

# Book Reviews

*Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus.* By N. T. Wright. Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2007, xvi + 79 pp., \$10.95

This book derives from a series of sermons that N. T. Wright preached at the Church of the Ascension, Easington Colliery, during Holy Week in March 2007. Easington Colliery, a small town in England, has suffered over the years: a devastating underground explosion in 1951 killed 83 people, and then the mines themselves were shut down in 1993. The town has not recovered from that economic blow, and it is still reeling socially, morally, and spiritually.

Wright's sermons were intended to bring the message of the cross and resurrection to a community that had lost hope. Anyone familiar with Wright's work would expect the sermons to be creative and fascinating, and Wright does not disappoint. His sermons here have a verve and dynamism that carry the reader along.

Several things particularly struck me in reading the book. First, Wright captures the theme that the love of God is displayed in the cross. The cross signifies that God in Jesus has come to make things right. Something has gone horribly wrong with the world, but the cross shows us that God loves us and cares about our plight. Wright reminds the church at Easington Colliery—and us—that we can bring our pain and shattered hopes to the cross.

Second, Wright rightfully locates the story of Jesus within the story of Israel. What took place at the cross was not just a transaction. It is part of a grand narrative—part of God's plan to reclaim the world for his glory.

Third, Wright does not give pat answers. He admits that he does not have a blueprint that can solve the problems of the town. The cross of Christ reminds us that the way is not invariably easy. Sometimes we suffer as Christians in agonizing ways.

Fourth, the sermons offer hope. The resurrection of Jesus reminds us that death is not the last word. We can be sure that we will ultimately triumph. Nor is the resurrection merely a "spiritual" reality. Jesus was truly and physically raised from the dead, and we too will be raised physically with him.

Fifth, Wright emphasizes that the resurrection represents God's "yes" to creation. As Christians we are not to retreat from the world but work to change it, for we proclaim the joyful news that Jesus is Lord.

Are there any weaknesses in the book? Three different things stood out to me, but they are all related to the same issue. First, one of the central themes in Jesus' preaching was the call to repentance and faith. Wright rightly offers comfort to the church, but Jesus also emphasized the sins of those in Israel (yes, even when speaking to those who were already religious). Hence, he called on Israel to repent, to take up their cross and follow him, to turn away

from all other gods, and to believe in the gospel. That theme is quite muted in Wright's sermons.

The second weakness is related to the first. Wright pays much more attention to our responsibility to further God's work in this world than he does to the need to put one's faith in Jesus. He agrees that the latter is necessary, but he stresses the former. Of course the Christian life is about more than "getting saved." We have work to do in this world after we believe. Nevertheless, it would seem that Easter week sermons would be a prime occasion to call upon one's hearers to believe in the gospel; and yet a strong call to faith is lacking from this book. Wright seems to assume that all his hearers are already Christians. Wright should emphasize conversion more and call his readers (and hearers) to repentance and faith, especially since the church in England is shrinking and evangelism is such a crying need in Britain.

Third, Wright clearly believes that Jesus bore our sins as our substitute. Still, he scarcely emphasizes the awful judgment and wrath that we deserve as sinners—a wrath that is turned away by the cross of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:25-26; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). Wright focuses on the love of God, but he does not say much about his holiness. Yet it is when we see God's dazzling holiness that his love shines all the brighter.

We can be grateful for some of the themes sounded in this book. Still,

the lack of urgency about our need to repent and believe in the gospel is a blind-spot in Wright. Any pastor who preaches during Easter week must make it a first priority to preach the good news of Christ crucified and risen and call upon sinners to repent and to put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Wright's failure to do this during Easter week is something pastors should not imitate.

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Thomas R. Schreiner

*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church.* By N. T. Wright. New York: HarperCollins, 2008, 352 pages, \$24.95.

N. T. Wright is one of the most talented writers among New Testament scholars today. In this book he presents his understanding of what the Scriptures teach about heaven, the resurrection, and the church's mission.

What is heaven after all? Wright contends that too many Christians have a Platonic idea of heaven. They conceive of it in ethereal terms, as if we float in a bodiless state in some transcendent realm. Indeed, most Christians think of heaven as "up there," and as separated from the earth. What the Scriptures teach, however, is that heaven will come to earth. The Scriptures do not say, according to Wright, that we will "go to heaven when we die," but that heaven will come to earth, that the earth upon which we live will be

transformed, and that we will enjoy the new creation.

Wright's understanding of the Christian hope is predicated upon the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. *Surprised by Hope* therefore summarizes Wright's older, massive, and outstanding book *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. What is important to see here is that the resurrection is irreducibly physical. People in the ancient world believed in spirits, ghosts, and the like, but they did not confuse things like these with the idea of a resurrection. Also, Wright does not simply accept the resurrection by faith, since the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is incredibly strong. No, we cannot prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Christ was raised. Still, his physical resurrection fits most suitably with the evidence of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to Wright's thesis, for Christ's resurrection is tied to the future resurrection of believers. Hence, the future that awaits believers cannot be described as a spiritual existence in heaven. Rather, heaven will be on a new earth where believers will continue the bodily existence they enjoy in this world, but with bodies that are transformed by the Holy Spirit.

And what is the payoff for the church's mission in the present? Wright emphasizes over and over that our life in this world makes a difference. We do not simply wait to go to heaven when we die. We are called upon to engage this world, to work for justice in the political realm, to exercise our artistic gifts as

creatures made in God's image, and to evangelize the lost.

How should we assess *Surprised by Hope*? Wright's fundamental thesis here is correct. Heaven will be on a new earth, and therefore it must not be regarded as floating in some kind of spiritual never-land. We look forward to our future resurrection, and to the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. Wright's defense of the resurrection of Christ, defended more fully in his major book on the topic, is the finest treatment I have read on the subject. Wright does affirm the intermediate state, but he rightly stresses that the future hope of believers is the resurrection. Furthermore, Wright is on target in saying that we are to strive for justice, truth, and beauty in this world. Some believers have said that this world is destined for destruction, and hence only focus on the salvation of the lost.

Yet there are some significant problems with the book. Surely some believers have mistakenly thought that heaven was only spiritual, but many (most of those I know) do not conceive of heaven in this way. We could say that Wright exaggerates his thesis to make his point. Well and good. Still, he is excessively critical of the phrase "go to heaven." After all, we have a number of statements in Scripture about entering (going to!) the kingdom in the future (e.g., Matt 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mark 9:47; 10:15; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). Scripture also speaks of heaven as a realm above and separate from us (Matt 6:1, 9, 10, 20; 18:10; Luke 24:51; John 1:51; Acts 1:10; 2 Cor 12:2; Col. 1:5;

1 Pet 1:4). That does not, to be sure, communicate that our future destiny is non-physical, but it does stress that it is a realm separate from our present existence. Yes, Wright is correct in saying that heaven will be a transformed earth, and that heaven will come, so to speak, to this world. But since the Scriptures also speak of us “entering” the kingdom; since they speak of heaven as a world above and beyond us; and since the new creation is not yet here in its fullness, I don’t believe it’s wrong to say that we will “go there,” as long as we recognize that this is just one of the ways to express the reality that awaits us. In fact, Wright’s protests against using the phrase “go to heaven” betray an overly literal understanding on his part. Hence, against Wright, the hymn *Away in the Manger* does not contradict Scripture when it asks God to “fit us for heaven, to live with thee there” (22).

As noted above, Wright often emphasizes that our work in this world is important. Christians ought not to think that their work in politics, economics, business, art, and so forth is insignificant. There has been a kind of pietism that has denigrated such work. Still, it isn’t clear that forgiving third world debt is a moral obligation on the same level as abolishing slavery. Wright too confidently dismisses all who disagree with him on this matter, sweeping away any objections with rhetorical statements. Moral claims in the public sphere must be advanced by careful reasoning, and Wright does not provide arguments to support his conclusions. Perhaps in the future he

will tackle the matter with reasoned public discourse instead of dicta from above.

Wright commends evangelism as part of our work as believers, but he clearly emphasizes being engaged in the political sphere. Surely Wright has his emphases backwards here. The Scriptures teach that only those who believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins will enjoy the new creation. Isn’t the most important thing for human beings, therefore, to gain acceptance into this new creation? Aren’t there great artists and gifted politicians who have improved our life in this world (for which we are all thankful), and yet who will not be part of the new creation because they have rejected the gospel? Moreover, while Wright correctly affirms that everything done in this world matters, there is also discontinuity between this world and the next. The curse of Genesis 3 will not be lifted until Jesus comes again. Our work in this world is provisional and always touched by the curse. The invention of the car solved a pollution problem in the streets caused by horses, but no one foresaw that it would cause pollution problems of its own.

All this is to say that the call for Christians to evangelize remains more pressing than any call to work in the political sphere, even though all our work in this world is significant. Wright emphasizes that the good news of the gospel is that Jesus is Lord, but, as John Piper has pointed out, this isn’t good news if you’re still a rebel against God; its terrifying news. The New Testament is permeated with the message that we must

turn from our sins and put our faith in Christ. Wright does not disagree with the need to do so, but he seems to be most excited about our work in the political and social sphere.

I could perhaps understand why Wright would stress social concerns if England’s churches were full and thriving—as if almost everyone was a believer. But what is curious is that England’s churches are empty, and unbelief is common. It seems that a bishop in these circumstances would vigorously call upon the church to evangelize, and would emphasize the need to put one’s faith in Jesus Christ and to turn from one’s sins. I don’t see that urgency in Wright’s writing, and therefore he veers from the message of Jesus and the apostles.

I would also mention some bits and pieces of the book that call out for comment, even if I don’t have space here to interact with them here in detail. For instance, Wright contends that Jesus never spoke about his return. He defends this claim in other works, but it’s a controversial point. Here I simply want to register my disagreement with his exegesis.

Also, Wright correctly says that justification by faith and judgment according to works do not conflict (140), but he gives us no help in seeing how these two themes fit together. Readers would be helped in knowing *how* the two themes cohere. Putting these truths together wrongly can lead to a final curse (Gal 1:8-9), and hence Wright must be clearer in explaining the gospel in his exposition.

The section on purgatory is nicely done, showing that purgatory is absent from the biblical witness.

But Wright falls into inconsistency when he endorses praying for the dead since this practice is not found in the Scriptures (172). He does rightfully rule out invoking the saints for assistance.

Contrary to Wright, Jesus' statements about *gehenna* do not refer to the judgment of A.D. 70, though I cannot defend this argument here. Nor do I think Wright is correct in saying that judgment is a minor theme in the letters. The theme is pervasive in them, but, again, that would take too long to defend here.

Too often Wright prosecutes his case by caricaturing a view and then introducing his own view as the solution. Hence, he rightly rejects the notion that hell is a torture chamber, but his own view of hell seems to be shorn of any notion that God punishes those who refuse to believe in Christ. Wright argues that those in hell lose the divine image, and this may well be part of the picture. Nevertheless, many texts speak of God's active punishment of the wicked. Since Wright summarizes his view and does not engage in detailed exegesis, I assume he would offer a different interpretation of the relevant texts. Still, it's difficult to see how God's active punishment of the wicked can be denied (e.g., Rom 2:8-9, 16; 2 Thess 1:8-9, etc.).

Wright appeals to many because he is brilliant and fascinating, and some of what he says is helpful. Nevertheless, his failure to emphasize the centrality of the gospel is troubling, and pastors who find his work illuminating need to be careful that they do not veer away from their central

task of proclaiming the good news to a lost generation.

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Thomas R. Schreiner

*The Drama of Doctrine a Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology.* By K. J. Vanhoozer. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, 493 pp. \$39.95 paper.

Scripture is more than a set of propositions. It is a divine speech-act with an intended effect. This proper and healthy understanding of the biblical text guides Vanhoozer's proposal that the aim and task of theology is to further the "performance" of the drama of the biblical narrative in the life of the church. The attempt to develop a hermeneutical theology that accounts for the effect of Scripture in life while neither jettisoning the primacy of Scripture nor the cognitive, propositional dimension of biblical revelation is by all means to be welcomed. Even if one must be conscious of the limits of speech-act theory, it is entirely justified and appropriate to appeal to it, as Vanhoozer does, in developing a theology of Scripture that moves beyond a bare propositionalism. We must truly appreciate Vanhoozer's project, especially in its primary concerns.

Nevertheless, the model of dramatic performance that forms the basis of his work leads in various ways to questionable outcomes. One of the most fundamental of these is the manner in which Vanhoozer

understands the perlocutionary force of the Scriptures. The Scriptures perform their work in us, but in what way do they do so? In his *analogia dramatis* Vanhoozer presupposes an essentially active role for the human being—not only for the hearer of Scripture, but also for the speaking theologian—"Theatrical beholding overcomes the theory/praxis dichotomy, then, *when it insists on audience participation.*" (16, emphasis in original). The theologian is to serve as the dramaturge—the expert advisor on the performance of a dramatic script—who provides creative insight into how to bridge the gap between the text and performance, between past and present, between *scientia* and *sapientia*, between knowledge and practical understanding. Informed by the theologian and empowered by the Spirit, the congregation performs the text.

Underlying this approach is the view that the humanity is related to God through a covenant or series of covenants (137, n. 70), which despite the element of promise that they contain, lay obligations upon the human being (50-52, 136-137). From Vanhoozer's perspective, that is true not only for the Sinai covenant, but also the new covenant, which is nothing but the old covenant in a different key (e.g., 21-23, 115-150, 301). Here problems arise. The location of "promise" within the larger structure of covenantal requirements and demands obscures the distinct, unconditional words of promise given in Scripture. Thus, for example, in describing the place of "promise" within the context of "covenant," Vanhoozer urges that

“the covenant is personal-relational before it is legal-political” (107). Unless, however, this “personal-relational” dimension of “covenant” is bound to a distinct *word* of promise (“My child, your sins are forgiven you!” Mk 2:5) it remains undefined and diffuse, and threatens to become dependent on some inward quality of the human being: either a sense of dependence or a disposition for action. In response one must counter: promise is itself “legal-political” in nature, just as in the Scriptures all that is “personal-relational” is fully and entirely verbal.

But Vanhoozer does not see the matter so, or at least obscures it. With him “promise” comes to us en clothed in covenant, in a sort of inversion of Calvin’s *totus lex*. By virtue of this understanding and the guiding paradigm of an *analogia dramatis*, the performance of the divine drama becomes nearly—if not entirely—a performance *in us*. Indeed, for Vanhoozer, it becomes *our performance*, even if it is ultimately the performance of the sovereign God. But to the extent that *our performance* of the drama stands at the center of interest—and this is substantially the case in Vanhoozer’s work—we lose from view the true drama of Scripture, the *stupendum duellum* in the cross and resurrection of Christ where God triumphs over sin, death, and the devil for us. The real performance of Scripture is not properly a performance in us, but one which has been completed without reserve *extra nos*. Vanhoozer himself speaks of the history of Jesus Christ as the “perfection and completion” of the

“whole theo-drama” (388). Nevertheless, he is also able to say that “the Scripture remains incomplete” in that it calls for “performance” (101). The two irreconcilable thoughts sit uneasily side-by-side in his work. Of course, the assertion that God’s work has been completed outside of us does not all imply that God has no work to perform in us, or that we have no work to perform. The divine performance that has been completed and set before our eyes *for us* in the crucified and risen Christ—and in which we ourselves have been included—must yet be performed *in us*. God’s work does not exclude our work, but sets us free for it *by placing and keeping it within its proper limit*. And our actions are not only limited, but are also—so long as we are in this body and life—flawed and finally perverse. It is the action of Another that *in sheer grace* carries the drama through. This relation may be profoundly paradoxical, but it is nevertheless clear and comprehensible. In Vanhoozer’s approach to the atonement, however, the relation between the divine performance and our own remains obscure. He unequivocally affirms the ultimate and fundamental character of “the penal substitution view” of the atonement, while at the same time conceiving of it as “relational restoration” (387). What sort of relationship exists, however, between these two views of the atonement? The ideas again sit uneasily side-by-side. The understanding of the atonement as penal substitution remains intact. But is it essential to Vanhoozer’s presentation of the divine drama? He affirms that

Jesus’ death did not take God by surprise (388). Yet he also characterizes the event as God’s “improvising with a canonical script.” In this sense, “the cross was God’s creative response to a new situation” that nevertheless is in keeping with what had gone before (388). The affirmation of the newness and the wonder of the cross are to be appreciated. Yet one must wonder if Vanhoozer’s model of drama and improvisation does not lead him astray. The dramatic, covenantal plan upon which God creatively improvises remains in place as the fundamental story-line. The cross appears as a happy blip in an otherwise straight line of development in which God and his purposes remain calculable and visible. As an improvisation (and a good one at that), the cross becomes integrated into God’s purpose, but does not appear essential to the divine drama. Or at least, Vanhoozer does not tell us how it is so. What is of fundamental importance to him is that *we find our roles*. Here one must say: either the story of Christ determines our understanding of “story” or our construction of story, storyline, and drama (so popular among evangelicals these days) determines our understanding of Christ and, therefore, of God.

That the place of the substitutionary understanding of the atonement remains underdefined for Vanhoozer is reflected then in the overwhelming priority he gives to the “redemptive relational” conception of the atonement. This understanding of the atonement, guided by the metaphor of dramatic performance, is largely what the book is about—and tellingly

appears in Vanhoozer's characterization of the Lord's Supper. Just as he embraces the understanding of the atonement as an act of penal substitution, Vanhoozer clearly and decisively affirms the priority of Christ over the church. But his interest is so focussed on the communication of Christ to the church and on the participation of the church in Christ, that the abiding distinction between Christ and the church—the distinction between the strong and loving bridegroom and the poor harlot whom he saves—goes missing at the most decisive points of his presentation. He urges that between the understanding of the Supper as a mass and the understanding of it as a memorial stands the third option of understanding "the church as *mimesis* of the body of Christ" (409). The celebration and enactment of the Supper is not lacking in this proposal—liturgy after all is one dimension of the church's actions—but Vanhoozer's views the drama as centered upon the church that *signifies* Christ and thus by the Spirit is drawn into "the ongoing theo-dramatic action" (412). Indeed, for Vanhoozer, the church itself is sacrament (408). At this point he almost certainly is thinking not only of its liturgical acts, but also of its life in the world (408). The thought stands remarkably close to Bonhoeffer's likewise sacramental view of the church as "Christ existing in community"—which likewise fails to distinguish properly between Christ and the church. It also approximates the churchly dimension of Barth's *Church and State*, which bears the same weakness.

To the extent, however, that the work of God in Christ is *extended* into the life and work of the church rather than *announced* to it as an effective word from without, the uniqueness of the dramatic action of God the Creator is lost. The promises of God have their "yes" not in us, but in the crucified and risen Christ—as Bonhoeffer himself reflects in one of his healthier moments. The work of the Creator remains inimitable, Jesus' new commandment notwithstanding. The call to be God's co-worker is never a call to be a co-creator. God alone remains author *and* performer of drama, a drama that he displays through the apostles before the audience of the world and angels. In this drama, we are not in the first instance actors, but those acted upon. The Christian life is neither contemplation nor action, but—said with Luther—it is faith understood as *vita passiva*: life received as a gift from God. Here our actions are not dismissed but *defined* in their secondary place. It is not we who fulfill the Law, but the Law—weak as it is—is fulfilled in us by Another.

Although he does not forget the history of Adam, the abstractness of the dramatic metaphor leads Vanhoozer to forget that Adam's tragic drama is also *our* drama, recapitulated in sorrow, sickness and death, and in the destructiveness of sin. There is no neutral place on this earth between wrath and grace. Deliverance from our past (which is always with us) is much more than our discovering our role in a drama, or responding "rightly to God's cognitive and covenantal contact"

with us (301). Romans 12:1-2 calls for something far greater than the acquisition of a new world-view, even if the text generally is preached that way. We require deliverance from ourselves, a deliverance that comes to us again and again solely from the word and work of the Creator, who pronounces the forgiveness of *our* sins and promises our resurrection. Only in this way does the Gospel set us free from our past, grant us a future and a hope, and set us in service in the present. As Paul makes clear, Christian obedience—our participation in the divine drama—is nothing other than the resurrection from the dead projected into the present, an event which daily must be grasped as such.

Our identity is not to be found in the roles that we play. The attempt to make it so is to risk losing our self in our multiple tasks or to play the hypocrite—a term derived from the Greek theater. At the risk of sounding like a Bonhoeffer fan (which I am not), it is worth pointing to his remarkable poem of self-doubt and faith, "Wer bin ich?" ("Who am I?"): the roles we play are always uncertain and tainted with our sin. Thank God our identity lies in Christ!

The one who lives by faith, does not live by sight. Neither the Scriptures, nor our lives, nor human history run the predictable course of a continuous storyline. Israel's history is largely a history of regress from brilliant moments of grace—as is also the case for the history of the church up to the present moment. Nor are God's acts of mercy and deliverance predictable, even if evangelicals are

tempted to pretend that they are so. We are not permitted to forget the history of Job, nor God's inexplicable hiding of his face—Luther's *deus absconditus*—upon which Paul in hope against all hope builds the soaring conclusion of Romans 8. We *hear* of the immeasurably happy end of all things in the gospel, including our freedom from sin and death, *but we do not yet see it*, nor can we track and chart it in some redemptive-historical scheme. The real drama of doctrine and of salvation is the unfathomable love of the Creator in unsearchable ways of mercy and judgment. This drama, which has come to fulfillment in Jesus, now is taking place in the whole creation and, therefore, also in us mere human creatures. Paul thus sings his praise at the conclusion of Romans 11. The drama advances not in the clear vision of a storyline, but in the groaning of the Spirit who reaches out for us toward an unseen hope. In this drama, we remain those called to stand and see the Lord's work—as did Israel at the Red Sea—without any diminishing of our duties or the final removal of our sorrows. If this is so, our work includes joining the song of the apostle and the *lyric* of the psalms (of which genre Vanhoozer remains suspicious)—the “little Bible within the Bible.” Israel sang God's praises at the shore of the sea. Shall not we Christians sing? The Apocalypse surely sees our song as our final role in the divine drama.

The true weight of the gospel as “God's saving power,” as the *effective* Word of God that performs what it says, does not come to expression in Vanhoozer's proposal. Not what we

do with the Scripture, but what the Scripture does with us is of fundamental importance. It is perhaps not without significance that Aristotle's conception of theater as *mimēsis* with its intention of empathetic effect on the audience implicitly stands in the background of Vanhoozer's work, and that the role of the dramaturge with its task of overcoming historical distance, which especially G. E. Lessing furthered plays such a large role in it. It is not the Aristotelian theory of drama that Vanhoozer offers in his proposal, nor does he overlook the promissory dimension of Scripture entirely. He does, however, subordinate the category of promise to the paradigm of imitation and dramatic re-production. *Theology* is thus the “bridge” between the drama of Scripture and the performance of Scripture in life. Correspondingly, according to Vanhoozer, one who serves as a theologian in a public way—whether as an academic or as a pastor—is called to be a “dramaturge,” that is, one who mediates Scripture to the congregation.

Such a priesthood of the theologian is nowhere to be found in the New Testament. Not even the apostle has a place between Christ and his bride, even if he is father, mother, and more to his churches. His relationship to them is far more intimate than the merely intellectual role of a dramaturge (1 Thess 2:7, 11-12; 2 Cor 12:14). Yet its intimacy by no means renders it mediatorial. The apostle already knows what Robert Jenson articulates concerning Christian preaching, “‘Who hears you hears me’ is not a trope.” (“Luther's Con-

temporary Theological Significance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* [ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003], 278). Like John the Baptist before him, Paul with all his life and word merely points to Christ. So long as his churches continue in faith, he is entirely dispensable (Phil 2:17-18, 4:9; 1 Cor 11:1). The call to imitate the apostle—and thus Christ himself—is an imitation worked by the word (Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Cor 4:16-17; 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 3:7-9). In contrast to the refined role of the dramaturge, the apostle chooses the lowly metaphor of the farmer to describe his theological labors: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused growth, so that neither the one who planted nor the one who watered counts as something, but only the God who causes growth” (1 Cor 3:7-8). “Ruling the church” with the Word demands dirty and sweaty work. But this mere delivery of seed, water, and perhaps some manure remains secondary. We farm hands—mere migrants that we are—are entirely dispensable. God alone remains the true and final author, performer, and dramaturge.

If theology may be understood as a guide for reading Scripture, proper theological instruction must drive us away from all theological schemes and constructions, back into Scripture—there to encounter the living God. This understanding shaped the first Protestant systematic theologies of Melancthon and Calvin. The performance of the drama of Scripture—what the Scriptures call “piety” (*eusebeia*)—is a great mystery that has been revealed in the flesh,

seen by angels, and taken up in glory. This One cannot finally be imitated, but only believed, confessed, and worshipped with body and life. Our place in the divine drama is thus not discovered (especially not by the cleverness of a dramaturge), but given to us through the gospel, no matter that we must apply to it all the wisdom that God grants us. Our roles as God's earthly vessels are more "suffered" than acted. So long as God remains his own interpreter, the *claritas Scripturae* remains, historical distance notwithstanding. As one Reformer reminds us, the Holy Spirit is no skeptic, nor is that which he writes in the hearts of his Christians uncertain. As Paul reminds us, the hand that writes in our hearts is Christ's alone, no matter that he uses earthen vessels to do so. Whatever course the world and the church around us might take in this drama, through the Word the Spirit binds us to the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. According to Peter, it is here that we have been given a fixed and unchanging interpretation of Scripture, a little lamp upon which we are called to fix our gaze until God's epic runs its course and the daystar rises in our hearts. If the Scripture may be understood in this way as "the divine Aeneid" (Vanhoozer's suspicions of the epic genre notwithstanding), we poor beggars dare not touch it, but must—with body and life—worship its course.

Mark A. Seifrid

*The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 382 pp., \$50.00.

Everyone engaged in serious study of the New Testament has benefited from the work of James D. G. Dunn, recently Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham. Controversial, yet engaging, Dunn's work has spanned many areas of NT and theological investigation, including Pauline studies, pneumatology, Christology, theological method, and NT theology in general, among others. He has made profound and lasting contributions in all these areas. In light of that, the appearance of a *Festschrift* in his honor was an anticipated event, and this volume is no disappointment in terms of its content.

This reviewer found the essays by Robert Morgan, Scot McKnight, Robert Banks, I. Howard Marshall, and Richard Bauckham to be the most engaging, though all twenty-seven essays had something helpful to say. Morgan's chapter on unity and diversity picks up where Dunn's monograph on that topic leaves off. His work will be unsatisfactory to most evangelicals, but it is a helpful piece in ascertaining where non-evangelicals who still have regard for Scripture are headed with that topic. McKnight also leaves those of us who want to affirm his evangelical status as being intact in some doubt. In his chapter, "Covenant and Spirit: The Origins of the New Covenant Hermeneutic," he calls into question the authenticity of the statement in

Luke 22:20, "The cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." McKnight argues that this locution likely originated in the months after Pentecost when the early church had occasion to connect the death of Jesus with Jeremiah 31 (46-47).

Robert Banks has made many positive contributions to our understanding of early church communities in his writings. Here in an essay which clearly gives a higher regard to the historicity of Acts than can be found in the work of the recipient of the *Festschrift*, Banks identifies a work of the Spirit in the Book of Acts that others have given little attention: The guidance of the Apostles in their journeys by the Spirit. He notes that Luke's preface to each of the Pauline journeys "begins with a clear reference to the Spirit" (119). So, even as the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, so that same Spirit led Paul on the way to fulfilling his ministry of carrying the gospel to the Gentiles.

Marshall writes on the Holy Spirit in the Pastoral Epistles and the Apostolic Fathers. He begins with a tacit affirmation of P. N. Harrison's argument that the Pastorals reflect a vocabulary closer to the second century Fathers than to Paul, and thus that the Pastorals are not Pauline (see his commentary on the Pastorals in the International Critical Commentary), a point with which we would not agree. But beyond that, his treatment of the Fathers is helpful, not least so because it demonstrates many affinities of flesh/spirit language between the Fathers and Paul himself, especially in Ignatius. Curi-



ous, indeed! Bauckham's essay on the Spirit in James also is worth careful reading.

There is much in this book that will bother evangelical readers, but also much that is helpful, a sense that many of us have encountered when reading Dunn's own work through the years.

Chad Owen Brand

*Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology.* By Frank D. Macchia. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006, 296 pp., \$29.99.

Frank Macchia, well-known Assemblies of God theologian and professor of theology at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, California, has produced a closely-reasoned and well-researched volume on Spirit baptism which is penned on behalf of the global Pentecostal community. Macchia is a great exemplar of the new Pentecostal scholarship. That two-word locution might once have been thought to be an oxymoron, but that is no longer the case, even if it once was. With a D.Theo. from Basel, Macchia is one of the finest theologians in America, with numerous publications under his belt.

Here is an irenic and thoughtful defense of the traditional Pentecostal view on Spirit baptism—that it is generally subsequent to conversion/initiation, and that it is evidenced by tongues. Absent from Macchia's presentation is any sense that this implies Pentecostal spiritual superiority. This reviewer has had the privilege of meeting the author and

has found him to be an engaging and clear communicator.

Two caveats. Though he argues his position well, this reviewer is still unconvinced of the basic Pentecostal thesis with regard to Spirit baptism. Second, his rejection of traditional evangelical views on justification is disturbing (129-40). In a lecture a few years ago at the Society for Pentecostal Studies he made a comment something like, "When I read the Canons of Trent on justification, my heart was strangely warmed." That is a problem. But in these pages, one will discover a very fine work of scholarship in the pneumatic tradition.

Chad Owen Brand

*Preaching With Variety: How to Recreate the Dynamics of Biblical Genres.* By Jeffrey D. Arthurs. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007, 238 pp., \$15.99 paper.

Jeffrey Arthurs, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Communication at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, believes that a sermon's content should explain and apply the Word of God as it is found in a biblical text, and that a sermon's form should unleash the impact of that text (13). The second part of that belief is the focus of his book, *Preaching With Variety*. In order to explain how preachers can be biblical in how they preach and not just what they preach, Arthurs describes the aspects of certain biblical genres and then explains how preachers can reproduce those aspects in their sermons. In the last seven chapters of the book Arthurs describes the following

genres: psalms, narratives, parables, proverbs, epistles, and apocalyptic literature.

Before getting to those chapters, however, Arthur first makes his case for the importance of preaching with variety. He notes in his introduction that preaching with variety is not the most important of a preaching ministry (that would be glorifying God), but that is nonetheless still important (15-16). The first chapter explains that variety is important because God, who is the Great Communicator, communicates with variety. The Bible is full of different literary forms that communicate in different ways. General revelation in creation also manifests God's creative variety. Preachers ought to emulate God by preaching according to the forms of his revelation. The second chapter gives a second reason why it is important to preach with variety. Preaching ought to be incarnational; it ought to adapt God's truth to a particular culture. Our culture is visual, fast, interactive, leery of authority, and full of different types of listeners and learners. Not only should preachers preach with variety because God communicates that way, but also because it helps people learn God's truth more effectively.

Each of the remaining chapters covers one particular biblical genre (although narrative is treated in two chapters), and each chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section Arthurs defines what the genre is. The second section focuses on the particularities of each genre, explaining how the text communicates and what the text does. For example, in his

chapter on Psalms, Arthurs explains that lyric poems such as the psalms are normally short, have intricate structure, use concrete images, and convey intense emotion. The third section of each chapter is entitled "Try This." Arthurs here give practical suggestions on how preachers can express the form of the biblical text in their sermons. For example, in his chapter on Proverbs, Arthurs offers the following tips: preach observations, not promises; do not preach selfish behavior, humanism, or materialism; preach through units; use your imagination; show as well as tell; turn on the spotlight; make your central idea proverbial; compare and contrast proverbs; borrow the proverb's movement; adopt the teacher's stance; feature women; use some humor; and use homespun language. Each of these suggestions is supported with examples from relevant portions of Scripture. The fourth section of each chapter is a checklist of the main points from the chapter that the preacher can use as a reference tool when putting together his sermon.

The third sections of the chapters are the strongest parts of the book, and worth the purchase price. Arthurs's suggestions are not only practical, but useable. Preachers could easily use this book as a reference when putting together their sermons, incorporating one or two of the suggestions as ways to vary their preaching. No one preacher is likely to use every one of Arthurs's tips, but he offers enough of them for each genre that most preachers will find at least one or two that are

fresh and helpful. The other sections of the chapters, Arthurs's explanations and definitions of the different genres, while necessary for a book of this sort, are nothing new to those who have read standard works on homiletics or hermeneutics. They are good introductions to the different nuances of each genre, but nothing more. For a book of this length, however, this is not a problem, and Arthurs does include footnotes and a bibliography. Arthurs succeeds in explaining why variety in preaching is so important and how preachers can actually accomplish that variety in their sermons. Preachers of all ages and experience, from those beginning in the ministry to those who have preached thousands of sermons, would benefit from many of the suggestions in this book.

Gary L. Shultz Jr.

*Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice.* By Daniel J. Treier. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 221 pp., \$17.99 paper.

One of the vexing aspects of engaging in the conversation about theological interpretation is the problem of definition. Scholars and theologians from varying backgrounds and disciplines are claiming "theological interpretation of Scripture," while employing methods and producing results that span the interpretive grid. In *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, Daniel Treier seeks "to tell the story and map the major themes of this movement" and also

"to address some tough questions to clarify its future direction" (11). Treier defines the movement broadly as one that "seeks to reverse the dominance of historical criticism over a churchly reading of the Bible and to redefine the role of hermeneutics in theology" (14).

Treier divides the book into two main sections. In part one, he charts the "catalysts and common themes" of the movement, which include an interest in precritical interpretation (chapter one), the possibility of a "ruled" reading which takes account of Christian doctrine (chapter two), and the role the community plays in discerning and arriving at meaning (chapter three). In part two, Treier delineates the areas where proponents of theological interpretation have sharp disagreements. These differences include the assumptions and positions involved in engaging biblical theology (chapter four), general hermeneutics (chapter five), and various social locations (chapter six). In this section, Treier asks if theological interpretation can bridge the gap between biblical studies and theological reflection, if secular theories of reading and interpretation have any bearing on biblical texts, and if interpreters of Scripture should be mindful of global social contexts.

One notable feature of this book is the analysis of theological interpretation that Treier offers in a concluding chapter. Synthesizing his previous material, Treier asserts that theological interpretation uses the ideas of canon, creed, and culture to engage the Scriptures with and for the church. However, for Treier,

the church does not participate in the theological process merely to take part in an informed discussion about the Bible. Rather, “the ultimate interpretive interest of the church is to know God in a holistic sense” (204). Theological interpretation seeks to utilize all the various “lenses” of literary and theological reflection in order to produce “a coherent vision of who God is and who that calls us to become in Christ” (203). Treier calls this perspective the “widest-angle lens” which puts the task of interpretation into proper focus (203). These perspectives also function as a map that guides the church on its pilgrimage to know and respond rightly to God. To illustrate this practice, Treier provides a sustained case study throughout the book concerning the “Image of God” (*Imago Dei*). In doing this, Treier relates the themes of each chapter to this doctrinal concept, and in the conclusion, he summarizes the role that exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology play in its full explication. For Treier, this “sketch” of theological reflection provides a “pattern for thought” that can guide the interpreter in his pursuit of “prayerful contemplation” (199). Thus, Treier engages in the process of theological interpretation even as he introduces the concepts.

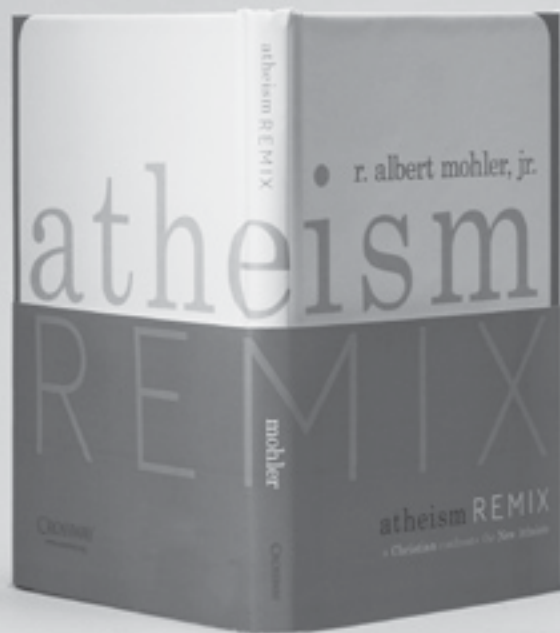
Some readers, though, might object to Treier’s framing of the issues, as even the ordering of an “introduction” involves debatable interpretive decisions. Others may also see a few gaps in the “prehistory” of the movement that Treier develops, though this is likely a

feature of the introductory nature of the work rather than a result of oversight. A further concern relates to the chapter on globalization. Treier recognizes that while the other issues he treats “are frequently addressed at length by advocates of theological exegesis, globalization is not” (157). He quickly moves from this concession to an extended discussion of postcolonial thought and the rise of Pentecostalism in “the global south” (157). Because this emphasis is in some ways unique to Treier, readers would benefit from a more detailed discussion of its relevance and connection to the idea of theological interpretation, especially in light of Treier’s acknowledgement that “this chapter evokes more questions than answers” (182). One also notices Treier’s heavy reliance on the cultural analysis of Philip Jenkins. Nevertheless, Treier’s basic point in this chapter is well taken. As the Bible is being read, cherished, and interpreted in diverse contexts, “non-Western voices can no longer be marginal as they once were. We must listen” (186). This emphasis resonates with Treier’s similar interest in demonstrating the ecumenical benefit of a widespread return to the practice of theological interpretation (20-33).

Through his clear structure and concise content, Treier achieves his aim of providing scholars, students, and pastors with a succinct introduction to this burgeoning movement. The two parts of the book quickly highlight the unity and significant diversity of the movement. Further, while Treier’s primary dialogue partners are the ones at the forefront of the

theological interpretation movement (e.g., Stephen Fowl, Francis Watson, Kevin Vanhoozer), he also interacts with a wide range of related scholarship (e.g., the canonical approach of Brevard Childs and Christopher Seitz). In addition, Treier constantly references the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, thus making his study a fitting companion volume to this other important work in the field. Though *Introducing Theological Interpretation* appears early in the movement, it offers a contribution of definition and direction. To borrow his own metaphors, Treier’s work can function as a set of lenses to bring the contours of this movement into focus and can serve as a roadmap to chart some of the trajectories the church and the academy will need to follow in order to recover the “Christian practice” of theological interpretation of Scripture.

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