

S O U T H E A S T E R N

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Book Reviews

Rodney Stark. *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*. New York: HarperOne, 2011. 506 pp. Hardback. ISBN 9780062007681. \$27.99 Hardback.

Rodney Stark serves as Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University. He is the author of several books on Christian history and the impact of Christianity on civilization, including *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1996), *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (Random House, 2005) and *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (HarperOne, 2009). This work is a continuation of *Rise of Christianity*. Stark seeks to broaden the scope of his earlier work beginning with the religio-political context of the early first century CE through the present status of Christianity as a global faith. The issue the work addresses is how Christianity grew to become the world's largest faith system. While Stark treats this issue broadly, his work also serves as a defense of Christianity as an indispensable element in the progress of human civilization.

The book is divided into six parts and twenty-two chapters. It is not a work of theology, but an historical/sociological work examining Christianity's growth and impact on human cultures spanning the past 2000 years. Stark makes numerous assertions about the essence, growth, character, and value system of the faith and of its followers. In the first three centuries of its existence, the faith spread over the Mediterranean world less as a result of powerful preaching or climactic events, but more because of ordinary Christians winning over those in their social circles with the power of the gospel. Contrary to the belief that conversions were predominately among Gentiles, Stark points out that the first successes of Christianity were within the Jewish community. As late as the fifth century, the churches and synagogues were closely connected.

Stark argues that Christians fulfilled Christ's calling to be salt and light within the culture in the Roman world. He wrote, "In the midst of squalor, misery, illness, and anonymity of ancient cities, Christianity provided an island of mercy and security" (112). By being obedient to Christ's teachings, early Christians transformed the ancient world where life was short and cheap. They laid the foundations for the idea that human life is precious and ought to be preserved. Still, Stark acknowledges that Constantine's conversion in the early fourth century, and the legalization and later institutionalization of Christianity in subsequent years was a mixed blessing. The church in the late Roman Empire would grow to be intolerant. Stark wrote, "Far better that [Constantine] would have remained a pagan who opposed religious persecution, while allowing Christian diversity to flourish" (181).

There is a serious element of “mythbusting” throughout Stark’s work. Figuring prominently are the notions that the medieval period was, in the words of Will Durant, an “age of faith”; that the centuries after 1500 represented a “renaissance,” an “age of reason,” an “Enlightenment”; or that there was a rise of science following a period of superstition and intellectual darkness. Rather than there being a measurable intellectual break between the medieval and modern periods, Stark asserts that the progress seen from the sixteenth century forward was a continuation of a pattern of progress coming after the fall of the Roman West in 476.

Stark also emphatically disputes the notion that the Crusades were the earliest expressions of an offensive and exploitative European colonialism. Instead, he argues that the Crusades were justified because they were defensive campaigns against expansionist Islam, which had already conquered much of the Christian east and North Africa by the ninth century. This chapter on the Crusades follows the argument he made in his book *Case for the Crusades*.

Stark also engages the argument commonly made by new atheists such as Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins, that religion is antithetical to human flourishing and that it will ultimately disappear as collective human knowledge increases. On the contrary, science and technology flourished within a Christian intellectual and cultural framework. Religious pluralism in America encouraged the growth of Christianity and enhanced its vitality, rather than undermining it. The secularization thesis of the new atheists is simply wrong, according to Stark. His overall argument in the book is that Christianity has had an enormous impact on the progress of humanity due to its message, cultural flexibility, emphasis on human value, pursuit of knowledge, and globalization. Forty percent of the world’s population is Christian today, and it is the fastest growing faith system in the world.

Stark makes an important contribution in his historical/sociological study of the progress of Christianity and its contributions to human flourishing. Particularly valuable are the arguments Stark makes against many prevailing beliefs about Christians and Christianity that are overly critical and negative. His contributions lay important groundwork for future studies on the powerful impact that Christians have had on human civilization not only in the West, but in the world.

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Houston, Texas

J. Patout Burns (translator and editor). *Romans: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*. The Church’s Bible. Grand Rapids, Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2012. Xxvii + 428 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-2575-9. \$46.00 Hardback.

This volume is part of an upsurge in interest in patristic theology and exegesis over the past two decades. It has led to countless monographs (for pa-

tristic exegesis in particular see M. Fiedrowicz, *Theologie der Kirchenväter: Grundlagen frühchristlicher Glaubensreflexion*; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2007, 97–187), several series of editions of patristic texts in different languages (see for example the *Fontes Christiani*), a number of reference tools and several anthologies of patristic texts of some kind. Among the latter is *The Church's Bible*, which aims to present for each biblical book texts from the first thousand years of Christianity.

The present volume starts with the series preface (xf) by Robert L. Wilken, who serves as the series editor of *The Church's Bible*. He states the scope of the series (see p. ix):

The volumes in *The Church's Bible* are designed to present the Holy Scriptures as understood and interpreted during the first millennium of Christian history. The Christian Church has a long tradition of commentary on the Bible. In the early Church all discussion of theological topics, of moral issues, and of Christian practice took the biblical text as the starting point. The recitation of the psalms and meditation on books of the Bible, particularly in the context of the liturgy or of private prayer, nurtured the spiritual life. For most of the Church's history theology and scriptural interpretation were one. Theology was called *sacra pagina* (the sacred page), and the task of interpreting the Bible was a spiritual enterprise.

During the first two centuries interpretation of the Bible took the form of exposition of select passages on particular issues. For example, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, dismissed many passages from the Old and New Testaments in his defense of the apostolic faith against the Gnostics. By the beginning of the third century Christian bishops and scholars had begun to preach regular series of sermons that followed the biblical books verse by verse. Some wrote more scholarly commentaries that examined in greater detail grammatical, literary, and historical questions as well as theological ideas and spiritual teachings found in the texts. From Origen of Alexandria, the first great biblical commentator in the Church's history, we have, among others, a large verse-by-verse commentary on the Gospel of John, a series of homilies on Genesis and Exodus, and a large part of his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. In the course of the first eight hundred years of Christian history Christian teachers produced a library of biblical commentaries and homilies on the Bible. ...

The distinctive mark of *The Church's Bible* is that it draws extensively on the ancient commentaries, not only on random comments drawn from theological treatises, sermons, or devotional works. Its volumes will, in the main, offer fairly lengthy excerpts from the ancient commentaries and from series of sermons on specific books. ... Some passages will be as brief as a paragraph, but many will be several pages in

length, and some longer. We believe that only through a deeper immersion in the ancient sources can contemporary readers enter into the inexhaustible spiritual and theological world of the early Church and hence of the Bible.

This is followed by R. L. Wilken's brief survey of "Interpreting the New Testament" in the patristic period (pp. xi–xxii). In the introduction to *Romans* (pp. xxiii–xxvii), J. Patout Burns sets out with a brief survey of the plan and structure of *Romans* and the early Christian interpretations of *Romans*. They were faced with religious questions somewhat different from those Paul had addressed. The patristic commentators "did not hesitate to adapt Paul's teaching to this new and different context" (p. xxiv):

The plan of divine governance which had integrated the Jewish response to Christ into the process of salvation of the nations could be understood as a paradigm for the interaction of divine initiative and human response in the election and calling of Christians from among many peoples. Most of the commentators followed Origen's lead in upholding human autonomy and free choice—though carefully limited—because they considered this essential for safeguarding the human moral responsibility essential to their understanding of God's justice in condemning sinners and rewarding the faithful. Augustine, and occasionally others, emphasised the sinfulness of humanity and the absolute gratuity of all God's operations which led chosen individuals to that salvation provided in Christ. In a similar way, the various parts and roles of the divine law—natural, Mosaic, and Christian—had to be distinguished and related. Some Christians used allegorical techniques to direct the entire law to the guidance of conduct; others treated the ritual provisions as foreshadowing the work of Christ.

Patout Burns also discusses the text of the Pauline letters which was used in patristic exegesis. He further explains the two criteria employed in his selection of passages from the ancient commentaries:

First, interpretations that have relevance for current living and understanding of Christian life have been preferred to observations and explanations of the text which have only historical value for understanding the ancient Christian church. Second, interpretations representing different perspectives and thereby illustrating the range of ancient Christian understandings of the Letter to the Romans have been included. Sometimes an interpretation was advanced by a single author, but in many instances understandings were shared among several commentators. Thus Chrysostom and Theodoret often agree, while Augustine diverges from a widely held view (p. xxvi).

The editor also lists the available English translations of commentaries on *Romans* from the patristic era.

The body of this commentary consists of selected readings from the early and late ancient church on the preface on Romans and on all chapters of the letter. For the preface and each chapter of the letter to the Romans, the editor provides succinct summaries of the concern and focus of patristic commentators. The texts have been selected from Ambrosiaster, Apollinaris, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Gennadius of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, Origen of Alexandria, Pelagius and Theodoret of Cyrrihus (brief biographies on pp. 394f); for these interpreters see H. Graf Reventlow, *Epochen der Bibelauslegung I: Vom Alten Testament bis Origenes* (München: C. H. Beck, 1990) and *Epochen der Bibelauslegung II: Von der Spätantike bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters* (1994); D. K. McKim (ed.), *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 1998) and the forthcoming volume one, *From the Beginnings to 600*, of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* (eds. J. C. Paget, J. Schaper).

In his explanation of the selection of patristic readings of Romans, Patout Burns notes some of the shifts in interest in patristic exegesis which has led to “strongly negative statements about Jews which are contrary to what now appears as Paul’s intention” (p. xxvii). He traces this development as follows:

Paul devotes extended attention to the status of the Jews and of the promises which were made to Israel. He argues that those promises were fulfilled in Christ and that the Jews will share in that gift of God. The ancient commentators in some instances no longer found the original Pauline message plausible; it was contradicted by their experienced separation and antagonism between Christians and Jews. In many instances, therefore, they developed interpretations of the Pauline text which adapted its meaning to their own times and culture.

He writes that “For the most part, these negative judgements have not been selected for inclusion because they do not contribute to the objectives and goals of this series, which is to make the resources of an earlier and foundational period of Christian life available for the contemporary edification of the church” (p. xxvii). While edification may be a legitimate goal, one wonders whether a problematic aspect of patristic exegesis and theology (with at times deplorable practical consequences for Jews!) can and should be brushed aside that easily.

The volume closes with appendices of authors of works excerpted and of sources of texts translated and with indices of names, subjects and Scripture references. Unfortunately the volume does not contain a summary and critical analysis of the patristic engagement with Romans.

Other volumes in this new series are R. A. Norris on the Song of Songs, R. L. Wilken on Isaiah (see my review in *Religion & Theology* 16, 2009, 118–120) and J. L. Kovacs on 1 Corinthians.

A similar English series is the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (now twenty-nine volumes in print, eds. G. Bray, T. C. Oden, Downers Grove: IVP; on this series see www.ivpress.com/accs). In that series the commentary

on Romans was compiled by Gerald Bray (volume 6 of the series, 2. ed., 2005; xxviii + 406 pp.). That series also contains an excellent supplement volume: C. A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* published in 1998.

In German language a similar series, the *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* has recently started to appear. So far two volumes have been published: M. Meiser, *Galater*, NTP 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007f) and A. Merkt, *1. Petrus*, NTP 21 (2011).

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Allen P. Ross. *A Commentary on the Psalms*. Vol 1 (1-41). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011. 992 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978 0 8254 2562 2. \$59.99 Hardback.

This commentary on the first Book of the Psalter opens with chapters covering standard topics such as titles and headings, poetry, literary forms, and history of interpretation. The ensuing exposition of each psalm consists of translation and text-critical analysis, composition and context, exegetical analysis, commentary in expository form, and finally message and application. The approach is basically form critical as the catalogue of “literary forms” reveals and so each psalm is labeled according to this approach.

A brief summary of the Psalter’s arrangement, which is seen as having achieved its present shape gradually consists of the Davidic monarchy in Books I and II, failure of it in III, and restoration of the Lord as king in IV and V (p. 54). Psalms were thus placed in specific sections because they applied to specific periods in Israel’s history (p. 54), and the flow takes one from Davidic experiences to the universal reign of Yahweh (p. 63). Psalms 1 and 2 form the introduction to the whole work, introducing the themes of law and kingship respectively (p. 54). However, while the present overall arrangement is apparently intentional, Ross expresses skepticism regarding “connections and patterns that may not be there, or if they are there, are only slight” (p. 62). So the place in the Psalter of a given psalm may not have a direct bearing on its exposition. Accordingly, he places greater emphasis on awareness “of how the psalms have been applied in different situations in Israel’s history” for contemporary application (pp. 62-3).

Hebrew students will find useful discussions of grammar and structure in the expository section, but beyond this level of analysis there are major difficulties with the commentary’s approach. The palpable subjectivity inherent in historical reconstruction or identification of literary forms is in contrast to the established and stable Psalter sequence, 11QPs^a notwithstanding. From the very outset the Psalter’s redactor did not follow form critical criteria. A wisdom psalm (Ps 1) is followed by one royal (Ps 2), and an individual lament (Ps 3). Numerous substantial and unique literary connectors that elucidate its

purpose characterize the canonical sequence generally and these first psalms as well, but reference to them are absent in the commentary.

Overt anachronisms in the Psalter's arrangement such as David fleeing Absalom in Ps 3 and hiding in the cave in Ps 144 exclude the chronological history of Israel interpretation. Likewise the Mosaic Ps 90 follows complaints about the loss of the monarchy (Ps 89) and Davidic psalms in Books I and II. Psalms 78 and 105 rehearse history (Egypt to David, Abraham to the conquest), but their location (Books III, IV) does not follow the chronological grid imposed by the commentary.

For Ross, the original purpose of the Psalter was to be the "hymn book of the temple" (p. 25), and thus, "like our hymn books" (p. 63). This widespread view overlooks the fact that the very first piece of this "hymnbook" is apparently "practical wisdom" (p. 141). How would one sing a broken acrostic such as Pss 9-10? Further undermining the analogy is the fact that for the ancient writers music was not distinguished from prophecy, as II Chron 25:1-5 indicate (cf. also II Kgs 3:15ff). The very Levitical singers named in Psalms were appointed by David to *prophecy* with instruments. He likewise is characterized as a prophet in II Sam 23:1.

It is not surprising given the approach taken that Ross finds the "Psalms do not have much direct prophecy, it is a little more difficult to explain the New Testament usage...there are times when they use passages in ways that do not seem to be in the understanding of the psalmists" (p. 165). "Royal psalms" should especially be studied because of their importance for biblical theology (p. 165), but were applicable to Israelite kings and are only indirectly "messianic" (p. 157). Accordingly, Psalm 2 is a "royal psalm" and "would have applied to every Davidic king" (p. 200). Actually, the case of Pss 1 and 2 and their thorough integration at all levels points to the identification of an impeccable, celestial, priestly and absolutely monarch, *excluding* any historical figure in Israel's history. Numerous connectors at various levels confirm that this king is found in both psalms, as are his opposites, the wicked and rebellious rulers. The surprising coherence between such apparently disparate pairs at the outset is present throughout the Psalter, in spite of Ross's negative judgment (cf. Pss. 22-23). As an approach for understanding the canonical Psalter, *Gattungsforschung* has been tried and found wanting. A serious grappling with the book's arrangement and shape at all levels is the key to unlocking its secrets.

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Kelly James Clark and Raymond J. VanArragon. *Evidence and Religious Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. vii + 214 pp. Hardback. ISBN 9780199603718. \$65.00 Hardback.

This is a collection of essays examining whether religious beliefs must be based on evidence to be rational. Overall, the essays are well-written. One of the book's unique strengths is that it probes this topic from the angle of epistemology and the standpoint of metaphysics. Some chapters explore epistemological issues such as evidentialism, the view that beliefs need evidence to be justified, while others explore metaphysical issues, such as whether there is evidence for theism.

The book is divided into three sections. Part one focuses on whether religious beliefs need evidence to be rational. James Ross, Linda Zagzebski, C. Stephen Evans, and Chris Tucker contribute chapters. Some of these chapters attack evidentialism. For instance, Ross argues that it cannot meet its own standard. The evidentialist contends that all beliefs need evidence to be justified, but it's not clear what evidence there is for this view. For example, given ordinary things we have evidence for, such as the fact that grass is green, it's hard to see how to derive the bold conclusion that *all* beliefs need evidence. Other chapters take a conciliatory tone. Evans, for instance, points out that experience provides evidence for beliefs. For example, if I experience the grass as green, this provides evidence in favor of my belief that it is green. In turn, Evans argues theists can meet the evidentialist's demand. The key is to realize that experience of one thing can be mediated by another thing. For instance, someone might hear the voice of her son through a cell phone. In the same way, Evans argues people can have a mediated experience of God through His creation. For example, by looking at a beautiful sunset, someone might experience God and thereby have evidence for His existence.

Part two explores the extent to which a person's evidence for or against religious belief depends on other factors, including a person's character and other beliefs. William Wainwright, E.J. Coffman, Jeff Cervantez, and Thomas Crisp contribute chapters. Some of these chapters offer suggestions as to why theists and atheists disagree over the evidence for God's existence. For instance, Wainwright claims that it might be due to sin. Other chapters argue that, given other beliefs atheists hold, they cannot launch certain arguments against theism. For example, Crisp considers the atheist that accepts the theory of evolution. He argues such an atheist has no reason to think that she can reason reliably about abstruse philosophical matters. Evolution provides reason to think that humans will be able to do things well that are useful to their survival, such as reproducing, but it provides no reason to think that humans can do things well that are not useful to their survival, such as reasoning about abstract philosophy. In turn, if there is no reason for atheists to think they can reason reliably about abstract philosophy, there is no reason for them to think that certain abstruse philosophical premises are true that compose various arguments they make against God's existence. For instance,

atheists routinely argue against theism by claiming there are no reasons that would justify God in allowing horrendous evils like the Holocaust. However, given the theory of evolution, Crisp thinks atheists cannot know this is true.

Part three of the book looks at actual evidence for and against theism. Thomas Kelly, Kelly James Clark, Andrew Samuel, William Rowe, William Hasker, and John Hick contribute chapters. In favor of theism, Kelly explores the viability of the *consensus gentium* argument, the idea that there is evidence in favor of God's existence given the fact that there is widespread belief in Him. At first, the idea that widespread acceptance of a belief might provide evidence in favor of its truths seems odd. Nonetheless, Kelly argues that it is not so strange, since we routinely reason this way. For instance, if someone learns that all of the neighbors on her block think that their recycling will be picked up on Wednesday, then she has reason to think that this is true. Against theism, Rowe argues that theists cannot claim that God is the greatest possible being. He starts by observing that our current universe could have been better than it is. For instance, it would have been better if it contained more life-supporting planets like Earth. However, if our universe could have been better than it is, then God Himself would have been a better being if He had created a better universe than what He did in fact create. In turn, if God could have been better, then, contrary to the theists, He is not the greatest possible being.

The editors have done an excellent job bringing together a first-rate group of philosophers. Scholars and serious students will want to use this book as the starting point for thinking further about the issues it addresses.

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Owensboro, Kentucky

C.E. Hill. *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 295. Hardback. ISBN 9780199551231. \$27.95 Hardback.

It seems like nearly every year a new "Gospel" is being unearthed by archaeologists, each of whom claims the document offers us a new perspective on the historical Jesus and the movement he inspired. This trend coincides with a scholarly community that emphasizes early Christian diversity over unity, privileges heresy over orthodoxy, and offers political readings of early Christian historical theology. And, of course, novelists such as Dan Brown have provided us with bestselling fictional works that assume the heresy-before-orthodoxy, competing Christianities paradigm.

Charles Hill, who teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, has little patience for the scholarly status quo. In *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*, Hill offers a critique of scholars such as Bart Ehrman, Elaine Pagels, and Lee McDonald, each of whom argues that ecclesiastical power politics rather than theological considerations resulted in

the church's embracing of the four canonical Gospels. *Who Chose the Gospels?* demolishes the questionable historical work of such scholars, which is helpful. As an added bonus, Hill writes in a playful, even punchy way that plays off of the popular idea that the Bible is the product of a vast Catholic conspiracy.

Hill chips away at the conspiracy thesis bit by bit. He demonstrates that many scholars play fast and loose with statistics in an effort to prove that the Gospels were less popular than other writings now deemed heretical. Hill defends Irenaeus against scholarly attempts to paint him as a heresy-hunting power-monger. He shows that writers such as the Apostolic Fathers and Justin Martyr had the same regard for the four canonical Gospels as Irenaeus. He shows how Gospel summaries and harmonies actually prove the greater acceptance of the four Gospels rather than apocryphal documents. Hill tentatively suggests that the Apostle John, who was the same person as John the Elder, played a key role in promoting the four-fold Gospel. The author's cautious proposal stands in welcome contrast to the sweeping claims made by the scholars whom he is critiquing.

In his conclusion, the author argues that no one person or council "chose" the Gospels, but rather Christian leaders increasingly recognized an apostolic quality about the canonical Gospels that was lacking in other writings of the era. This recognition was based upon a combination of key relationships, minor differences among the Gospels, and doctrinal considerations. In short, early Christians valued the insights and recommendations of their forebears, appreciated the way the four Gospels offered different, but complementary portrayals of Jesus, and, differences notwithstanding, recognized a common doctrinal core among Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. To Christians of the second and third centuries, the Gospels had a "self-attesting authority" that was lacking in other would-be Gospels (244).

Who Chose the Gospels? is a great resource for traditionalist Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox scholars and clergy. For professors, Hill pushes back against the reigning scholarly paradigm that assumes the absence of any sort of normative orthodoxy. For pastors, Hill provides a helpful apologetic resource for answering questions raised by anxious church members who have been confused by documentaries on The History Channel or articles in *National Geographic*. Unfortunately, Hill will likely not convince many scholars on the other side; worldview considerations factor into this discussion at least as much as scholarly evidence. Nevertheless, he will help to persuade many students and pastors not to abandon traditional interpretations of the canonization process and the formulation of orthodoxy. *Who Chose the Gospels?* should be on every pastor's bookshelf. It would also make a fine supplemental textbook for courses in early church history or New Testament text criticism.

Nathan A. Finn
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Robert Kolb. *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. vii + 188 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-3891-4. \$21.99 Paperback.

Luther and the Stories of God takes the reader on a carefully crafted tour of Martin Luther's basic insights into the gospel and its hermeneutical significance when attending to the narratives of Scripture. Readers could not hope for a better tour guide than Robert Kolb. The maturity of his long handling of Luther yields a confident sense of the whole as the reader moves through large swaths of Luther's preaching and lectures on Biblical narratives. Kolb brings these practices of Luther into conversation with current "narrative" approaches. The result, in the account of this reviewer, is a helpful point of entrance for those trying to navigate the difficult terrain of preaching, teaching and understanding Biblical narratives as a living Word. Luther understands himself to inhabit the same divine economy as the biblical narratives. This location within the divine economy allows Luther's preaching and lecturing to have a sense of immediacy and urgency when reading Biblical narratives in light of the gospel and for the present community of faith.

Luther was a master story-teller, so Kolb states in his first chapter. Luther's chief aim both in his preaching and university lectures was to shape his hearers in light of the paradigmatic narrative of Holy Scripture: the primary location where God reveals himself and forges human identity. From this introductory chapter, Kolb then presents what he deems Luther's "metanarrative." This metanarrative, or over-arching narrational framework, was shaped by Luther's conviction that God acts in history, and, moreover, our understanding of God is never abstracted from God's *ad extra* move towards humanity. The jolt of God's revelation of himself in human history as witnessed to in Holy Scripture is God's hiding of himself from human reason. Again and again God defies our expectations about what it means for God to be God. The presentation of human history in Holy Scripture—a presentation Genesis 1-11 reifies in the narrative move through apostasy, repentance, and obedience—assumes God's interaction with humanity within the divine economy of God's redemption of sinners.

For Luther, as for most within the grand-stream of pre-modern biblical commentators, the divine economy witnessed to in Holy Scripture is the self-same divine economy inhabited by Luther. He and his hearers breathed the same air. The narratives of Scripture aid the Christian in what Luther understood as the ultimate purpose of engaging God's word: cultivating the Christian life as a *life of repentance* (p. 18). Three nodal points provide the hermeneutical framework for Luther's preaching and teaching of biblical narratives: one, law and gospel; two, two kinds of righteousness (passive and active); and three, two kingdoms or two realms. It goes beyond the purview of this brief review to engage critically Luther's guiding hermeneutic. Suffice it to say, Kolb is nuanced enough in his presentation of Luther's teaching—or we should say Luther is sufficiently nuanced—to anticipate and clarify the typical

challenges directed at these interpretive instincts: e.g., the gospel is neutered of its imperatival force, the “legal fiction” of *justitia aliena*, and the two kingdoms lets Christians off the hook of cultural engagement.

“Luther’s sermons were conceived in the study and born in the pulpit” (p. 30). Thus is Kolb’s point of entry into chapter two where Luther’s particular use of story or narrative is engaged. Kolb presents Luther as one who valued the positive force story played in preaching and teaching. Of special interest in this chapter is the interlocution between Luther and modern practitioners of so-called narrative hermeneutics/theology. Luther is much more in line with Kevin Vanhoozer’s “canonical-linguistic” approach over against Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” understanding of Biblical language: an understanding of biblical language as hemmed in by community use. Nevertheless, Luther makes for an interesting conversation partner with Sternberg, Frei, Lindbeck and others. Luther believed story deployed in imaginative ways was rhetorically effective in shaping the hearer. His preference in preaching was biblical narratives, though he allowed himself liberty to use narratives or illustrations from outside the Biblical canon.

The remaining chapters of Kolb’s volume then take the reader into the world of Luther’s actual preaching and teaching. Kolb shows how Luther allowed Biblical narratives to shape his hearers in the following areas of the Christian life of repentance: fearing, loving, and trusting God; the life of *Anfechtung* (suffering); the call to praise and prayer; loving one’s neighbor; and the *ars moriendi* (the art of dying). These chapters are chock-full of insights that preachers, teachers, and readers of God’s word can turn to when engaging these different *topoi* of the Christian life. Luther’s teaching ministry is certainly influenced by his place in time, but it is not bound by such. Though there are aspects of Kolb’s (and Luther’s) presentation worthy of critical query, readers are indebted to both for the gems presented in this volume.

Mark S. Gignilliat
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Timothy S. Goeglein. *The Man in the Middle: An Inside Account of Faith and Politics in the George W. Bush Era*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2011. xvi + 241 pp. Hardback. 978-14336-7288-0. \$19.99 Hardback.

George W. Bush’s reputation as president leaves much to be desired. Public opinion polls and scholarly rankings generally categorize Bush as one of America’s worst presidents. Few people have raised their voices in defense of the 43rd President and his record. Timothy Goeglein is one of those individuals. As one of the longest serving White House aides to President Bush, Goeglein knows Bush and his record and seeks to salvage the President’s reputation. The author readily admits that he was not part of the Bush inner-circle, but demonstrates that his position as Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the Office of Public Liaison from 2000 to 2008 al-

lowed him to witness what few are ever privileged to see: the inner-workings of a presidential administration and the true character of a President.

Goeglein's White House memoir is written from the perspective of a politically-engaged Christian conservative. Raised in a traditional mid-western family that transitioned from the Lutheran Church in America to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as the former drifted away from orthodoxy, Goeglein followed his parent's lead in devouring the writings of political and Christian conservatives, ancient and modern. After graduating from Indiana University's School of Journalism, he worked for leading figures of the Religious Right in the state: Dan Quayle and Dan Coats. After serving as the communications director for Gary Bauer's unsuccessful campaign for the 2000 Republican nomination, Goeglein became the Director of Media Coalitions in the Bush-Cheney campaign. After Bush's close victory in 2000, Karl Rove asked Goeglein to work in the Bush White House serving as the "middle man" between the President and his base—fiscal conservatives and conservative Christians.

Goeglein's seven years of funneling ideas and opinions between the White House and organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the Family Research Council serves as the basis from which he evaluates the Bush presidency. Goeglein concludes that Christian conservatives should appreciate Bush because "no president in the contemporary era did more to advance life, marriage, and religious liberty than George W. Bush" (137). He recounts Bush's efforts to defund embryonic stem cell research, establish his office of faith-based initiatives, and defend traditional marriage. While these reminiscences may help conservatives remember what they liked about George W. Bush, they will likely do little to sway his most ardent critics. For instance, little effort is made to justify Bush's decision to invade Iraq or to defend other controversial aspects of Bush's presidency.

Goeglein ultimately wants his readers to see that Bush was a committed Christian and wise servant leader who genuinely cared for people and the country as a whole. This characterization comes across most powerfully at the beginning of the book where Goeglein describes his own downfall. In February 2008, a newspaper reporter discovered that Goeglein had plagiarized nearly two-dozen columns published in his hometown newspaper. The first chapter of the book recounts this painful experience, which ended with Goeglein's resignation from the White House. He makes no excuses for his actions and emphasizes that President Bush and others in the administration comforted and prayed for him, rather than ostracize him as one would expect. This, he says, shows the real measure of the man he worked for and of those surrounding him.

Readers of this journal will appreciate the author's frank confession of his sins and his testimony of receiving unmerited grace and forgiveness from God and others in the aftermath of his scandal. They will also be intrigued by his stories of working in the White House and in the conservative movement

of the last few decades. Rather than the popular caricature of that movement, readers will find conservative activists who were intelligent, cultured thinkers who read widely and cherished the exchange of ideas. Readers will also appreciate the author's opinion on politics. Though a political activist himself, Goeglein repeatedly argues that conservative Christians should view public policy as secondary to shaping the culture. Getting the "right" people into political office will be of little benefit in an increasingly secular and hedonistic culture. His prescription for cultural reform, however, is disappointingly vague, consisting primarily in a call for "a refreshed and renewed Judeo-Christian consensus in America" (213).

While this book is not the last word on the Bush presidency or on the role of faith in politics, it is a well-written, moving, and at times entertaining tale of an important chapter in the life of our nation. It offers an invaluable glimpse inside the workings of the Religious Right, particularly when it had a prominent seat at the table of national political power. It is also an important corrective to the Bush record, a corrective that, when joined by contributions yet to come, should eventually revive the reputation of the imperfect, yet remarkable, 43rd President of the United States of America.

Brent J. Aucoin
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John Goldingay. *Key Questions about the Christian Faith: Old Testament Answers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. xiii + 345pp. Paperback. ISBN 9780801039546. \$24.99 Paperback.

In this apologetically oriented book, well-known OT scholar John Goldingay addresses 25 questions about the Christian faith. Each chapter answers one question and does so primarily from the author's "First Testament" perspective. In using this phrase, Goldingay connects the OT to the NT and contends that the former should be read "not as something old and legalistic but as something pristine and creative" (xi). The questions addressed in this book range from the classic (e.g., "How do God's Love and God's Wrath relate to each other?," "Is Election Fair?"), to topics treated in systematic theology (e.g., "Who is God?," "What is Sin?"), to more detailed theological questions (e.g., "What is a Covenant?," "Was the Holy Spirit Active in First Testament Times?"), to Christian living (e.g., "Should I Tithe Net or Gross?," "How Does Prayer Work?"), and to contemporary issues in society (e.g., "Is God in the City?," "Does God Care about Animals?").

Since so many topics are addressed in this book, this review will focus on some of its notable points rather than attempting a comprehensive summary. Parts of Goldingay's work that were particularly insightful include his response, based on Ecclesiastes and Job, to the problems of death and suffering (pp. 56-66). Likewise, the chapter entitled "What Does it Mean to be Human?" has a helpful emphasis on the disabled based on Goldingay's expe-

riences of living with a disabled spouse (p. 42). He also clearly debunks the idea that the God of the OT is a God of wrath and the God of the NT is a God of love (p. 12). Other parts of his work were thought-provoking, such as his view that there is an asymmetrical relationship between God's love and God's wrath, with the former being his "dominant side" (p. 23). Insights like these are frequent throughout the book as Goldingay draws upon his vast knowledge of the OT. This work is also to be commended for addressing some questions that are not usually addressed in other books like it.

On the other hand, there are also parts that readers more theologically conservative than Goldingay will find edgy, or worse. For example, he occasionally uses questionable anthropomorphisms, such as "God [was] out for a stroll in the cool of the evening" (p. 1), God's "tough, angry, negative side" (p. 12), and "Yahweh is often a pushover when urged not to act in punishment" (p. 18). Yet there are even more troubling statements scattered throughout the work. Although proposing a "different framework" (p. 25) for the open theism debate ("Does God Have Surprises?"), Goldingay nevertheless affirms, "Sometimes God does not know how the future will turn out" (p. 34). Elsewhere he refers to Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Job as "fictional stories" (p. 61) and associates them with Jesus' parables. Also, on the basis of his assertion that "the First Testament does not link sacrifice with legal categories" (p. 148), he claims that their use in understanding the atonement "looks unscriptural as well as unlikely to aid the proper preaching of the gospel" (p. 148)—an implicit rejection of the penal substitution theory of atonement. More examples could be cited, and such troubling statements are serious enough to warrant caution.

There is no doubt that this book contains many insights from an accomplished OT scholar, but its troublesome parts make it difficult to recommend to its apparent target audience—"seekers" or inquisitive Christians. Such readers may not be able to sift through the varied material adequately. Those who are able and willing to do this will benefit from its insights and gain a survey of Goldingay's thought on a variety of issues.

Kevin Chen
Jackson, TN

Ronald J. Sider, ed. *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012. 216 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9780801036309. \$27.99 Paperback.

Ronald J. Sider is president of Evangelicals for Social Action and professor of theology, holistic ministry, and public policy at Palmer Theological Seminary. As a bestselling author who has worked, taught, and written on topics related to killing for more than three decades, Sider is well qualified to produce a text on the early church and killing.

As its subtitle implies, *The Early Church on Killing* is a compilation of primary source writings from the early church on the act of killing in various contexts. Sider plainly writes, “In this book I have sought to provide in English translation all extant data directly relevant to the witness of the early church on killing” (p. 14). The reader should note that in using the term “early church” Sider is referring to the roughly 300-year period from Jesus’ death until the reign of Constantine.

Structurally, *The Early Church on Killing* consists of a brief introduction, wide-ranging primary source material organized into four parts, and an afterword. The four parts into which Sider organizes his primary sources are: Christian Writers before Constantine, Church Orders and Synods, Miscellaneous Items, and Other Evidence of Christian Soldiers before Constantine. Some of the early writers and sources included in this compendium include: *Didache*, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, *First Clement*, *Second Clement*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, *Didascalia apostolorum*, Julius Africanus, Origen, St. Cyprian, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius of Alexandria, Archelaus, Adamantius, *Dialogue on the True Faith*, Arnobius of Sicca, Lactantius, *Apostolic Tradition*, Three Later Church Orders, *Synod of Arles*, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, Paul of Samosata, and *The Acts of Xanthippe and Polixena*.

In this work Sider has done the researcher a tremendous service in assembling into one place all of the extant works from the early church on the act of killing. Moreover, Sider is to be commended for the brief introduction he gives for each writer or work included, as well as for the helpful explanatory notes that sporadically appear throughout the four sections. These notes give helpful information about the background or context of a particular included source. The modernized English translations, as well as the four extensive indices make this volume very user-friendly and certainly well within the reach of scholars and lay-people alike. Additionally, Sider succeeds in not allowing his personal, Anabaptist, pacifist bias show through in his assemblage and presentation of primary sources.

The above accolades notwithstanding, there are a few drawbacks to *The Early Church on Killing* of which the prospective reader should be aware. While Sider does present primary sources in a dispassionate manner, a reading of his introduction, and especially his afterword, indicate that his agenda in producing this text was not neutral. Specifically, it is clear that Sider wants to argue the writings of the early church support a pacifist view of killing, which he believes to be the Christian position. This idea is flawed, however, by Sider’s presupposition that “Christians much closer to the time of Jesus . . . would be more likely to understand Jesus’s teaching on loving enemies than those who lived centuries later” (p. 13). The problem here is that Christians are to base their view of the ethics of killing (and the related topics of war, abortion, and capital punishment) not solely upon the writings of others, but upon the teachings of Scripture itself.

There is no reason to assume, as Sider apparently does, the Holy Spirit's ability to guide in truth is somehow culturally conditioned or chronologically superior in the early church. Indeed, if this assumption is unsound, then even if it could be proven the early church was pacifistic (a debatable conclusion in light of Scripture and the assembled material), Sider's position could not necessarily be proven. Moreover, most scholars would agree that the methodology of appealing to the aggregate historical view on killing within the Christian tradition would lead one to a non-pacifist position.

One additional shortcoming of *The Early Church on Killing* is that the subtitle might lead the prospective reader to believe this book contains organized, specific material about war, abortion, capital punishment, and the like. While there is much material on these issues scattered throughout this volume, it should be noted that this book is arranged chronologically, not topically. Therefore, there is no specific section of historical material on capital punishment, for example. Additionally, it seems that in this text Sider is more interested in warfare than other topics related to killing, for he devotes 27 of his 32 page afterword to war and military service.

In conclusion, *The Early Church on Killing* is a good sourcebook that ought to find its way onto the bookshelf of students, pastors, and lay-people. Given Sider's pacifist bias, however, regardless of one's own view of the morality of killing, I would suggest skipping the introduction and afterword of this book and just utilizing the assembled primary source material.

David W. Jones
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R. Reed Lessing. *Concordia Commentary: Isaiah 40-55*. St Louis: Concordia, 2011. lii + 737 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-0758602688. \$49.99 Hardback.

R. Reed Lessing is an Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology and the Director of the Graduate School at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Isaiah 40-55 represents his third contribution to the *Concordia Commentary Series*, having already penned commentaries on Amos and Jonah respectively. As with all commentaries, the editorial aims of the *Concordia Commentary Series* shape the direction and scope of this book. While many commentaries fail to highlight the modern relevance of ancient biblical texts, the main purpose of the *Concordia Series* is to "assist pastors, missionaries, and teachers of the Scriptures to convey God's Word with greater clarity, understanding, and faithfulness to the divine intent of the text" (p. x). However, it is the editorial commitment to the belief that every word of the biblical text is the "inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God" (p. x) that controls the commentary's final direction, most importantly the belief that Isaiah 40-55 was authored by the 8th century BCE Isaiah ben Amoz. Such a presupposition places Lessing's work in conflict with the majority of modern critical scholarship on Isaiah.

While the aim of the commentary series is practical application, it is also well researched as the pages contain multiple citations, extended footnote discussions, and a 30 page bibliography. The commentary itself is extensive, offering 671 pages of text, including a 100 page introduction that covers all the wide-ranging issues related to Isaiah studies, such as authorship, historical setting, a brief history of research, outline/structure, genre, and themes – all written at the level of the intended audience. The commentary itself follows the general pattern of offering a translation of the text, in-depth textual notes, and verse by verse commentary, before concluding with a shorter “Reflections” section. Application and New Testament connections are intermixed heavily throughout the sections. The scholarly strength of the commentary is found in the textual notes where Lessing’s grasp of Hebrew syntax and word study is evident. While not overly complex, the intended audience of teacher/preacher/missionary may have some difficulty with these sections unless they’ve recently refreshed their Hebrew.

Whether or not one finds this commentary helpful will largely depend on the reader’s presuppositions regarding Isaianic authorship. Those comfortable with a one-Isaiah authorship will probably find Lessing’s work a refreshing change from the rest of the modern critical commentaries. However, those who hold to different views of Isaianic authorship may find that many of the discussions and explanations seemed stretched to support that presupposition. At the heart of the issue is Lessing’s understanding of biblical prophecy. He argues, “A theory of two or three or four authors for Isaiah (or gradual authorship by disciples or redactors) does not rest on any textual or scholarly proof, but on the unproven opinion that a prophet’s vision could not extend into the future” (p. 20). While this may be partially correct, a prophet’s ability to foretell the future has not been the main issue for many recent evangelical scholars, but rather the need for prophecy to make sense to those to whom it was originally given. This issue seems overlooked as Lessing applies Isaiah 40-55 directly to the Babylonian Exile, with little mention of how that message would have been received by an “original” 8th century audience.

One of the most glaring examples is that Lessing at least seems open to the possibility that Isaiah 40-55 contains polemic against the Babylonian *Akîtu* Festival (pp. 40-41). However, what is the likelihood that an 8th century Judahite would be familiar with this Babylon-specific ceremony? Likewise, Lessing argues that “In terms of international relations, in the eighth century, there was little difference between Babylon as currently ruled by the Assyrian king and later Babylon, which would be ruled by a Chaldean king” (p. 16-17). Such differences were surely clear to the residents of Lachish who were deported by Sennacherib in 701. Additionally, the commentary can read as hostile towards those who do not share similar authorship views. These scholars are in “error” because “If Isaiah did not write the book attributed to him, the NT would be a false witness” (p. 19), and “the documentary hypothesis runs

counter to the Bible's witness and is an assault against evangelical doctrine" (p. 54). Lastly, there is a very strong New Testament focus that runs throughout the commentary, most plainly seen in Lessing's interpretation that the Servant of 49-55 is "Jesus, and Jesus alone" (p. 83).

This is not to say that most will not find the commentary helpful. Lessing's grasp of the text and secondary literature, as well as knowledge of the New Testament is evident. While many even within the target audience may have some difficulties with the commentary, those looking for an accessible and applicable commentary may find it valuable.

Jason T. LeCureux
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Stephen J. Chester, Grant R. Osborne, Mark A. Seifrid, and Chad O. Brand.
Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: Three Views of Romans 7. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011. x + 213 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9780805447910. \$24.99 Paperback.

Romans chapter seven is a notoriously difficult Pauline text. Why does Paul switch from the third- to the first-person in this section of Romans? Whom does the "I" represent? Why does Paul shift from the aorist to the present tense in verse fourteen? Is Paul describing humanity in general, his own life autobiographically, or the ongoing struggle with sin that all Christians face?

This book is laudable for offering in one place the litany of questions surrounding this controverted text, and for presenting a detailed justification of three common but very different interpretations. It is also one of the few "perspectives" books on scriptural text, offering instructive exemplary exegesis. Contributors display charity despite disagreement, and pastoral applications flowing from each different understanding of the text are offered. Helpful responses to each essay from the other contributors highlight new details, as well as reinforce key points in favor of the different interpretations.

Grant R. Osborne proffers that Paul here describes what believers experience in their struggle with sin even after regeneration and conversion. Situating the passage in the broader context of Romans, Osborne elucidates numerous pivotal questions about the text and their various possible answers. He includes answers he disagrees with and answers not represented by the other contributors. With close attention to grammar and vocabulary, he argues that in the first half Paul: (1) presents an apologetic for the Law but condemns sin in the face of his critics; (2) employs first-person "speech in character" to use his own experience as an example of every person; (3) echoes Adam and Eve's confrontation with commandment and sin; (4) and refers to but does not showcase Israel's experience under the Law. He then

contends that the second half depicts, in Pauline flesh–Spirit dualism, believers’ conflicts with sin due to the “flesh” juxtaposed with the possibility of victory in the Spirit. Strengths of Osborne’s essay include his detailed coverage of the reasons for positions other than his own, as well as the use of ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish parallels.

Stephen J. Chester presents the case for the “retrospective view,” or that Paul recounts his pre-Christian life under the Law from his new perspective as a Christian. Chester first explains the historically influential interpretations of Augustine and Wesley. He then argues with detailed exegesis that Paul here engages in what sociologists call “biographical reconstruction” of his former pre-Christian life, and explains why he believes that other interpretations fail. Chester’s essay is commendable for appropriating watersheds in modern Pauline scholarship. These include Kümmel’s highlighting of how Paul elsewhere recounts his pre-Christian view of his relationship to the Law in exclusively positive language, and Stendahl’s elucidation of Paul’s intentions when discussing the Law in the context of questions about Gentile admission into early Christian communities.

In his contribution, Mark A. Seifrid argues that Paul here depicts all of humanity confronted by the Law. After a thorough treatment of the broader context of Romans, Seifrid proceeds to draw on: parallels of the lament genre in Qumran and the Pseudepigrapha, echoes of the Septuagint, the apocalyptic theology underlying much of Paul’s theology, and close and careful exegesis to argue that Romans seven is about neither the believer’s ongoing struggle with sin nor Paul’s own prior pre-Christian life. Rather, urges Seifrid, it is about the universal human problem of sin going back to Adam and humanity’s damning encounter with the Law. This encounter precipitates both a despairing lament and shout of thanksgiving to God through Jesus Christ. Seifrid’s essay is particularly admirable for its comprehensive treatment of Romans as a whole, including the concepts of “Law” and “Spirit” throughout the rest of the epistle.

While each contributor offers practical theological implications resulting from his exegesis, Chad O. Brand does an excellent job of indicating specific pastoral and ministerial applications that flow from the different understandings of Romans seven presented in the book. Brand does so without prejudicing his discussions by his own position, which he does provide, along with some of his reasons for embracing it.

Regarding the volume as a whole, the contributors might have interacted with and employed more of the vast body of contemporary Pauline scholarship. At times one suspects that systematic theological concerns override *a posteriori* exegetical conclusions. Despite this, in a superlative way this book exemplifies informed, detailed, and careful exegesis of a text ridden with exegetical questions and difficulties, as well as the art of moving from exegesis to practical theology. Because it is rigorous enough for scholars and easily acces-

sible to non-specialists, scholars, pastors, ministers and laypersons alike will learn much from this eminently helpful volume.

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James K. A. Smith. *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000. 228 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0830815746.

In fewer than two hundred pages, James K.A. Smith accomplishes several important goals in *The Fall of Interpretation*. In the context of his careful, sustained, and original argument regarding the creational goodness of interpretation, he brings together the worlds of contemporary and traditional Christian theology with those of contemporary and traditional philosophy of religion. As a result, this already influential work can be recommended to a variety of readers.

This text will be helpful for intellectually-curious Christians outside of the academy who are interested in (and/or concerned about) how recent discussions of hermeneutics and post-modern thinking are impacting the interpretation of scripture. Smith's arguments are clear and they often have in mind the theologically-educated layperson. For philosophers of religion who are interested in the so-called "theological turn" in Continental philosophy, this work provides a nice point of entry into how such thinkers as Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida have been impacting religious thinking during the past few decades. Smith's work will likewise prove instructive for academic theologians who are interested in the recently articulated connections between Augustine's thought and contemporary conversations in the philosophy of religion.

The many accomplishments of this very readable and approachable text are made possible by the fact that Smith dwells within and is fluent in the respective languages of several different theological and philosophical communities. He is conversant with contemporary evangelical communities and can speak to the rootedness of these communities in orthodox Christian thinking. He is a philosopher who makes theological contributions. While immersed in the "Continental" tradition, he is just as comfortable speaking the language of analytic philosophers of religion.

Such intellectual multiculturalism makes Smith an ideal guide for the discussion of creation and hermeneutics found in *The Fall of Interpretation*. Avoiding schematics without losing the reader in dense details, Smith crafts his account of the goodness of interpretation by showing how two very different groups of thinkers get interpretation wrong. On the one hand, thinkers like Koivisto and Lints promote the view that interpretation is an activity which is only necessary following the Fall. As this account sees it, prior to human sin individuals had a direct, unmediated knowledge of God's will; there was no

need for hermeneutics. After the Fall, interpretation was needed to mediate the gap created by disobedience. Thus, as this story goes, interpretation is necessary for fallen individuals but not part of God's intended plan for creation.

The work of a second group of thinkers goes a long way toward dispelling the notion that our status as interpreters could somehow be separated from our status as humans (whether before or after a "Fall"). Secular philosophers such as Heidegger and Derrida have argued compellingly that the dream of unmediated knowledge of the world, one which avoids hermeneutics, is merely an illusion. However, such thinkers also argue that, by its very nature, interpretation is "fallen" and "violent." Thus, on this account, interpretation is necessary, but also necessarily problematic. What both the evangelical Christian accounts and secular philosophical accounts of interpretation have in common then, is their denial that interpretation is an inherently good aspect of our humanity which was given to us by God.

Enter James K.A. Smith. Against the backdrop of these prominent accounts, Smith offers his own view, namely that interpretation is part and parcel of what it means to be a created human but that this feature of humanity should be understood as a point of *goodness* in creation rather than as a trauma resulting from the Fall. To establish his position, Smith turns to a particular reading of Augustine, one which requires a good deal of theological scholarship since it means sorting through passages of Augustine which could potentially undermine Smith's argument. In the end, he skillfully leverages the hermeneutics of charity which lies at the heart of Augustine's thought to argue that his own position in *The Fall on Interpretation* is most true to Augustine and most true to the Christian tradition.

His account is compelling, cogent, insightful and original. More as point of full-disclosure than as a critique: potential readers should anticipate that, because it quickly covers a great deal of ground and is written with several audiences in mind, they may at times be disappointed that Smith doesn't take time to either more carefully illustrate his points for the beginner or provide further details for the seasoned scholar. This is simply the nature of a text which does many things at once and which is written with more than one reader in mind. Smith provides a wonderful foundation here for further study and reflection by beginners and old-hands, philosophers and theologians alike.

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J. Stevenson and W.H.C. Frend. *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD 337-461*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. v + 479 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-3970-6. \$45.00 Paperback.

The history of early Christianity is thoroughly rooted in the ancient sources of antiquity. Therefore, in order to more fully understand the development of the Christian church and its emerging theology during the Patristic Period, immersion into the very writings that shaped the faith is absolutely paramount. This is the basic underlying supposition that serves to highlight the creation of the widely successful *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies*.

Now in a revised edition aimed primarily at a North American audience, Stevenson and Frend's excellent primary source reader opens up a window to the formative years of the Christian faith. Here *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* continues to maintain its standing as the companion volume to the editors' similarly successful *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD337*, the point of demarcation between these two valuable works being the death of the first "Christian" Emperor, Constantine. Thus, the source documents included in *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* begin chronologically just after the polarizing Emperor's death and stretch up through the life of the famous missionary Patrick of Ireland.

What lies between is the real treasure of Stevenson and Frend's work – a fascinating look not only at those writings that became the bedrock of Christian belief, but also at some of those heretical ideas that forced the church to reassess and formulate positions that subsequently became orthodoxy. The selections contained therein enable the reader to walk alongside the apostolic and early church fathers as these Patristic figures literally establish the bounds of Christian doctrine and church practice. The sampling of source material includes critical discussions relating to the Trinity, Christology, Christian expansion, monasticism, and much more. Thus, readers of these important historical documents can more fully understand the appeal of monasticism against the backdrop of a territorial Christian church, experience firsthand the Cappadocian Fathers' theological consideration of the unique God-man, Jesus Christ, or stand alongside Augustine in his battle with the Donatists and Pelagius.

The only real shortcomings of this reader rest in two areas and are admittedly minor if not altogether understandable. The first relates to the dominance of "orthodox" works as opposed to those deemed heretical by the church. Some of the latter are included and offer tremendously valuable insight into the arguments and ideas that helped shape the views of orthodoxy; yet *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* is definitively more concerned, according to the sampling of writings chosen, with those accepted as a part of Christian orthodoxy. Secondly, at times a brief introduction to each work would be helpful. For the scholar well acquainted with this period introductions to each of the selections may not be required. However, for students and lay church

members otherwise unfamiliar with the period a brief word relating to the historical context and legacy of each would be a welcome addition.

The most significant revision to *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* from its first publication in 1966 may be found in the division of these primary documents along more personal and thematic lines. A chronology relating to each document is still maintained, but with more useful subdivisions that allow the reader to more easily engage readings related to a specific topic of interest. Moreover, the inclusion of certain documents not found in the 1966 edition helps both to bolster the development of certain doctrinal convictions and to bridge gaps in the advancement of ideas otherwise present.

As a presentation of the writings that helped to direct and orient the early church, *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* is perfectly suited for undergraduate and seminary students in the classroom, and yet it retains significant use for the lay church member who may want to better understand the beliefs they hold as a follower of Jesus Christ. Therefore, *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* is perfectly suited to be read as a stand-alone reader or it may serve as a valuable supplement to a good survey of church history. However it is employed, Stevenson and Frend's work is a valuable resource that affords its reader a much better understanding of the development of Christian thought in the fourth and fifth centuries.

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Kevin Hector. *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language and the Spirit of Recognition*. Current Issues in Theology. 8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. x + 301 pp. Paperback. ISBN. 978-1-107-01028-4. \$30.99 Paperback.

There are two distinct projects at work in this book. In the first Hector offers an incisive discussion of how the problem of a perceived gap between God and human language underwrites contemporary modes of metaphysical thinking (in both essentialism and what he calls "correspondantism") as well as responses and rejections of metaphysics in the apophatic postmodern projects. (represented by Jean-Luc Marion and John Caputo)

The analysis of the shared problematic here is helpful, accessible, and clear, no small feat given how challenging it can be to read analytic and continental thinkers together. Hector's first goal is to offer a "therapeutic" response to the malady of God's distance. The therapy offered is an "overcoming" of metaphysics, a "stripping" of its presuppositions and "releasing us from its grip" (p. i).

The other project in the book is offering an alternative theological method which avoids these problems by way of Schleiermacher and "recognition pragmatism" (p. 40 fn. 76). This way beyond the problems of metaphysics uses "ordinary practice and experience as its explanatory primitive" (p. 45)

explaining how speech about God arises and travels *within* ordinary human practices and experience¹ inhabited by the action of the Spirit.

The reach of Hector's theological exposition within the frames of this ontology produces slightly odd ways of articulating biblical and doctrinal themes. For one, the doctrine of revelation is located within the imminent processes and developments of human cultural linguistic traditions. Hector suggests that there are two pivotal moments in the history of the practices of Christian God-talk; these are what he calls the "canonical gestures" (pp. 137, 175) of Abraham and Jesus. Abraham begins this process by making an "anaphoric gesture" (pp. 171ff.) when, out of the available and at hand cultural notions of gods, he identifies the God who is calling him to be identical with the God who had made a covenant with him (p. 172). The process of handing this anaphoric reference off within the tradition continues and culminates with Jesus, who identifies this God with his own identity and makes the second "canonical picking-out" (p. 175).

Hector is rigidly working out the revelatory process by way of the natural and imminent process of human linguistic traditions in order to counter absolutely any notion of a "gap" between humans and God. Theologically, the emphasis is placed exclusively on the natural ability of human persons to pick out God. There is a conflation, a leveling, here between the traditional distinction between natural and special revelation. There is also a "high" anthropology at work in that it fails to adequately account for the very thing which underwrites the need for revelation: human sin.

When, in the Bible, God is pictured metaphorically as standing at some remove, it is not a problem of the natural function of language; nor is it a literal problem of divine geography; it is a byproduct of humanity's regular and consistent moral failing. The practices of sin manifest false God-talk, idolatry. The Pentateuch, Wisdom literature, Psalms, The Histories, and the Prophets, all employ distance imagery. Are the biblical writers guilty of bad metaphysics? The "problem" of distanciation as well as the more common biblical themes of religious blindness, or deafness, all originate from our sinful condition not from a heavy handed Enlightenment philosophy. This is the point where Hector does not go far enough in his prescription.

Predictably, another byproduct of Hector's urge to keep the various facets and functions of theological language immanent and accessible is that it only requires a low Christology. The function of Jesus Christ in his model is exemplarist: Jesus is the one sent by God, who, from the possible practices and references to God which he had at hand, perfectly picks out and gestures at those which are true. Jesus trains others to pick out faithful gestures and so forth. But that is all that we would need from Jesus, on this model, to be faithful practices of god-talk.

¹ Summaries of his argument are helpfully sprinkled throughout the book. One of the clearest and most extensive is unpacked on pages 37-42.

The lack of any sustained discussion of Scripture, especially its norming role, in a book dedicated to the question of the relationship of God and human language is perhaps the largest and most stunning lacuna.² We normally associate this function with Scripture as the Holy Canon, but the language of canonicity has been relocated to the anaphoric gesturing of Abraham and Jesus. Other troubling signs of this are his suggestion that the *norms* for the practices of god-talk are “implicit within recognitive practices” (pp. 48, 53, 60ff).³ Norms are carried exclusively within linguistic traditions? What would be the norming role of Scripture in this model?

This book is entirely silent on these important issues. Hector raises key questions, both explicitly and implicitly. I suspect that most readers will benefit from their raising even as many may be frustrated by the lack of their resolution.

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Dave Earley. *Pastoral Leadership Is... How to Shepherd God's People with Passion and Confidence*. Nashville: B&H, 2012. 310 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-4336-7384-9. \$16.97 Paperback.

Dave Earley's *Pastoral Leadership Is...* serves as a helpful resource for pastors and teachers of pastors. Earley, who is the Lead Pastor of Grace City Church in Las Vegas and an Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Leadership at Liberty Seminary, writes in an accessible, pastoral style. As a whole, *Pastoral Leadership Is...* appears to be the collection of Earley's notes, arranged in an organized, easy-to-read/use manner.

The author first examines three biblical examples to understand the role of the shepherd: Moses, Jesus, and Paul (chapter 1). Earley emphasizes three particular responsibilities for every pastor in light of these examples: (1) Prayer, (2) Teaching the word, and (3) Equipping/leading others.

Following this introductory chapter, Earley spends six chapters in each of the five parts of the book. The five parts include: (1) Being a Man of God; (2)

² Let alone the revelatory character of Christ, which is another lacuna which time and space will not permit proper exploration here.

³ Also “The normative criterion by which candidate expressions are to be judged is itself the product of a trajectory implicit in expressions recognized as precedential, since one judges a candidate expression of the prevailing piety by determining whether it goes on in the same way as other expressions one recognizes as such. It also follows that the criterion changes, in only slightly, each time a new expression is recognized, since, on the one hand, the relevant norm is itself a product of the normative trajectory implicit in a series of precedents, and on the other, the recognition of a further precedent contributes to the shape of that trajectory” (p. 85).

Praying with Power; (3) Teaching the Word of God; (4) Equipping and Leading Others; and (5) Shepherding God's Flock.

Part 1: Being a Man of God. The issues of calling, integrity, purity, being a faithful servant, engaging in spiritual warfare, and training oneself for godliness are addressed in this section. Regarding *calling*, Earley summarizes various biblical passages on the different callings of individuals. He first notes nine marks of a genuine call according to the Bible. Then he lists five evidences of a true calling. Regarding *integrity*, he summarizes Paul's list of qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. After briefly noting these qualifications, he provides a personal checklist of eight exhortations that he has developed for building a life of integrity. Regarding *purity*, he focuses mainly on the need to pursue financial faithfulness. On being a *faithful servant*, he explains this pastoral expression by using four biblical concepts. Next, he discusses *spiritual warfare*, explaining the "wiles of the devil." Regarding *training for godliness*, Earley discusses the need for discipline, and then provides a sample personal growth plan that includes Bible, prayer, journaling, exercise, mentoring, fasting, and reading.

Part 2: Praying with Power. The next six chapters relate prayer. Earley talks about the need to prioritize prayer, intercede for others, follow Paul's example, fast and pray, make prayer your church's top priority, and to build a house of prayer. Notable features in this section include a helpful chart of Paul's prayers for the churches, and a practical list of suggestions for preparing for a fast, and examples of movements of prayer.

Part 3: Teaching the Word of God. Here, Earley highlights different aspects of the pastors' role in expounding the biblical text. In six chapters, he discusses *preaching, communication, feeding the sheep, studying the Bible, preparing the message, and living and giving the message.* Earley has a high view of Scripture and this leads him describe the need for biblical proclamation. He explains and applies 2 Timothy 4:1-2, providing a foundation for the task. Then he highlights the important of having one dominate idea in a sermon. Next, he notes three primary elements of feeding the sheep. He follows these exhortations with some practical notes on planning one's preaching. Studying the Bible is the focus of the next chapter. Earley has a three-part study process: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. He offers his eight-step plan for preparing the actual sermon in chapter 18. Finally, he exhorts the reader on how to live and give the message.

Part 4: Equipping and Leading Others. Earley describes the importance of equipping others to do ministry in this section. He describes the biblical foundation for equipping the saints in chapter 20, and then provides some practical suggestions in chapter 21. Next, he discusses the nature of mentoring like Jesus, and then provides some practical ways to do 2 Timothy 2:2 mentoring in chapter 23. Chapters 24 and 25 focus more on leadership than equipping. In chapter 24, he discusses the nature of a leader's vision, his need to have proper priorities, and the need for purposeful planning. Next, Earley

talks about how to inspire others as a leader. He includes a helpful chart on page 239 on how to honor others, and how to avoid dishonoring them.

Part 5: Shepherding the Flock. Using biblical expositions, personal testimony, and practical counsel, Earley talks about the following subjects in part 5: (1) Shepherding through Undershepherds; (2) Counseling the Flock; (3) Resolving Conflict; (4) Celebrating the Ordinances; (5) Doing Premarital Counseling and Weddings; and (6) Conducting Funerals.

Young pastors and aspiring pastors will benefit from this book. It is a helpful primer for the pastorate. Looking back on my journey, I would have benefited tremendously from it when I first began doing pastoral work. I appreciate the readability, biblical focus, and seasoned wisdom. Perhaps, others will want a little more on issues like sermon preparation and the role of elders in shepherding. Some time was devoted to sermon preparation, but more could be said about different issues, such as how to practically ensure a Christ-centered focus in each sermon. Elders were mentioned in the book also, but for those who wish to build their shepherding ministry around the plurality of pastors-elders, they will need to find some additional resources on the subject.

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Victor P. Hamilton. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. xxix + 721 pp. Hardback. ISBN 9780801031800. \$54.99 Hardback.

Within the larger context of study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament within the church, Hamilton's commentary on Exodus makes an interesting contribution. Whereas many commentaries are expending effort on placing the teaching of OT books within the context of the church's theology, Hamilton's work has reverted in many ways to a traditionally exegetical treatment of the text. After a short introduction to the book as a whole, the commentary divides the text of Exodus into smaller portion, each of which has three sections: (1) an original translation prepared by Hamilton, (2) grammatical and lexical notes that provide information ranging from Hamilton's translation rationale to comparative philology to how phrases are used in other parts of the text, and (3) a running commentary about the text. This review will analyze briefly the contribution of the introduction as well as each of these sections of the commentary.

While granting the fact that commenting in detail on the translation and interpretation of forty chapters of Hebrew text demands much space, the introduction Hamilton provides seems somewhat lacking. He certainly hits some of the highpoints of structure and theological contributions; yet, a section of methodology would have been helpful. For the reader leaves wondering, among other things, about how his methodology relates to the modern

interpretive grid of OT studies, how he came to his theological conclusions, how he came to make applications to the Christian, etc. The introduction has not really answered the question this reviewer wanted to know: What distinguishes this commentary from others in such a way as to make a contribution? I certainly appreciate that Hamilton did not drone on about traditional critical scholarship, but at the same time, setting his comments within the larger veins of the discipline would be helpful, especially given that he quotes from such scholars as Brevard Childs.

When approaching each section of the text, Hamilton provides his own translation, which contributes greatly to the value of the commentary. The author's skill in the Hebrew language (as well as its cognates) is unquestioned. Although one may prefer some type of reference to the name of God (e.g. Yhwh) instead of the customary LORD, the translation is readable, helpful, and reliable, and the author is to be commended. Furthermore, the grammatical and lexical notes reveal an author that is highly skilled in all elements of Hebrew grammar and philology. He successfully interacts with the ancient translations and demonstrates his broad knowledge of the Hebrew Bible as a whole.

Hamilton also contributes much in his running commentary on the text. Not only does he show proficiency in those areas that are expected of tradition exegetical commentaries (such as interaction with historical, geographical, and Ancient Near Eastern matters), but he also shows that he has thought well about the poetics of biblical narrative, which is a more modern field of study. For example, on the former, he goes to great lengths to show the (dis)connections of the Covenant Code with other law codes of the ANE (pp. 359ff.). On the latter, multiple times he shows that the narrative is arranged in a chiasmic pattern, as for example in Exodus 19–24 (pp. 298ff.). He also shows his knowledge and implementation of inner-biblical exegesis, as seen in his comments on Isaiah 19 and Exodus 3 (p. 57).

Yet, the commentary also has some weaknesses. First, there seem to be some keen observations that are left without explanation. Examples might include a description of a chiasm with the names of the sons of Jacob (p.4), after which the reader might be left asking about the purpose (cf. also p. 36 and the explanation of the verb “quickly” and p. 130 with the connection of “teeming” with Genesis 1 and 6–8). Second, and most significantly, little help is provided in how Exodus can (or should) be taught and preached as Christian Scripture. The author obviously speaks of the text from a Christian perspective, but the preacher who needs assistance in properly preaching law texts to a congregation will be left wondering. The simple question of how the believer should relate to the law is left unanswered. Although there seems to be a latent understanding of how this should be done within Hamilton's traditions, his thoughts about how the church should read Exodus as well as the subsequent theological contribution of the book would be most welcome. In this light, the value for the modern preacher or teacher will be in the valu-

able exegesis of the details of the text and not the theological appropriation of Exodus to the church.

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