

Book Reviews

Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education. By David S. Dockery. B&H Academic, 2007, 288 pp., \$19.99 paper.

Martin Luther once warned Christians with these words: "I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scripture and impress them on the young folk." The great Reformer knew of the importance of Christian education and the development of Christian thinkers, but his great fear of schools as potential "wide gates to hell" is all too justified.

In his new book, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education*, David Dockery proposes that the Christian college or university should not be merely an academic institution with Christian teachers and Christian students, but instead it should be "the academic division of the kingdom enterprise."

Dockery serves as president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, and that school serves, in substance, as evidence of his vision for Christian higher education. Dockery's central model is the Christian university, combining several disciplines of learning and professional study within its institutional reach. He proposes his own vision for making all of these areas of study accountable to Christian truth.

He also calls for the recovery of the Christian mind and the development

of Christian thinkers:

Our task will be intellectually challenging. The work is not easy, but it is faithful to the calling upon Christ-followers. There is no room for anti-intellectualism in Christian higher education. We are to have the mind of Christ, a concept that certainly requires us to think and wrestle with the challenging ideas of history and the issues of our day. To do otherwise would result in another generation of God's people becoming ill-equipped for faithful thinking and service in this still-new century. A Christian worldview is needed to help interpret an ever-changing culture. Instead of allowing our thoughts to be captivated by culture, we must take every thought captive to Jesus Christ.

To their shame, many Christian institutions of learning fall short of a model of responsible Christian scholarship. Dockery calls for a reversal of this trend and a reassertion of the scholarly vocation and responsibility.

In his words: Serious scholarship is often described as "a search for knowledge or a quest for truth," phrases so familiar as to be clichés in higher education. Our task must not be described carelessly or flippantly. When we speak of scholarship from a Christian perspective, we speak of more than scholarship done by Christians. Rather, we speak of a passion for learning based on the supposition that all truth is God's truth. Thus, as Christian scholars related together in a learning community, we are to seek to take every thought captive to Christ.

But the recovery of Christian scholarship and the development of young Christian minds also requires the recovery of the vocation of the teacher. Even as many of the most prestigious academic institutions in the land elevate research above teaching, the Christian school can never forget the central role of the teacher in the educational process. At the same time, those teachers must be practicing scholars who model the academic vocation and the life of the mind.

Dockery explains,

In the large majority of Christian universities, it is teaching that is rightly prized and prioritized, but we also need a complementary place for Christian scholarship. Rightly understood, Christian scholarship is not contrary to either faithful teaching or Christian piety. Christian scholarship provides a foundation for new discovery and creative teaching as well as the framework for passing on the unified truth essential to the advancement of Christianity.

This revealed truth is the foundation of all we believe, teach, and do. We believe that this God-revealed truth is the framework in which we understand and interpret our world, the events of human history as well as our responsibilities toward God and one another in this world. This is what it means for us to advance the Christian intellectual tradition and to love God with our hearts, our strength, and our minds.

Renewing Minds is a genuine and helpful contribution to evangelical scholarship. Furthermore, it comes from one who leads a major Christian university and has earned the credibility to set forth his vision. This book should be read by pastors, parents, educators—and all who share a passion to see the renewal of Christian minds in this generation.

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize? By Robert L. Plummer. Paternoster Biblical Monographs. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006, 190 pp., \$25.00 paper

When Christians want to motivate each other to spread the gospel, passages like Matt 28:19f or 1 Pet 3:15 quickly come to mind. But it is not all that obvious which passage from Paul's letters should be used. This is all the more surprising as Paul is the missionary *par excellence* in the New Testament and as all of his letters were written in the context of the early Christian mission. Robert Plummer, Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, addresses this observation head on and asks in the present volume: "Did the apostle Paul expect the early Christian communities to evangelize?"

Plummer sets out with a detailed survey of research on approaches to the continuity between the mission of Paul and the mission activ-

ity of the churches that he founded (1-42). Plummer rightly observes a dichotomy in scholarship: "Some scholars argue that Paul's writings reflect only a passive or supportive missionary vision for his churches in distinct discontinuity with his own centrifugal mission. Others see evidence for greater continuity between the apostle's own outward-directed missionary labors and his evangelistic expectations of his churches" (41f). In chapter two, "The Church's Mission in the Pauline Letters: A Theological Basis for Apostolic Continuity" (43-70), Plummer argues that the nature of the gospel is powerful and dynamic: it is God's effective, self-diffusing word, spread by the apostle(s) and all other Christians. "Paul speaks of the gospel as a dynamic entity that propelled both him (as an apostle) and the churches (as gospel-created and gospel empowered entities) into the further spread of God's word" (67). He further sets Paul's theology of mission within the broader New Testament understanding of the church's mission. The chapter closes with all too brief observations on the discontinuity of missionary activity between the Old Testament and the New Testament (which in view of Plummer's emphasis on the effective word of God would have deserved more attention!) and a mere two pages on the co-workers of Paul who form a close link between the mission of Paul and the mission of the Pauline communities. In view of its importance for Plummer's case, the effective and dynamic nature of God's word in the Old Testament as

a backdrop for the proclamation of the gospel deserves more than a few lines. This lack of detail is the one weakness in Plummer's otherwise persuasive treatment of a question crucial for our understanding of Paul as well as the nature of the missionary task in the early church and today.

Chapter three examines the instructions to spread the gospel in Paul's letters (71-105). Plummer finds the following Pauline exhortations to witness actively: Phil 1:12-18; 2:14-16; Eph 6:15, 17, 18-20 and 1 Cor 4:16; 7:12-16; 11:1; 14:23-25. He concludes,

There can be no doubt that Paul instructs and approves of his churches actively proclaiming the gospel. In Philippians, Ephesians, and 1 Corinthians ... Paul commands the churches to declare the gospel, to be prepared to do so, or to imitate him in the way that he strives for the salvation of non-Christians. Also, in Philippians, we saw that Paul approvingly mentions that ordinary Christians in his current setting have been emboldened to preach the gospel because of his example (96).

Plummer also discusses reasons why Paul has not addressed the missionary task of the communities more often (96). In addition, there is an expectation to witness passively in 2 Cor 6:3-7, 1 Thess 2:5-12, and Titus 2:1-10 (slaves are charged to adorn the gospel, i.e., to make it attractive through their behaviour).

Chapter four gathers "Incidental Evidence that Paul Expected the Churches to Spread the Gospel in the Apostolic Pattern" (107-39). Paul expected that the gospel would pro-

pel the church in missionary activity that paralleled his own apostolic mission. He also expected that other facets of his apostolic mission would be replicated in the life of the church, namely signs, wonders, and miracles in confirmation of the proclamation of the gospel, prayer for missions: "Paul prayed for the churches' relationship with outsiders, for the churches' internal spiritual health, and (in all likelihood) for his own mission. Paul expected the churches to also pray for the same things. The apostolic ministry of prayer is replicated in the churches" (116). The teaching and "building up" of the church was also part of Paul's expansive missionary vision which he expected to be replicated in his congregations (107-21), together with the apostolic pattern of suffering (121-38). The pattern of suffering in the early church is a powerful argument for the church's missionary nature as it demonstrates that the dynamic and offensive gospel was progressing effectively through its adherents. Plummer concludes that

Paul thought of all but the non-repeatable functions of his apostleship as devolving upon the churches. The cumulative witness ... gives us grounds for concluding that Paul viewed the church as continuing his apostolic mission (minus non-repeatable functions). We would expect nothing less than such missionary activity from an entity defined by the same self-diffusing gospel as its apostolic founder (138).

Plummer concludes by offering a summary of his study and drawing implications (141-45): "Just like the ancient churches that Paul addressed,

modern churches should be active in proclaiming the gospel, suffering for the gospel, authenticating the gospel by their behaviour, confirming the gospel through miracles, building-up the church, and praying for missions and the church" (144). A full bibliography (147-75) and an index of scripture and authors round off the volume.

Plummer offers a short, but succinct study of a significant aspect of early Christian mission. Despite the limited textual evidence that is available, he demonstrates that beyond the apostles and the band of their co-workers, all Christians were called and expected to spread the gospel. This is also to be expected in view of the rapid spread of Christianity from the very beginning. Plummer's study raises a number of important implications for the mission of the church today. Monastic orders, missionary societies, para-church organisations, evangelists, or other certain gifted individuals cannot fulfil the missionary task for the church, nor should they attempt to do so. Close relationships and cooperation with churches will grant them validity and legitimacy. The most effective way of returning the missionary task to the church "is to teach and preach the gospel accurately. Because the gospel is self-diffusive, when it truly dwells in a congregation, that congregation will experience 'spontaneous expansion', empowered by God's word and presence" (144f). Plummer's stress on the effective, self-diffusing nature of the gospel carries missiological implications but also implications for the nature of the church. If this word

of God is no longer sufficiently or correctly proclaimed, the church divests itself of its dynamism and vitality. No programmes whatsoever will be able to replace this force on the long run. The last words belong to Plummer: "While Paul does speak of the missionary task entrusted to him as an *obligation*, it is more comprehensively described as a natural overflow of the dynamic gospel's presence in his life. The church also, because it is created and characterized by the same gospel, must be an active missionary community" (145).

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Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation. By Graeme Goldsworthy. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006, 341 pp., \$29.00.

Graeme Goldsworthy, a retired lecturer from Moore Theological College, Sydney, carries his passion for biblical theology and applies it to the discipline of hermeneutics. As the title of this work suggests, Goldsworthy unashamedly seeks to develop a thorough-going evangelical hermeneutic. The book is divided into three parts. Part one, "Evangelical Prolegomena to Hermeneutics," considers the foundations and presuppositions of evangelical exegesis, interpretation, and theology. Goldsworthy strongly affirms that the Bible has a single, coherent

message—a message that centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ: “At the heart of evangelicalism is the belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation to mankind of God’s mind, and the defining fact of human history. The person and work of Jesus provide us with a single focal point for understanding reality” (21). Because neutrality and complete objectivity are presuppositional myths, it is better to declare our assumptions up front. Thus, he explains that his evangelical presuppositions (e.g., grace alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, faith alone), as well as his gospel-centered hermeneutics are Christocentric. He states, “For hermeneutics to be gospel-centered, it must be based on the person of Jesus Christ” (58). He then gives the reader a sampling of his biblical theology by examining (1) Creation and Fall, (2) Torah, (3) Wisdom, (4) Prophets, (5) the Gospels, (6) Acts, (7) the Epistles, and (8) Revelation. Only when the progression of biblical revelation is understood can we accurately interpret the Bible.

Part two, entitled “Challenges to Evangelical Hermeneutics,” is a survey and critique of the history of hermeneutics. Goldsworthy addresses several influences that have caused the gospel to be minimized or ignored throughout the history of the church. He traces how the intrusion of inconsistent presuppositions and unbiblical philosophies resulted in the true gospel message being eclipsed in (1) the early church, (2) the medieval church, (3) Roman Catholicism, (4) liberalism, (5) philosophical hermeneutics, (6) historical

criticism, (7) literary criticism, and (8) evangelicalism.

Perhaps the most interesting and relevant chapter in this section is the final one, which evaluates the eclipse of the gospel in evangelicalism. He first mentions the danger of Quietism (or evangelical Docetism), which relates to those who claim they do not make decisions because the Holy Spirit makes them for us. In this case, the “human characteristics of the biblical documents are ignored” and “historical and biblical theological context are regarded as irrelevant” (168). Literalism (or evangelical Zionism) fails to correctly understand both the progressive nature of biblical revelation and the use of figurative language in the Bible. Thus, some (wrongly) insist that certain prophecies in the OT must be interpreted literally—especially those prophecies related to the restoration of the nation of Israel. One problem with a literalistic approach is that the NT authors do not interpret OT prophecies literally. A third danger, legalism (or evangelical Judaism) highlights humanity’s desire to merit salvation. Decisionism (or evangelical Bultmanism) involves the calling for decisions to follow Jesus without telling people *why* they should make such a decision. Goldsworthy comments, “The problem is not in the call for decision. The error of decisionism is to dehistoricize the gospel and to make the decision the saving event” (174). Subjectivism (or evangelical Schleiermacherism) is the trend to elevate feelings over thinking. It is the idea that if something *feels* right, then it must *be* right. The problem is

that such a focus on emotions “is in fact a form of reader-response hermeneutics in which the reader, often under the guise of being led by the Spirit, determines the meaning of the text” (176). A sixth danger, Jesus-in-my-heart-ism (or evangelical Catholicism), puts too much emphasis on God’s grace as a kind or spiritual infusion into the life of the Christian and tends to minimize the focus of God’s grace in the historic gospel event of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. As Goldsworthy says, “The gospel is seen more as what God is doing *in* me now, rather than what God did *for* me then” (176). Further, the NT does not speak in terms of asking Jesus into one’s heart, nor does it ever teach us to pray to Jesus. Finally, Goldsworthy discusses the dangers of evangelical pluralism and evangelical pragmatism.

The third part of the book, “Reconstructing Evangelical Hermeneutics,” considers the role of critical evangelical approaches to the literature, history, and theology of the Bible. After highlighting some pre- and post-Enlightenment evangelical interpretation, Goldsworthy offers three key principles: (1) the sole content of Scripture is Christ (unity), (2) Scripture is self-authenticating (authority), and (3) Scripture is self-interpreting (meaning). The literary dimension of Scripture is then examined. This chapter includes a brief section on linguistics, speech-act theory, and double-agency discourse. The historical dimension examines the importance of history in evangelical hermeneutics. The section on theology is divided into two chapters: (1)

the two testaments and typology and (2) biblical and systematic theology. Next, Goldsworthy discusses the role of contextualization in the hermeneutical process, including a helpful section on contextualization and the translation of the Bible. The final chapter offers a summary of how Christ must be the ultimate aim and interpretive center of evangelical hermeneutics. This chapter ends with some practical suggestions for reading and studying the Bible.

Overall I found this book helpful in painting the big picture of hermeneutics. We are reminded that the science (and art) of hermeneutics does not merely involve a step-by-step method of interpreting the Bible or certain principles for interpreting the various genres of Scripture. Goldsworthy's aim is to stress the importance of biblical theology in the interpretation process. As he states in his book, "I want to commend the much neglected role of biblical theology in hermeneutical practice" (15). Before we seek to interpret an individual text we must first of all understand the flow of redemptive history. The stress on Christ as the focus of hermeneutics is also a good reminder. Goldsworthy reminds us that "the prime question to put to every text is about how it testifies to Jesus" (252). This Christ-centered approach also applies to the OT because God has given us a unified message.

I was not, however, completely satisfied with the book. At times (especially in part two) I felt that it was so philosophical and academic that the average pastor or Bible

interpreter would quickly lose interest. Goldsworthy provides a solid foundation for biblical hermeneutics but rarely carries these principles through to provide concrete examples. His discussion of hermeneutics remains somewhat abstract. As such, I would not recommend this book as a main textbook for a college or seminary course on hermeneutics. It may, however, serve as a secondary text to highlight evangelical presuppositions and the need for biblical theology. Another shortcoming of the book is Goldsworthy's dependence on secondary literature. Although he readily admits this in his book (87, 107), it seems that in the end it would have paid off to examine and quote from original sources.

Benjamin L. Merkle
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Theology: The Basic Readings. By Alister McGrath. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, xxi + 210 pp., \$24.95 paper.

The prolific Oxford professor Alister McGrath has added a new item to his bibliographical tapestry—another volume of readings in theology. This volume is much smaller than his earlier work, *The Christian Theology Reader*, and has a less ambitious goal. The book is a companion to McGrath's other new work, *Theology: The Basics*, and, like that book it is intended for an audience that knows little or nothing about theology. As McGrath notes, "It *assumes* that you know virtually nothing about the subject" (xi, italics his). The volume contains some good

selections from historical sources, mostly orthodox, but his selection of more contemporary authors leaves something to be desired. Various liberals, feminists, and neoorthodox theologians are cited, but little from modern evangelical writers. Still, the book is a good resource and can be used effectively in an introductory course on theology. The price is somewhat prohibitive at \$75.00 for the cloth edition and \$25.00 for the paperback in such a slim volume. Perhaps Blackwell might consider a more "Basic" price for the volume.

Chad Owen Brand

Passionate Conviction: Contemporary Discourses on Christian Apologetics. Edited by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig. Nashville: B & H, 2007, viii + 280 pp., \$19.99 paper.

Here is another fine work in apologetics published by B & H Publishers in Nashville. Copan and Craig assembled a very fine team of writers to deal with a set of specific contemporary issues in apologetic discourse. Especially helpful are the chapters by Jay Richards on contemporary issues in design argument and Francis Beckwith's chapter on moral relativism. The essay by N. T. Wright on the resurrection of Jesus is a very fine piece of historical work done in a short essay. His discussions of the rise of resurrection belief in Judaism is very helpful, as is his defense of the bodily nature of Jesus' resurrection over against those theologians who want instead to argue for some form of spiritual exaltation of the Savior

after his death.

Craig Hazen of Biola University has also contributed a helpful essay on Christianity in the world of religions. Among other points, he notes that the very fact that nearly all world religions co-opt Jesus for their own purposes ought to make us pay attention to Christianity as the central religious tradition which ought to be examined and evaluated by everyone. R. Scott Smith's essay on MacLaren and the Emergent tradition is also incisive. He notes that the emergent people are asking important questions, but coming up for the most part with the wrong answers. Gary Habermas also wrote a very fine piece on emotional doubt, an article that can be helpful for pastors to use with their church members.

In all, this is a very good book. I was a bit disappointed in a book on "Contemporary Discourses" that there was no substantive discussion of Presuppositionalism. Also, it is obvious that the contributors are all (or nearly all) out of the libertarian tradition.

Chad Owen Brand

Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study. By Markus Bockmuehl. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, 297 pp., \$21.99.

Markus Bockmuehl has contributed a thought-provoking book that illuminates the way for future productive New Testament study. The work is the first in the Studies in Theological Interpretation series and reads like a conglomeration of essays with an intended order and shape, beginning

with the problem, moving toward a proposed solution, and concluding with illustrative case studies. Bockmuehl—professor of biblical and early Christian studies at the University of St. Andrews—argues that in order to survive as an intellectual discipline, New Testament studies must focus more carefully upon effective history (i.e., the history of the text's effect upon the church) and upon the text's implied readings and readers.

Bockmuehl begins with a discussion of Simon Marmion's miniature, *St. Luke Painting the Virgin and Child*, in which Luke is depicted painting a portrait of the virgin and child that is "deliberately and strikingly different" from the reality sitting before him (16). In Luke's version, the pair appears less messy and more heavenly. Bockmuehl argues that the scholar is similar to Marmion—"painting the biblical author painting Christ" (19). The scholar must reckon with the "real" empirical image *and* the one viewed through the lens of the biblical author. Biblical exegesis "fails to do justice to both if it denies either their difference or their sameness" (20). Bockmuehl contends that all interpreters can benefit from the rediscovery that adequate interpretation will ultimately resemble Marmion's task.

The book proceeds in three stages: (1) taking stock of the problem, (2) exploring implied readers and readings, and (3) "remembering the Christ" (24). Chapter 1 examines current predicaments in New Testament studies, as well as past "rescue attempts," offering two suggestions for ways forward: (1) effective his-

tory and (2) implied readings and readers. Chapter 2 describes the "implied exegete" whom the biblical texts themselves envision—namely, a believing disciple. Chapter 3 turns to implied readings, arguing that the text ultimately "intends believers' instruction, encouragement, and hope" (119). Chapter 4 considers the relationship between Peter and Paul with regard to the reception history of the post-apostolic period. Chapter 5 provides an illustration of the organic link between text and church through the work of British scholar E. C. Hoskyns.

In the final two chapters, Bockmuehl moves to the third stage of the book, "remembering the Christ." Chapter 6 argues for the importance of living memory in the apostolic period. Chapter 7 considers the implications of the gradual rediscovery of Jesus' Jewish identity in New Testament scholarship. Lastly, a summary epilogue closes the book.

Bockmuehl has clearly demonstrated that there is a problem in New Testament studies. He argues persuasively that the discipline fails to manifest "anything approaching a consensus about even its purpose and object" (39) and that the future of New Testament studies as a publicly accepted academic discipline is questionable at best. While Bockmuehl's remedy will likely not convince everyone, he succeeds in posing the problem in such a way as to elicit a sense of urgency for seeking some kind of solution.

His critique of traditional "rescue attempts" also appears accurate. On the one hand, modern historical-

criticism has been short-sighted, tending to neglect that, given the theological nature of the New Testament, there can be “no objective history—and certainly no neutral historian” (45). On the other hand, postmodern ideological criticism has not fared any better, curiously combining suspicion of the motives of the biblical authors with a naïve credulity toward its own agenda (51). Both routes suffer from the same weakness: failure to be self-critical. At this point the reader is set up nicely for Bockmuehl’s solution.

Indeed, his solution—effective history and implied readings and readers—appears promising. Viewing the New Testament as the Scripture of the church, even if merely from a phenomenological vantage point, is a fruitful endeavor “for any approach that aims to do justice to the texts themselves, let alone to their historic footprint” (64). For those of us who hold the Bible as the rule of faith, it is especially beneficial to view the text as whole, given by God to shape his people. But even if one were not to share this presupposition, there are conceivable benefits to studying it the way Bockmuehl describes, since this is the way the text appears to present itself, and this is the way that the majority of the church has received it.

Moreover, Bockmuehl’s emphasis upon implied readings and readers is also to be welcomed. For a work of the magnitude of the Bible, a reading *with* the grain of the text, rather than against it, seems only fair. Of course, this kind of approach will inevitably create a sharp division between

“interpretations that seek to hear and expound the text and those that intend primarily to subvert it” (74). In this case, Bockmuehl’s proposal will no doubt hold out more promise for those of the former persuasion than those of the latter. Yet, one wonders if this is such a bad prospect; any great piece of literature deserves at least a mildly sympathetic reading.

Therefore, Bockmuehl provides good stimulus for rethinking New Testament interpretation. At the same time, the book suffers from two weaknesses. First, despite its witty and thought-provoking individual chapters, it is not particularly well-constructed as a whole. To be sure, a general shape is present. But the chapters and their arguments are not put together in a fashion that convincingly establishes a thesis. The book begins strongly enough, with a statement of the problem and two suggestions for ways forward. But soon enough Bockmuehl’s forest often cannot be seen for the trees. For example, his chapter on Peter and Paul feels unexpected and awkwardly placed, and even more so does the chapter on E. C. Hoskyns. To a slightly lesser degree, the same could be said of the following two chapters. In themselves, the chapters are interesting and suitably-crafted, but as a whole they have the appearance of a disparate collection of essays that have a common theme but do not flow together to make a tightly-woven argument.

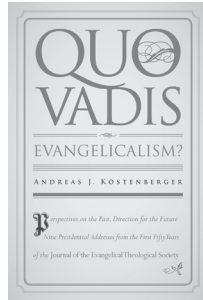
Second, with all the discussion of implied readers, one cannot help but wonder who Bockmuehl’s own implied reader may be. On the one

hand, his argument for canonical, theological interpretation of the Bible will find a ready-made audience with those of us who already take the Bible as an inspired whole. Yet Bockmuehl will no doubt have a much tougher time convincing those who do not share his assumptions. This would be fine if it did not seem as though he were sometimes appealing to these very people. He writes that “students of Christian faith, of other faiths, or of no faith can find their own understanding of the New Testament honed and interrogated by a plural but common conversation about the object of these writings” (231-32). While on some level a “common conversation” may be a possibility, one wonders what the incentive to join the conversation would be for someone with a radically different approach (e.g., a postmodern deconstructionist). Bockmuehl would need to provide much more evidence to convince someone like this that his ways forward are truly viable for interpreters of all stripes.

In the end, Bockmuehl has succeeded in highlighting a serious difficulty in New Testament studies. He has also provided two important avenues for resolving this difficulty. The book is an interesting and stimulating read for the sympathetic reader. That it will convince the unsympathetic reader is unlikely. However, Bockmuehl’s proposals for future New Testament study appear to be headed in the right direction and should provide good impetus for further work on the subject.

Andy Hassler

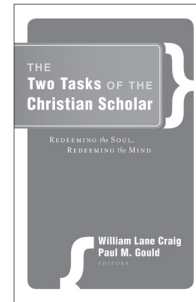
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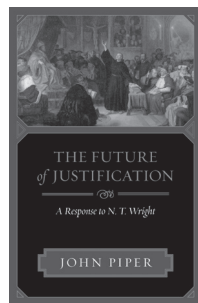
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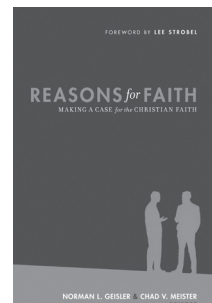
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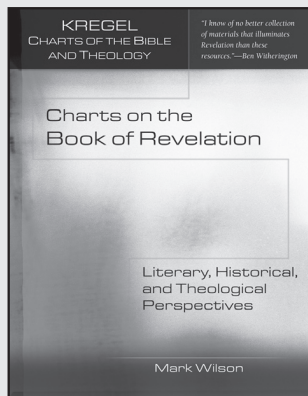
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