

Book Reviews

The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship. By Robert Letham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004, xv + 551pp., \$24.99 paper.

Robert Letham has written an excellent and very helpful book on the Trinity. The resurgence of trinitarian theology and interest in the last two-plus decades has been a good sign. And the time indeed is ripe for a lengthy and robust monograph on the trinity from an evangelical perspective. Letham is pastor of an Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is an adjunct professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and also teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C./Baltimore. Readers may recognize him as the author of *The Work of Christ*, a volume in IVP's *Contours of Christian Theology* series.

Letham's monograph is divided into four key sections: Biblical Foundations, Historical Development, Modern Discussion, Critical Issues. Two appendices (critiques of Gilbert Bilezikian and Kevin Giles) plus a glossary, bibliography, and scripture, subjects, names appendices close the volume.

The Holy Trinity is undoubtedly the fruit of many years of teaching, both in academic and church settings. It is written from a Reformed perspective, and Letham writes, "To be Reformed is to be truly catholic, biblical, evangelical, and orthodox" (ix). The monograph would serve as

an excellent introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, although an introduction of a particularly detailed sort. The Biblical Foundations section is thorough (70 pages) without getting bogged down. The Historical Development section will be extremely helpful for students of many stripes, as Letham engages in significant detail with the key historical figures/schools of thought in Trinitarian development, ranging from early trinitarianism, through key eastern and western thinkers, and ending with John Calvin. The Modern Discussion section moves from Barth to Thomas F. Torrance, and theological students will be immensely helped by this guide through modern theology. The last section deals with four critical issues: Trinity and Incarnation; Trinity, Worship, and Prayer; Trinity, Creation and Missions; Trinity and Persons.

All throughout the volume, Letham gives evidence of a careful reading of key thinkers past and present, and ranging from Catholic to Orthodox to Protestant, and he engages fairly with thinkers across the conservative to liberal spectrum. The glossary is helpful, and the bibliography is excellent. For thoughtful laypersons or the seasoned scholar, Letham's *The Holy Trinity* deserves careful reading.

Brad Green
Union University

The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues. Edited by R. Stanton Norman. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007, 210 pp., \$16.99 paper.

This collection of twelve essays originated with a conference entitled "The Mission of Today's Church," held at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in February 2005 under the auspices of The Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry. The Center for Baptist Theology and Ministry at New Orleans was directed by the editor, R. Stanton Norman, at the time of the conference. Since then, Dr. Norman has taken an administrative position at Oklahoma Baptist University. Steve Lemke, the provost at New Orleans Seminary, has since been tasked with directing the work of this important locus of Baptist thought and practice. The purpose of the book is to explore what "Baptists believe about the nature and mission of the church and how that mission is contextualized in our contemporary world" (ix). The book meets its goal, but raises unintended questions about divergent views of the nature of the church and its mission.

On the one hand, the commonalities manifested by Baptists within the book should be stressed. On the other hand, the divergences expressed within the book should be noted, too. Below, we consider the book from the perspective of both unity and diversity with regard to Southern Baptist understandings of the Great Commission, the nature of the church, and the denomination's direction. (Kenneth D. Keathley's excellent essay on divine sovereignty and human salvation draws upon the Great Commission, but it is a heavier theological piece that is not easily classified within this book.)

First, it should be noted that the authors of the book are all Southern Baptists and are dedicated to Great Commission ministry within that denominational context. Beside Norman, the lineup includes one pastor, one state convention executive, three school presidents, three theol-

ogy professors, and three other denominational servants. The preponderance of educators and denominational servants should not be seen as negative, however, for the writers collectively have many generations of pastoral experience between them. Moreover, the lives and words of each writer indicate that they are committed to serving the churches through their various roles.

Second, the editor comments that the authors are each passionately committed to fulfilling the Great Commission within the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. There is little doubt in this regard, but the essays stress the mission of the church to varying degrees. The essays primarily devoted to consideration of the Great Commission as a practice include those by James Jenkins ("Three View of the Church's Mission in the Black Community"), Charles L. Quarles ("Explaining the Gospel to Kids"), Ed Stetzer, ("The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches"), and Barrett Duke, ("Being Salt and Light in a Post-Christian Culture"). The essays by Jenkins and Quarles are perhaps the most practical, even as their practicality necessarily entails a restriction of their subject matter to the black community and to children, respectively. Unfortunately, none of the writers were tasked with actually defining theologically and missiologically what the Great Commission is and means.

The essays by Stetzer and Duke are more theoretical, even as they address the mission of the church in the world today. Both men address the problem of the relationship between culture and church. Duke carefully threads his way between the opposing reactions of engagement and retreat as the churches are confronted by an increasingly post-Christian, post-modern culture. Duke laments the loss of belief in a universal moral truth that accompanies post-modernism, even as he brings Scripture to bear in order to define and propose a relevant Christian worldview. Stetzer's essay is much less careful, for even as he notes the shift to a post-modern paradigm, he is loath to

offer any criticism of it. Rather, Stetzer argues for contextualization or cultural relevancy, placing himself squarely against the dominant Southern Baptist tendency to regard the culture as a scandal. (Stetzer also argues for an expanded role for younger leaders.) The increasingly stark differences between the views of theologians like Stetzer, who want to downplay cultural problems in the name of evangelistic effectiveness, and the views of theologians like Duke, who want to maintain biblical truth in an increasingly anti-Christian environment, requires further thought by Southern Baptist intellectuals.

Third, there are a number of essays that consider the local churches, including offerings by David S. Dockery ("The Church, Worship, and the Lord's Supper"), R. Stanton Norman ("Together We Grow: Congregational Polity as a Means of Corporate Sanctification"), and Jerry Sutton ("Congregational Polity and Its Strategic Limitations").

Dockery intends to recover a Reformation doctrine of the Lord's Supper, including the spiritual presence of Christ within the worshipping congregation and the imagery of the supper as the visible Word. Dockery correctly argues that the supper should be "more than a mere appendage to the preaching service" (49). However, the place of the Lord's Supper as the expression of church communion and, therefore, of church discipline (i.e., excommunication) is remarkably absent. Norman draws upon many years of advocating biblical ecclesiology by defending congregational polity as a means of holiness. Sutton, on the other hand, argues against congregational polity as strategically limited, even as he denies that there is a discoverable "biblical model" for the church (citing Millard Erickson, 113). As with the divergence between Stetzer and Duke, so the divergence between Sutton and Norman is noticeable, if not intentional.

Finally, there are four essays that consider the progress of Southern Baptists. Two of the four essays are concerned with the cooperative nature of the Southern Baptist Convention. Jim Richards

("Cooperation among Southern Baptist Churches as Set Forth in Article 14 of the Baptist Faith and Message") discovers four areas of cooperation within the common confession of Southern Baptists. Those concerned about the decline of Baptist identity and the rise of evangelical ecumenism should consider Richards' very helpful paradigm. Providing yet another contrast to Sutton, Chad Owen Brand ("Toward a Theology of Cooperation") argues from the hermeneutic of the regulative church principle that Scripture, including the descriptive passages in the book of Acts, certainly does provide a model for the church and for cooperation between churches.

The remaining two essays, actually printed first, consider the progress of Southern Baptists as a whole. Daniel L. Akin ("Ten Mandates for Southern Baptists") provides a balanced and comprehensive vision for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention, with regard to a recovery of biblical ecclesiology within the churches, with regard to the Great Commission focus of the denomination, and with regard to the function of its missionary and educational agencies. Finally, Charles S. Kelley ("Between Scylla and Charybdis: Reflections on the Baptist Way") writes that Southern Baptists have always been a people of controversy and rehearses conflicts over Sunday School, evangelism, sin, and theology. He thus demonstrates that Baptist theology and polity have helped the Southern Baptist Convention to become a responsive and responsible organization that "emerging leaders" should enthusiastically embrace. "Feeling tensions is not a sign of death. It is a sign of life" (35).

Reflecting upon the current Southern Baptist tensions on unintentional display in this book itself, Kelley's words strike this middle-aged reviewer as concurrently biblical and relevant. Perhaps the older generation has some wisdom to relay to the middle and younger generations after all. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is rendering Southern Baptists a great service through the continuing work of The Center

for Baptist Theology and Ministry. And B&H Academic, a division of LifeWay Resources, has rendered Southern Baptists a great service by publishing this fine collection.

Malcolm B. Yarnell III
Center for Theological Research
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God. By J. R. Daniel Kirk. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 245 pp., \$32.00 paper.

This monograph, the fruit of a dissertation written under Richard Hays, represents yet another brave attempt to read Paul afresh through the lens of God's dealings with Israel. At various points the influence of N. T. Wright's work becomes apparent, although Kirk quite rightly distances himself from Wright on the question of continuity between this age and the one to come, that is, between a *iustitia civilis* and the *iustitia Dei*. As the title indicates, the burden of the book is to show that Jesus' resurrection is the key to reading Romans, and that this key has to do with theodicy. In Jesus' resurrection, God justifies himself as the one who is faithful to his promises to Israel.

There is some insight in the claim that Romans has to do with theodicy. Unfortunately, Kirk, despite his attempt to distance himself from philosophical abstractions, construes theodicy in Leibnizian terms as the justification of God before the forum of human reason (or, in this case, human questions: in this way Kirk attempts to approximate biblical categories). But, as is apparent from the very start in the letter, the matter of theodicy is not *merely* the question of God's justice, but rather the *conflict* between the fallen human being and God as to who is in the right: *homo verax*, *Deus mendax* or, as the apostle, citing Ps 51:6 insists, *homo mendax*, *Deus verax*. Human beings and God enter into judgment with one another. Kirk's failure to recognize the biblical form of theodicy (see Job!) cripples his work in a

fundamental way, since it brings him to separate the question of finding a gracious God from that of the faithfulness of God to his promises. Correspondingly for Kirk, there is no condemning voice to the Law (!), but only a witness to salvation (227; to which one might ask, "From what, mere disaster?" That is nothing!). With Wright, Kirk wants to see justification and sanctification as *outflows* of the gospel, which itself has to do with the salvation of Israel. One of the unhappy effects of this slip is that Jesus' resurrection becomes categorically different from our own. His resurrection is his justification, but it is ours only in a derivative manner, only a by-product of our incorporation in the faithful community. Not only that, but Kirk essentially reads Jesus' work as that of a good Jew, a good human being, who was faithful to death. But Christ appears not only as the obedient human in Romans. He is also the one who acts as God *by his free gift and grace of giving*, that liberates not only Israel, but all of humanity from sin and death (5:15). And despite Kirk's confident claim that in 3:21-26 Paul "clearly" speaks of Jesus' faithfulness to death, it is God, not Jesus who is the actor in the passage, and who displays his righteousness in Jesus the mercy seat (222).

Of course, the larger problem remains that the act which answers the question of Israel's suffering turns out to be a radical re-reading of Scripture, in which the people of God become the ethnically mixed community of Jews and Gentiles. It is hard to see how Paul's message brought any comfort to those for whom it was intended in this reading of the apostle. It is also hard to believe that Paul understood himself to be re-interpreting the Scriptures, rather than unlocking them for his readers through the resurrection of Christ.

Although Kirk appropriately underscores the significance of "apocalyptic" as opposed to the straight lines of salvation-history, he ends up stripping present participation in Christ of its eschatological significance. Against Kirk it must be said that the "place" of obedience (226) is nothing other than the new creation: the newness of life of

the resurrection entered into the present age (6:4). The “sphere of obedience” is that of the age to come: the life beyond judgment brings us through judgment. It is not a matter of mere grace, as Kirk (along with many others) supposes, but whether “future vindication” is already contained within the verdict of Jesus’ resurrection for us.

Strangely, this Reformed theologian could use just a small dose of Luther in order to keep himself orthodox. The matter at stake in Romans is not “about God” but—to cite the much-maligned Luther—the single, indivisible subject of Romans is the human being under guilt and condemnation *and* God the justifier and savior of the human being. Kirk fails to see that in the community of Jews and Gentiles, the power and love of the Creator is manifest in his justifying work in the resurrection of the Christ, so that believers in Messiah remain Jews and Gentiles and yet find community in him alone.

Mark A. Seifrid

Galater. By Martin Meiser. Novum Testamentum Patristicum 9. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007, 373 pp., 89 € (\$ 112.00).

This first volume to appear in the NTP series offers considerable promise for those yet to come. Like the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, the project was born of the fresh interest in the tradition of Christian reading of Scripture, long ignored by modern scholars but now receiving its rightful place in interpretation. Rather than merely providing a selection of readings with thematic comments (as does the ACCS), the NTP explores the theology and hermeneutics of the Fathers as they interpret and employ the text, presenting the material verse-by-verse or unit-by-unit as the text and tradition warrants. Already in the conception of the project, the original editors rightly decided that they should set their aim on something more than a patristic “Billerbeck.” Not only the words, but

the matters believed, treated, and celebrated form the content of this commentary (11). Meiser’s remarkable erudition in this task provided a reality check for the editors: unless each volume was to become an encyclopedia in itself, the original goal of a comprehensive treatment of the patristic literature had to be surrendered. Along the way, Meiser himself found that he had to settle for the presentation of the major lines of interpretation. He nevertheless provides a remarkably thorough treatment of the reception history of Galatians from Polycarp and Ignatius to the venerable Bede, including the apocryphal and Gnostic literature. As the editors of the series indicate, subsequent volumes may not match the extent of this outstanding contribution. It is no wonder that Meiser, who serves on the Protestant faculty of the Erlangen-Nürnberg University, received the “Pope Benedict XVI” prize in 2008, given annually in recognition of especially valuable scholarly, theological contributions. It is well-deserved. This volume—as well as the series to follow—not only belongs in the library of every theological faculty, but deserves to be translated into English for use by a broader public. One can only hope that an American publisher will have the vision to invest in such an endeavor.

Mark A. Seifrid

The Lord’s Prayer - Viewed in Light of Its Jewish Context. By Eduard Lohse. Lucas-Preis 2007. Trans. Shivaun Heath. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 110 pp., € 24.00 (\$ 36.00).

The Leopold-Lucas Award, granted annually by the Protestant Theological Faculty of Tübingen University, was endowed in 1972 by the Consul General, Franz Dietrich Lucas, in memory of his father Rabbi Dr. Leopold Lucas, a doctoral graduate of the faculty, and later a victim of National Socialism: Leopold Lucas died in Theresienstadt, his wife at Auschwitz. The gesture of reconciliation and forgiveness which this endowment to a

German theological faculty expresses can hardly be overestimated.

It is entirely fitting that Eduard Lohse should have been selected as the 2007 recipient of this prize, given his longstanding concern to show how earliest Christianity remained deeply rooted in its Jewish context. That scholarly interest was more of the exception than the rule when Lohse completed his doctoral dissertation on “ordination” in early Judaism and earliest Christianity in 1949.

In his address for the occasion of the award, Lohse presents a fresh comparison of the Lord’s Prayer with contemporary Jewish prayers, especially the Eighteen Benedictions and the Qaddish. Lohse’s reflections are thoughtful and measured: there is nothing that is stunning here, but much that is useful. Lohse here gathers together a fine, historical bibliography on the Jewish background to the Lord’s Prayer as a simple by-product of his own address, which itself is valuable. The address is presented with an English translation parallel to the original German, making the lecture available to the larger world.

Mark A. Seifrid

That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John. By Christopher D. Bass. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008, xiv + 241 pp, \$24.99.

Christopher Bass, Pastor of Redeemer Fellowship Church in the greater Boston area, has given us a very insightful and helpful volume on assurance that arose from his doctoral dissertation which was written under the direction of Professors Thomas Schreiner, William Cook, and Bruce Ware at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This volume argues that assurance of salvation is available to believers, and that it is essentially grounded in the cross-work of Christ on the believer’s behalf, but that it is also rooted in the lifestyle of the individual person. A Christian who is not walking in the Spirit, therefore, may be truly saved, but has no right to assurance of

that salvation.

Here is a wonderfully balanced book which does not make the mistake of either making assurance only a matter of the heart (the witness of the Spirit), nor merely a matter of works (the practical syllogism), but finds value in both sides of the equation. I wish I had access to this book a couple of years ago when I was preaching through 1 John. This is a fine addition to the NAC Studies in Bible and Theology series.

Chad Owen Brand

To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History. Edited by Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008, 347 pp., \$ 17.00 paper

The essays of this collection go back to conferences entitled *To the Jew first in the new millennium* which were held in New York (a city that boasts of the largest Jewish population anywhere in the world) and in Florida in 2000 (11). In the rather passionate “Introduction” (11-19) Jewish Christian M. Glaser notes that “Jewish evangelism is as much a ‘theological football’ as any other issue deemed ‘politically incorrect’ by some within the Christian and Jewish community” (12). He expresses hope that “the church will love the Jewish people, affirm the Jewish identity of Jewish people who become followers of Jesus, pray for the Jewish people, and do all it can to support them – especially by bringing the gospel to God’s chosen people” (13). He suggests that proper discipleship should encourage Messianic Jews to maintain their Jewish identity as part of the visible expression of the remnant of Israel as well as part of the church and as a testimony to God’s faithfulness (15, this discussion could be related to Romans 14-15 and to Paul’s own understanding of his identity and practice as a Jew among Jews and Gentiles). For Glaser the biblical base for evangelizing Jews is the salvation-historical priority of Israel (Rom 1:16

“to the Jew first”) and Paul’s attempts of making Israel jealous through his Gentile mission.

Part one examines biblical issues. M. A. Seifrid writes on “‘For the Jew First’: Paul’s *Nota Bene* for His Gentile Readers” (24-39; the ongoing witness to the Jewish people is an essential component of the hope of the gospel, the good news to the Jews testifies to the truth of God’s gospel). W. C. Kaiser examines “Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium in Light of Israel’s Future (Romans 9-11)” (40-52; making a case for the continuing importance of Jewish evangelism; God’s salvific purposes for humanity include a positive relationship between the Jewish people and the nations). D. L. Bock studies “The Book of Acts and Jewish Evangelism: Three Approaches and One Common Thread” (53-65). The three approaches are the missionary speeches of Acts 2, 3, and 13 which address Jewish audiences and present Jesus as the one through whom the God of Israel has worked decisively. Bock emphasises the Jewish nature of these speeches and suggests how the gospel can be communicated to Jews today. D. L. Turner comments on “Jesus’ Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today” (66-77). He argues that Jesus’ scathing criticism needs to be understood as part of an inner-Jewish debate, i.e., as a critique of a segment of the Jewish leadership arising from within Jewish life itself, and “The content and style of this often heated *intrafamily* discussion within Israel way typical of the time” (23). This also applies to the alleged anti-Judaism of the New Testament, which would have deserved an article on its own in view of its problematic history. R. E. Averbeck devotes himself to “The Message of the Prophets and Jewish Evangelism” (78-97; there is a close relationship between the Holy Spirit and the institution of prophecy in the Old Testament; evangelism should be seen as a prophetic activity for the church today). An article on Paul the Jew and the thoroughly (early) Jewish nature of his theology would have been helpful. This has rightly been emphasized in recent New Testament schol-

arship. Though it sounds odd, the same case can and should be argued for Jesus in view of older and more recent attempts to drive a wedge between him and the Judaism of this day. Also an article on the nature and consequences of the temporary hardening of Israel by God and its relationship to the prospects of evangelism would have deserved more extensive treatment.

Part two discusses theological issues. C. A. Blaising writes on “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question” (102-21; arguing against supercessionism/replacement theology, which “dangerously undermines a holistic christology by de-emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus; Jesus’ teaching on the restoration of Israel and its implications for the nations, which need to be further developed). B. R. Leventhal examines “The Holocaust and the Sacred Romance: A Return to the Divine Reality (Implications for Jewish Evangelism)” (122-54). J. Lanier Burns discusses the concept of “The Chosen People and Jewish Evangelism” (155-67; addressing Jewish identity and urging those who bring the gospel to the Jewish people to become knowledgeable about the broad spectrum of Jewish thinking and to become better equipped to reach Jews; several historical examples for this attitude could be cited!). R. L. Pratt offers “To the Jew First: A Reformed Perspective” (168-88; including the *Overture on Jewish Evangelism of the 20th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America*), and A. G. Fruchtenbaum, “To the Jew First in the New Millennium: A Dispensational Perspective” (189-216).

Part *three* is directly devoted to various issues involved in mission to Jews. M. Glaser draws “Lessons in Jewish Evangelism from the past Century” (220-40; Jewish mission in its social and political framework; Glaser issues a call to learn from the creative strategies of the past; there are many interesting instances of Jewish mission before 1900 that could also teach many lessons; cf. also the *The Online Jewish Missions History Project*, accessible at www.lcje.net).

Further essays treat the missiological dimen-

sions and importance of Jewish evangelism, as well as the ramifications of the gospel for Jews and Gentiles: A. F. Glasser, "Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium: The Missiological Dimension" (241-60; examining Jesus' ministry of proclamation, stress on the uniqueness of Jewish missions and application of Jesus' ministry to evangelism today); M. Rydelnik, "The Ongoing Importance of Messianic Prophecy for Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium" (261-91; Messianic prophecy has always been crucial in Jewish evangelism). The author suggests how it can be used today. The hermeneutics of these prophecies should be treated in more detail, more up-to-date research on these prophecies is urgently needed. K. Kjaer-Hansen contributes "One Way for Jews and Gentiles in the New Millennium" (292-311; arguing that if the gospel is not for the Jewish people, then it is also invalid for Gentiles; the discussion includes a historical overview and critique of two covenant theology). The volume ends with detailed notes for the essays (312-47).

This volume offers several interesting perspectives on the question whether and how the Christian gospel should be proclaimed by Jews. That these essays are written by North American scholars who live in a country with a significant and influential Jewish minority and without the burden of the European history since the middle ages adds to the discussion, though the absence of this burden occasionally adds a touch of naivité to some statements. Compare also the proceedings of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (www.lcje.net and www.lausanne.org/issue-jewish-evangelism/lcje.html – access to the several Lausanne Occasional Papers; some of these helpful and balanced documents should have been included in such a volume).

Christoph Stenschke
Missionshaus Bibelschule Wiedenest
and Department of New Testament
University of South Africa