all secularist expectations to the contrary notwithstanding, become more religious over time, at least as we look at the statistics up to the mid-twentieth century.

For worse, we might note the decided individualism of the American church. The nineteenth century witnessed not only awakenings and revivals of various sorts but also the rise of the Restoration movement and of significant cults (most notably, the Mormons). The ethos that developed as a part of all this religious pioneering was quite entrepreneurial and individualistic as opposed to traditional and corporate. What went on in America from the nineteenth century on is now seen, in some measure, to be going on in the places where Christianity is now making a great impact, like Africa and South America.

Some have assumed that the burgeoning Christianity of the majority world (or two-thirds world) is guided by America. Noll questions this assumption, reminding us that correlation is not causality, i.e., things may be happening worldwide that appear to mirror America for the last two centuries; it may not be, however, because America is the master puppeteer, but because events have fallen out similarly in other countries and the results are similar. Noll writes about three positions with respect to the relationship of events in America and the majority world—the first position finds America controlling or influencing the development of Christianity in other places rather directly. Positions two and three find the relation of America to other places to be more indirect, the second position speaks of America as “influencing” developments and the third is even less direct than that (Noll finds himself between the second and third positions).

Noll describes the third position this way: “It recognizes that newer expressions of Christianity around the world, despite many differences with each other, often do share many of the characteristics of Christianity in the United

States. But in this view, the reason for those similarities is not direct manipulation, and often not even conscious American influence. Rather the reason is shared historical experience. Thus, the things that often characterize many of the newer Christian regions in the world look similar to features of American Christianity because they have emerged out of historical circumstances that parallel what Christianity in the United States passed through in its own history. Correlation, not causality, is the key" (68).

Noll has dedicated much of his career to grasping and expressing what he understands Christianity in the United States to have passed through in its history. In America, Christianity, no longer enjoying state protection but no longer encumbered by state interference, developed in ways that mirrored the economic development of America, a sort of free enterprise religious growth with all the good and bad that such entails. Unlike the moribund state churches of Europe the disestablished churches of the United States have flourished, creating the kind of vibrant pluralism that we witnessed in the twentieth century, involving particularly the growth and development of Pentecostalism and like spiritually dynamic movements. While appreciating the vibrancy of the innovative American churches, Noll also sees weaknesses in this individualistic approach that militates against the corporate.

Noll would also, it seems, argue against a mere conversionist model of the church that focuses only on personal spirituality at the expense of the wider good that Christianity might do if it has a more properly integrative approach between beliefs and actions. He does see something of a hopeful increase in such a wholistic approach among evangelicals who emphasize deeds more than creeds (particularly insofar as evangelicals are not wed merely to the right; Noll's political bent seems to lean left). At any rate, he is seeing what has happened in America as happening elsewhere. Whereas he formerly highlighted American uniqueness in terms of origin and development, he is now finding that what happened here appears to be replicating itself elsewhere.

What is happening elsewhere? The second chapter in particular deals with this. There is a worldwide lay movement that has at the same time embraced the Bible and many aspects of the health and wealth gospel. What has happened here is happening worldwide, whether in Korea, East Africa, or Brazil.

This book is excellent on description, insightful in places about America and the world, and less discerning about what it all means. Noll seems, as does Philip Jenkins in his work on the burgeoning Christianity of recent decades, to observe present world Christian trends uncritically. What do we make of the spread of Pentecostalism, of health and wealth gospels? These are very difficult questions, ones that *Time* and *Newsweek* are not as sanguine about as is Noll. There have, in the secular press, been significant questions raised about the kind of Christianity that is spreading so quickly across the two-thirds world. Are some embracing Christianity simply, or mainly, for what they think that it will bring them, whether health or wealth or power? Noll does not appear to concern himself so much with the quality of Christianity worldwide as with the quantity and to note that historical conditions prevail in these places that prompt it to develop along the lines

that American evangelical Christianity has developed. Thus this work may be consulted to get Noll's perspective on what is happening with Christianity worldwide but not for what to make of it, as least as far as a Reformed perspective is concerned.

—Alan D. Strange

Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010. Pp. xxxiii + 596. \$50.00 [cloth]

Few contemporary New Testament exegetes are more highly regarded than Peter O'Brien, senior research fellow in New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. Readers familiar with O'Brien's body of work, especially his commentaries on the Pauline Prison Epistles, have come to appreciate both the technical expertise and the expositional brilliance of this first-rate exegete.

O'Brien's latest contribution to The Pillar New Testament Commentary series certainly lives up to the stated goal of the series, namely "a blend of rigorous exegesis and exposition, with an eye alert both to biblical theology and the contemporary relevance of the Bible, without confusing the commentary and the sermon." In addition, it is evident to any reader of *The Letter to the Hebrews* that the author's formidable erudition in matters of biblical exegesis and theology is rooted in a reverence for the Scriptures as the inspired and authoritative word of God. In this respect, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series* is a welcome and much-needed addition to the host of modern New Testament exegetical commentaries.

But the question remains: does O'Brien's commentary provide anything substantively new to the already extensive exegetical/biblical-theological discussions involving Hebrews? Anyone considering the addition of *The Letter to the Hebrews* should seriously contemplate that question, particularly when one compares this latest commentary to the two volume commentary on Hebrews by William L. Lane in the Word Biblical Commentary series (1991), which in the judgment of this reviewer remains the gold standard for exegetical commentaries on the epistle to the Hebrews. In terms of exegesis and exposition, O'Brien's insights and conclusions often echo the previous work by Lane. The significant difference between O'Brien and Lane's work, however, lies in O'Brien's extensive usage of the literary or discourse analysis of Hebrews developed within the past twenty years by George H. Guthrie and others. Guthrie's discourse analysis differs significantly from the method employed by contemporary advocates of rhetorical analysis (such as David de Silva), which seeks to analyze the epistle along the lines of Hellenistic literary devices. In O'Brien's judgment, the text of Hebrews "does not fit the template of the classical Hellenistic structure." The exegetical usefulness of Guthrie's work can be appreciated, not primarily in the exegesis or exposition of a specific passage, but ultimately in the comprehension of the epistle in its literary entirety.

As with his other commentaries, O'Brien's work in *The Letter to the Hebrews* demonstrates a thorough and judicious treatment of the original text and a respectful, yet decisive, interaction with the work of other scholars. In

the judgment of this reviewer, *The Letter to the Hebrews* has not surpassed William L. Lane's two volume commentary in the Word Biblical Commentary series, but it certainly ranks as one of the finest contemporary works on this magnificent epistle and should prove to be an invaluable resource for pastors and Bible students.

—Paul R. Ipema

Robert A. Peterson, *Our Secure Salvation: Preservation and Apostasy*. Explorations in Biblical Theology, Robert A. Peterson, Series Editor. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2009. Pp. xi + 240. \$14.99

Robert A. Peterson, who has taught systematic theology for many years at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, is the general editor of the series of which this book is a selection. The series, *Explorations in Biblical Theology*, intends to provide an accessible treatment of a variety of important biblical subjects for a general audience. The aim of the series is not to address an academic audience, but to provide biblical studies that treat a variety of biblical themes or biblical books for the instruction and edification of Christian believers.

In keeping with this aim and purpose, *Our Secure Salvation* offers a general survey of the Bible's teaching on the topic of the believer's preservation in the way of salvation. In the history of theology and the life-experience of believers, the question whether true believers may have the assurance that the work of God's grace in their lives will be brought to completion often arises. May believers be confident of their preservation in the way of faith and salvation? Or, do the frequent warnings in the Scriptures against the real danger of apostasy suggest that true believers may ultimately lose what they once possessed? Does the teaching of the preservation of believers lead to inappropriate complacency? These questions, which are commonly addressed under the heading of the "preservation" or the "perseverance" of the saints, are the focus of Peterson's attention in this book.

Peterson begins his discussion with a chapter, "Setting the Stage," that defines the topic he wishes to address. Within the framework of the doctrine of the assurance of salvation, believers are frequently unsure what to do with the twin emphases of Scripture. On the one hand, the Scriptures seem to teach that God will keep his people for final salvation. On the other hand, the Scriptures also warn of the danger of apostasy, the denial of the Christian faith by those who formerly professed it. How are these seemingly disparate emphases to be harmonized? In Peterson's judgment, these emphases must be given their due and be regarded as finally harmonious. A careful treatment of these emphases will, he argues, lead to at least four conclusions: God uses preservation to assure his children; God teaches his children the need to persevere to the end; God warns his children of the danger of apostasy; and the Bible often speaks of preservation and apostasy.

After his introductory setting of the stage, Peterson's study consists of ten chapters, which expound a variety of Old and New Testament passages that are especially important to his topic, and a concluding chapter that attempts

to pull the arguments together and present a case for how the topic can help believers live for Christ. In Chapter 2, he begins with a survey of Old Testament teaching on the topics of preservation and apostasy. Chapters 3 through 6 explore the teaching of Jesus and his apostles on these topics. And then in Chapters 6 through 11, Peterson takes up some of the most important, and at times vexing, warning passages in Scripture that raise the specter of apostasy on the part of some believers.

Due to the particular importance of the warning passages in Hebrews, especially chapter 6, Peterson devotes an entire chapter to their exposition. Though Peterson follows the general outline of the traditional Reformed view of Hebrews 6, he believes the passage presumes the possibility of a real falling-away on the part of professed believers. However, he also emphasizes the importance of Hebrews 6:9 to a proper interpretation of the warning of the chapter. In this verse, Peterson argues, the writer expresses a hope of “better things” for his readers than that they should fall away from the faith, and identifies these better things with “things that belong to salvation.”

Peterson’s study admirably fulfills the aim of the *Explorations in Biblical Theology*. Though he engages the relevant literature throughout, his study is not encumbered with an excessive amount of attention to all of the theological discussions of the topic. Perhaps due to a desire to reach an audience that does not know or subscribe to the confessions of the Reformed churches, the study avoids, perhaps to a fault, an appeal to any extra-biblical sources. In a clear, balanced, and persuasive way, Peterson works through the primary biblical data that bear upon the topic, and he does so with an eye to the pastoral implications of his findings. The usefulness of the book for Bible study is enhanced by the inclusion of a list of questions for each chapter, together with a selected list of resources on preservation and apostasy.

—Cornelis P. Venema

John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007. Pp. 239.

In recent years, the theological academy and the church alike have become embroiled in yet another controversy regarding the doctrine of justification. Students of the Reformation of the sixteenth century are aware of the fact that the doctrine of justification was at the core of the dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics in that period and thereafter. What some may not yet know is that the doctrine of justification has once again taken center stage as a topic of controversy. One of the primary sources of the recent controversy is the advocacy of what is known in short-hand as “the new perspective on Paul” by writers like N.T. Wright, an influential New Testament scholar and bishop of Durham of the Church of England.

John Piper’s recent book, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*, is another in a growing body of books on the controversy. In his introduction, Piper explains why he felt compelled to enter the fray with a response to N.T. Wright, arguably the most influential proponent of the new perspective

on Paul. In Piper's judgment, Wright's position on justification "will lead to a kind of preaching that will not announce clearly what makes the lordship of Christ good news for guilty sinners or show those who are overwhelmed with sin how they may stand righteous in the presence of God" (15). While Piper felt compelled to write his critique of Wright's view for this reason, he is at pains to avoid unfair criticism and even submitted a first draft of his volume to Wright, who in turn wrote an 11,000 word response. Since Wright "loves the apostle Paul and reverences the Christian Scriptures" (27), Piper writes with the hope that his engagement with Wright's views on justification will be "fruitful."

In the introduction to his book, Piper enumerates eight features or claims of Wright and the new perspective that compelled him to engage the controversy regarding justification: (1) the claim that the gospel is not about how to get saved, but about the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ; (2) the assertion that justification is not about how you become a Christian, but about membership in the covenant family of God; (3) the idea that justification is not the gospel; (4) the insistence that we are not justified by believing the right doctrine regarding what justification means; (5) the startling claim of Wright that the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness makes no sense at all; (6) the claim that the believer's final justification will be on the basis of works; (7) the common view of new perspective proponents that Paul did not confront a boastful legalism, when he opposed the Judaizers of his day; and (8) the identification of God's righteousness with his "covenant faithfulness."

According to Piper, these features of Wright's view of justification constitute a substantial attack upon the historic reformational view, and therefore require careful scrutiny by the standard of Scriptural teaching. The title of his book, *The Future of Justification*, underscores what is at stake in a twofold way. On the one hand, it raises the question whether the doctrine of the Reformation has any future. And on the other hand, it prompts the question whether the ultimate justification of believers at the final judgment is partially based upon the good works performed by believers.

After offering an apology for his engagement with the controversy regarding Wright's doctrine of justification, Piper carefully develops his critique in eleven chapters.

In the first five chapters, Piper addresses a series of topics that are preparatory to his examination of Paul's doctrine of justification and its importance to our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 examines the extent to which extra-biblical sources may serve as an interpretive grid for reading Paul's New Testament epistles. In Piper's judgment, new perspective proponents like Wright tend to have "an overweening confidence" in "assured interpretations of extra-biblical texts to illumine their *less sure* reading of biblical texts" (35). Fresh and new ways of reading the Bible tend to be preferred to older ways, especially when the new has the sanction of extra-biblical historical research.

Chapter 2 evaluates Wright's claim that justification, though it has its background in law-court imagery, is principally about membership in the covenant. For Piper, Wright's reduction of the language of justification to covenant membership fails to reckon with the importance of justification as a divine action that makes possible membership or reception into God's covenant.

In Chapter 3, Piper continues his analysis of Wright's reductionistic conception of the language of justification. In this chapter, Piper argues that the "righteousness" of God is more than simply God's faithfulness to his promises. The righteousness of God is an essential attribute of God, and refers to his unyielding resolution to uphold the glory of his name. For God to receive sinners into fellowship with himself, he must satisfy his own righteousness by acting in a way that protects his name and upholds his moral integrity. God's righteousness must be vindicated in order for God to justify fallen sinners.

In Chapter 4, Piper argues that the declaration of justification involves more than the mere declaration of the sinner's forgiveness. When God justifies a person, he declares that person to be righteous in a way that fully answers to the requirements of God's own righteousness. In justifying believers, God is both just and the one who justifies. At no expense to his own righteousness, God grants and imputes to believers the righteousness of Jesus Christ who fulfilled all of the obligations of God's holy law on behalf of his people.

Contrary to Wright's assertion that the gospel is not about how people get saved, Piper concludes the first five, ground-laying chapters of his book by insisting that justification lies close to the heart of the good news that Paul preached (Chapter 5). If the gospel is about anything, it is surely about the gracious verdict that delivers sinners from God's judgment and that constitutes the basis for their acceptance with him.

After establishing the groundwork for an interpretation of Paul's doctrine of justification in the first five chapters, Piper devotes the remaining six chapters of his critique to an exposition of the biblical understanding of justification. In these chapters, he addresses such topics as: the nature of the verdict that justification announces (Chapter 6); the basis of this verdict in the righteousness of Christ; the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers as an essential component of the divine act of justification (Chapters 8 and 11); the role of good works in the confirmation of the genuineness of faith, but not as a basis for the declaration of justification itself (Chapter 7); and the failure of Wright to demonstrate that Paul was not opposing a boastful legalism, when he opposed those who sought to be justified by the "works of the law" (Chapters 9 & 10).

In chapters 6 through 11, which present the substance of his case against Wright's doctrine of justification, Piper carefully expounds the biblical basis for insisting upon justification by grace alone through faith alone upon the basis of the righteousness of Christ alone. He also argues that, if final justification is based upon the works of the believer, then the doctrine of justification by grace alone will be radically compromised. Furthermore, if the act of imputation is excluded from the divine verdict that justification pronounces, then no secure basis remains for God's declaration of the believer's innocence. When the imputation of Christ's entire righteousness as the basis for the believer's justification is denied, the inevitable consequence is the insertion of the believer's good works into the picture as a partial ground for the justifying verdict.

Though this represents only a sketch of Piper's critical evaluation of the new perspective of Wright and others, it is sufficient to illustrate Piper's contention that this perspective constitutes a serious distortion of the biblical doctrine of justification. Piper writes as a preacher who is passionately devoted

to the biblical teaching of free justification on the basis of the work of Christ alone as an integral component of the biblical gospel. Though Piper remains irenic and careful throughout the book, he ably dismantles many of the tenets of the new perspective and offers a compelling case for a continued adherence to the reformational view of the gospel. Among a growing number of fine assessments of the new perspective, Piper's book undoubtedly deserves a special place.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Maurice Roberts, *Union and Communion with Christ*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008. Pp. 130. \$10.00

Maurice Roberts currently serves as the Minister of the Inverness congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and formerly served as the editor of the monthly magazine *The Banner of Truth* from 1988 to 2003. His recent book consists of what might be described as a series of meditations bound together by the common theme of union and communion with Christ and is marked by pastoral tenderness and concern throughout.

Roberts writes with simplicity and clarity yet consistently conveys a sense of the majesty and vitality of the topic while exploring its important implications. To be sure, this is not a theologically detailed or technical volume, but that is not to suggest that Roberts' work lacks depth. While the style of the book is devotional in nature, it remains deeply instructive and challenging. Indeed, in a plain and consistently Reformed manner, Roberts touches on topics as rich and complex as federal headship, imputed righteousness, election, and the cessation of extraordinary gifts, just to name a few.

The reason behind the order of the eighteen brief chapters is not explicitly given and the flow cannot always be logically detected, but there does appear to be a progression from union with Christ to communion by abiding in him and finally to an exploration of how the ministry of the church relates to the subject. Concerning the role of the church, Roberts provides superb chapters on how communion with Christ is strengthened by the Word and expressed in our attitude toward the Scriptures (Chapter 10), on the believer's communion with others in the church (Chapters 11 and 12), and on how the sacraments relate to union and communion with Christ (Chapter 16). In treating the matter of communion with others who profess Christ, Roberts reflects upon the complex relationship between church unity and church purity with sensitivity, wisdom, and a commitment to God's truth.

Throughout the book, Roberts highlights both the indicative of union with Christ and the imperative of communion with Christ, striking a fine balance between the privilege believers enjoy in union with Christ and the corresponding duty that such privilege brings. He writes that "once we are united to Christ in our newly created state, we are laid under the lifelong duty and obligation to 'abide in Christ'" (30). Roberts is careful to distinguish union with Christ from communion with Christ, noting that "our union with Christ, if we are truly 'in him,' cannot be broken. But our communion with Christ will be dimmed and weakened if we do not carefully attend to the duty of ... obedi-

ence" (34). He moves seamlessly from celebrating God's love for believers in Christ to exhorting the church to respond to her Lord in total submission and genuine love.

Along these lines, one of the most notable traits of the book is Roberts' repeated contrasts between those who are truly in union with Christ and those who merely profess Christ and yet belong to the world (10, 19, 24, 35, 50-53, 118-121). In exposing the differences, Roberts repeatedly calls the reader to self-examination and spiritual assessment of our affections and conduct (12, 21, 42, 74, 116).

As a result of its balanced approach and challenging contrasts, this small book is not only able to comfort the afflicted by pointing the reader to the treasures to be found in union and communion with Christ but is also capable of afflicting the comfortable by exposing the real danger of false professions and by issuing a challenge to maintain a close communion with Christ that is marked by godliness, devoted obedience to the Lord, and sacrificial love for others.

Overall, Roberts' book is highly lucid, accessible, and concise, as well as convicting, and is an excellent resource for personal or family devotions. It could also serve as a basic introduction to a rich and essential topic often overlooked and neglected today.

—Brian Allred

Gordon T. Smith, editor, *The Lord's Supper: Five Views*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008. Pp. 159. \$18.00

In recent years, a spate of books have been published that offer the reader an introduction to representative views on a particular topic in the history of the church. These volumes can be useful introductions to the way different church traditions have understood an important doctrine throughout the course of church history. However, they can also be less-than-helpful, when the authors do not provide a competent and accurate statement of the historic position of the church communion that they are asked to represent.

The Lord's Supper: Five Views clearly belongs to this genre. The editor, Gordon T. Smith, is president of resource Leadership International for Theological Education, an organization that supports theological education in the developing world. The aim of the book, as Smith notes in the introduction, is to provide a concise summary of distinctive perspectives on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and to grant each of the authors an opportunity to respond to them from their own point of view.

While the editor acknowledges that there are other, important perspectives on the Lord's Supper (e.g. Eastern Orthodox), he has selected five perspectives for inclusion: the Roman Catholic, represented by Jeffrey Gros; the Lutheran, represented by John R. Stephenson; the Reformed, represented by Leanne Van Dyk; the Baptist, represented by Roger E. Olson; and the Pentecostal, represented by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. The format of the book consists of a chapter-length summary of these perspectives, followed by a brief 1-2 page response on the part of the other authors. The editor provides an introductory

and concluding chapter, and the authors append a selected bibliography of representative sources for their particular church tradition.

Though books similar to this one can be useful, I am not convinced that this volume is one of them. Throughout the book, an “ecumenical” desire to find common ground and consensus on disputed points regarding the Lord’s Supper in Christian history tends to trump an accurate presentation of the historic distinctives of each perspective. For example, Gros, who presents the Roman Catholic perspective, seems to mute some of the essential features of classic Roman Catholic teaching on the sacrament in order to promote greater ecumenical good will and to diminish historic points of dispute. In his introduction and conclusion, the editor places the book in the context of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches’ document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which was released in 1982. Though a desire for respectful discussion of differences and even convergence of conviction where possible is commendable, this desire can tend to blunt and even disregard distinctive features of the churches’ doctrines. The contributions (and contributors) to the volume are not always fully and accurately representative of their respective traditions, which diminishes significantly the book’s value.

Another problem with this book is its identification of the five views represented. Is it really possible to speak of a “Baptist” or a “Pentecostal” understanding of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper? Are there not, rather, a diversity of perspectives within these ecclesiastical traditions, which are often fluid and amorphous?

For these reasons, though the aim and project of this book are commendable, the execution is rather disappointing.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Douglas A. Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word: A Model of Faith and Thought*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. Pp. 208. \$20.00

Another book on Jonathan Edwards: Is it warranted? Some may not even know why the question is properly raised. Such a question is proper because churning out books on Jonathan Edwards has become quite an occupation in recent decades. Some may argue that we’ve had enough and another book on Edwards is not justified. While the three hundredth anniversary of his birth, celebrated in 2003, surely glutted the market beyond all demand. Is this book needed? This reviewer says, “yes.”

If one has read anything that Douglas Sweeney, professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Illinois), has written about Edwards and his followers, one knows that Sweeney is likely to write something worth reading. And he has. He is an able student of Edwards, critical yet sympathetic. This book is, rightly, commended on the back cover by leading Edwards’s scholars like Harry Stout, George Marsden, Gerald McDermott, Kenneth Minkema, and others. They appreciate Sweeney’s penetrating, yet receptive, reading of Edwards. While another introduction to Edwards as such may not be needed, this introductory work can find its niche in the wide world of scholarship on Edwards because it highlights something that other recent works on Edwards have deemphasized, if not obscured.

This reviewer believes that this book fills an important lacuna, serving as a popular treatment of Edwards as a Bible expositor. We've had lots of books and articles on Edwards as philosopher, as scientist, as speculative theologian. This is a book that reminds us, and refocuses us, on what was central for Edwards and was the heart of all his work: the Word of God. Edwards, above everything, was a man consumed with the Bible and its exposition. To this he gave his life. And to the degree that he made a contribution in any of his endeavors, and to the church more broadly, he did so because of his commitment to and defense of the Bible as God's Word in an "enlightened" age that no longer looked to revelation but to human reason and experience as the source of all truth and knowledge.

While much of the history of Edwards's life and times is well-known and other writers have described it in greater detail, Sweeney does an excellent job in a small space of not only giving us interesting details of Edwards's life but also of depicting the sights and sounds of Edwards's world. Sweeney is a first-rate historian who is determined to give us an Edwards in context, not an Edwards who becomes a mouthpiece for Sweeney's own agenda. It is so tempting with a major figure like Augustine or Calvin or Edwards to enlist them in our own causes and have them help us make our cases. Sweeney does not appear to do this at any point, and it quite refreshing to get Edwards, warts and all. Sweeney gives us neither a canonized nor a vilified Edwards.

Most of the book consists of a description of the life and work of Edwards, with an emphasis on the role and his use of the Bible. Chapter three holds special interest as Sweeney focuses on Edwards's approach to revelation and biblical interpretation. Chapter five is also of particular interest as Sweeney addresses Edwards's major works, especially *Freedom of the Will*, *Original Sin*, and the *Two Dissertations*. Sweeney's treatment of Edwards is rich, detailed, and matured over the course of some years of reading and reflecting on him. Finally Sweeney concludes with some reflections on Edwards's legacy. Given Edwards's profundity, it is unsurprising that his legacy is broad and mixed, finding claimants among the orthodox and not-so-orthodox (193-197). Sweeney closes with seven theses for discussion, having to do with, among other things, the centrality of religious affections and a life lived for Christ. The final thesis is one that appropriately concludes this work: "Edwards shows us the necessity of remaining in God's Word" (199-200) and this he did all the days of his life.

—Alan D. Strange

Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. Pp. 221. \$19.99

Daniel J. Treier, who serves as an associate professor of theology at Wheaton College, aims in this book to "recover," as his title suggests, a more theological and historical approach to the interpretation of Scripture than the one that has characterized biblical criticism for the last two centuries. Rather than interpreting the Bible as an historical text without giving attention to the history of the interpretation of the Bible in the church, Treier argues for an ap-

proach that treats the Bible as a canonical book whose interpretation belongs ultimately to the ecclesial community of faith.

In his introduction, Treier observes that a movement began within evangelicalism in North America in the 1990s to recover a “distinctively theological interpretation of Scripture” (11). Treier’s purpose in writing his book is to tell the story of this movement, to identify its background and history, and address some of the “tough questions” that it provokes. The movement toward a more theological approach to the reading of Scripture arose as a reaction to the excesses of historical biblical criticism, and is particularly linked to the theological reading of Scripture represented in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. However, Treier observes that the movement toward a different approach to Scripture interpretation has put down roots in various settings, from evangelicalism to mainline Protestantism to Roman Catholicism. Though Treier is skeptical of the idea that there is such a thing as “post-modernism” (he prefers to speak of “post-modernisms”), he does acknowledge that one of the emphases associated with so-called post-modernism is an emphasis upon the role of communities in the interpretation of historical texts. The emphasis upon the role of communities in the interpretive process has lent impetus to the project of a theological interpretation of Scripture.

Treier addresses his topic in two parts. The first part of his study, which consists of three chapters, treats what he terms “catalysts and common themes.” In these chapters, Treier identifies three important catalysts for the interest in a more theological approach to Scripture interpretation: (1) the desire to return to and imitate the pre-critical tradition of Scripture interpretation; (2) the recognition that, in the reading of Scripture, interpreters are to remain within the boundaries of the consensus of Christian doctrine; and (3) the realization that the reading of Scripture belongs to the church as a community of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the historical conceit of the critical tradition, which tended to view the older tradition of Scripture interpretation as unenlightened, the approach of theological interpretation recognizes that the Bible belongs to the church, and that the church is a community of faith with an extensive history of Scripture interpretation upon which contemporary interpretation needs to build.

The second part of Treier’s study, which consists as well of three chapters, deals with “continuing challenges” that confront the project of a theological interpretation of Scripture. Treier identifies three challenges in particular. The first of these challenges concerns the legitimacy of “biblical theology” as a bridge between biblical exegesis and systematic theology. The emergence of various forms of “biblical theology,” as a discipline intermediate between the direct study of biblical texts in context and the systematic exposition of the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole, has raised questions regarding the legitimacy of traditional systematic theology. Some forms of biblical theology have presented themselves as a substitute for the older project of systematic theology. The second of these challenges is the challenge of “general” hermeneutics. Should the interpretation of Scripture be governed by a Scripturally-derived approach to the interpretation of the text? Or should Scripture interpretation be one expression of a more general theory of the interpretation of texts? The third and final challenge that Treier identifies is the challenge of

different social locations or contexts. Here Treier means to identify the challenge posed by the emergence of a genuinely global or international church community. How does the social and cultural context of the Scriptural interpreter affect the way in which biblical texts are interpreted?

In his concluding chapter, which bears the interesting heading, “In the End, God,” Treier offers a synthesis of the two parts of his study, and then suggests an agenda for further reflection upon the enterprise of the theological interpretation of Scripture. According to Treier, though the catalysts for a theological interpretation are evident and compelling, the book has not yet been written as to what the project will ultimately require. Minimally, it will require a recognition that Scripture may be read through a diversity of lenses, and that the various divisions of theological study represent something of that diversity (biblical studies, historical studies, systematic studies, etc.). It will also require a recognition that, though a diversity of “maps” may represent truthfully the topography of Scripture, there needs to be a sense of the unity and coherence between them. Simply put: not all perspectives or approaches are equally true. Some are more true than others. And all of them must serve the ultimate end of bringing the reader of Scripture into a more rich and fulsome communion with God and the community of the church.

Though Treier’s study does not offer a finished account of what the theological interpretation of Scripture may require, it does offer a stimulating and helpful preliminary report on this project’s emergence and the challenges it faces. In the history of Reformed theology, in distinction from the more recent history of evangelical theology in North America, the kinds of interests reflected by the theological interpretation of Scripture have always been recognized. However, it is encouraging to witness the renewed attention to the unity and coherence of the canonical Scriptures, and to the role of the church’s traditional teaching (codified in her creeds and confessions) in the enterprise of interpreting the Scriptures.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today’s Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture*. Explorations in Biblical Theology, Robert A. Paterson, editor. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2009. Pp. 283. \$17.99

Dr. C. Van Dam was a pastor in a church before he began teaching Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario. He is well-qualified to address this very vital topic from its theoretical basis, as well as its practical side. This book clearly exhibits marks of one who is familiar with the territory covered by ruling and teaching elders (pastors). The author states that his “chief concern” in this book is “to obtain a renewed understanding of and appreciation for the office and task of the elder by taking into full account the relevant Old Testament material.”

The author finds the modern office of elder traceable back to the family and clan structure in the earliest days of God’s covenantal dealings with his people. Such “heads” of families and clans in turn became community leaders. Van Dam rightly points out that God is the source of the office’s authority. This

clearly runs counter to the modern idea of democratization in all of society's institutions. Van Dam finds a line of continuity in the Old Testament institution of elder and that which was employed in the New Testament church. While one can argue for the offices of the priest and king finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ, such that no one serves as priest and king within the church, the elders' office, on the other hand, continues today in the leadership roles which earlier existed in the older covenant era. Of course, there are adjustments to be noted as appropriate to the redemptive-historical era of the times. Yet Van Dam accents the lines of continuity more than those of discontinuity.

The author seeks to demonstrate in the book that the office of elder has as its primary task "preserving and nurturing life in covenant with God." As such, the elder's work may be properly described as serving, not lording over, the people of God. Van Dam explores both the authority aspect that the church elder exerts as well as the pastoral care dimensions. He looks at the question of ordaining women as ruling elders and the question of having lifetime elders. He stands opposed to the ordination of women in the offices of the church, but he strongly pleads for the use of women's gifts in the life of the church. On the question of lifetime elders ("definite and indefinite tenure" is his phraseology), Van Dam notes the history of both practices in the Presbyterian and continental Reformed traditions and the arguments for both, coming down gently on the side of definite tenure for ruling elders.

The book includes study and discussion questions at the back of the book, making this an excellent tool for church councils, church societies, and others to use. The book includes other print and visual resources on the office of elder, as well as a thorough Scripture index. This book, a welcome addition in the series "Explorations in Biblical Theology," produced by P & R Publishing, is highly recommended.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

David F. Wright, editor. *Baptism: Three Views*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. Pp. 200. \$16.00

David F. Wright served as professor of patristic and Reformation Christianity at New College, University of Edinburgh until his death in February 2008. Wright himself had written rather extensively on the subject of baptism, as is evidenced by the bibliography of his published works on baptism at the back of this book. As editor of *Baptism: Three Views* published by IVP Academic, he had intended to contribute an introductory essay to the present volume. Though able to complete the editing work before his death, Wright was unable to contribute the introduction.

An introduction is supplied by Daniel G. Reid, an editor for IVP Academic. In it, he acknowledges that the book does not attempt to exhaust the variety of positions in the church today concerning the practice of baptism. Indeed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Methodist, and Pentecostal views of baptism are left unaddressed. Rather, the book targets readers coming from Bible-believing, mainstream evangelicalism and "the three views represented make up the most common ones encountered in this broad tradition" (15).

The three views covered are designated in the book as believer's baptism, infant baptism, and the dual-practice view. The case for believer's baptism is made by Bruce A. Ware, professor of Christian theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Sinclair Ferguson, senior minister at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina and former chair of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, contributes the essay on infant baptism. While one would expect arguments both for and against the practice of infant baptism in a volume on different views related to baptism, it is, perhaps, a unique feature of this book that it includes a third "middle position", if you will. This dual-practice baptism view is offered by Anthony N.S. Lane, professor of historical theology at London School of Theology, Northwood, England.

Though only a limited number of views are examined, the focus on a narrower range of perspectives will likely prove helpful to the audience the book intends to address. After all, questions about baptism within local, Bible-believing, evangelical churches are likely to grow increasingly common. On the one hand, local Reformed churches are likely to face questions about infant baptism due to the welcomed resurgence of a Reformed soteriology within the evangelical church that often flows from non-Reformed sources. This resurgence can be attributed, in part, to the widespread influence and popularity of pastors like John Piper who, while boldly declaring God's sovereignty in salvation within a Calvinistic framework, nevertheless remains a Baptist in his convictions concerning baptism. The result is that many of his adherents adopt a Reformed doctrine of salvation while they own misgivings or reject the Reformed doctrine of baptism. On the other hand, inquiries may be more frequent in traditional Baptist churches as well, due to the increasing influence of covenant theology within dispensationalism, most easily detected among progressive dispensationalists. For this reason, this book offers a great deal to evangelicals on both sides of the debate as well as to those who feel uncomfortable with any dogmatic assertions made on the topic.

The book is structured by three main sections corresponding to the three views expounded. In each section, the case is made for a particular view, followed by appraisal and critique from the advocates of the other positions. Each section ends with concluding responses and final arguments in favor of the position being considered. By presenting such an exchange of interpretations and convictions, the format lends depth, awareness, and clarity to the issues involved by highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of each position.

In assessing the individual essays offered by each of the three contributors, some comments are in order. Bruce Ware defends the believer's baptism view, perhaps more appropriately called the "credobaptist" position. Ware begins with an attempt to make a case for baptism by immersion only believing that an exclusive practice of immersion in the New Testament would lend "indirect" support for the credobaptist position. Aside from the historic Eastern Orthodox practice of baptizing infants by immersion, both Ferguson and Lane in their respective responses soundly refute his assertions about the meaning of βαπτίζω and his claims that the New Testament texts require an "immersion-only" reading.

Subsequently, Ware considers the proper recipients of baptism by making a case for the baptism of believers only. In examining the Biblical record,

he maintains that the New Testament explicitly and repeatedly depicts baptism upon profession of faith even as it records “no clear and unmistakable instance of ... infant baptism” (29). He also undertakes to demonstrate that texts to which paedobaptists commonly appeal, namely the household baptism texts, do not require the conclusion that infants were baptized. To the contrary, Ware finds support for his own position in these texts. In addition, he counters paedobaptist interpretations of Acts 2:38-39 and 1 Corinthians 7:14 by offering his own exegesis.

Upon completing his investigation, Ware concludes that “the case for believer’s baptism is uncontested when one examines all of the relevant evidence from the New Testament” (40). This is obviously overstated. The very placement of this essay within a volume presenting three differing views refutes the notion that Ware’s position is uncontested! Of course, if what he means is that the practice of baptizing adult believers upon profession of faith is uncontested, such can be granted. Indeed, the baptism debate, specifically concerning its proper recipients, is not about baptizing professing adult believers but whether or not to baptize their children on the basis of the covenant.

Aware of this important covenantal element, Ware next devotes his attention to baptism’s role as a sign of the new covenant. Ware, writing as a self-identified progressive dispensationalist (44 footnote), recognizes the important role of the covenant in both Old and New Testaments. He realizes that a major difference between credobaptists and paedobaptists is how the relationship between baptism and circumcision is understood (41) and that this relationship is set within a larger context of perceived continuities and discontinuities in the old and the new administrations of the one covenant of grace (42).

Though it is doubtful that all Baptists would be altogether comfortable with Ware’s theological framework and assertions, his articulation of the credobaptist position bears similarity to Paul Jewett’s and Fred Malone’s and presents some of the weightiest objections against the traditional paedobaptist position by attempting to make the credobaptist case from within a covenantal view of Scripture as opposed to outside it.

Still, there are serious flaws with Ware’s formulations. For example, Ware states that “the old covenant incorporated the people of God at two levels, one ethnic and national, the other spiritual, whereas the new covenant constitutes the people of God exclusively as those who have believed in Christ” (43). He alleges that while the old covenant people of God were a mixed company, the people of God under the new covenant, as defined by Jeremiah 31:31-34, “could not be more markedly different” (43), consisting “exclusively” of believers (41).

To be expected, Ware sees the old covenant sign of circumcision operating at two levels as well: one corresponding to the people of God in their physical descent and the other corresponding to the true and spiritual Israel. For Ware, this dual operation ceases under the new covenant administration in which only believers are in view. In his words, “Precisely because the people of God under the new covenant are, in their entirety, those of faith and trust in God through Christ, it is therefore right to apply baptism as the sign of their new life in Christ only to them” (45).

Ware’s formulation is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the idea that the old covenant functioned at two levels cannot be supported. Consider

that covenant unfaithfulness and unbelief in the Old Testament resulted in being cut off from the covenant people. Such covenant breakers were not regarded as cut off on a spiritual level while retaining their covenant status on a physical level based on ethnic descent. Moreover, foreigners born outside the line of Jacob who exercised faith in Israel's God were regarded as belonging to the nation of Israel, not merely as covenant participants on a spiritual level—one can think of Rahab and Ruth. Indeed, the Old Testament knows nothing of a covenant on two levels as Ware postulates. The administration of the old covenant did, to be sure, include a national and ethnic aspect. But it was precisely these national people who were called to live as spiritual partakers of God's covenant promises by faith.

Ware attempts to buttress his position by quoting Stephen Wellum, who posits "In the OT era, the people of God were both a nation and the spiritual people of God; circumcision signaled one's affiliation with the nation" (45). But to be more precise, one might rather assert that in the Old Testament era, the covenant people were confined to basically one nation.

Second, Ware's assertion that circumcision functioned on two levels, one on a spiritual level and the other signaling one's affiliation with the people of God on a national level by physical descent, is faulty. Indeed, Wellum's claim that circumcision signaled one's affiliation with the nation is misleading. The truth is that circumcision signaled one's affiliation with the covenant (Genesis 17:10-11). Again, while the covenant people were confined to basically one nation in the Old Testament era, it is not the case that the covenant or the sign of the covenant functioned at two levels. The importance of right formulation is seen in Ware's subsequent conclusion that a significant discontinuity exists between the recipients of baptism in the New Testament and the recipients of circumcision in Old Testament because under the new covenant "no physical marker of ethnic descent would be appropriate" (46). True, but if circumcision, in its essence, is rightly regarded not as a physical marker of ethnic descent but rather as a sign of God's covenant promise, the relationship between baptism and circumcision is maintained and the continuity in administration is more readily apparent.

A third problem is Ware's insistence that the new covenant is composed exclusively of believers (41) and "only those who know the Lord" (117). Of course, as it pertains to actually possessing the blessings of the covenant, which are received by faith, this is true. But Ware seems to object to any outward aspect in the administration of the new covenant without a corresponding inward reality. In addition to erasing the distinction between the visible and invisible church, such an understanding appears to confuse the sign and the thing signified in baptism. He writes that "For baptism to function truly as a sign of regeneration, conversion and new life by the Spirit, the one baptized must have experienced inwardly the spiritual reality which baptism so beautifully portrays" (29-30). While he explicitly rejects baptismal regeneration, his claims with reference to the nature of the new covenant seem to leave no room for the baptism of the unregenerate.

To be fair, Ware does admit that there are no guarantees of excluding false professors in practice (50), but the point is that in his unqualified assertions about the nature of the new covenant he seems to make no allowances for

this reality in the new covenant. The truth is that the new covenant, like the old, contains an outward element in its administration that does not always correspond to an inward reality. Passages like John 15:2, Romans 11:17-21, and Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:29, which are not addressed in Ware's essay, establish the presence of an outward aspect not only in the administration of the old covenant but of the new covenant as well.

Ware concludes his essay with a brief summary of the historical support for the credobaptist position and some final commendations. In his concluding response to pointed and well-stated critiques offered by Ferguson and Lane, Ware declares that the New Testament's silence on the replacement of circumcision with baptism in the new covenant is "simply incredible" if the apostles anticipated the first believers to practice infant baptism (72). However, he fails to perceive how the continuity of a covenantal framework to define the people of God demonstrates that it is even more remarkable that the new covenant would regard the children of believers as outside the covenant of grace, a position Ware explicitly adopts (75), without a single word announcing such an arresting change in covenant administration.

Over against the credobaptist position presented by Ware, Sinclair Ferguson authors an excellent essay on what is called the infant baptism view, frequently referred to as the "paedobaptist" position. Perhaps even more descriptive, Ferguson offers what can be called the traditional covenantal view of baptism. Indeed, Ferguson rightly sets the issue of infant baptism within the larger context of the Reformed view of the sacraments in general, and baptism in particular, as signs and seals of God's covenant promise. Because Ferguson acknowledges that seeing baptism as a sign of the covenant means its significance is determined by how we view the covenant (96), it is not until he has set forth a covenantal understanding of baptism that he addresses the matter of the baptism of infants. Indeed, only 12 of the 34 pages of his essay are devoted to the matter of infant baptism.

Ferguson begins his essay where Ware ends—with an examination of the historic practice of the church as it pertains to the baptism of infants. Ferguson rightly concludes that the "evidence from the early church is inadequate to ground a logically necessary conclusion either way" (83). So Ferguson moves from a historical analysis to a consideration of the theology of baptism, beginning with an overview of covenant theology. At a later point, Ferguson provides an outstanding defense of his covenantal approach in response to Lane's criticism that the covenant theme is not as prominent in the New Testament as it is in the Old (131).

In addition to adopting a covenantal framework in which to understand baptism, he perceives that the different practices in baptism are not only about the proper recipients but more fundamentally about the "basic meaning of the sign" (85). After establishing the relationship between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament and exploring their roles as signs and seals of the covenant of grace, he stresses the objective nature of the sacrament on the basis of Romans 4:11, concluding that baptism, contrary to Baptist theology, points "us to Christ to whom faith responds, not first to the faith which does the responding" (96).

In making the case for infant baptism, Ferguson points out, as does Lane in his essay (158), the covenantal overtones in the language of Acts 2:38-39

and in the “household” baptisms (105-106), refuting Ware’s conclusions in the process. Ferguson also offers as supporting evidence for infant baptism the blessing of infants by Jesus. Indeed, Ferguson’s exegesis of Mark 10:13-16 (107-110) is exceptional and issues a strong challenge to those who deny its relevance to the debate.

However, the contribution of Ferguson is not without some weaknesses however. First, he fails in his essay—or in his responses—to dismantle Ware’s theological assertions about the nature of the new covenant functioning on two levels and consisting exclusively of believers. Indeed, the only time he refutes Ware’s claims by pointing out the external elements in the administration of the new covenant is in a footnote (99). Second, it is difficult to detect Ferguson’s intended audience when he employs technical Latin terms like *ex opera operato*, *status quaestionis* and *desideratum* without added explanation. Still, Ferguson’s essay, while perhaps demanding in places, is a faithful statement of the traditional Reformed view and a valuable contribution that makes a strong case for infant baptism.

Professor Anthony Lane contributes the third and final essay on the dual-practice baptism view. Lane opens his essay by investigating the meaning of baptism, disagreeing with both the credobaptist understanding of baptism as a sign of faith and the paedobaptist understanding of baptism as a sign to faith. Instead, Lane claims that the New Testament regards baptism as a part of Christian initiation. According to Lane, baptism was part of what it meant to become a Christian or what it meant to be saved, along with repentance, faith, and the reception of the Holy Spirit (141).

The central concern with which Lane deals in his essay is whether or not baptism was applied to infants in the apostolic church. Lane maintains that the New Testament pattern concerning baptism was converts’ baptism, but that the Scriptures are silent about how the children of converts were treated. Given this silence, he adopts what he calls a “seismological approach” to “deduce what was the situation in apostolic times by its effects two to three hundred years later” (144). In noting the “meager and ambiguous” evidence relating to infant baptism from the first two centuries, Lane begins assessing the historical situation in the third century when the evidence for church practice is clearer and moves forward to consider the practice of the fourth and fifth centuries. Only after considering such evidence does Lane move back to the second century and end with the first in an attempt to reconstruct the apostolic practice.

Lane, an able historian, conducts a critical analysis of the church’s teaching and practice concerning baptism in the first five centuries that is reflective, insightful, and balanced. He concludes that “surviving evidence does not enable a clear answer to be given for any time period prior to about A.D. 175” (159). However, according to Lane, the pattern that emerges from the first five centuries of the church is one that reflects a diversity of practice. Lane argues that what best explains the presence of this diversity is variety in the practice of the apostolic church itself (161). While he admits that it is unlikely that the practice of infant baptism was unknown in the apostolic church, and that the practice was indeed likely, he doubts that infant baptism was universally practiced in the apostolic church (163).

On the basis of historical considerations, Lane proposes a dual practice of baptism in the church today in which both the credobaptist position and paedobaptist position are accepted. He maintains that the silence of the Bible gives the church liberty to vary its practice. He also argues that a dual-practice has value for the church: the paedobaptist practice bears witness against contemporary individualism and the credobaptist practice combats nominalism (167).

Overall, Professor Lane's contribution is a most highly useful resource on the history of baptismal practice in the early church, specifically on the practice of infant baptism. In addition, Ferguson rightly notes that Lane's contribution "expresses an admirable desire for the visible unity of the church, a harmony of life in local congregations and for the rite of baptism not to be seen as more important than the life and worship of the baptized" (185). While this is to be commended, Lane's essay fails to convince that his dual-practice hypothesis reflects apostolic practice. Indeed, while the practice of the early church may very well have been varied, he offers no evidence that the early church fathers argued for variety on the basis of apostolic practice. In other words, while attempting to make an argument from history, he fails to cite a single advocate in the early church making such a case in history. Along these lines, while Lane rightly notes the danger of downplaying tradition (149), in ultimately grounding his position more on a reading of church history than on a reading of Scripture, he ends up at the other extreme of placing too great an emphasis on historic practice.

Regardless of one's theological stance on baptism, the essays in this volume will serve to sharpen and challenge. Even if the essays in this volume prove to be ultimately unpersuasive to those already holding to particular convictions and positions, everyone who reads this book will be forced to think through the various issues more thoroughly and biblically. For this reason, the book deserves to be widely read so that the people of God might be better informed, more discerning, and increasingly equipped to interact with the important issues concerning the theology and practice of baptism. The book could serve as an excellent text for students in a college or seminary setting and could be used equally as well at the local church level as part of a Sunday school class or discussion group. Indeed, this volume can be very helpful in a variety of venues and climates if people are willing to engage the issue openly and to give an honest hearing to divergent opinions.

—Brian Allred