Book Reviews

Galatians. Concordia Commentary. By A. Andrew Das. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2014, lxix, 738 pp., $54.99 hardback.

A. Andrew Das serves as the Donald W. and Betty J. Buik Chair of Religious Studies at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, IL. His fresh and substantial contribution to the Concordia Commentary series represents some of the best of contemporary, conservative Lutheran scholarship. Like other volumes in the series, Das's commentary engages current scholarly discussion concerning Galatians, Paul, and his theology, with respect, reflection, and genuine interaction. The aim of the series is to enable and equip pastors and teachers of the Scriptures to proclaim the Gospel with greater clarity and accuracy. For those with ears to hear: that means not only Lutheran pastors and teachers, but any and all who regard the Gospel as central to Christian preaching and teaching. Here is a contribution from Lutherans and for Lutherans that serves the larger body of Christ. True, Das's commentary might "infect" readers with elements of Lutheran thought. But from my perspective, that is all to the good.

The "Editor's Preface" (x-xiii) clarifies the guidelines and presuppositions of the series: 1) Jesus Christ in his saving work is the ultimate message and content of Scripture. The commentaries are thus to be Trinitarian and Christ-centered. 2) The Scriptural witness to Christ takes the *form* of Law and Gospel, demand and gift. This form is not limited to particular language, but appears within a variety of ways within Scripture. The commentaries are in this sense to be Evangelical. 3) The Scriptures are God's vehicle for communicating the Gospel. Together with Evangelicals (in the broader sense of the term), the authors of the commentaries maintain a high view of Scripture. 4) The Scriptures have as their target and purpose the creation and sustenance of the church instead of the scholar's desk. The pulpit and the pew are the decisive context for the interpretation of Scripture. As the series itself attests, the pulpit and the pew do not do away with the need for the scholar's desk! They, however, provide the scholar with his proper context. Das's Galatians more than fulfills these admirable aims without

exhibiting stuffiness or taking hide-bound positions. At least, I can't find them. Indeed, Das at points takes pains to distance himself from traditional Lutheran readings. R. H. C. Lenski often becomes his sparring partner. As is to be expected (and welcomed), Das cites Luther regularly, but not slavishly, and to good effect.

Before all else, Das is an exegete. His work certainly belongs in this scholarly series. He already has written considerably on Paul, Paul's Jewish background, and the interpretation of the *Hauptbriefe*, especially Galatians and Romans. He has read widely. No one can read everything in our time, but Das has read a great deal concerning Galatians. It is always possible to complain about one's own favorites that go missing here and there. But Das touches on nearly all the important theological and historical debates that concern Galatians. He does so, furthermore, in a way that allows the reader to see clearly the interpretive options that have presented themselves in recent scholarship. If anything, one might want to press Das here and there to come to more decisive exegetical conclusions (e.g. on the question of *pistis Christou* in 2:16, the exceptive or adversative clause in 2:16, the death to the Law "through the Law" in 2:18). Even if one ends up disagreeing with Das at certain points (as is to be expected), the commentary offers a good education in exegetical reflection. All who use it will come away with a better understanding of the letter.

One of the few points at which I thought Das might have been more thorough was on the question of Paul's understanding of justification, as it first appears in 2:15-21. Admittedly, this theme has been a preoccupation of mine. But there is a relatively long tradition of the interpretation of Paul and Luther, going back at least to the beginning of the twentieth century (furthermore, n.b., not merely deriving from the Holl School), that has emphasized the wider, effective and creational understanding of justification that appears in the Scriptures, which is taken up by Paul, and which was appropriated dynamically by Luther (in contrast to Melanchthon). Rightly understood (as with Luther!), this reading in no way diminishes the forensic nature of God's justifying work in Christ. Rather, the effective and creational understanding merely recognizes the effective nature of God's Word. As is well-known, in differing ways Ernst Käsemann and Peter Stuhlmacher became advocates of this approach as exegetes. This approach is likewise prominent in the work of Oswald Bayer, a systematician. Furthermore, is

to be found widely (and with variations) among German theologians and exegetes, especially Lutherans. I would have been happiest, of course, if Das himself had taken up this view. It was a bit of surprise, however, not to see it at least represented and discussed.

Nevertheless, Das's commentary is a strong commentary. It is especially strong in the presentation of Jewish-Hellenistic and Greco-Roman background materials. There is a wealth and a thoroughness here that is scarcely to be matched. It is a valuable resource in this regard, especially for busy pastors.

In general, the formatting of the Concordia Commentary series is quite useful. The use of the wide margins for Scripture cross-references is useful. Various icons appear in the margins as well, marking fundamental themes, especially those important to Lutherans. My first reaction is that the discernment of such themes remains the work of the pastor or teacher. The icons might distract from that task. But perhaps others will find them useful. With the considerable number of references to secondary literature in the commentary, one might wish for an index of authors. But that is a minor lack. Das's commentary, together with the series as a whole, is a wonderful gift.

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***The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus.* By Michael F. Bird. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014, xiv + 394 pp., $30.00 cloth.**

According to Marcus Bockmuehl's *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study*, New Testament scholarship is in a bit of a stalemate. *Wirkungsgeschichte* and theological interpretation of Scripture, he argues, are ways to advance the discipline. I, moreover, would want to add what Michael F. Bird accomplished, in *The Gospel of the Lord*, is another means to vivify a potential stalemate. Bird masterfully brings to bear New Testament scholarship into conversation with first and second century traditions. Thus, Bird is engaging the intersection of New Testament studies with early Christian studies. By doing so, he brings to life old traditions.

Bird prophetically forecasts a potential resurgence in Gospel scholarship (vii). Even though the future of the "Third Quest" of the historical Jesus—potentially so-called "Fourth Quest"—has potentially stagnated, Gospel studies may begin to see renewed interest with social memory and performance criticism, as well as reading the Gospels in and within early confessional traditions. Bird is attempting to ride and shape a new wave of reading the Gospels. In this volume, Bird is "focused on the origins and development of the books we call 'Gospels' in the context of the early church" (ix).

Four questions govern the direction of the book. These are four, clearly delineated and articulated questions that govern the basic shape of Bird's book. First, "We have to look at the 'big bang' behind the Jesus tradition" (3). That is, how the oral tradition of Jesus was preserved by the disciples and early church up through the third century. Second, "how was the Jesus tradition transmitted" (4)? Third, a slew of critical questions exist that need answers—"what were the sources behind the Gospels, what genre are the Gospels, and why would anyone even write a Gospel?" (4). Fourth, why are there four Gospels instead of more or less (5)?

Thus, the proceeding chapters and arguments of Bird's volume can be subsumed under such questions. He aims to describe how Jesus traditions may have been preserved and why it was important for the early church to do so (23). As he develops this, I find a refreshing balance of critical scholarship, theological rationale, and concern for tradition. For example, the early church in part preserved the Jesus tradition because of interest in Jesus (36–40), pedagogical and rhetorical cues (p.40–42)—similar to Dale Allison's work, the possible use of notebooks to remember Jesus tradition (45–48), the value of eyewitnesses as signs of authenticating valid Jesus tradition (48–62), and the importance of imitation motifs (62–63).

Next, Bird develops his argument for the formation of Jesus tradition on social memory theory. He argues, "an 'informally controlled' oral tradition looks like a plausible and realistic model for how the Jesus tradition might been transmitted" (95). His accounts of social memory argue for the use of remember, remembrance, recalled, and similar expressions in the Gospels, Pauline literature, the rest of the New Testament, and in literature up through the second century. Bird rightly argues that "It [source and tradition criticism] can no longer be defined in terms of separating history from theology or

identifying layers of tradition, but should be conceived as tracing the impact of a memory in the formation of early Christianity" (105). It is here that Bird identifies with a specific line of thought within social memory theory. However, I remain unconvinced that his understanding of social memory represents the majority of social memory scholars (e.g., Jens Schröter, Chris Keith, Rafael Rodríguez, Alan Kirk, Holly Hearon, and Tom Thatcher to name a few).

When engaging some of the typical historical questions of the Gospels, Bird attempts to give a fresh voice to the Synoptic problem and to the Johannine question. The slew of scholarship engaging the synoptic problem is quite difficult to mine, and Bird has provided his reader with helpful summaries and insightful comments to various positions. In the end, Bird affirms *Marcan priority*, with what he calls *Q-lite* (162–87). With all the recent work of Mark Goodacre, and others, against the use of Q, I was rather surprised still to see Q alive and walking down the *Synoptic* halls of scholarship.

The primary value of Bird's contribution, although there are other competing texts, is the pedagogical value for young scholars and students. Bird's volume is not only readable, it is clearly ordered and accessible. Although there are other texts of its kind, Bird clearly stands out from the rest in noting the plethora of sources. If I have a historical question or need to gain brief insight on an issue he addresses, I will turn to his footnotes for an immediate reading list.

The second value of this source is how Bird brings to bear New Testament modern scholarship into conversation with Patristic reception. Bird has an ear towards early tradition, more so than typical historical scholarship is accustomed. This mode of scholarship is welcomed for a number of reasons. Along with Bockmeuhl's concerns, I envision this being one way to enrich and vivify New Testament scholarship—bring it into conversation with Patristic traditions. Second, theological inquiry is founded upon a different form of historical inquiry. It isn't solely historical critical but it is early ecclesial tradition. Last, and not limited to these, it broadens New Testament students in good ways. They are introduced and required to wrestle with primary ancient texts, gospel traditions, and ancient tradition.

Other than some of the critiques already given, I have one final critique to note. Bird lacked a concluding chapter. His introduction was highly informative and clarifying. The layout of chapters answered each question raised

in the introduction. I turned the page, knowing it was the last chapter, and saw the bibliography. Although his arguments were clear and his chapters well ordered, it needed a 3–6 page concluding chapter to sum up and tie the book together. In order to remedy such problem, the reader must consult the introduction once more—which is not totally problematic.

This book offers new and old ways to read the "behind-the-text" traditions. I will use much of this book in the formation of class lectures on Gospel traditions and locate up-to-date accessible Gospel scholarship. I highly encourage New Testament professors (undergraduate and graduate), all New Testament students, and the inquisitive pastor to consult this volume. In Bird's work, readers will be afforded an up-to-date analysis of Gospel scholarship, an up-to-date bibliography, and an up-to-date reading list. This book is a worthy read. In Bird's own words, "Young and ambitious theologians, especially those concerned with relating the text to the missional situation of the church in the twenty-first century, would be wise *to keep exploration and exegesis* of the fourfold Gospel uppermost in their studies" (328).

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The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology. **By Jeremy R. Treat. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, 305 pp., cloth.**

In *The Crucified King,* Jeremy Treat—Pastor of Equipping and Theology at Reality LA in Hollywood, California—seeks to integrate the kingdom and the cross, which he argues has been divided in post-Enlightenment scholarship. By employing both biblical and systematic theology, Treat presents a biblically rooted and theologically formed case for how the kingdom and cross belong together. He persuasively demonstrates that the establishment of God's reign comes through Jesus, the crucified king.

In Part One, Treat develops the themes of victory and suffering through the Old Testament. Chapter 1 unpacks the pattern of "royal victory through atoning suffering" across the storyline of Scripture. This pattern begins after

the fall with the promise of Genesis 3:15 and progressively develops through Abraham, the covenants, the exodus, David, the righteous royal sufferer in the Psalms, and the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah. Chapter 2 focuses on Isaiah, the climax of Israel's story and doorway into the New Testament, and shows that the servant is a Davidic king who will bring about a new exodus and thereby establish God's kingdom by means of his sacrificial suffering. From the *protoevangelium* to the end, then, the Old Testament reveals, albeit progressively, that the fulfillment of God's promise to reign will come by a royal victor(y) through atoning suffering.

Chapters 3-5 begin where the Old Testament ends by examining the New Testament, particularly Mark (chap. 3), which itself has Isaiah's new exodus in view, and Colossians and Revelation (chap. 4). From Mark's Gospel and representative passages in Colossians and Revelation, the New Testament holds together the kingdom of Christ and the blood of his cross. Chapter 5 rounds off Part One by synthesizing and clarifying these biblical-theological threads.

Part Two applies the biblical-theological findings of Part One to various issues in systematic theology. In other words, Treat shifts from the story of redemption to the logical coherence of redemption, though he acknowledges that both are mutually informing. Since the kingdom and the cross are held together by Christ, the doctrines of Christology, atonement, and kingdom must inform interpreters and be placed in relation to each other.

Treat begins by reconsidering the doctrines of the two states of Christ (humiliation and exaltation) and the three offices of Christ (prophet, priest, and king). In place of understanding the states of Christ as strictly successive (humiliation *then* exaltation), he argues that the kingship of Christ on the cross is exaltation *in* humiliation within the broader movement of exaltation *through* humiliation (chap. 6). Similarly, instead of dividing the offices of Christ, he argues that Christ's death be understood as both a priestly *and* kingly event. As a result, rather than pitting *Christus Victor* against penal substitution, a better way to relate them is *Christus Victor* through penal substitution (chaps. 7-8). In other words, as the priest-king Jesus disarms Satan and his accusatory power and establishes God's kingdom on earth through bearing the penalty of sin by taking the place of sinners.

Chapter 9 sets forth a constructive proposal for the cross-shaped nature of the kingdom. In critical dialogue with Jürgen Moltmann, Treat argues

that "[t]he cross reveals that God is a compassionate king—a shepherd-king who rules by serving. However, the fact that he may rule by serving does not mean that he rules only by serving. As a shepherd-king, God reigns not only by laying down his life for his sheep but also by defending them against voracious wolves. He rules through serving *and* guarding" (239-240). As a result, God advances his kingdom through the church as it conforms to the cross. Finally, chapter 10 provides concluding thoughts on the story and logic of redemption.

The Crucified King is quite impressive for several reasons. First, it demonstrates Treat's proficiency in biblical, systematic, and historical theology—each related to and informing the other—and how it should be put into practice in the church. Second, he not only sets forth a faithful method of doing theology, he employs it to show not only that the kingdom and the cross are central, but also how they are related and located within the biblical storyline that culminates in a priest-king who establishes his kingdom through his atoning death. Third, this work is not only important for scholarship, although it is his published dissertation written at Wheaton under the supervision of Kevin Vanhoozer, but also for the church since it is actually a readable and enjoyable dissertation! That is, it displays both breadth and depth of research in the footnotes and brings together what many have wrongly separated in a clear and rich way. Thus, Christians would benefit from—and at times be moved by—learning of their great King who serves *and* guards his people through his enemy-crushing, wrath-appeasing death and resurrection. Moreover, pastors would grow in their understanding of the storyline of Scripture so that they would more faithfully preach Christ from all of it—from promise to fulfillment. Perhaps the book may be summed up in the words of Augustine: "The Lord has established his sovereignty from a tree. Who is it who fights with wood? Christ. From his cross he has conquered kings" (29). So take up and read, praise God for and be conformed to our crucified and resurrected King.

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The Tradition of Liberal Theology**. By Michael J. Langford. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014, 176 pp., $18.00 cloth.**

This is a helpful book for a theologian looking for a quick presentation of the broader background of the liberal theological tradition. The most helpful aspect of the book is that its author is a seasoned, self-identified liberal theologian. Michael Langford's presentation is favorable and native to the theological context, which lends authority to this succinct work. Langford has also previously written two helpful works on liberal theology: *A Liberal Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001) and *Unblind Faith* (expanded ed., Turnbridge Wells, UK: Parapress, 2010). This third book on liberal theology is a shorter work that benefits from Langford's previous research.

Langford explains the liberal tradition in four chapters. Chapter 1 defines the term "liberal theology." According to Langford, liberal theology is a theology that appropriately balances "between religious faith and human rationality" (1). This balance is found in being open-minded toward challenges to dogmas and revelation, following where reason seems to lead while still attaching some value to historical expressions of theology. Langford's liberalism is summarized by eleven distinct characteristics in chapter 2. The characteristics touch the doctrines of revelation, and soteriology, as well as practical ethics. Langford argues a liberal reads the bible non-literally and harmonizes reason and revelation. He places a rejection of a penal substitutionary atonement and the exclusivity of Christ, and promotion of works-based salvation at the heart of liberal theology. According to Langford, liberalism also typically rejects imputation of guilt, settling for a vague notion of original sin. This is coupled with a minimization of the effects of the fall on the created order and belief in human libertarian free will. Ethically, Langford argues acceptance of a wide range of lifestyles in a cornerstone of theological liberalism. One of the more significant characteristics of liberal theology for Langford is a requirement for a minimal number of basic teachings, which is directed at the tendency of some conservative Roman Catholics to expand the category of necessary beliefs. However, the trend among liberal Protestants to severely limit first-order doctrines is just as evident.

Based on Langford's presentation of liberal theology, the distance between an evangelical Christianity and liberalism is undeniable and is founded

in divergent understandings of the trustworthiness of Scripture. Though *The Tradition of Liberal Theology* was written by someone distant from the Southern Baptist tradition, it helps to explain the necessity of the Conservative Resurgence. Langford's version of liberalism presents human reason as the ultimate judge of truth, which is demonstrated in his desire to modify revelation to match contemporary rationalism and to read Scripture in a "non-literal" fashion. The rejection of most miracles by liberals is a direct assault on Scripture; it spiritualizes the narratives of Scripture by pushing them from factual accounts to mystical reactions to subjective emotions. Langford provides a clear picture of the doctrinal roots of theological liberalism. Ultimately, the evangelical rejection of liberalism is a reaction to the willingness of liberals to deny the truthfulness of clear accounts within Scripture. In Langford's case, this quickly moves from a theoretical denial of miracles to normalization of homoeroticism (54–59).

In chapter 3, Langford describes the contribution thirteen different historical figures made to liberal theology. He begins with Justin Martyr and then moves on to individuals like Peter Abelard, Richard Hooker, Hannah Barnard, and Frederick Temple. He also expands on some of the more recent themes in liberal theology in the Twentieth Century. Notably, not all of the major figures would be properly classified as a liberal according to Langford's own eleven characteristics. Each one was chosen for their liberalizing influence, rather than consistency with the entire model. For instance, Justin Martyr is included within the liberal tradition because of his efforts at demonstrating the reasonableness of Christianity according to the philosophical categories of his day, though he was theologically conservative in other ways. In chapter 4, Langford critiques alternatives to liberal Christian theology. Among these he includes fundamentalism, dialectic theology, and materialism. This is the least helpful of the chapters as, in many cases, Langford's description of the more conservative forms of Christianity do not reflect the careful engagement with primary sources and the best streams of theology.

This short treatment on liberal theology is invaluable because it represents in the most positive light the central aspects of the liberal tradition. It is an insider view of a theological tradition foreign to many evangelicals. Adding to the value of the presentation, Langford has written with academic rigor in accessible prose. This makes this a valuable resource for more introductory applications, like a college class or as a resource for a parishioner who

is trying to understand how liberal theologians arrive at their conclusions. Langford reveals that there is a fundamentally distinct approach to theology in the liberal tradition. It is also helpful that Langford defends Christianity against atheism and materialistic agnosticism. This book does not present a form of Christianity that is entirely incredulous and without faith. It does, however, present Christianity from a faith that is defined as "willingness to live in accordance with the beliefs one has come to hold –– in many cases, by a long process of reflection" (11). Langford's description of *faith* as enduring *faithfulness* is appealing, though the divorce of faith from authoritative revelation in Scripture is also telling.

The Tradition of Liberal Theology provides an important introduction to liberalism. However, a weakness of Langford's book is the failure to deal with opposing views in a nuanced manner. Langford lumps all Christians who believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture into the category of fundamentalist and describes a high view of Scripture as a theological development of the last two centuries. He does distinguish, in a limited manner, evangelicalism from fundamentalism but characterizes the differing labels as a distinction without a difference. Likewise Langford's interaction with conservative Catholicism seems underdeveloped, though his treatments of dialectic theology and materialism are much longer and more balanced. Langford appears to misread conservative theologians in exactly the way the conservatives anticipate. This makes his presentation of their contrasting viewpoints more striking since Langford's criticisms focus on exactly the areas in which conservative theologians invest the most care to explain their position.

Despite an imbalanced presentation of opposing streams of thought, the book is a phenomenal resource that should be part of the library of a scholar or a pastor. Langford's summary of liberal theology is a gift to those seeking to find a reliable source on the liberal interpretation of Christianity. In less than two hundred pages, Langford provides an accessible, well-organized foil which can be used in the classroom or the pastor's study to demonstrate the real differences between liberalism and evangelicalism.

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