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DISCIPLESHIP

BOOKS REVIEWED

Book Reviews

Biblical Studies

***Ezra & Nehemiah*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. By Matthew Levering. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007. 256 pages. Hardcover, \$29.99.**

Before investing in Levering's work on Ezra and Nehemiah, one should carefully read the preface and introduction to ascertain the author's approach. To be fair, Levering admits that he is not attempting to write a traditional commentary (21). However, a subtitle clarifying the focus of this text would be helpful. Even Levering's own stated goal falls short of the direction of this commentary. The author states that his goal "is to illumine how these two books fit into the unity of the Bible" (19). More specifically, as the author later stipulates, the book is an attempt to trace the theme of "eschatological restoration" within the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as only understood by reading them through the lenses of later biblical works (35). As such, the book does not attempt to exegete the texts of Ezra and Nehemiah, but focuses on aspects within them that point toward prophecy and fulfillment. This accentuates the greatest limitation of the work as the author often forces the eschatological fulfillment into the text, thus weakening its significance on its historical context.

The book is structured around the chapter divisions of the two books. The effort of the author to demonstrate how Ezra and Nehemiah fit within the context of the rest of Scripture and specifically the New Testament is laudable, though the connections, at times, appear forced. The style of the book is somewhat confusing. The author is prone to lengthy asides (cf. 161–12) and frequently interacts with Bede in the chapter using parenthetical references, but also includes footnotes of the other authors cited. The bibliography is rather selective, with many excellent recent sources absent and showing a decided proclivity towards a select few sources, with only sparse interaction with the others. The references to Bede are so frequent it is often difficult to determine where Bede stops and where Levering begins again.

The struggle for the reader begins with Levering's noncommittal stance on the historicity of the books themselves. This is demonstrated by the author's attempt to establish the significance of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah by advocating Ezra's role in the composition of the Old

Testament canon. He suggests, with Friedman, that it was Ezra who “took on the enormous, intricate, and ironic task of combing these alternative versions of the same stories into one work” (30), but only benignly concludes that “his prophetic authority enables him to produce a canonical text of the Torah that adequately, despite its errors, expresses the original divinely revealed Torah” (29–30).

The weakest section of the book is the conclusion to the book of Nehemiah, which is decidedly misnamed. The entire chapter is more of a polemic for the Roman Catholic Church with little to do with the text of Nehemiah. Instead, Levering uses that chapter to advocate that one is not a believer if he or she is not a part of the church (211–13).

When the author interacted with the text, a few helpful insights emerge. However, those occasions are infrequent and are often followed by *non sequitur* conclusions (cf. 152). In the end, the author’s unanswered rhetorical question summarizes the entire work. He asks, “Did Ezra and Nehemiah, in their efforts to reconstitute Israel culturally and politically, take a wrong turn or at least a dead end?” (30) Perhaps that should also be asked of the author.

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***Proverbs.* By Tremper Longman III. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 608 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.**

Tremper Longman has brought his experience to a helpful and practical commentary of the book of Proverbs. This volume is the second in Baker’s series on Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. While the series admits to seek as its target pastors and seminary students, the book demonstrates a simple outline and is replete with practical application that any Bible student will find helpful. The text is marked by a thorough and helpful use of Hebrew, highlighting both the speakers and the intended audience while revealing the proverbs in their context whenever possible with the balance of Scripture and New Testament application. Frequent use of footnotes allows interested readers the chance to engage in further study of significant topics and the bibliographical section is impressive.

The introduction of the commentary addresses the critical issues regarding the title, place in the canon, authorship, date, setting, genre and style. Longman also addresses the book of Proverbs in the context of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. In addition, Longman includes an excellent section on the theology of the book of Proverbs that exposes

those who only superficially read the text and miss its theological truths. Among the selected topics discussed, Longman explains the sources of wisdom described in the book of Proverbs. He lists observation and experience, tradition, and mistakes, but omits other sources as described in the book including: the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7), the Word of God (Prov 6:23; 16:20; 28:4–5, 9; 30:5), divine direction (Prov 16:90), and wise counsel from others (Prov 20:5, 18).

The commentary divides the book of Proverbs into five parts. Longman demonstrates that the first nine chapters of the book are organized as comments on the path of one's life portrayed as a journey with dangers to avoid along the way. Parts two through five, Longman suggests, reveal a more random arrangement and are divided in this work into two sections of collections of proverbs by Solomon, sayings of the wise, and the final section which encompasses the sayings of Agur and King Lemuel and the Poem of the Virtuous Woman.

Each chapter begins with his translation followed by a section on interpretation. Since the first division of the book demonstrates a more organized structure, Longman concludes each chapter in that division with a section on theological implications. Longman explains that chapters 10–31 of Proverbs are intentionally random partly due to the means of collection and partly by intention to address life-situations, reflecting "the messiness of life" (40). Longman is suspicious of commentators who find "under-the-surface-arrangements" (42) within the book. Thus, the final four sections of the commentary proceed with the same verse-by-verse exposition, but leave the implications to the topical studies outlined in the appendix.

The strength of the work is the strong exegetical commentary throughout. Readers will find the topical studies section in the appendix especially helpful. This section outlines 28 topics arranged alphabetically and lists the passages in which they are addressed.

Longman presents the book of Proverbs as a practical book, the purpose of which is to "give prudence to the simpleminded . . . [and also] to give knowledge and discretion to the 'young'" (97). It is addressed to anyone who will listen to its teaching (103), and maintains that those who follow its instructions pursue wisdom, yet understand that "there is always more to learn" (219). Longman explains that some of the proverbs in this book are always true, while some are bound by time and condition.

Those interested in a more detailed explanation for the divisions of the sections of the commentary may leave somewhat disappointed with only a brief paragraph or two introducing each new division of the book.

This commentary leaves the reader with a greater appreciation for God's Word, a greater understanding of this magnificent book, and access

to the wisdom it seeks to convey. It will be an excellent asset for pastors, teachers, seminary students, or anyone interested in a detailed discussion of Proverbs.

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***The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World.* By Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley. Jerusalem: Carta, 2006. 448 pages. Hardcover, \$99.95.**

While the publisher advertises this as an “atlas of the biblical world,” this is not your typical Bible atlas. One may be tempted to interpret this work as an historical geography textbook, but it is not your typical historical geography textbook. The content and incorporation of primary sources would define the target audience as scholars, but the structure and writing style focus on students. The title of the book belies the scholarly intent and approach of the book. The study of the Bible must be done in its geographical, cultural, and historic contexts. The revelation of Scripture (or as the authors articulate it within its literary context—“the epic literature of the ancient Israelites”) occurred and developed on a small strip of land that served as a bridge and a barrier as armies and ideas marched across its soil.

The authors have succeeded in producing an historical geography resource for all students, scholars, and those who take seriously the study of biblical history. The atlas consists of twenty-five chapters from the “Dawn of History” (early and intermediate Bronze Ages) to “The Bar Kochba Revolt 132–135 CE.” It includes three introductory chapters addressing the topics of the history of the discipline of historical geography, the ancient worldview, and the geography of the Levant. The first sixteen chapters were written by Anson Rainey and R. Steven Notley wrote chapters 17–25.

The format of the book is consistent for each chapter, which deals with a specific segment of history. A discussion of Egypt is followed by Mesopotamia (e.g. Kassites, Anatolians, and Assyrians) and then sometimes other regions such as the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean, North Syria, or Phoenician Coast. After this broad historical overview of the ancient Near East, a discussion of the history of ancient Palestine follows. Most chapters end with excursuses addressing issues pertinent to historical texts and/or archaeology. The book contains references and an index at the end.

One of the unique features of the work is the color coding—references (red text), original texts (light blue), and their translations into English

(dark blue). Throughout the text pertinent primary data is accessible in the body of the work, whether it is original Egyptian hieroglyphs, cuneiform (in transliteration), Hebrew, or Greek. In addition, when a biblical text is quoted, it is first written in Hebrew and/or Greek, followed by an English translation. Archaeology discussions play an auxiliary role.

The text reflects years of scholarship. The authors are well known and trained in their respective disciplines and have control of the biblical and other textual data. They make a concerted effort to ensure that this work will be used by students and non-specialists. While they move the reader from the primary texts and data to an historical reconstruction, there is no rehashing of every scholarly opinion of individual site identification that is common in earlier works of historical geography. The format is well designed and the illustrations are exceptional.

While the work uses historical critical methods and views the biblical text as literature, there is an underlying assumption that beneath the biblical accounts there is solid history. A student or scholar who digests this work will be well equipped to address the biblical text within its historical and cultural context. The theologian or biblical scholar who has a high view of the biblical text, and is not shy to confront primary data, will find many gems to mine from this work and a foundation for handling the biblical text within its revealed history.

Steven Ortiz
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***Romans. Hermeneia.* By Robert Jewett. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. 1140 + lxx pages. Hardcover, \$90.00.**

Robert Jewett is known for his longtime fascination with Pauline literature and theology, particularly as found in Romans. His work in the field is demonstrated by the depth and breadth of this commentary that covers things grammatical, syntactical, and theological while his pastoral heart is shown by his comments that are practical and applicable to the current world. The stated purpose of the commentary is to be as comprehensive as possible while remaining readable (1), certainly a laudable if lofty goal.

Jewett believes that Paul's main concern in writing Romans is to promote his mission to Spain, and in so doing to unite the disparate elements of a divided Roman church into a single body under the "shameful cross" of Christ (1). The introduction continues to outline Jewett's method, bringing to bear all critical forms of evaluation including socio-rhetorical along with historical and cultural information. In terms of the structure of

Romans itself, Jewett outlines a typical persuasive letter, though he differs in the details from others. Jewett lists the various parts: *exordium* (1:1–12), *narratio* (1:13–15), *propositio* (1:16–17), *probatio* (1:18–15:13), and *peroratio* (15:14–16:24). He certainly simplifies the overall outline of the letter, which clarifies the flow of Romans.

Each section of the commentary is broken down such that information can be easily accessed. For example, 7:7–25 begins with a translation along with text critical notes (the notes are intentionally limited to changes that make a difference in sense). Jewett then gives a brief analysis of the section as a whole, noting what verses belong together and how the section coheres to the previous and coming portions of the text. He then explains the contentious issues of the passage (in this case determining who the “I” of 7–25 is), explains the various positions, both historic and current, along with the major proponents, and then explains and defends his own conclusion (“I” refers to Paul’s pre-conversion self as seen through his post-conversion eyes, building on the work of Lambrecht and Stowers). He follows this with a detailed outline of the section based upon rhetorical disposition. Finally, Jewett gives a verse by verse exegesis of the text, melding grammar, syntax, theology, and praxis into this portion.

Robert Jewett has crafted a magnificent commentary on Romans. In no way is this a revolutionary text or a major breakthrough for exegetes of Romans, rather it is a compendium of scholarship on the letter along with detailed, critical analysis offered with an eye toward application in today’s world. The only complaint one can offer is that Jewett assumes Paul cannot have a developed Trinitarian understanding of God, and thus neglects such passages as Romans 8:9–11. While Jewett’s offering is not a landmark in the understanding of Romans, it is one of the most complete works on Paul’s letter because it incorporates various disciplines into a coherent whole. This commentary is intended for scholars and pastors who have retained a deep understanding of Greek, and it should be on the shelf of all those who want to study this letter from Paul.

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***Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study.* By Markus Bockmuehl. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 297 pages. Paperback, \$22.00.**

Markus Bockmuehl is a professor at Oxford University. His complementary interests in New Testament studies and early Christian studies contribute to the central points of *Seeing the Word*. In order

to appreciate the central points of *Seeing the Word*, the reader needs to appreciate Bockmuehl's underlying concern for creating a new way forward for New Testament studies. He is concerned about two types of narrowness that tend to undercut the ability of scholars to attend to what the New Testament says, and to do so in dialogue with a wide array of other scholars. The first type of narrowness claims that "Christian confessional and theological convictions have no place in serious study of the Bible" (76). This is a well-represented position among those who labor in the academic study of the Bible, especially in secular university settings (55–56). The second type of narrowness is a single-minded focus on a uniquely Christian, theological interpretation of Scripture that has difficulty hearing contributions from those who do not share the same Christian or theological convictions (59). Bockmuehl's point is that one aspect of Scripture is its role as "public truth." Because it is "public truth," it is desirable to create "a credible rallying point around which secular, Jewish, and Christian approaches to the New Testament" could "meet for discussion and debate about the Christian claims" (59).

Bockmuehl then goes on to set up two proposed areas of focus that could lead to a helpful discussion about what the New Testament actually says and allow for the input of an array of scholars (61–74). First, it would be helpful to focus on "effective history," which means focus upon the effects of the New Testament, especially on its earliest readers (65–66). In other words, beginning from the early church, what effects did the New Testament have upon those who received it? Second, it would be helpful if those engaging in conversation about what the New Testament says were to agree to read the New Testament together with a focus upon what the New Testament says to its implied readers. Its implied readers view the New Testament as truthful and authoritative, because they have become "Spirit-filled" Christians who are part of the church (69–72). Even readers who are not Christians can contribute to this discussion of what the Bible says to its implied readers (73). He recognizes that this calls for a "distinction between interpretations that seek to hear and expound the text and those that intend primarily to subvert it, whether doggedly or glibly" (74).

In chapters two through seven, Bockmuehl seeks to clarify and demonstrate how these two areas of focus for New Testament study are both defensible and fruitful for interpreters. His examples include an overview of the way these two approaches show up fruitfully in the contributions of E.C. Hoskyns to the study of the Gospel of John and to New Testament theology (chapter 5).

Bockmuehl's work provides three important benefits for believing interpreters of the Bible. First, he reminds believing interpreters of the important contributions that can be made by those who are willing to

interpret the New Testament in line with the presuppositions of its first primary audience. Second, he also reminds us that believing interpreters have gone before us and that we can learn from them, both positively and negatively. Third, he encourages believing interpreters to realize that it would be fruitful for the study of the New Testament for them to invite others to read the New Testament like a believer would. Other important benefits of Bockmuehl's book for all interpreters include its positive disposition toward New Testament theology and toward a healthy relationship between good theology and good exegesis.

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***Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume 15.* Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Translated by David E. Green. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 702 + xxiv pages. Hardcover, \$65.00.**

The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* has long been considered a staple of Old Testament studies. Now with the completion of the English translation of volume 15, the almost three-decade effort is nearly finished. This work concludes the study of the Hebrew words: forthcoming are volumes 16 and 17, covering the Aramaic terms and a general index respectively.

This volume is a translation from the German *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, which was published in 1994. In all, 61 scholars contribute to the 86 articles comprising this volume which ranges from **שִׁכָּר** (to become intoxicated) to **תַּרְשִׁישׁ** (Tarshish). Occasionally, one of the editors or other contributors will add a paragraph in the middle of the discussion that supplements that material. These interjections are added seamlessly into the flow of the article and add to the scholarship. The words are arranged alphabetically according to the Hebrew, but are transliterated throughout the dictionary. Thus, while knowledge of biblical Hebrew is helpful in understanding the discussions, it is not essential.

The authors' preface from the very first volume stated their three-fold goal, "The major goal of all the studies in this work is to present the fundamental concepts intended by the respective words and terms, the traditions in which they occur, and the different nuances of meaning they have in each tradition." To accomplish that goal, each article includes a thorough investigation of the various concepts, traditions, and interpretations of the words, including etymology, lexical field, occurrences, derivatives, archeological insights, cognates, and both theological and secular uses. The

various nuances of the lexemes are systematically addressed to give a full understanding of the term.

The work is thoroughly annotated and many of the articles include an extensive bibliography. This particular volume includes articles of significant importance. The publishers point out **שְׁלוֹם** (peace), **שֵׁם** (name), **יָם** (heaven), **שָׁמַע** (hear), **שָׁמַשׁ** (sun), **שָׁפֵט** (judge), and **הוֹרָה** (instruction), as being particularly significant. Also included are **שָׁלַח** (send), **שָׁמַר** (watch, keep), **שָׁנָה** (year), **שַׁעַר** (gate), and **הוֹלְדוֹת** (family, clan).

This volume will be an invaluable tool to students and ministers seeking to understand better these terms in an effort to communicate more effectively.

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***Understanding Matthew: The Early Christian Worldview of the First Gospel.* By Stephen Westerholm. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 160 pages. Softcover, \$16.99.**

Stephen Westerholm's goal in *Understanding Matthew* is to extract Matthew's worldview from the First Gospel by seeking to understand "how Matthew made sense of things, and to see how it makes sense to make sense of things that way" (26). Westerholm concludes that Matthew's basic message is that Jesus "is a fit object of devotion and discipleship" (14). Thus, "Matthew wrote . . . not to inform readers of the nature of Christian discipleship but to summon them to a *life* of discipleship" (16). Throughout Westerholm's book, he employs Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a conversation partner since Westerholm thinks that Bonhoeffer lived Matthew's call to discipleship accurately and faithfully.

Westerholm appropriately sets the stage for a book about worldviews by defining "worldview" in chapter one: a worldview is "our basic understanding of life, the framework within which we interpret our lives and the world around us" (21). From here, Westerholm presents two interrelated chapters. In chapter two, Westerholm explores Jesus' famous recitation against worry (6:24–34). Herein, Jesus' fundamental worldview surfaces: "Jesus simply assumes that the people to whom he speaks believe that there is a God and that God is their benevolent heavenly father" (28). Chapter three wrestles with the difficulties imposed by the high moral demands of the Sermon on the Mount. These demands make sense within Jesus' (and Matthew's) worldview: "Jesus lives in a world of good and evil—of infinite goodness and unacceptable evil" (49).

In chapters four and five, Westerholm briefly retraces the history of Abraham, Moses, David, and the Babylonian Exile in order to note their

importance for interpreting Matthew's worldview. This history reaches its climax in Jesus, who inaugurates God's reign. After discussing what Jesus *does* in chapter five, Westerholm presents who Jesus *is* in chapter six, namely someone who assumes the divine functions of God and who demands absolute allegiance (112). Westerholm describes this allegiance as true discipleship in chapter seven. Chapter eight serves as the book's conclusion and reminds the reader that Matthew is better read narratively instead of thematically.

Understanding Matthew allows the readers' eyes to glide effortlessly through its pages. Especially helpful is Westerholm's reminder that it is important to understand an author's worldview. Westerholm grounds the interpreter in the authorial intent of the text and seeks to avoid emphasis on Matthew's sub-themes to the exclusion of his primary theme, namely discipleship. Going a step further, Westerholm correctly reminds the exegete that Matthew wrote his story in order to elicit allegiance to Jesus. The rest of the Gospel must be read through this lens.

Aside from these strengths, *Understanding Matthew* has at least three major weaknesses. First, Westerholm apparently has in mind a scholarly audience, but the book does not exhibit the marks of a scholarly work. Although he offers splendid explanations of several difficult passages and Matthean theologies (39–40, 48–51, 66–67, 95, 114–117), Westerholm does not interact with scholarly literature, offers no bibliography for further research, and provides no Scripture index. In essence, Westerholm should delineate his audience in the introduction.

Second, Westerholm over-simplifies Matthew's worldview. Westerholm is correct in that Matthew's worldview does assume the existence of a benevolent creator; it is deeply rooted in the heritage of Abraham, Moses, David, and the Exile; and it does assume that Jesus is the Messiah after whom all people should unswervingly follow. However, Westerholm fails to say enough. A few strategically placed footnotes concerning the complexity of Matthew's worldview would eliminate Westerholm's apparent flattening of the evidence.

Third, Bonhoeffer's role in the book is unexpected and artificial. It is unexpected in light of the book's title, which gives no indication of Bonhoeffer's salient role. It is artificial in that it is often unclear why certain sections about Bonhoeffer were added. Given the prominent role that he plays in the work, the title or sub-title should inform the reader of his presence and/or function. In so doing, Westerholm might better market his book to those who are interested in Bonhoeffer's life and hermeneutic and better explain its purpose.

Understanding Matthew fails to include enough adequate information to use it as a primary textbook for understanding Matthew's worldview.

However, it might function well as supplementary reading for an undergraduate class or church.

Keith Campbell

***Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary.* By C. John Collins. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006. 318 pages. Softcover, \$17.99.**

Passionate discussion is once again taking place regarding the nature of Scripture and what is meant by inerrancy. Much of this discussion has been generated by Peter Enns's book *Inspiration and Incarnation* and Greg Beale's rigorous interaction with some of Enns's troubling claims. A good portion of the disagreement centers on the extent to which the Old Testament reflects ancient Near Eastern assumptions and how the world picture the Bible generates should be conceived given what modern science tells us about the universe. John Collins did not intend to engage the Enns-Beale debate, but his book is nevertheless a timely contribution to the discussion.

Collins is uniquely suited to write this volume, having a background in science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Now a professor of Old Testament at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Collins addresses linguistic, literary, historical, and scientific questions in this thorough study of Genesis 1–4. Collins's first two chapters set out his methodology and rationale, aiming at "ancient literary competence." The reader is introduced to "A Discourse-Oriented Literary Approach," which is how Collins describes the method he employs in analyzing the text as well as the criteria he uses to evaluate interpretative options.

Having set forth his methodology, Collins first takes up Genesis 1–4 in its literary context, then discusses the creation week (Gen 1:1–2:3), the garden of Eden (2:4–25), the Fall (3:1–24), and what takes place after Eden (4:1–26). This section of the book is a commentary on the text—not arguing a thesis but discussing the text according to the methodology Collins set forth. Interspersed are extra notes on many points of interest, such as the nature of death in Genesis 2:17, the location of Eden, and whether Genesis 3:15 is a protoevangelium. Collins also traces reverberations of these texts through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. Having thoroughly discussed Genesis 1–4, Collins turns to the question of sources, unity, and authorship. He concludes that Genesis 1–11 is a unified composition that fits best with the ancient claim of Mosaic authorship.

Collins then argues in chapter 9 that the communicative purpose of Genesis 1–4 is to set forth the worldview that undergirds the religion of the Pentateuch (244). Chapter 10 takes up historical and scientific issues,

and it is here that Collins's work contributes to the Enns-Beale discussion: "the worldview is intended to be normative, while the world picture need not be; by this distinction I, as a modern who accepts contemporary cosmology as part of my world picture, can share a worldview with some ancient whose world picture involved a stationary earth with an orbiting sun" (262). At the same time, Collins emphasizes the importance of understanding phenomenological language and suggests that the world picture described in the Bible might not be as different from our own as some, such as Peter Enns and Paul Seely, suggest. Collins argues against the view that "the water under the earth" (Exod. 20:4) refers to a subterranean ocean (264), and asserts, "There is no evidence that the 'expanse' . . . *must* be describing a solid canopy as a physical entity; it is enough to take it *as if* the sky were such" (264, emphasis his). For Collins, "it may well be that some biblical statements reflect a world picture that we cannot share—say, on the size of the earth, or that the moon is a lamp rather than a reflector. But this does not mean that the world picture is part of the message being communicated" (265). These considerations are significant contributions to the ongoing discussion of the relationship between the inerrancy of the Bible and modern science.

This book furthers our understanding of Genesis 1–4 and those wrestling with the relationship between science and the Bible will benefit from what Collins says in this and other volumes. Less satisfactory is Collins' methodology, with particular reference to his appeals to interpretive criteria and discourse analysis. Many of Collins' conclusions are derived from considerations not set forth in his methodological discussion. For all the focus on the science of interpretation, Collins also practices it as an art. This is not to take issue with the artistic aspects of interpretation, traditional hermeneutics, or with coming to interpretive conclusions based on criteria that are not articulated. It is to insist that interpretation is both a science and an art. That being said, the importance of the subject matter, the quality of Collins's work, and the timeliness of this contribution make this a valuable volume.

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Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: A Beginning Grammar.* By Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi. *Invitation to Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006. 364 pp. \$49.00.

Warning: the use of this grammar could revolutionize the study of Hebrew. Follow all instructions. Use only if the desire is to learn the language. Mix with diligence to achieve desired result: ability to read Hebrew.

Kregel has published not only the text of *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew* produced by Fuller and Choi, but also a set of six DVDs containing two semesters' worth of lectures through the grammar. What ignites the use of the grammar and the DVDs, however, is undoubtedly the workbook. The grammar gives the student the raw data. The DVDs present Fuller lecturing through the grammar. And the workbook—if used—will drill students on the material until the fundamentals of the language are instinctive for them. Grammar, DVDs, workbook: a worthy combination.

Fuller and Choi honed this material through years of classroom use. This reviewer studied under both as they were perfecting this material and method. The process they taught is the method that involves several iterations through the material in different formats: lecture, reading, carefully crafted questions, and targeted drills.

Working through a language in this manner takes the student again and again through the material. Students of Hebrew who faithfully work through this material find that the fundamentals of the Hebrew language become part of the furniture of their minds. The process may seem extensive and demanding, but it gives students a real shot at learning a very foreign, very difficult language.

There are debates among Hebrew grammarians as to the best approach to learning the language. The student who comes to this grammar will combine the fundamentals of the language with a core of memorization. The method of this grammar, with its brilliant drills, may make it the best approach to learning Hebrew. The drills will challenge students not only to reproduce the material but master it.

Great teachers, like great coaches, emphasize the fundamentals. Russell Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi understand the fundamentals of the Hebrew language, and their grammar presents these fundamentals in systematic detail, with an array of pithy mnemonic devices that make the learning of a difficult language enjoyable.

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Theological Studies

***Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission.* By R. Larry Shelton. Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006. 268 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.**

R. Larry Shelton, who serves as Richard B. Parker Professor of Wesleyan Theology at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, argues that the traditional models of the atonement cannot meet the existential needs of postmodern people. Shelton finds his ideal model of the atonement in “the covenant motif” that presents the interpersonal relationship between “divine commitment and human obligation” (19). Sin is the violation or abandonment of human obligations such as obedience and faith. Animals were sacrificed to restore the abandoned obedience and faith of sinners toward God. Likewise, the ultimate purpose of the atonement in and through Christ was not to get rid of the penalty of sins but to transform sinners into faithful and obedient children of God.

In light of the interpersonal relationship between God and man in the context of covenant, the forensic (penal substitution and satisfaction), classic (recapitulation, ransom, and Christ the victor), and moral influence views of the atonement all fall short of the biblical presentations of the death of Christ. In particular, Shelton says the penal substitution view seriously distorts the truth of the atonement, for it describes the relationship of Christ and sinners in terms of the impersonal mercenary transaction between the two parties. This view also diminishes the importance of on-going repentance and obedience. Therefore, many evangelicals have lost the sense of participation by faith in the atoning work of Christ. Shelton asserts that many advocates of penal substitutionary atonement fail to connect the atonement with the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and often imply that penal substitution is the only theme of the atonement. Shelton’s critiques of the penal substitution view of the atonement need to be heard.

Notwithstanding Shelton’s constructive critiques of the penal substitution view, I note several areas of disagreement. First, Shelton’s denial of the transference of sins in the Old Testament sacrificial system and in the cross of Christ must be rejected. As Shelton argues, it is true that laying one’s hand(s) on the animal to be sacrificed represents the identification between the victim and the giver of that victim. Unlike Shelton’s argument, however, identification is not mutually exclusive to the transference of sins. Rather, identification and transference are complementary to each other. Without the real transference of value between a victim and a person offering that victim, there is no real identification between two parties.

Second, Shelton's denial of propitiation as the appeasement to the divine wrath must be reconsidered. Unlike Dodd, Shelton admits that the wrath of God toward sin really appears, but will not consider God as the object of propitiation. Consequently, the death of Christ did not appease God's anger toward sinners but simply got rid of the sins that caused the wrath of God. However, this view fails to recognize that God is not only the subject but also object of the propitiation.

Third, Shelton's presentation of the penal substitution view is not fair. Shelton's assertion is that the kernel of the penal substitution view is union with Christ. None of the responsible representatives of this view presents the forgiveness of sins and the declarative righteousness of a believer in a way of *ex opera operato*. The penal substitution view strongly emphasizes faith as the only means through which sinners can be identified with the crucified Christ.

In sum, Shelton is right to argue that the atonement is not merely the matter of changing the legal status of sinners before God but involves the restoration of the covenantal relationship between God and sinners. In addition, he correctly warns that penal substitution is not the only valid perspective of the atonement. Unfortunately, however, Shelton himself is in danger of holding to only a subjective theory that does not see God as judge or take his retributive justice into account. Is the restoration of the broken covenantal fellowship possible without establishing forensic justice? Abraham's appeal to the justice of God must be echoed to contemporary opponents of penal substitution: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25, KJV).

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***Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement.* Edited by Mark D. Baker. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. 204 pages. Softcover, \$18.00.**

Any reader who holds a view that Jesus died on the cross to bear God's righteous wrath against our sin will discover before he finishes the first chapter that the essays in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross* were not compiled for him. Rather, the editor is clear throughout the book that his goal is to explore every image of the atonement *except* penal substitution. He describes his viewpoint as "Looking for Alternatives to Penal Satisfaction" (27, 192 n. 17) and explains that "people with a penal-satisfaction-only view of the atonement are not the intended audience of this book" (29).

The editor, Mark D. Baker, serves as associate professor of mission and theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. This book follows *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, which argued for a multiplicity of atonement images other than penal substitution. The present work is a collection of eighteen essays which originally took the form of sermons, youth Sunday School lessons, chapel addresses, articles, and even a portion of a novel. All of the essays are included with the aim of explaining the death of Christ in terms other than penal substitution. Rather than summarize every essay, one will serve as an example. The first essay is a scene from C.S. Lewis' classic *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and is intended to demonstrate that Aslan's self-sacrifice to the White Witch on behalf of Edmund could be considered as both the conquering of evil powers and as substitution, but not penal substitution.

Baker's book should be commended for at least three reasons. First, these essays cause the reader to clarify one's view of the atonement. Everyone who preaches or teaches about the cross implicitly or explicitly answers the following question: Was Christ's death on the cross intended to satisfy God's wrath (objective view) or to inspire us toward self-sacrifice and forgiveness (subjective view)? Although Southern Baptists will disagree with Baker's theological conclusion, the variety and number of essays provided enables readers to identify and understand the subjective view. Second, this work should be commended for its effort to contextualize the message of the gospel. This scandalous message is not intended to remain only in our mind or on our bookshelf, but explained, illustrated, and applied in words and images that are understandable to our contemporary audience. Third, the format of the book provides a platform for many voices to be heard on this subject, from recognized names (such as Richard Hays and Rowan Williams) to other names that are not as well known. The format of the book also allows for brief commentary from the editor about how each essay contributes to the book's theme.

Two of the challenges that the book faces are found in its style and theology. First, the use of biased language is a literary device that weakens this work. Although the aim of the book is to reject one view of atonement in favor of many others, it is a misstep to characterize penal substitution in the following ways: "the formulaic transactional understanding promoted by evangelical pop-atonement theology" (117); God is "the offended potentate who needs somewhere to vent his rage" (119); and "a God who kills somebody out of loyalty to an abstract principle doesn't feel truly loving" (129). Even the viewpoints of those with whom we disagree should be fairly presented. Second, this book faces certain theological challenges. Due to its commitment to the subjective view of the atonement, it argues for forgiveness without penalty or payment (61, 83). Sin is alienation from

self (132) rather than enmity with God. The cross was “sacred violence” (48) and it was a Girardian expression of God’s undermining of the sacrificial system by submitting to it as a victim (71). Jesus is the scapegoat (68, 142) and expiation (167) but not the sacrificial goat or propitiation in Day of Atonement imagery. Some of the contributions can be read as providing atonement images in *addition* to penal substitution (such as C.S. Lewis, Richard Hays, and Curtis Chang). But the aim of the editor and most of its contributors is to provide the images as *alternatives*. Although there is merit in many of these other atonement images, they are all inadequate when separated from the idea that Christ became sin for us and died our death at the cross.

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***Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples.* Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger. Nashville: B&H, 2006. 257 pages. Hardcover, \$19.99.**

In *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger seek to apply the “simple revolution” of the last few years to the way church is done in America. Recognizing that “the healthiest churches in America tended to have a simple process for making disciples” (ix), Rainer and Geiger began a research project which confirmed that there is a “highly significant” correlation between the simplicity of a church and its ability to thrive. After conducting their research, Rainer and Geiger conclude that “church leaders need to simplify” (4). Thus, the aim of their book is to encourage and equip these leaders to produce simple and revitalized churches.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part describes the “simple revolution” in general and provides definitions and examples of what a simple church looks like. In chapter one, Rainer and Geiger assert that “simple is in. Simple works. People respond to simple” (8). This observation drives the rest of the book. After noting that companies like Apple, Google, and Southwest Airlines capitalize on simplicity, they argue that Jesus himself was the “original simple revolutionary” (16).

In chapter two, Rainer and Geiger recreate two church consultation trips so the reader can “see a simple church in action” (31). One of these churches is an established church with many programs and multiple vision statements. The other is younger and has experienced consistent growth in recent years. Rainer and Geiger compare and contrast the methodologies of these two churches, highlighting the complexity of the former and the simplicity of the latter.

Borrowing the metaphor of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, in chapter three, Rainer and Geiger demonstrate the need of many churches to reconstruct the way they “do church.” They define a simple church as “a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth” (60). They then describe their research method. Deciding against an extended set of case studies, they opted for a more expansive survey approach. They randomly selected from both growing and declining churches to participate in the survey and then sent the data to an independent statistics analysis company for processing. The first phase of research was limited to Southern Baptist churches, and the second phase included the other major evangelical denominations. For the authors, the result of this research confirms that “in general, churches that are vibrant and growing are simple” and that “the vibrant churches are much more simple than the comparison churches” (67). On the basis of this research, Rainer and Geiger delineate four elements they deem necessary to form and maintain a simple church. These elements are clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. To illustrate these ideas, they provide “three simple stories” that highlight different churches in America that are thriving as a result of having a “simple church.”

Whereas part one defines and illustrates a simple church, part two attempts to enable church leaders to transform their churches into simple churches. Chapters five through eight each develop one of the concepts of clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. To have an effective simple church, leaders must clearly articulate the vision of a simple process of discipleship (clarity). They must strategically design their programs to move their members to deeper levels of commitment (movement). They must ensure that every program is part of the same simple process (alignment). Finally, they must refuse to add any program to the church’s agenda if it does not contribute to the simple goal of making disciples (focus). Chapter nine summarizes the process of becoming simple and provides four practical steps designed to achieve the four elements of a simple church.

Two primary strengths of this book are its overall purpose and its clear structure. Rainer and Geiger intend to provide church leaders with “a framework for a simple ministry process” (236). They achieve this aim by clearly describing the need for simplicity in church life (chapter 1), defining the nature of a simple church (part 1), and delineating the actual process of becoming this type of church (part 2). While these features of this volume should be carefully considered by any church leader, there are few concerns. Rainer and Geiger consistently present the idea of a simple process of disciple-making as “revolutionary.” The simple church is “discovered” (ix) rather than re-discovered. Consequently, a serious discussion of the biblical foundations of disciple-making is absent from the book.

Most often, the motivation and evidence given for an assertion comes from survey research or statistics rather than scriptural texts or theological principles. The biblical text is used primarily as an illustration rather than as a foundation. A representative statement as to why the reader should accept a given point is because it “has been validated by our research” (111). Thus, the chief motivation given in *Simple Church* for doing church in this manner is because “simple is in,” rather than because the New Testament mandates disciple-making.

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***Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology As Wisdom.* By Daniel J. Treier. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 278 pp. \$30.00.**

What is the nature of theology? What should be the respective goals of theological education and the theological interpretation of the Scriptures? Is it scientific knowledge, exegetical insight, or something else? In this revised dissertation, Daniel J. Treier, Associate Professor of Theology in the School of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College, seeks to answer these questions. He is troubled by a litany of “fractured relationships: between academy and church, biblical scholarship and theology, theory and practice, even between holistic thinking and specialist detail” (xiv). His concern is to chart a map whereby these relationships might be mended. The key feature of this map is a common destination, namely, the goal of (Christian) wisdom.

The book is divided into three parts: (1) Education and the Nature of Theology (chs. 1–3), (2) Interpretation and the Nature of Wisdom (chs. 4–5), and (3) Education and Interpretation: Synergy (chs. 6–7). In “Education and the Nature of Theology” (chs. 1–3), Treier defines theology as follows: “Linking virtue and the voice of God in Scripture, theology is an every person, transforming, communicative praxis, subject to a chastened understanding of public criticism” (30). Chapter 2 contains a theological reading of Proverbs 3:13–18 in which he considers how wisdom and its attendant knowledge function in the formation of Christian virtue and “practical reason” (*phronesis*; cf. 46). Treier distinguishes Christian *phronesis* from its Aristotelian counterpart, both in its focus upon humility and its goal of love leading to peace. Wisdom is only found in the Word of God (i.e., Christ as He is communicated via the Scriptures). Treier argues (contra Lindbeck) that Christian theology holds a true correspondence to reality (ch. 3). While he cites Reinhard Hütter’s “pneumatolizing of history” as a helpful corrective to Lindbeck’s intratextuality, Treier criticizes Hütter

for making theology an activity of the few and placing church authority in distinction “over against Scripture” (84). Wisdom is something for the entire Christian community, not merely a small group of the spiritually elite.

In part two, Treier considers “Interpretation and the Nature of Wisdom” (chs. 4–5). In chapter 4 he outlines the postmodern context and construal of the nature of biblical interpretation and its elevation of the reader/community above “authors, subject matter, and text” (e.g. Stephen Fowl). Treier seeks to strike a balance between Fowl’s “ecclesiastical positivism” (which equates church practice with revelation) and models of biblical theology that identify “God’s action . . . too immanently or statically with the human texts of the Bible” (126) and ignore the performance of the text (127). In chapter 5, Treier considers general hermeneutics as well as the possibility and actions of understanding. He examines (a) the nature of special hermeneutics with relation to Scripture; (b) the problem of distance as it pertains historically to authors and audiences and hermeneutically to “human authors and divine author”; and (c) weighs the value of various models of meaning and interpretation (esp. Vanhoozer, Thiselton, and Wolterstorff).

In part three, “Education and Interpretation: Synergy” (chs. 6–7), Treier relates the findings of the previous two sections. In chapter 6, Treier applies the Christian version of practical reason (*phronesis*) to the academy’s pursuit of scientific knowledge (*Wissenschaft*). Treier notes the distinctive commitments of Christian interpretation (170), but argues for a public engagement of theology. Though Christians must not allow apologetics and external conversations to drive their theology (171), they should recognize their sinfulness and be open to areas of criticism from outside the Christian community (174; e.g., slavery). He also considers how the “textual practices” of theological interpretation should interact with historical, literary, and philosophical disciplines (176–79). In the final chapter, Treier summarizes his case that wisdom offers a helpful way to connect our understanding of “the nature of theology and theological education” (187). Here he gives an intriguing discussion on the relation between general and special hermeneutics. He follows Barth’s Trinitarian model of revelation in explicating his own understanding of Word and Spirit and coordinates his brand of theological interpretation with other prominent voices in the field.

As one would expect from a revised dissertation, the work shows an immense amount of research and scholarly interaction. Treier engages a variety of thinkers and academic disciplines, including theological interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics, systematic theology, practical theology, biblical theology, virtue epistemology, etc. His interdisciplinary methodology is consistent with at least one of his stated objectives, namely to point

a way toward mending the fractured relationships within the academy.

The accessibility of the work is somewhat low for those in the outer courts of the discipline. The work is written on a high academic level and assumes a significant amount of previous interaction with the disciplines and works with whom the author is engaging. Further, Treier includes several extended, untranslated quotes in German and rarely if ever quotes Scripture in English (e.g., German [43] and Greek [55]). Though a standard practice in scholarly literature, it is an interesting feature for a (revised) book decrying the growing gap between the academy and the church. However, these aspects simply point to the fact that Treier's focus is the academy. Those outside the academic camp will benefit from his thesis, but they will likely struggle with its form.

Consequently, this work is recommended primarily for readers with at least an intermediate familiarity with texts in the fields of philosophical hermeneutics and theological interpretation. Nonetheless, those interested in these disciplines would do well to use Treier's extensive bibliography as a stepping stone for further study. His discussion of virtue's role in interpretation holds value for those interested in what a Christian version of virtue epistemology might look like (chs. 6–7). This work is commendable for its depth of insight, its purpose of reconciling the church and academy, and its focus upon theology as “an every person, transforming, communicative praxis” that humbly but boldly interacts with the world without being compromised. In arguing for an understanding of theology as wisdom, Treier has effectively connected theory and practice. His overall argument is persuasive and patient readers will find benefit.

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Missions and Evangelism

Evangelism for the Rest of Us: Sharing Christ within Your Personality Style.
By Mike Bechtle. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006. 156 pages. Paperback, \$12.99.

Mike Bechtle makes use of personality theory and offers his view of biblical evangelism to make introverts feel comfortable with evangelism. He offers his new work on the assumption that extroverts write the books on evangelism, and that these books do not offer introverts much help. Bechtle provides personal illustrations and suggestions he has found helpful in witnessing as an introvert. He even gives readers a personality

inventory to help them determine whether they are introverts or extroverts (36–37).

Essentially, Mike Bechtle's book is one of the best and worst books I have read on evangelism. The weaknesses of Bechtle's book are serious. To begin with, Bechtle uses personality theory as a foundation for personal evangelism. Confusion exists among theoreticians of personality theory, and by using it, Bechtle may intensify the confusion many suffer in evangelism.

Additionally, Bechtle demonstrates an inappropriate use of Scripture. First, as harsh as it sounds, Bechtle distorts biblical texts. For example, he explains 1 Corinthians 12:17–18 in terms of personality theory instead of spiritual gifts. In that text, Paul argues for appreciation of all spiritual gifts, but Bechtle revises the text to argue for appreciation of all personality types (24).

Second, Bechtle's use of 2 Kings 7:9 is equally troubling. The full verse states the four lepers said, "We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. *If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us.* Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace" (2 Kings 7:9, emphasis added). When Bechtle quotes it, he removes the words about God's judgment. In their place, he inserts ellipsis points. When used appropriately, ellipsis points improve the author's style. By inserting the ellipsis points where he does, Bechtle leaves out a significant motivation for evangelism that emphasizes the theology of 1 and 2 Kings—judgment according to God's word. That Bechtle has distorted 2 Kings 7:9 becomes manifest in his comments after the verse quotation: "If the four lepers hadn't reported what they had seen, *they would have lived while the city perished*" (emphasis added). Bechtle asserts the opposite of the biblical record. He offers assurances for the lepers that the Scripture does not offer. In fact, the Scripture offered no assurance of life had they remained silent; contra Bechtle's view, it offered judgment.

Next, Bechtle betrays unawareness about extroverts. He leaves readers with the mistaken notion that extroverts find it easier to witness than introverts do. How I wish that were the case! Not only do introverts fail to witness, but extroverts fail, too. Both struggle with evangelism. Evangelism is tough for all of us, but we should all do it because others going to hell is far worse.

Finally, Bechtle's book includes other weaknesses. It includes the standard caricatures and straw men found in many evangelism books, and this will annoy sensitive readers. Accumulating annoyances, Bechtle labels as myths that make introverts uncomfortable with evangelism. Among these are truths that have helped Christians of all types become faithful and fruitful witnesses (52–59).

I fear the cumulative effect of these weaknesses upon introverted readers. They may lead introverts to think more of themselves and less of lost people. Specifically, Bechtle's work may encourage introverts to be more sensitive to their introversion without considering the introversion of lost people. Bechtle admits that he has yet to witness to an employee at a hotel where he frequently stays (94). Someone has to say something about salvation, and the introverted lost person is not likely to start the conversation. I fear that Bechtle's work does not offer much help in winning introverted lost people to Christ.

The weaknesses of Bechtle's work are serious, but there are also significant strengths. First, Bechtle's view of God and evangelism deserves credit. For the most part, he has perceived God's passion for getting people into the kingdom. According to Bechtle, this requires Christians to influence intentionally unbelievers with the gospel (50, 117).

Second, Bechtle's emphasis on building relationships with unbelievers will help any Christian who has a sincere love for them. Bechtle instructs and illustrates the sacrifice necessary to immerse ourselves into the lives of lost people. Following his instruction at this point could revolutionize the evangelistic ministry of many churches.

Third, Bechtle encourages readers to open themselves to a variety of tools in presenting the gospel. He suggests that developing relationships with unbelievers, handing out tracts, organizing crusades, and standard approaches to personal evangelism training (e.g., *Evangelism Explosion*) can effectively deliver the gospel to unbelievers. This is not to say that every use of these methods is appropriate, or that these methods have not suffered some abuse. He does not trash other methods, however, because they are not his preferred method (70–71, 147).

Finally, Bechtle provides tools to aid witnesses with an evangelism skill that has proven to be one of the most elusive—starting a conversation. Bechtle provides specific instruction on this topic that will help witnesses amass conversation starters (139–41). Most of these suggestions will aid extroverts and introverts alike.

Bechtle's strengths are such that he could have left out the personality theory and written an excellent book on personal evangelism. The weaknesses notwithstanding, I suggest readers study his work, but that they study it as they eat fish—eat the meat and throw away the bones. They should be careful not to allow the weaknesses of Bechtle's work to keep them from his admirable strengths.

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***Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture.* By Michael Frost. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006. 333 pages. Softcover, \$19.95.**

Michael Frost unapologetically argues that the age of Christendom has come to an end. As a result, Christians presently live in a generation where their normal way of life and modes of thought are no longer the accepted norms for society. The author approaches the subject from an Australian point-of-view. In this, he promotes the concept that Christians should live “missional” lives so as to promulgate the Gospel of Christ. By “missional,” he refers to the idea of believers living in close community with one another and through this community, being salt and light to the outside world in every difficult situation that it might face.

The author opines that believers have been exiled because of the demise of Modernism and the rise of Postmodernism. Consequently, they have been forced to change based upon the requirements set forth by culture. Christians, as exiles, should live as the “exiled” Christ lived and minister to people wherever they may be (i.e. bars, street corners, shopping areas, and ball fields). The core of Frost’s work consists of five methods, each dealing with a specific promise that the exiled Christians should employ, and he dedicates a significant portion of the work to this end.

The missional concept is not new. Darrel Guder’s excellent work, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in America* explains it from the idea of the kingdom of God. Yet, missional in all of its definitions and explanations focuses on neither the traditional understandings of evangelism nor missions. Being missional is simply being like Christ in one’s everyday life. Frost further advances the idea by proposing that Christians should focus on injustices that are done to people (i.e. socially and economically). While Christians must recognize that injustices committed against individuals are biblically wrong, the idea that this is the sole end of a missional Christian is not theologically accurate. Jesus described His mission to the world: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Christ’s purpose was not necessarily to heal people’s physical abnormalities and infirmities, neither was it to protect people from the injustices of the Roman world nor improve their way of living. Each of these represents a facet of a theological conceptualization known as liberation theology and also touches upon another heretical doctrine presently being indoctrinated in the West—the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel.

Frost fails to promote adequately a new idea which will radically revolutionize the church. True, the world is changing and perhaps Modernism has seen its best days; however, a total alienation to the concepts

of missions and evangelism demonstrates a questionable approach to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Frost is part of the emerging movement, and as a result, one of his primary motivations is to find problems and breakdowns in the church and to replace them with innovative methodologies. However, in the first two millennia of the church, missions and mission work have been synonymous with the heart of the church. Organizations such as the Moravians, the Student Volunteer Movement, and the Southern Baptist Convention were built on the foundation of missions. This is not to say that many of the methods once employed by them are not outdated; however, it sheds light upon the idea that historically, missional life for a Christian has been the sharing of Jesus Christ with the world and the continual evangelization of that individual or people group.

One encouraging word from *Exiles* is the author's focus upon incarnational community. A deep and sacrificial relationship with others helps to break down walls in order to share the gospel of love with those in need. Incarnational community encourages a believer to live as Christ to those around him. This elicits the opportunity to engage others in a non-threatening environment while maintaining the Word of God.

Overall, Frost's work is encouraging to the Christian who lives in the present age. Yet, it lacks the evangelistic fervor one might hope to see. *Exiles* focuses too much on the physical and social needs of people while neglecting to recognize the lostness of man. Because of this disregard for sin and humanity, Frost fails to catch the concept of what it really means to live missionally. However, it must also be said that the author entices the reader to delve further into missional existence.

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***The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia.* Library of Modern Middle East Studies 50. By David Dean Commins. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006. 288 pages. Hardcover, \$85.00.**

The average citizen on the street has one of three responses to the sudden emergence of Islam as a global issue. First, he may well identify all who follow Islam as being part of a violent faith, which renders each Muslim individually suspect and somehow guilty of the actions of all Jihadists. The second prevalent view, born out of religious pluralism, is to defend Islam as a legitimate religion, opining that much about it is surely misunderstood. The third and most prominent perspective (the one discussed at Starbucks) is probably a simple shake of the head when the subject is broached. A wondering question about who can possibly understand what

is going on in our world usually follows. This latter group tends to believe that if the United States would just leave Iraq, somehow most of the problems on the front page of the newspaper would be replaced by the latest hero of *American Idol*. However, readers and thinkers who still operate with a fairly basic understanding of Islam have heard or read about Wahhabi Islam and are often quick to identify Al Qaeda and the work of Osama Bin Laden as the offspring of the Wahhabi expression of Islam, which is traced to Saudi Arabia. Many who have tried to be more studious about Islam, having read the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*, as has this reviewer, are still guilty of this essential conclusion regarding both Al Qaeda and the Wahhabis.

David Commins, Professor of History at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, has written what is to this point the definitive volume on the history and content of the Wahhabi mission and its particular relation to Saudi Arabia. Commins was a visiting scholar at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh and has written in 1990 on Islamic Reform and in 2004 an historical dictionary of Assyria. He remains one of the best informed authorities in America on the nature and history of Islam.

The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia is not the most scintillating book ever published, but what is lacking in readability is accomplished superbly in the validation of its arguments and support of those conclusions from Islamic sources. (For those who desire a perspective about life in Saudi Arabia with greater adventure and color, yet perceptive regarding the tribalism of the Arabian Peninsula, Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* [New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2008] is a scintillating volume to augment the picture.)

The reader will find numerous insights in Commins. Most people think primarily of two denominations within Islam, namely, Sunni and Shia. Some who have a bit more background might include Sufism as a third denomination. Others would protest the use of "denomination," since that tends to be a term associated principally with various aspects of the Christian faith. However, Commins himself actually makes use of that terminology once in the book (166). But what relatively new readers in Islam will find enlightening is the multiplicity of legal traditions informing Islam as well as different religious groups normally led by some new leader who arises and demands a following. The number of these groups will be surprising to most non-initiates. However, the biggest surprise of all will be the author's tracing of Wahhabism as it relates to the development of Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden.

Commins argues that revivalism among Islamic leaders and the rise of preaching radical Islam certainly has some things in common with Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia. However, he concludes that Wahhabism,

while having common goals with radical Islam is, nevertheless, opposed to the developments that have unfolded in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Wahhabis believe, for example, that religious authorities cannot announce Jihad. Only the ruler of the country can do that, and hence the widespread use of Jihad among Muslim revivalists is considered illegitimate by Wahhabism. There are also other points in which Wahhabism would differentiate itself. The present state of Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden owes its origin rather to teachings of Sayyid Qutb, arising originally in Egypt. On the other hand, Wahhabism's base has been in Saudi Arabia; and while Osama Bin Laden is a Saudi and was definitely impacted by Wahhabism, he was able to muster considerable following among younger Muslims and mold together these Muslims of divergent perspectives to fight the infidels (Russians) in Afghanistan. His own attitude toward Saudi Arabia was then altered rather dramatically by the influence of democratic reform movements in Saudi Arabia, which ultimately led to allowing the United States military to move into Saudi Arabia for the protection of that kingdom as well as Kuwait and to resist the onslaught of the Baathists in Iraq.

The result of all of this, Commins concludes, is that "the Wahhabi mission's two-hundred-year reign as a hegemonic regional religious culture is in jeopardy" (205). Most readers will be surprised at this conclusion. Commins makes no attempt to predict the future, observing that it is not the responsibility of the historian to do so. Clearly there is substantial conflict within Islam, and the reading of this book gives one a far greater perspective in that regard.

The book employs endnotes; and while they are quite helpful in citing other sources and expanding information given briefly in the text, I confess my own preference for footnotes to avoid on a regular basis having to turn to the back of the book to ascertain what has been cited. On the other hand, the chronology beginning with the 1744 rise of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and coming all the way to the National Dialogues held in Saudi Arabia in 2004, is very helpful. By the same token, a glossary of terms, while in need of expansion, was nevertheless quite useful, and the reader can check repeatedly on unfamiliar terms and keep in mind what Commins is citing. Finally, the bibliography is thorough and demonstrates the breadth of Commins' grasp of the Islamic world.

Several groups should take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the pages of this book. Anybody intending to do business anywhere in the world where the Muslim faith is heavily represented could profit immensely in relating to these various factions by gaining awareness and understanding of them. Those seeking to interact philosophically and theologically with Islam cannot afford to bypass this volume. Finally, it would be difficult to imagine a more critical volume for the reading of those who

are engaged in state department work or in foreign affairs religiously or politically. David Commins has given us a superb and enlightening history and a rare insight into the Wahhabi mission and Saudi Arabia.

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Ethics and Philosophy

***Effective Parenting in a Defective World.* By Chip Ingram. Carol Steam, IL: Tyndale House, 2006. 181 pages. \$13.99.**

This a helpful resource for any pastor or parent, who is looking for a common-sense book on raising children in a problematical cultural context or, as the author calls it, our “defective world.” One of the characteristics of this text is that it sets forth some sound principles of action, most of which have a biblical basis, and then develops several types of applications to modern family situations. Each of the principles that are utilized also confront a modern myth that many parents believe. For instance, some parents would hold the myth that a good parenting goal is to make their kids happy, while the parenting reality is that their goal should be make their kids holy. Another parenting myth is that parenting could be straightforward if only they could find the right formula or how-to book, while the reality is that good parenting will always require adapting the parenting approach. It is interesting that Chip Ingram does have a penchant for setting forth lists of how-to’s and formula sounding presentations or arguments for approaches for handling a number of common problems in child-raising. Those arguments tend to be rather well nuanced, biblical and logical, as well as being nicely illustrated, primarily by the author’s own experiences.

It cannot be said that this book has a depth of Bible exposition, but there are numerous biblical passages that are used in a somewhat popular fashion to forge the basis of many of the guiding principles that are given for healthy parenting. The author does not claim to be doing biblical counseling, but rather is carefully giving guidance for child raising in a positive, Christian manner, with fairly regular doses of logic or reasonable insight and parenting experience given for added measure. It is an enjoyable and believable approach and one that could be beneficial to most pastors, family counselors, and struggling Christian parents.

The first three chapters deal with some essential guidelines for parenting. The next four chapters focus on some of the more problematic issues faced in parenting, such as discipline and punishment. The last two chapters share “five smooth stones” for preparing one’s children for facing

the giants of life. For example, one of those “stones” is to teach them how to “suffer well,” or to persevere with understanding that suffering is normal and to be expected in life, even as Christians.

It should be added that there is a video unit that can also be used to accompany this material for both individual learning and for group interactions. Each chapter finishes with a brief section of exercises for applying the concepts of the chapter. These can be helpful for the parenting couple, a single parent, or as conversation starters for a group process.

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Software

***Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible*. CD Rom. Version 2.0. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems. \$324.95.**

Serious textual study of the Bible must involve the science and art of textual criticism, comparing variants to determine the original reading of the text. These pursuits use the critical apparatus, and the *Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible 2.0* (SESB) greatly enhances these examinations by providing the Old Testament and New Testament modern critical apparatus in electronic form. So far, other electronic software offers only old (Tischendorf's) or incomplete modern versions.

A textual apparatus includes shorthand notes that tell what the variant textual readings are and where they occur: the specific papyri, manuscripts, ancient translations, and/or ancient quotations by the church fathers. Without examining the apparatus one cannot knowledgeably examine the question of the provenance of such passages as Judges 16:13–14; Matthew 6:13b; Mark 11:26; 16:9–20; Luke 23:34a; 24:12, 36b, 40; John 7:53–8:11; Acts 8:37, and Romans 16:24—to mention some of the better known—most of which are noted in modern translations with brackets or marginal notes. One must examine the apparatus to determine which is the preferred reading for Genesis 4:8; Psalm 2:11–12; 22:1, 16; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 15:6; 27:24; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:1; 8:26; John 10:29; and 1 John 5:7–8, to mention a few texts with variant readings.

Version 2.0 of the SESB adds fifteen resources to version 1.0: The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) with critical apparatus and the WIVU morphological and syntactical tags, the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ—the fifth major critical edition of the Hebrew text) with apparatus, a morphologically-tagged Septuagint with the CCAT-database, the Nestle-Aland

Novum Testamentum Graece 27 with apparatus and Gramcord morphological tags, the UBS4 *Greek New Testament* with apparatus, the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, and the *Gospel of Thomas* in Greek, Coptic, English, and German. In addition, there are the following modern Bible versions: English (NIV and NRSV), Greek (1), German (3), French (4), Dutch (5), Norwegian (4), and Danish (1), as well as four original language dictionaries (including the Septuagint: Lust; NT: Barclay Newman, which is the smaller one at the end of the UBS4).

As fine as this product is, Logos Research Systems might increase its usefulness and accessibility by adding the following: (1) a German and an English book on textual criticism, such as *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*, by Paul D. Wegner, (2) *A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*, 2nd edition, by Bruce M. Metzger (available for individual purchase), (3) a constituency tree analysis of the WIVU syntax tagging of the entire Old Testament, (4) an apparatus for the LXX and for the Vulgate, and (5) offer UBS4 apparatus as a separate resource so one can view it in a separate screen.

The minimum system requirements are: Microsoft Windows 98 or later, Pentium 133 MHz, 64 MB memory, CD Rom reader, 60 MB hard drive, and 800 x 600 screen resolution.

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