

Book Reviews

Allah: A Christian Response. By Miroslav Volf. New York: HarperOne, 2010, 326 pp., \$25.99.

“Do we worship the same God?” This hotly contested question is asked by many Christians about Islam. Influential theologian Miroslav Volf offers an answer in his latest book, *Allah: A Christian Response*. Volf comes to this question with three formative influences, and an agenda. His first influence is a long-standing engagement with the theology of reconciliation, out of which he wrote his acclaimed *Exclusion and Embrace*. Volf’s second formative influence is his intensive dialogue with Muslims in recent years, particularly through the Common Word initiative (<http://www.commonword.com>). His third influence is his admired father, to whom the book is dedicated, and who taught Volf that Christians and Muslims do indeed worship the same God. The agenda Volf pursues is one of political theology. He asks, “Can religious exclusivists, adherents of different religions [i.e., most Muslims and Christians], live comfortably with one another under the same political roof?” (220). Volf’s answer to this question is “yes,” on the basis of a shared belief in the one God.

A “hot and spicy” dish, as Volf calls it, *Allah* is jam-packed with interesting ideas and perspectives. Volf’s reflections on what Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Luther had to say about Islam are

rich, as is his discussion of the Trinity, in which he argues that what Muslims deny when they reject the Trinity is also denied by orthodox Christianity, and “Christians affirm what Muslims affirm” about God’s oneness (143).

To fully appreciate Volf’s argument—and its limitations—one must take careful note of his “commonalities approach.” His rules of engagement with the other are: (1) “Concentrate on what is common,” and (2) “Keep an eye out for what is decisively different” (91). At the heart of *Allah* are a handful of claims about God that Volf contends are shared by “normative” Islam and “normative” Christianity (123). He argues from these shared convictions in favor of a political solution for how the two religions can live together in peace, united by faith in the same God. His six core beliefs of monotheism are: (1) there is only one God; (2) God created everything that is not God; (3) God is radically different from everything that is not God; (4) God is good; (5) God commands us to love God; and (6) God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. He also distinguishes between referring to and *worshipping* God, and proposes that “*To the extent* that Christians and Muslims strive to love God and neighbor, they *worship* the same true God” (124). The Allah of whom the Qur’an speaks, Volf argues, is the God of the Bible, and this one God “requires Muslims and

Christians to obey strikingly similar commands as an expression of their worship” (124). Volf is an advocate of religious freedom, and argues that common belief in the one God who commands us to love our neighbors requires both Muslims and Christians to support the impartiality of the state toward all religions (238), including freedom of religion (234).

Volf’s statements about Islam betray large blind spots. This leads him to promote as uncontroversial a series of rosy opinions about jihad in Islam, without engaging contrary evidence. In this he relies heavily upon two letters written by Muslim scholars as part of their interfaith outreach to Christians—the Amman letter (<http://www.ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>) and the Common Word letter—but is naïvely unaware that eminent signatories to these very same letters have published opinions in their native languages that contradict conclusions that Volf appears to have drawn from these letters on subjects such as aggressive jihad and suicide bombings.

Absolutely pivotal for Volf’s argument is a saying of Muhammad which he claims is a command for one to love “all” neighbors as oneself (182), including non-Muslims. Again, Volf appears to derive this insight from Muslim interfaith encounters. However, normative Islam interprets this tradition to refer to loving one’s Muslim neighbor; this is clear even in the very source which Volf himself cites (*Sahih Muslim*, The Book of Faith, Chapter 18). Tellingly, Volf is unable to cite a single verse of the Qur’an that commands loving one’s neighbor.

Volf is so keen to achieve his stated agenda of establishing a political theology for mutual coexistence that he is blind to contrary evidence, even when this is readily available. An example is Volf’s claim that the Qur’an’s commands are similar to the Ten Commandments of Moses. In making this claim, he overlooks other commands in the Qur’an that contradict the Ten Commandments in dealings with non-Muslims. Volf’s method is to zero in

on apparent commonalities to secure his six principles, back each point up with a verse, and then pursue his argument in isolation from Islamic theology and jurisprudence. The result is that Volf’s conclusions are at odds with normative Islamic beliefs and practices. The credibility gap between his conclusions and normative Islam is so great—on such topics as freedom of religion, treatment of apostates, and the political status of non-Muslims in an Islamic state—that he virtually mounts a proof-by-contradiction against himself, in which his premises are undermined by his conclusions.

Volf repeatedly claims that he has written this book for Christians. However, it is far from clear what is the point of persuading Christians about Islamic tolerance, if many Muslims do not and will not accept these arguments. In reality *Allah* is very much pitched at Western Christians. For Christians who currently live under Islamic dominance, Volf’s views could be received with shocked incredulity. To them his rhetoric could sound like a form of abuse (i.e., the *dhimmi* syndrome), in which non-Muslims are only allowed to pursue peace by praising Islam. If the whole Christian world thought like Volf, the outcome would be that Christians do nothing to counter resurgent Islamic supremacist ideology, because they have convinced themselves that “normative Islam” supports principles of equality and freedom. This would produce anything but peaceful coexistence. Indeed it would be the recipe for a long, steady spiritual decline.

Volf’s *Allah* is a good-hearted attempt to forge an interfaith theology for political coexistence and peace under “the same political roof” (220). Although his edifice is constructed on a profound knowledge of Christianity, warts and all, it relies upon blind spots and wishful thinking about Islam. Volf takes irenic delight in focusing on the appearance of goodness and similarity in Islam, as offered up to him by Muslims in interfaith dialogue. However, he repeatedly overstates what is common and overlooks what is different. As a result, Volf looks upon Allah through Christian

eyes, reading the God of the Bible into the pages of the Qur'an, but is blind to contrary evidence, even when it can be found in the statements of his own dialogue partners. This is a form of prejudice, not one based on hostile fear of the other, but on the fear of excluding the other. This is a fear of being found to be less than Christian. Unfortunately, in Volf's method, and—it must be conceded—against his avowed intent (259), love trumps truth. *Caveat lector* ("Let the reader beware").

—Mark Durie
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Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine. By Peter J. Thuesen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 309 pp., \$29.95.

Peter Thuesen is Professor and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He is also co-editor of *Religion and American Culture*. His book on predestination won the 2010 Book Award for History/Biography from *Christianity Today*; it is a well-deserved honor.

Thuesen contends that "predestination has been one of the most important but unacknowledged sources of discord in churches across the denominational spectrum" in the United States (4). He supports this assertion by examining a wide range of confessional traditions that dot the landscape of American religion. Thuesen focuses on the major denominations as he examines the debates that have erupted over predestination in our nation's short history. As one would expect, he gives most of his attention to skirmishes among Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Lutherans, and Baptists. However, the author also touches on the histories of lesser-known groups (Adventist, African Methodist Episcopal, Campbellite), and even some cults (Christian Scientist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness)

in ways that elucidate his main argument.

Although Thuesen gives a general backdrop to the biblical idea of predestination as it has been developed in western Christianity from the time of Augustine, his main focus is not on the doctrine itself but on the divisiveness that has surrounded it as different groups have addressed it throughout American history. The result is a fascinating and informative book that sheds light not only on the development of Christianity in the United States but also on current debates that are raging over "Calvinism" within various evangelical groups.

Of particular interest is Thuesen's analysis of Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists over the last 250 years in America. In the divisions that have marred each of those three groups a high view of scriptural authority has been found on the same side of a high (or higher) view of "unconditional predestination." What became the modern Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) stood firmly against their Ohio Synod brethren in the late nineteenth century because of the latter's position that election is "*intuitu fidei*" (in view of faith) rather than "unto faith" (155-63). In more recent years the LCMS has stood against the avowedly liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its "ecumenical promiscuity" manifested in united efforts with Roman Catholicism as well as other liberal Protestant denominations.

The story is the same among Presbyterians. It was the "Old School" Presbyterians in the nineteenth century who argued for strict subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith—including chapter three on God's eternal decree—against their "New School" counterparts who argued for a less strict adherence to the confession, especially at those points where election and predestination are affirmed (175-82). In the North, it was the Old School proponents who pulled out of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1936 under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen, who also helped found Westminster Theological Seminary.

In the South, a similar path was followed when Old School heirs formed the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Both of these new denominations formed with a clear commitment to the full authority of Scripture. As Theusen notes, “Since 1983, when the northern and southern mainline bodies reunited to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), strict predestinarianism among Presbyterians has continued to find its strongest advocates in the OPC, the PCA and other constituencies committed to biblical inerrancy” (192).

The book concludes with a look at Southern Baptists, including a special epilogue devoted to Rick Warren and his purpose-driven emphasis. While some of the details are inaccurate and others lack important nuance, no one can quibble with this summary observation: “Though home to some of the most convinced and articulate predestinarians in the United States today, the SBC also includes anti-Calvinists who are equally adamant that unconditional election is unbiblical” (175). After a brief overview of the Arminian and Calvinistic streams that trace back to the seventeenth-century origins of Baptists, Theusen examines the modern contention over the doctrines of grace in the SBC or, as he labels it, “the *other* Baptist battle” (200). He rightly cites John Dagg and James Boyce as representative of the “Convention’s founders” who adhered to a Calvinistic understanding of the biblical doctrine of predestination. However, he betrays an unfortunate reliance on secondary sources when describing the historic Sandy Creek Baptist Association of North Carolina as a “quasi-Arminian faction” whose heirs are the contemporary “non-Calvinists” in the SBC (201). It is beyond doubt that the Sandy Creek tradition influenced early Southern Baptist life. It is equally beyond doubt that those who established that tradition cannot legitimately be called Arminian, hyphenated or not. As the first covenant ever adopted by the Sandy Creek Baptist Church asserts, those early Separate Baptists believed in “particular election of grace by predestination of God in Christ.”

Theusen is mostly accurate in his description of the origin and work of Founders Ministries and of the changes that took place at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary under the leadership of R. Albert Mohler, Jr. He misunderstands, however, the manner by which Mohler led the institution to its current confessional fidelity. Theusen states that Mohler not only “announced that anyone paying mere lip service to inerrancy was unwelcome. In rebuilding the faculty, he also instituted another litmus test: subscription to the school’s unmistakably Calvinistic 1858 Abstract of Principles” (205). Far from imposing his own will on the seminary, Mohler simply called the school to return integrity in holding to its charter, which says, “All persons accepting professorships in this Seminary shall be considered, by such acceptance, as engaging to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the Abstract of Principles hereinafter laid down, a departure from which principles on his part shall be grounds for his resignation or removal by the Trustees.”

Peter Thuesen has provided students of American Christianity a significant resource for examining the impact of Augustinian and Calvinistic views of predestination on religious debates and denominational identities. The breadth of his examination encompasses so many traditions that minor misstatements about events or people are probably inevitable (though describing R. C. Sproul as “a radio evangelist” may not qualify as such [192]!). Fortunately, such mistakes do not detract from the overall usefulness of the book. It is well indexed and includes a helpful ten-page “Glossary of Theological Terms.”

Thuesen is an engaging writer whose skill in telling a story makes this book, on a rather narrow slice of historical theology, both beneficial and accessible.

—Tom Ascol
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No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s-1700s. By Keith E. Durso. Macon: Mercer University Press; Atlanta: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007, xii + 292 pp., \$23.00 paper.

Keith E. Durso's, *No Armor for the Back* deals with an idea that is once again coming to the fore in Baptist circles in the West: physical suffering for the sake of Christ. Of course, this is a biblical theme, even to the point of martyrdom being recognized as a gift of the Spirit (see 1 Cor 13:1-3). Consider, for example, Acts 14:19-22. After having survived an attempt on the part of certain Jews to kill him and so silence his preaching the gospel of a crucified and risen Lord, the Apostle Paul told the disciples in various congregations he planted in present-day Turkey, "we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." But a long stretch of time in which this type of experience was not part and parcel of the life of Baptist congregations—one has to go back to the days covered by this book—has dulled our memory and senses. Suffering for the sake of the gospel is all over the New Testament texts, but in days of peace, this element of Christian warfare has receded into the far recesses of our corporate memory. Not anymore though, as across our world militant Islam and Hinduism seek to curb the growth of the church, and in the West there are possible intimations that our freedoms may well be in for a rough ride in the days to come. In such a context, the themes and the figures covered in this book will be a very helpful guide to what it means to suffer for Christ.

All in all, this work is a very helpful study of the experiences and writings of Baptist forebears who were imprisoned and even beaten for the sake of their biblical convictions. Most of Durso's examples come from the seventeenth century—those years from 1660 to 1688 in the British Isles when the Baptists and other Nonconformists knew what it meant to be the church under the cross—but there are also two chapters dealing with Baptist suffering at the hands of the Puritan leaders

in New England and Virginian Anglicans (190-251). In fact, unlike our present situation, the vast majority of the persecutors of these early Baptists were professing Christians—which itself was a strong argument in favor of the Baptist perspective on religious liberty—but the lessons these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptists can teach us have not diminished one whit.

Abraham Cheare (1626-88), for instance, who was the pastor of the Baptist work in Plymouth, was arrested, cruelly treated, and imprisoned on Drake's Island, a small island in Plymouth Sound in the early 1660s (see Durso's treatment on pages 149-54 that focuses on Cheare's poems written for children). Fearful that some of his flock might compromise their Baptist convictions to avoid persecution, he wrote a number of letters to his church during the course of this imprisonment, which was his second. In one of them he cites with approval a statement from the *Irenicum* (1646) of "holy Burroughs," that is, the Puritan author Jeremiah Burroughs (c.1599-1646). "I desire to be a faithful Minister of Christ and his Church, if I cannot be a Prudent one," Cheare quotes from Burroughs' "Epistle to the Reader," "standing in the gap is more dangerous and troublousom [*sic*] than getting behind the hedge, there you may be more secure and under the wind; but it's best to be there where God looks for a man" (*Words in Season* [London, 1668], 250). Like the other prisoners of conscience Durso examines in this book, Cheare was more afraid of displeasing God than dying.

Durso treats a number of these Baptist prisoners through the poetry they wrote in prison (143-89), though a number of these prison poets, including Cheare, Hercules Collins (d. 1702), and the inimitable John Bunyan (1628-88) also wrote prose tracts. It is a little surprising that this latter vein of material was not more extensively used. Obviously there are limits to what one can examine in a work of this size, though I must also confess missing any mention of William Mitchel (1662-1705), a tireless evangelist in the Pennines from the Rossendale Valley in Lancashire to Raw-

don in neighboring West Yorkshire. Mitchel was twice arrested for preaching illegally during the reign of James II (r. 1685-1688). On the first occasion he was treated with deliberate roughness and spent three months in jail at Goodshaw. On the second occasion he was arrested near Bradford and imprisoned for six months in York Castle. The enemies of the gospel who imprisoned Mitchel might have thought they were shutting him up in a dismal dungeon. To Mitchel, though, as he told his friends in a letter written from York in the spring of 1687, the dungeon was a veritable “paradise, because the glorious presence of God is with me, & the Spirit of glory & of God rests on me” (see 1 Pet 4:14). He had been given such a “glorious sight of [God’s] countenance, [and] bright splendour of his love,” that he was quite willing to “suffer afflictions with the people of God, & for his glorious Truth.”

This omission of any mention of Mitchel is a minor quibble, though, for Durso has provided an excellent overview of the primary sources pertaining to a key facet of early Baptist life. This, together with an extensive familiarity with the relevant secondary sources, makes this book a highly recommended introduction to a subject that can no longer be ignored.

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Athanasius. By Peter J. Leithart. Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011, xviii + 204 pp., \$27.99 paper.

This new study by Peter Leithart, one of the most versatile of present-day Christian authors (witness his competency in writing biblical commentaries as well as studies of a mutual favorite, Jane Austen), is a tour-de-force in many ways. Without

minimizing elements of recent portrayals of the Alexandrian bishop as something of an ecclesiastical thug, Leithart demonstrates that Athanasius’s literary defense of the deity of Christ is nevertheless one of those key moments in the history of the church that we ignore at our peril. In this regard, Leithart provides the series of which this book is the initial volume with an excellent start: this is patristic *ressourcement* at its finest. Athanasian trinitarianism, which has been the object of attack since the onset of the Enlightenment project in the late seventeenth century (“Athanasianism” was a deliberate term of abuse employed by eighteenth-century Socinians), is shown to be a vital representation of the biblical doctrine of God, as necessary for our theological health as it was for Athanasius’s contemporaries.

For example, concluding chapter three, “The One God”—probably the most brilliant chapter of the book—Leithart rightly points out that failure to appreciate the implications of Athanasius’s doctrine of the Trinity,

has sent certain forms of social trinitarianism down a blind alley. The Trinity is not, as social trinitarianism has suggested, a modern egalitarian democracy, made up of distinct but identical individuals. The persons are indeed equal, but not identical. At its best, though, social trinitarianism has been a plea to take personhood of the persons seriously; it has been a plea for a scriptural exposition of the ontological life of the Trinity in which the persons converse together as they do in the Gospel story (88).

A great part of the response to modern social trinitarianism, however, also falls short of Athanasius’s robustly biblical model, as Leithart notes:

the response to Trinity-as-democracy should not be the implicit subordinationism that has infected some traditional trinitarianism; we do not need to resort to a unilateral hierarchical Trinity, paternal monarchianism or paternal

causality, to avoid the problems of social trinitarianism. An asymmetrical account of triune life [towards which Athanasius' corpus points] takes the pleas of social trinitarianism seriously, and can get at all the dynamism and personal interactivity that social trinitarianism wants, without threatening to collapse into tritheism (88).

Leithart has an excellent grasp of the secondary literature and shows himself a skilled interpreter of Athanasius's exegesis, though I, for one, wish he had not been as reliant as he is on the antiquated translations of the Athanasius volume in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. On occasion he does employ more recent translations, but, from this reviewer's point of view, he should have done his own translation when nothing more recent existed. Critical to understanding the Fathers is being able to follow their train of argument and biblical interpretation, and the dense Victorian prose of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers is often more of a hindrance than a help for the modern reader in this regard.

It needs mentioning that there was one element of Leithart's *ressourcement* of Athanasius's theology that I found particularly unhelpful, namely, his argument that "Athanasius's trinitarian theology is more radically trinitarian than that of Augustine" (86; also argued at length on 75-77). Here Leithart seems to be rehearsing a variant of the old charge raised by many patristic scholars of the past century, namely, that whereas the eastern fathers were truly trinitarian, Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity had a fundamental unitarian slant. Recent patristic analysis, though, has shown this to be a basic misreading of the Latin father. (See, for example, Keith Goad's comparative study of the trinitarianism of Gregory of Nazianzus and that of Augustine in his "A Comparison of The Patristic Model of the Trinity and the Contemporary Social Analogy of the Trinity" [Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010].)

More attention could have been given to Athanasius's portrayal of model piety in his *Life of Antony* (treated somewhat sparingly on 169-71). Surely Athanasius intends us to view his hero Antony as *the* model of Christlikeness and the fullness of the Spirit. Other patristic authors, though, were not so sure about Antony as such a model. Basil of Caesarea, for one, spent much of his career as a monastic reformer seeking to produce a form of communal monastic piety that was an implicit rejection of the eremitic model promoted by Athanasius in his *Life of Antony*.

There is also good reason to have said more about Athanasius's ontological discussion of the Spirit in his *Letters to Serapion* (dealt with on 77-80, though see also 157-65 for discussion of the work of the Spirit). In these letters, Athanasius rectifies the shortcomings of his earlier writings in which the Spirit did not loom large. The pneumatology of these letters anticipates the work of the Cappadocian fathers and can therefore be rightly regarded as critical to the architecture of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (381). (See as fundamental in this regard, Adolf Laminski, *Der Heilige Geist als Geist Christi und Geist der Gläubigen: Der Beitrag des Athanasios von Alexandrien zur Formulierung des trinitarischen Dogmas im vierten Jahrhundert* [Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag GMBH, 1969], which is strangely absent from Leithart's secondary literature.)

In the final analysis, however, this is a truly convincing study of the importance of Athanasius's theology for our ongoing theological reflection, in which the triune God is once again looming large, a matter surely of deep satisfaction to the angels and glorified saints, among which number we trust is to be found the human subject of this book.

—Michael A. G. Haykin
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Secret Faith in the Public Square: An Argument for the Concealment of Christian Identity. By Jonathan Malesic. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009, 248 pp., \$28.00 paper.

My first thought on seeing the book's title? "I'm not buying it!" That Christians should keep silent about their faith in the midst of a fallen world? What about Jesus' rejection of tasteless salt? Jesus was adamant that we are not to hide our light under a basket, wasn't he?

How important to read a book before passing final judgment on it! And in reading the book, the reader will discover that Malesic's thesis—that a Christian's extraordinary righteousness should not happen in order to be seen—seems quite on target, even if agreement is not found at every point along the way.

Malesic's primary call, to the Christian, is for personal self-abasement and a refusal to promote self. The Christian ideal is that the Christian should do what is right simply because it is right. In part one of the book, the author presents support for his argument that he finds in the thought and writings of several individuals from history. In Cyril of Jerusalem (fourth century), the nineteenth century Dane, Søren Kierkegaard, and Germany's Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Malesic unearths support for his position that the Christian's private life and responsibilities are different from his public life. There are things Christians do in private (confessing our faith) and there are things Christians do in public (good deeds).

Perhaps Malesic's reference to Kierkegaard's "secret *agape*" encapsulates well his argument: "... Christians must ensure that their love is nonreciprocal. They must police themselves, so they do not undertake works of love in order to receive something in return" (102). Furthermore: "Concealing one's agency when performing a work of Christian love provides just such a means" (102). In everyday English idiom: as Christians, we are not to toot our own horns.

Having completed his conversation with Cyril,

Kierkegaard, and Bonhoeffer, Malesic moves to part two and brings the reader into the present context and wishes to know how the Christian should live in the contemporary American context. The reader likely will share some of the author's concerns, particularly the concern about American evangelicals who seem intent on building personal kingdoms and his concern about the church "overidentifying with American culture and making American political, economic, and social creeds into de facto doctrines" (207).

On the other hand, the notion that spreading the gospel is "an act not of broadcasting it, but handing it on" (197) is suspicious. Malesic writes: "Handing on the gospel is itself an act of neighbor love ... it need not be done through direct teaching. It can also be accomplished indirectly through other acts of neighbor love" (197). Almost defensively, it seems to me, he adds: "To be sure, it requires tremendous confidence in love to think that unseen works of love can bring another person around to adopting the Christian faith" (199).

Not merely acts of love, done anonymously or not, but the actual proclamation or declaration of the gospel is necessary for conversion. Paul's well-known affirmation in Romans 10—that salvation comes through hearing and that hearing is possible only with someone preaching—underscores the necessity of the proclaimed or declared gospel. The act of a public proclamation/declaration of the gospel is not a notion dreamed up by contemporary evangelicals wrongly wed to American notions; rather, it was the *modus operandi* of Jesus and the disciples.

With its focus on Christian humility and selflessness, *Secret Faith in the Public Square* is a book that can be read quite profitably, particularly by the believer in contemporary America. The reader might be forgiven, however, for questioning if the gospel can truly be advanced merely through "acts of neighbor love."

—George H. Martin

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Telling God's Story. By Preben Vang and Terry Carter. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006, 335 pp., \$29.99.

At first glance, my thought was that this book might be a useful text for a college or seminary survey course on the Bible. The questions quickly came: Would it be sufficiently detailed and technical for a Bible survey course? If not, in what context would *Telling God's Story* be most useful? The following are observations made after reading the book.

The reader should not look for in-depth discussions and tightly argued conclusions regarding many of the more difficult and debated stories in the Bible. As one example, in addressing the matter of "What was the method of creation?" the authors note the disagreements among Christians and offer a number of questions: What should we focus on in the biblical story of creation? Duration? Method? What did God want to teach us in his story? What is the main concern? The conclusion is simple and it is correct, as far as it goes: "... God created everything that exists including people" (29). The reader is likely to be left wishing for more.

The foregoing is not to suggest that the book is flawed or in error when dealing with difficult or disputed texts; rather, these observations simply affirm the nature of the book. It is largely a retelling of the biblical story, with occasional comment and application. It is not an attempt to deal with thorny and difficult issues that might arise in the study of the Scriptures, nor is the authors's intent to produce an introduction to the scholarly study of the Bible.

This chronological retelling of the story is the authors's intention, and this retelling is also the book's strength. Especially for those who are relatively unaware of the broad sweep of history and the story of God's redemptive work, *Telling God's Story* should prove to be a very fruitful volume.

Told in fourteen episodes, the story moves from creation to the first fathers of Israel and covenant, to the forming of the nation of Israel, through the rest of the Old Testament history, to the birth and ministry of the Messiah and, ultimately, to the

consummation at the end of the age. Students of the Bible have sometimes summarized the overall story thusly: "The Old Testament is promise. The New Testament is fulfillment." This character of the Bible, as one story—the story of God's redemption—comes through unmistakably as the reader progresses through the fourteen episodes rendered here.

Following two short introductory chapters that provide a broad overview of the Bible story and background materials, the fourteen episodes typically end with helpful study sections such as "Things to Consider," "Study Questions," "Outline Help," and other study materials that aid the reader in reflecting on the material presented.

Perhaps the most fruitful context for the use of this book would be the local church's small group teaching ministries. An instructor might list *Telling God's Story* in a recommended bibliography for a college or seminary course, but probably would not use it as a primary text. In a local church setting, however, and with the desire to help readers better grasp the overall story of the Bible, *Telling God's Story* might be the very book that a teacher would choose. The authors ask and answer the question: "Why tell this story? We tell this story because it is more than a story, even more than just a true story. It is *the* story! ... It promises a life-changing encounter with God!" (9). In an age of sound bites, Tweets, and talking points, *Telling God's Story* is a good reminder that we have a big story to tell and that it is *the* story that all people need to hear.

—George Martin

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A Model for Marriage: Covenant, Grace, Empowerment and Intimacy. By Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006, 240 pp., \$19.00 paper.

Jack and Judith Balswick's book on marriage does a fine job of making scholarly research in sociology and theology accessible to those concerned with the actual practice of a harmonious marriage. They present a social theology of marriage that integrates the theological analogy of the distinct-yet-unified trinitarian God with a social scientific understanding of marriage as a unity of two distinctly differentiated spouses.

The goal of their model is marital harmony through the core process of "differentiated unity in marriage." They define differentiation as "developing and defining a secure self, validated in Christ," whose unification results in "two secure spouses, distinct and unique in themselves, discovering belonging and connection in and through marital unity."

As the members of the Trinity maintain their unique personhood while mutually indwelling one another, so spouses maintain both distinction and unity "through a mutual, reciprocating process in which interdependence develops through the coexistence of distinction and unity in relationship" (33). This process is guided by four primary principles: covenant, grace, empowerment, and intimacy. The Balswicks then show how this model functions in practical situations of communication, conflict, the different seasons of marriage, sexual intimacy, and spiritual intimacy. They even address the practical balance of a dual-earner marriage.

The Balswicks bring a host of knowledge to the consideration of a very important topic. Their experience in the field is evident by their careful thought as well as their extensive practical consideration, resulting in an abundance of practical wisdom.

The central theme of the book, differentiation in marriage, is helpful in guarding against the fatal error of a spouse deriving his or her sense of self

from what the other can offer. Each spouse is to be differentiated in Christ, deriving his or her fulfillment and identity from him, so that each spouse is freed to serve the other while expecting ultimate fulfillment neither from one another (co-dependence) nor from him- or herself alone (independence). Biblical *interdependence* can then flourish.

This theme is also problematic, however. The issue of differentiation largely sets the agenda for the authors's consideration of Scripture and theology. Thus, issues such as the defined self or power dynamics in relationship become the driving concern in the biblical consideration of how a man and woman relate to one another in marriage. While the struggle for power, for instance, is helpful to consider, when it is the driving concern, biblical admonitions to serve one another become overly focused on empowerment and influence. A more biblically direct understanding of service would focus on sacrificial living for the redemptive good of the other. Such a focus would require a more robust discussion than this book contained on the power of sin and how the specific aspects of Christ's atoning work counter it in marriage.

A related critique is that the authors understand the trinitarian relationship as "complementarity without hierarchy" (68), leading to an egalitarian perspective of marriage roles. This suspicion of hierarchy is perhaps closely connected with their concern to avoid power dynamics. Authority seems to be understood mainly in terms of its power to influence. Because every member of the Trinity influences the other equally, the conclusion is that they all share authority. But to conclude thus is to overlook *the unique ways* that the members of the Trinity influence one another. The Bible does not speak of the Father having more power than the Son, but it does speak of the Father sending and directing the Son (e.g., John 8:42), and of the Son acting as the agent of the Father (e.g., Heb 1:2), for the Father's ultimate purpose of magnifying his Son above all things (e.g., Eph 1:9-10). Failing to see the Father's eternal authority robs the Trinity as well as marriage of the complex

and beautiful opportunity for authority to be a tool for honoring another.

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Galatians. By Thomas R. Schreiner. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010, 423 pp., \$34.99.

Tom Schreiner is well known to the readers of this journal. He is Associate Dean of Scripture and Interpretation and James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, at which he has served since 1997. Schreiner is the author or editor of numerous works. Due to his impressive commentaries such as the volume on Romans in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, his introductory guide *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, and his theology of Paul's letters titled *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, Schreiner has emerged as the uncontested dean of Pauline studies in Southern Baptist life—and arguably in the English-speaking evangelical world, as well. Through both his teaching and his writings on Paul, Schreiner increasingly steps into the role that F. F. Bruce filled for a previous generation. In addition to writing the volume on Galatians, he serves as an associate editor of this series.

The commentary series is packed with helpful features. The treatment of each paragraph begins with an explanation of the literary context that shows how the section fits with the material that precedes and follows it. This is followed by a very brief summary of the central thrust of the passage that condenses the major truths of the passage to just a couple of sentences. The commentator then offers his own translation of the text in a graphical layout that assists the reader in visualizing the flow of thought. A section devoted to a discus-

sion of the structure of the text explains the commentator's view of the relationship between the clauses of the passage. The next section contains a detailed exegetical outline that further assists teachers and preachers in understanding and explaining the flow of thought. The "Explanation of the Text" section focuses on establishing the original text of the letter, interpreting the text with careful attention to vocabulary and syntax, examining possible Old Testament allusions, and interacting with important secondary literature. Finally, the "Theology in Application" section contains reflections on the doctrinal and practical implications of the passage for modern readers. The series strikes a balance between the needs and interests of busy pastors whose Greek skills are rusty and the scholars whose language skills remain honed.

Since it is nearly impossible to summarize and interact with the details of a hefty and detailed commentary in a review of the assigned length, the remainder of this review will focus on some of the broader characteristics of Schreiner's work in this volume.

Although Schreiner is well aware that it is "out of fashion in some circles," he argues that "Martin Luther and John Calvin were substantially right in their interpretation of the letter." His exegesis convincingly demonstrates that numerous claims of scholars belonging to the so-called New Perspective miss the mark. He correctly challenges Gordon Fee's attempt to interpret Galatians as if the Reformation had never happened.

Schreiner does not allow current trends in scholarship to dictate his exegetical conclusions. Although he does not embrace traditional views merely for tradition's sake, he boldly adopts traditional interpretations when the preponderance of evidence supports older views. For example, Schreiner supports the South Galatian hypothesis that was popularized by Ramsey in the late nineteenth century and consequently affirms an early date for Galatians. He argues persuasively that Paul's opponents in this letter were Judaiz-

ers and that the “works of the law” on which they depended for their salvation included not only the boundary markers of Judaism like circumcision and dietary regulations, but also commandment-keeping in general. He affirms a traditional Protestant view of justification (although he correctly notes that references to justification are often eschatological in nature in this letter). He also argues that “faith of Christ” in Galatians is objective rather than subjective—i.e., it refers to the believer’s faith in Jesus rather than Christ’s obedience. He concludes that rhetorical criticism is of little benefit for a study of the Pauline letters since “we must seriously question whether Paul actually structured entire letters in accordance with the rhetorical handbooks.”

Schreiner’s exegesis is characterized by refreshing reserve. When the evidence is insufficient to lead one to firm conclusions and interpreters can only speculate, he candidly admits this. Furthermore, his exegesis is economical in the sense that he refrains from investing enormous amounts of time on questions piqued by scholarly curiosity that ultimately have little impact on the theological and practical implications of the letter.

Schreiner clearly writes with a scholar’s mind and a pastor’s heart. His work is offered for the edification of the church and with attention to the needs of the pastor who wishes to “correctly handle the word of truth” and faithfully expound the Scriptures before his flock. Many pastors will be especially grateful for the application sections that will guide them in distilling the theology and proclaiming the practical implications of the letter for their congregations. The discussions are never dry, but are warm and inspiring. Pastors who lament having to choose between an academic or devotional commentary will be thrilled to find scholarship and worship mingled in this work.

Schreiner’s research on Galatians is far more thorough than one might expect in what might be considered a pastoral commentary. Extensive documentation in the footnotes shows that he has carefully considered the most recent research that

has been published in respected scholarly journals. Interaction with these resources is normally relegated to the footnotes in order to avoid bogging down exegetical discussions unnecessarily. However, the interaction is so extensive that often more than half of the page is dedicated to footnotes. Scholars will find plenty of guidance here for additional research.

One of the most impressive features of the commentary is the attention given to issues of intertextuality. Schreiner frequently shows how familiarity with the Old Testament background of Paul’s thought illuminates his arguments. In the commentary proper, the theological reflections, and the treatment of general theological themes at the conclusion of the volume, the author shows how Paul’s statements in Galatians relate to the teaching of the Old Testament, of the Lord Jesus, and of other Pauline literature. This feature makes the commentary an excellent example of an integrated biblical theology.

Both novices to the study of Galatians and seasoned scholars who have pored over the letter many times will profit from a careful reading of this commentary. The commentary certainly deserves a place alongside the works of Lightfoot, Bruce, Ridderbos, and Silva on the pastor’s shelves. If a pastor or student is on a tight budget and can afford only one of these volumes, I strongly recommend this one.

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