Other markers of reformed theology–such as the affirmation of a covenant of works, the three-fold purposes of the Law, and an amillennial eschatology (found in the introduction to the book of Revelation)–would disturb the sensibilities of any Baptist who has imbibed a dispensational vision of salvation history. Similarly, Baptists concerned about pure Baptist ecclesiology will not be pleased with the affirmation (1623) that all three modes of baptism (immersion, dipping, and sprinkling) are consistent with scripture. However, the essay on "infant baptism" (37) does interestingly engage the Baptist position on believers baptism in a relatively non-polemical way, evidence that the editors are aware of the potential market the RSB might have among reformed Baptists.

There are no neutral study Bibles. Each of them has a certain audience in mind and a certain theological orientation it seeks to promote. This one is no exception. The RSB unabashedly seeks to promote a reformed reading of Holy Writ, and at times does not deal adequately with other alternative readings. At the same time, it is an excellent resource for Christians from the reformed corridors of evangelicalism who want to know the Bible better and to be introduced to the deeper levels of theology. As one who has affinities for the broader outlines of a Baptist reformed theology, I would recommend this study Bible to Christians who want an introductory theological grounding in the scriptures. For those, however, who have some maturity in their knowledge of scripture–long-time Bible students, M.Div. students, ministers, Bible educators in colleges and seminaries–the best Bibles I would recommend are still the ones that just come with the naked biblical text!

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Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post 9/11 Powers and American Empire. **By Mark Lewis Taylor. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005. 192 pages. Softcover, $16.00.**

In *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right*, Mark Lewis Taylor argues that the Christian right has leveraged post 9/11 nationalism to promote imperialistic and authoritarian policies that are more Manichean than Christian (24). The Christian Right is defined consistently throughout the book as a subset of the broader conservative and neo-conservative segments of the Republican Party. This religious subset has seized upon terrorist events to promote a political romanticism: A myth that America is a unique nation with a cause that transcends her boarders.

The events of 9/11 united two fundamentally divergent segments of the broadly conservative political landscape: Neo-conservatives and religious conservatives. While divergent in religious conviction both are united in their adherence to American exceptionalism which, following 9/11, resulted in two socio-political phenomena—belonging and expectation.

The Christian Right promotes an ideology and political agenda wherein Americans are a special nation whose calling is unique. This

calling, to conquer evil, and to spread democracy and freedom, contributes to American unilateral foreign policy. In addition to a sense of belonging, exceptionalism promotes a social expectation of economic optimism and material gain. Thus, exceptionalism blends a concoction of nationalism and consumerism resulting in unilateralism and corporate greed, both promoted by the ideology of the Christian Right.

American romantics take the myth of exceptionalism from cold war political rhetoric. Neo-conservatives are committed to interventionist foreign policy yet without the communist threat of the cold war they lack an effective message to leverage public opinion. However, following the events of 9/11, the religious right was able to wed neo-conservative ideas with the sacred language of evangelical theology: Divine favor and purpose, good versus evil, faith and patriotism, prayer, etc. In addition to sacred language, sacred symbols were utilized for a rally-around-the-flagpole effect. The cross and the flag became inseparable symbols of political and military power. Consequently, two cultures collided, resulting in a religious culture of war, torture, power, and domination.

Taylor's recommendation is two-fold. First, the myth of romanticism must be deconstructed. Second, a new myth of radical liberalism must be created, in which the values of power, purchase, and domination are exchanged for the counter-imperial values of liberation, reconciliation, and peace.

Taylor's assessment is simultaneously attractive and disappointing. It is a worthy project to separate the Christian faith from unrighteous political appropriation. The Christian community should think critically about its role in poverty, war, and consumerism. Evangelical Christians in particular must come to terms with the implications of the Gospel in regard to social justice.

At his best Taylor comes across in the vein of John Howard Yoder, seeing the Christian community as that which defies empire. The power of the Gospel, on this view, does not easily coincide with militarism and injustice. At other times he argues like Gustavo Gutierrez, appearing to reduce the atonement to a moral example and (by way of a naturalistic historical interpretation) negating the ongoing sovereignty of God over the affairs of humankind. Most troubling is that Taylor sees the Gospel as a message to appropriate rather than proclaim (158). Furthermore, his hermeneutic of suspicion comes across, at times, as conspiracy.

Despite its noble aim, this book is disappointing. For all his talk of myth construction, Taylor offers little as to what would ground his myth or make it more beneficial than that of the political romantics. Without a correspondence theory of truth, he is left with two rival theories and no readily available manner of adjudication.

While Taylor has a legitimate critique of the Christian Right, he doesn't connect his socio-political interpretation with scripture, or indeed to reference the scripture in any substantial way. This fact will undoubtedly undermine the value of the book for some pastors and sem-

inary students. Despite its shortcomings, this book is a thorough (if ultimately failed) critique of religion and politics that is worth reading.

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Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul. **By Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006. 419 pages. Softcover, $27.00.**

In this commentary, Malina and Pilch have undertaken the noble task of establishing the first-century Mediterranean socio-historical context of seven Pauline letters they have identified as "authentic" (1-3). According to the authors, Paul functions as a "change agent" who redefines the boundaries of Judaism in terms of the social norms of the Jesus-group, or the ἐκκλησία (20-21). As a result, Paul then serves as a messenger to Israelites who live in the Diaspora "among the nations" rather than as an apostle to the nations themselves (17-20). Paul's Jesus-groups operate within the Mediterranean patron-client system, whereby God functions as their benevolent benefactor, and group cohesion is maintained by cultivating an "honor-shame" mentality based upon communal mores and ethics.

Malina and Pilch have rightly focused on determining the socio-historical setting of the Pauline letters since they do indeed function as occasional documents which address specific groups with specific needs. To their credit, the authors have clearly stated their methodology and their presuppositions in the introduction and have abided by these principles throughout the rest of the work (28-29). In the "reading scenarios" at the end of the commentary, they also clearly define and categorize their terminology, thereby providing a helpful discussion for exegetes or students unfamiliar with social-scientific jargon (331-409).

Despite this clear organizational structure and concise writing, the book's methodology does exhibit some fundamental flaws. For instance, the redefinition of the term ἔθνή as a designation for Israelites residing among non-Israelites proves problematic. First of all, the discussion of ἔθνή lacks proper research to show that it has the range to refer to Israelites rather than non-Israelites/Gentiles in the context of Hebraic or even early Christian literature. More importantly, the primary sources cited never discuss ἔθνή specifically and incorporate only Greek and Latin synonyms into the discussion along with other works by ancient historians that broadly comment upon the process of Hellenization (17-20). Second, Malina and Pilch themselves even use the term arbitrarily to mean both Israelite and non-Israelite depending upon the nature of their argument (197-98, 265). Above all, in this commentary the authors have succeeded only in proving that ethnocentrism existed in the ancient Mediterranean world and not the fact that ἔθνή refers to Israelites in the Diaspora.

Another fundamental problem in their methodology arises when they attempt to classify all the occasional aspects of a particular letter into