

REVIEWS & RESPONSES

Review: David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliot (eds.), *The History of Scottish Theology*, 3 vols. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019). Hardback. \$375.00. Volume 1, 416pp. ISBN 978-0-19-875933-1. Volume 2, 464pp. ISBN 978-0-19-875934-8. Volume 3, 400pp. ISBN 978-0-19-875935-5. Reviewed by Harrison Perkins (PhD, Queen's University Belfast) is the assistant pastor at London City Presbyterian Church, a visiting lecturer in systematic theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary, and the author of *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works: James Ussher and the Reformed Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

Scotland has long been famous for its church culture, even if that has almost totally waned now in its post-Christian era, and especially Presbyterian traditions have often looked to Scotland for its example of a long-running Presbyterian heritage. Scottish theology inherently has *some* link to confessional Presbyterianism, which makes its history of immediate interest to readers of this journal. The new three-volume history of Scottish theology from Oxford University Press makes a massive contribution in describing some of the most important features and seismic shifts in the development of doctrinal thinking and church life in Scotland.

Volume one covers the periods from the Celtic origins of Scottish theology to the era of Reformed Orthodoxy. The task set for this volume was certainly monumental, and the difficulty of examining the most ancient features of Scottish theology is tremendously difficult given the available sources. However, Simon Burton's essay on John Scotus Erigena does a masterful job of investing a difficult and unknown source, and this essay is a particularly important contribution that helpfully introduces material that is likely unknown to many. The essays in this volume that are likely of most interest to readers of this journal are those that concern the Reformation and Orthodox periods. Whitney Gamble contributed a very useful survey of the Westminster Assembly. Although many readers are likely familiar with the Assembly, there is a lack of scholarly material that accurately considers the varying facets of the Assembly from the English and Scottish perspectives. Gamble's essay does a fine job of sketching the Scottish commission's contribution to the Assembly and the various issues involved in the English-Scottish relations during the civil war period. Essays by Aaron Denlinger, Marie-Luise Ehrenschenwender,

and R. Scott Spurlock raise some issues about the varying parties at work in Scotland during the later Orthodox period, and indicate some of the genuine complexities in studying Scottish ecclesiastical controversies. James Eglinton provided a masterful analysis of Scotland's theological connections to France and the Netherlands and traced out how those links inform various theological controversies and developments. Thomas Green wrote a supremely informative essay about changes and developments in Scottish jurisprudence in relation to theology, which is a topic that more scholars will now need to consider as they examine the political implications of Scottish theology.

Three essays in volume one directly address the issue of covenant theology, which is obviously a recurring theme in studies of Reformed historical theology. Two of these essays, however, are somewhat disappointing. David Mullan and Guy Richard both wrote specifically about the federal motif in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At least Mullan's prior work established him as a formidable expert in "Scottish Puritanism." Both of these essays do engage well with the primary sources and provide new analysis of important texts, such as the works of Robert Rollock, that contributed to Scottish covenant theology and these contributions are worth considering for their primary source assessment. Still, neither essay dealt with the relative explosion of literature on Reformed covenant theology in recent years, and opted instead to cite and engage with the same tired discussions from literature on covenant theology from twenty and thirty years ago. On the other hand, Stephen Meyers' essay about the Marrow controversy in the eighteenth century is a remarkably original and fresh assessment of that much discussed event. Meyers shed very insightful light on two conflicting paradigms of covenant theology that both grew out of latent tensions in prior Scottish theology and then clashed in the debates between the Marrow men and their opponents. It would be hard for readers of this journal to miss the correlations between the two conflicting versions of covenant theology that clashed in eighteenth century Scotland and debates about legalism and antinomianism that are raging in the Reformed community today. Although Meyers' historical essay may not solve those theological problems, it is well worth considering as a new and illuminating perspective on them.

Whereas volume one discussed issues from Scottish

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theology's ancient root up to early modernity, which meant that theology was largely an ecclesiastical and cultural focus, volume two covers topics related mainly to the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The essays in this volume are occupied mostly with analyzing how Scottish theology responded to the development of modernity, primarily in regards to the Enlightenment, but also the Enlightenment's lingering effects. These essays show how theologians were far friendlier with the Scottish Enlightenment than was the case in the French counterpart. Many theologians attempted to reconcile or incorporate developing intellectual trends with traditional or revisionist Christianity. Sometimes these efforts were successful to some degree, but other times they produced controversy or undermined confessional stances in the Scottish church(es). This volume deals far more with institutional issues, as the eighteenth and nineteenth century saw the splintering of Scottish denomination and the separation of university education from ministerial training.

Several essays in this volume stand out for their usefulness. David Bebbington provides helpful analysis of the ongoing issues of dissent in Scotland from 1720 into the 1840s. The two chapters on the interface between theology and Scottish literature give insight into how theology affected popular media and storytelling, although Ian Campbell's chapter on literature clearly assumes that modernity is better than traditional Christianity. Michael Braütigam's essay on the Free Church of Scotland from its inception in 1843 to 1900 is one of the more helpful treatments of the theology of some of the "Disruption fathers" in print. Those who are interested in the theology of the early Free Church must consult this essay. Rowan Strong's essay on Scottish Episcopalian theology sheds light on matters that are probable lesser known in the development of Scottish theology, since Presbyterianism is almost always at the forefront of historical discussion.

On the other hand, Donald Macleod's essay about the Westminster Confession seemed to be more focused on criticizing the confession and its use in Scotland than explaining its significance. Macleod appeared critical (or at least sympathetic to criticisms) of strict confessional subscription (pg. 3). Although his historical comments about *some* lack of clarity in the confession about covenant theology, since the confession did not mention the covenant of redemption, are insightful, he seemed to use that lack of clarity to stretch the bounds of confessional "theological pluralism" (pg. 5-6). He noted that the confession did not settle the dispute between pre- and postmillennialism, although it would be strange had the confession addressed the issue in those exact terms, since that debate in the way that we know it today is of more recent development. Macleod's criticisms of the confession are clearest in regards to theology proper, namely his rejection of the confession's assertion that God is "without passions."

Macleod argued first that the confession may not actually be rejecting divine passibility in full, suggesting that it could be a rejection of "bodily passions" in God or acts of the mind that go against reason (pg. 6-7). It is not clear to this reviewer why a rejection of "bodily passions" would be necessary since the confession also states that God does not have a body. It seems that Macleod was trying to stretch the most obvious meaning of the confession in order to make his own rejection of divine impassibility more acceptable. His view is that, "To infer from this statement that subscribers to the Confession were bound to the view that God has no emotions, or that he is not affected by events outside himself, or that he was not moved by the death of his own Son, would be to remove from Scripture key elements of its revelation of God" (pg. 7). This claim seems to go beyond the limits of what an historical essay about the confession should argue, but also seems to be a clear rejection of the historic church's and the confession's clear teaching on this issue.

The third volume traces Scottish theology into the twentieth century. In some ways, these essays basically describe the Scottish church's interaction with, and essentially appropriation of, modern theology. Bruce McCormack's contribution about the Scottish reception of kenotic Christology is an extremely useful piece, not just in regard to Scottish theology, but in gaining a better and more nuanced understanding of the various versions of kenoticism. Brian Stanley's essay showed that Scotland's missionary movement, in contrast with the parallel movements in England and America, remained—to their credit—a churchly endeavor. Whereas so many other missionary organizations became parachurch affiliations, Scotland maintained a tight link between the churches and its missionary activities. Paul Nimmo's essay about Karl Barth's influence in Scotland is necessary reading to understand the reshaping of Scottish theology in the modern period. Much the same could be said of David Fergusson's essay on modern Christology, and Paul Molnar's on Thomas Torrance.

Torrance was perhaps the most significant figure in Scottish theology at least since the nineteenth century, which makes Molnar's essays arguably one of the more important in this collection, certainly in volume three. Torrance did notably emphasize retrieving the riches of Trinitarian theology, but, as part of a moderate Barthian legacy, also reworked Reformed theology in more ontological categories. This recasting related largely to his criticisms of traditional Reformed covenant theology, which in Barthian fashion he argued was too "contractual." His solution was to discard the covenant of works and recast features of the covenant of grace in more ontological rather than legal terms. In sum, however, this volume displays Scottish theology's significant adoption of modernity and social concern. By the end of the twentieth century, Barthianism if not full Hegelianism were major features within the doctrine

of the Scottish church. The essays in this volume are in some ways often denser than those in volumes one and two, but that largely relates to the complexity inherent in the sources.

There is a massive stockpile of information contained in these three volumes on the history of Scottish theology. Some of the essays, perhaps especially those on the ancient period, will introduce readers to figures, ideas, and sources that are new or unfamiliar to many. Other essays describe Scotland's period of Reformed orthodoxy, which opens up the foundational era that gave Scotland its reputation in the confessional Presbyterian heritage. The essays about the Enlightenment and modern period, however, show the Scottish church's real struggle and frequent failure to hold onto that confessional tradition. Although these essays can at times seem disconnected, taken together they do portray a narrative of Scotland's fascination with innovative ideas and of the church's tendency to incorporate academic trends into its theological thinking that undermined the more traditional and confessional versions of its heritage.

Review: Kirk R. MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019). Hardback. 412 pages. ISBN 978-0-310-53453-2. \$34.99. Reviewed by Zachary Groff, divinity student and the Director of Advancement & Admissions at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Post-Enlightenment developments in so-called Christian theology are many, varied, and imaginative. One feature held in common across philosophical and denominational lines is the active reimagining of the relationships which exist between theology, the church, the Bible, and human experience. As a result, the modern theological enterprise is characterized by dynamism, innovation, and instability. Standard-issue church history and historical theology textbooks published in the last three decades report and reflect upon these traits of modern theology going into the twenty-first century. As the latest contributions to both academic and popular theological corpuses make plain, such innovative and imaginative developments show no signs of slowing down.

McPherson College professor of philosophy and religion Kirk R. MacGregor recently published *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction* to survey the field. He has produced a cogent, clear, and digestible volume encompassing theological developments from the late eighteenth century to the opening decades of the twenty-first century. As such, this volume is a worthy contender for being regarded as the single most helpful textbook on modern Christian theology for students and educators. Though lacking the helpful evaluative component present in *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in*

a Transitional Age by Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson,¹ MacGregor's collection of theological précis is both more comprehensive and more succinct than the earlier standard Evangelical textbook on recent trends and movements in theology. In comparing the two texts below, this review first briefly considers the earlier production.

Nearly 30 years ago, Olson and Grenz undertook the ambitious task (especially for 1992) of weaving together a dialogical and loosely narrative presentation of twentieth century theology, encompassing mainline and evangelical Protestantism together with progressive Roman Catholicism. On the whole, they have written a fascinating account and a helpful review of relevant theologians and their most significant publications. That being said, the book is a slog to read through as a base text in a modern theology survey course. It is the opinion of this reviewer that the authors could have accomplished their task in about 80% of the published length.

Using the twin concepts of divine transcendence and divine immanence as constituting an interpretive rubric, the authors claim that an unbalanced focus on immanence throughout the twentieth century—albeit with flashes of transcendence (from theologians such as Karl Barth, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, Carl F. H. Henry, and Bernard Ramm) interspersed at points—has both dominated the century and largely spoiled theology. They capture the theme of twentieth century theology in their exploration of Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng by writing, “That God suffers is almost a truism in contemporary theology. In a single theological generation the traditional doctrine of God's impassability has been overturned, so that it is now almost heresy to reassert it” (266–67). For Reformed and Presbyterian scholars and elders, this shift in theological discourse has had direct bearing on the peace and purity of their churches and corporate witness. One has only to consider the debates over K. Scott Oliphint's doctrine of God (i.e., his “covenantal properties” thesis implying a passible/immanent mode of God's existence distinct from the impassible/transcendent mode of divine being)² that have upset the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America (ARBCA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS). Grenz and Olson's observation is relevant to Reformed churches and institutions in a way that mirrors broader so-called Christian theology.

1. Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992); subsequent citations to this volume are provided in parentheses.

2. K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 110; see also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 572–573.

Grenz and Olson conclude their project on a note of optimism that the rise of postmodernism will inspire a new vitality in Evangelical theology. They write, “Although the emerging postmodern mind may appear to put faith on the defensive, it actually marks a new day of opportunity for theology” (314). However, ensuing theological developments have proven to be more of a self-negating embarrassment for Evangelical theologians than an opportunity for spiritual vitality. In the West, Evangelical theologians have increasingly adopted accommodationist and even radical hermeneutical and theological agendas. Social justice has emerged as the highest end of corporate Christian activity in some Evangelical circles. As a result, the spirituality of the church has been all but crucified on a cross of church-led and church-organized social activism. At the other end of the Evangelical spectrum, the best of worldwide Christianity has taken up earnest retrieval projects and philosophical engagements that have reestablished a more-or-less classical orthodox theological tradition once thought lost. Thoughtful Evangelical and Reformed systematic theologians have recently addressed modern theological controversies drawing from ancient, medieval, and early modern sources. For example, in a recently published edited volume entitled *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, Fred Sanders and Scott Swain introduce the project focusing on the doctrine of the Son’s eternal generation from (and relationship to) the Father by identifying a problem in modern trinitarian theology. They write, “Without eternal generation, the constellation of truths that compose the doctrine of the Trinity remain just so many points of stellar light; they are stars that fail to constellate.”³ It is precisely this problem which has provided the impetus for the retrieval project in which Sanders, Swain, and the volume’s other contributors are involved. Sanders and Swain elaborate, “The goal of *Retrieving Eternal Generation* is to make three cases in adequate detail: that this classic piece of theological confession is in fact biblically, traditionally, and systematically satisfying. It is our hope that these three are one persuasive argument for retrieving the doctrine of eternal generation and recognizing its central importance for the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁴ Writing much later than Grenz and Olson, Kirk MacGregor treats some of those ensuing theological developments in modern theology (both the self-negating and the constructive) in his more recent textbook.

MacGregor’s textbook is well-written, even if a bit dull

3. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain, eds., *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 17.

4. Sanders and Swain, 18.

5. MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology*, 64–73; subsequent citations to this volume are provided in parentheses.

6. See Bradley J. Gundlach, *Process and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845–1929* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

7. Fred G. Zaspel and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 380ff.

throughout. But what textbook is not a bit dull? Surprisingly expansive in scope, MacGregor’s survey does leave gaps in coverage, as well as take some liberties in the unavoidable generalization of issues here and there. For example, his inclusion of a chapter on “Princeton Theology”⁵ unfortunately limits the scope of his presentation of eighteenth century Reformed or Calvinistic theology. This lacuna might have been remedied by a broadening of the chapter and some shifting of material to mention contributions from other Presbyterian theologians of note (e.g., W.G.T. Shedd, Thomas Chalmers, James Henley Thornwell, R.L. Dabney, and J.L. Girardeau), the Mercersburg men (e.g., Philip Schaff and John Nevin) and New School Presbyterians. That same chapter gives a typical example of an understandable—if somewhat consternating—generalization. MacGregor makes the claim that B.B. Warfield “always subscribed to evolution” (71). He goes on to qualify this statement by noting, “[Charles] Hodge and Warfield opposed the combination of philosophical naturalism and evolution and viewed evolution as a means God employed in creation” (71). Nevertheless, recent historical scholarship has more accurately classified Warfield (and his colleagues at Princeton) as sympathetic to philosophical “developmentalism.”⁶ Some have gone as far as to characterize Warfield as an agnostic on the issue of evolution, for he recognized the exegetical incongruities (namely, the detailed account of Eve’s creation in Genesis 2:21–23) and theological problems presented by the collision of Darwin’s proposed mechanism of macroevolution and the clear testimony of Scripture.⁷ Despite these understandable and minor deficiencies, MacGregor’s work succeeds as a useful base text for courses in modern church history and theology within any denominational context.

Though MacGregor’s focus aligns primarily with scholarly interests in American Christianity, his textbook has a global scope and concern. That is to say, while the book’s coverage seems to be more attuned to the academic concerns of American church historians, the subject matter is not purely American. He includes several eye-opening chapters on little-known movements in world Christianity worthy of serious attention. In his chapter on “African Christology” (276–84), MacGregor notes that while “African Christology is more holistic in its integration of the person and work of Christ” than Western Christology, African pastor-theologians are “consciously aware and highly respectful of traditional Western Christological formulation” (277). Thus, the most important distinction between classical Western Christology and the more recent African Christology is not in substance, but in approach and emphasis. Whereas the principal focus of Western Christological method is on Christ’s divine nature and God’s eternal decree to take to Himself a human nature to save His elect, the more recent African approach takes as its starting point the person and work of Jesus in his historical

activity as the Godman. Thus, African Christology emphasizes Christ's role as sympathetic deliverer and omnipotent healer. He has experienced the pain of human travail, poverty, and woe, and He has conquered death. Without devolving into the materialism of the so-called social and prosperity gospels, African Christology describes the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in a manner well-suited to much of the African context, characterized as it is by crushing poverty, rampant disease, and entrenched political corruption. Because Jesus has overcome these and many more repercussions of the Fall, He must be "more than a man" (282), being indeed the human-divine mediator Who reconciles God and man.

In his chapter on "Chinese Eschatology" (318–24), MacGregor highlights the Chinese underground church's inter-denominational "Back to Jerusalem" movement, which adopted a common Confession of Faith in 1998 and has dispatched over 100,000 Chinese missionaries (most of whom are bivocational) to central Asia, Islamic nations, and the State of Israel (320). MacGregor identifies four points of theological emphasis which characterize the movement. First, leaders of the movement anticipate a wide-scale advance of the gospel and growth of the church in every segment of Chinese (and world) society leading up to the return of Christ and subsequent inauguration of His Millennial reign. Thus, the movement is distinctively—but not pessimistically—premillennial. Second, the strategy of the movement is to go first to the Gentile (i.e., Islamic) nations that yet lie in the darkness of unbelief, and then to the Jews (i.e., the State of Israel) in a grand mirror-image of the history of Christian missions, which began with the Jews and extended to the Gentiles. Third, the hymnody of their churches and training of their pastors/missionaries evidence an active expectation of persecution in the last days before the return of Christ. "Since each of the movement's pioneers spent decades in prison, its hymnody echoes a suffering church.... Contrary to Western ministerial preparation, the training of Chinese missionaries includes lessons and coaching on how to be an effective witness in prison as well as in death" (322). Fourth and finally, the movement emphasizes a disciplined and fervent prayer life of every believer, including prayer and fasting on behalf of the missionary labors of its own members as well as the renewed or enduring faithfulness of Western seminaries and Bible colleges (322–23). Though the theology (and particularly, the eschatology and ecclesiology) undergirding the movement is clearly at odds with confessional Presbyterianism at several points, the zeal and practical resourcefulness of the movement should serve as an inspiration for Christians everywhere to think creatively and energetically about how to reach remote people groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though the two chapters discussed above regarding facets of global Christianity are particularly eye-opening, MacGregor

gives attention to several important recent American movements in modern theology. In his chapter on "Theology and the Arts" (333–40), MacGregor notes interesting proposals in theological anthropology dealing especially with the relationships which exist between worship, emotion, cognition, and Christology. Theologians involved in these discussions have put forward requisites for true art, especially that it reflect the character of God in its "lucidity, intelligibility, and illumination" of Christ's person (339). Therefore, "the goal of art is to foster relational union with the Trinitarian God by clearly mediating to an audience the Christ-centered forms on which it is metaphysically grounded" (Ibid.). From a Reformed perspective, artistic forms of human expression (namely, music) enrich and lend structure to Christian worship in ways that are Christ-exalting and God-honoring. The involvement of human emotion in both art and worship is most pronounced in the church's activity of "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Theologians interested in the spiritual ramifications of this aspect of the Christian life and devotion emphasize especially the tight correspondence which exists between human cognition and emotion. For instance, "cognitive theories highlight that what we take to be full-fledged emotions depend on beliefs about the world or oneself" (335). MacGregor gives a helpful introduction to this promising theological research focus which has arisen in recent times.

Not surprisingly, MacGregor demonstrates his competence as an intellectual historian and academic philosopher in his refreshingly clear chapters on "Reformed Epistemology" (263–75) and "Philosophy of Religion and Analytic Theology" (304–17). His presentation not only makes the material easy to grasp, but also suggests a strong sympathy for certain peculiarities of these schools of Christian Philosophy. Attentive readers of a confessional Presbyterian persuasion might like to have seen a more sympathetic reading of one of the most prominent figures in recent American Presbyterian history. From the perspective of this reviewer, it is a lamentable accident of history that J. Gresham Machen continues to be catalogued among Fundamentalists rather than among the American Reformed and Evangelical theologians with whom he had more social and ideological affinity. In his chapter on "Christian Fundamentalism" (113–20) MacGregor rightly notes, "Although Machen permitted Christian fundamentalists to laud him as their academic spokesman, he did not completely fit their mold" (115). MacGregor is aware of the tension which attends lumping Machen together with Fundamentalism, but he stops short of characterizing Machen as anything other than a Fundamentalist. After noting some areas of disagreement between Machen and his Fundamentalist cobelligerents, MacGregor moves on in his discussion of Fundamentalism without devoting any space to developing

a fuller positive historical profile of Machen as a Presbyterian churchman. In other words, the presentation of Machen in MacGregor's volume is inextricably subsumed under the Fundamentalist movement.

The overall value of the included material notwithstanding, certain glaring omissions in MacGregor's coverage could be remedied in a few sentences or paragraphs. Like Grenz and Olson,⁸ MacGregor omits any substantial coverage of the gross moral failures of certain theologians (namely, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich). Taking into account the importance of Christian life and morals (orthopraxy) for Christian theology (orthodoxy), such an examination of men's lives is needful when giving consideration to their respective theologies and careers. Furthermore, this reviewer was left wondering why the BioLogos Foundation and Old Testament scholar John Walton received an entire chapter of coverage in "Evolutionary Creation" (357–66) without even so much as a mention given to the much larger, more well-funded, and more influential organization Answers in Genesis (AiG) and the Young Earth Creationism movement of which AiG is a major part. Similarly, why commit an entire chapter to Charles Haddon Spurgeon (74–84) without at least mentioning figures as significant as Cornelius Van Til, Geerhardus Vos, Abraham Kuyper, or Herman Bavinck? Again like Grenz and Olson,⁹ MacGregor subsumes his discussion of the discipline of biblical theology under "Postliberal Theology" (325–332),¹⁰ which includes what historians designate as narrative theology. As Peter Wallace¹¹ and C.N. Willborn¹² have demonstrated, biblical theology as a discipline in American theological seminaries has a pedigree rooted in nineteenth century and early twentieth century conservative Presbyterianism. The use of biblical theology by northern and southern Presbyterians who defended the authority, inerrancy, and plenary verbal inspiration of the Old and New Testaments anticipated Eichrodt's, Oehler's, and Vos's developments of the discipline. Thus, to lump biblical theology into so-called "Postliberal Theology" is at best incomplete, and at worst an example of faulty historiography. Despite these few and minor shortcomings, Kirk MacGregor has furnished Evangelical pastors, professors, seminarians, and laymen with a standard textbook for the study of modern church history which will prove itself to be more useful than its antecedents.

8. See especially, Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 116.

9. See especially, Grenz and Olson, pp. 271–285.

10. MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology*, 325–332.

11. Peter Wallace, "The Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology: The Development of Old Testament Theology at Old Princeton, 1812–1932," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 41–69.

12. C.N. Willborn, "Biblical Theology in Southern Presbyterianism," in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. Robert L. Penny (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 3–25.

Review: Harrison Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works: James Ussher and the Reformed Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). 288pp. Cloth. 978-0-19-751418-4. \$99.00. Reviewed by J. V. Fesko, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi.

Monographs on the covenant of works are few and far between, thus Harrison Perkins's recently published doctoral dissertation on James Ussher's view is a most welcomed addition. Perkins conducted his study under the supervision of Crawford Gribben, noted early modern historian, at Queen's University of Belfast, Ireland. Perkins divides his book into six chapters: (1) Ussher, covenant theology, and theological contexts, (2) the content of the covenant of works, (3) developing and debating the covenant of works, (4) the covenant of works and predestination, (5) the covenant of works and Christology, and (6) the covenant of works and salvation.

There are five noteworthy features of this book. First, in the present, one of the more common methodological moves is to read Calvin's *Institutes*, hop, skip, and jump to the Westminster Assembly, and then bound into the twenty-first century to demonstrate what the Reformed tradition believes about a certain point of doctrine. I have regularly encountered the statement, "The Westminster divines follow Calvin here...." As popular as the claim is, it does not follow historical evidence. While Calvin's name does appear as one of the more frequently cited authorities in the minutes of the Westminster Assembly, Ussher influenced the assembly in a number of ways. Notably, Ussher was the chief author of the Irish Articles (34–35), which was the first confession to codify the covenant of works and served as a source document for the Westminster Confession of Faith (9–10). Sometimes the divines borrow phrases straight from the Irish Articles and insert them into the Westminster Confession. Ussher's influence is, therefore, significant and often overlooked. Perkins documents and traces a number of these lines of influence throughout his book.

A second important feature pertains to Perkin's use of unpublished manuscripts. Recent work on Ussher by Alan Ford (*James Ussher*, OUP, 2007) and Richard Snoddy (*The Soteriology of James Ussher*, OUP, 2014) have made use of some unpublished manuscripts, but Perkins has made excellent use of them, including rare previously untranslated Latin manuscripts (39–40). Use of these manuscripts has often required challenging paleographical labors to decipher content, but this spadework provides for a thicker and richer account of Ussher's views. By digging through Ussher's manuscripts, Perkins notes that Ussher commended the works of Huguenot theologian, Daniel Chamier, to his students. Few today have ever heard of Chamier let alone read his works, yet Chamier was a likely source of Ussher's understanding of how

Adam was able to secure eternal life through his obedience (104–05). Moreover, Perkins's use of Ussher's unpublished sermon manuscripts provides fascinating historical texture so that readers can have a greater understanding of Ussher's times and theological concerns.

The third commendable characteristic is how Perkins traces the development of the covenant of works through Ussher's writings. For far too long historians have pigeonholed the covenant of works as a dogmatic imposition, or as theological ballast for the doctrine of predestination. Perkins instead rightly demonstrates the exegetical nature of Ussher's doctrine (44–45, 48–67).

The fourth aspect that commends Perkins's work is that he explores the catholicity of Ussher's doctrine of the covenant of works. Twentieth-century scholarship has claimed that the Reformation was a complete break with the patristic and medieval past, but a generation ago Heiko Oberman challenged this assumption. There are many aspects of early modern Reformed theology that stand in continuity with previous views. There is not, for example, a distinct Reformed doctrine of God. Many Reformed theologians followed the broad contours of Thomism (43). Ussher was an advocate of a Thomist intellectualist understanding of natural law rather than a Scotist voluntarist configuration, a key element of the covenant of works (65–66). This Thomist intellectualism is a characteristic he shared with fellow Reformed theologians such as Girolamo Zanchi or Westminster divine Anthony Burgess (71–72). But such continuities do not tell the whole story, as Ussher rejected the *donum superadditum*, which was a component of Roman Catholic pre-fall anthropology (73). Additionally, Perkins documents how one Roman Catholic theologian was an advocate of what would later be called the covenant of works in Reformed circles (46). The continuities with the earlier tradition that Perkins showcases reveals that the substance of the covenant of works is not a peculiar Reformed doctrine.

Fifth, in the twentieth century a regularly repeated mantra in the study of early modern Reformed theology was the normative status of the theology of John Calvin. Calvin was supposedly the lodestar, norm, or the chief influence upon the tradition. What Luther was for Lutheranism, Calvin was for Calvinism. Such a relationship between Calvin and the tradition has typically been used to pit Calvin against the later tradition. Calvin did not advocate the covenant of works unlike later Calvinists, thus the subsequent tradition innovated or deviated from Calvin's theology. Perkins avoids this common false narrative and sidesteps artificial points of contact between Calvin and the tradition. Just because a theologian was a prominent figure in the sixteenth century does not mean he was formative for every theologian. Perkins explores the sources that Ussher himself cites to determine

what theologians shaped his views. Perkins reveals that Ussher did own and interact with Calvin's writings, but the Genevan's influence was negligible (255–56). Calvin was certainly an important figure in early modern Reformed theology, but he was also one among many influential theologians.

In the end, Perkins's work makes at least two key contributions to the study of early modern Reformed theology. First, he presents important research on the development of the covenant of works, a little-researched topic. He dispels a number of canards regarding this much-maligned doctrine to reveal its catholicity and exegetical moorings. Second, he explores an early modern giant who has been largely ignored in the present day. The Westminster divines were not the first to codify the covenant of works; Ussher raised the doctrine to confessional status in the Irish Articles. Perkins, therefore, rightly shines much needed light upon Ussher's covenant theology. Perkins has given the church an important work that deserves a wide reading.

Review: Jay T. Collier, *Debating Perseverance: The Augustinian Heritage in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford University Press, 2018). 229pp. Hb. 978-0-19-085852-0 . \$115.00. Reviewed by Thomas Haviland-Pabst.

In this first book published by Jay T. Collier, the director of publishing for Reformation Heritage Books, and a research fellow and colloquium director for the Junius Institute for Digital Reformation Research, the reader is offered a fascinating glimpse into, as the title suggests, debates surrounding the doctrine of perseverance in post-Reformation England.

In the first chapter entitled “the Church of England, Sources of Identity, and Theological Distinctives,” the author sets the stage for the remainder of the book. Collier states that the “Church of England developed its theological identity” in “the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through an association with two influential groups” (p. 1). One group sought to maintain “relations to” the Reformed movement “throughout Europe”; another group looked “back in time” and thus “found great [connectional] significance with the early church.” Although there was harmony between the two, there was also conflict, and yet, they were both powerful forces “shaping and molding” a “rather unique self-understanding” in the Church of England, establishing a distinct pattern “of doctrinal development and argument.” Yet, modern scholarship is undecided to what degree these distinct traditions impacted the identity of the Church of England.

Weighing in on this debate, Collier surveys evidence for this two streams in the Church of England. Regarding the Reformed shape of her identity, soon after King Henry VIII, this Reformed identification took place, which is evidenced

by the connections established by Thomas Cranmer to leading reformers in continental Europe, namely, Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermingli. Both were invited to England and consequently the former was appointed “Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge” and the latter was appointed “Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford” (p. 2). Moreover, Queen Mary’s opposition to the Reformation resulted in exiles fleeing to cities aligned with the Reformation such as “Geneva, Strasbourg, and Zurich.”

Regarding the connection with early Christianity, writers such as John Jewel and William Perkins argued that “Rome had strayed from the old paths” with England maintaining the Scriptural position of the “ancient faith” (p. 3). This connection was bolstered by an “English exceptionalism” built on the recognition of “an early uncorrupted Christianity.” In addition, appeal was made to Reformed churches and ancient Christianity by those often opposed in other ways (e.g., Puritans and Archbishop John Whitgift). Thus both sources of identity were deemed essential to shaping Church of England’s own.

Collier, in surveying the approach to the relationship between these two sources in Anglicanism by historians, argues that both those who assert an Anglican via media between Geneva and Rome and those who deny it, favoring “a Calvinistic hegemony” (p. 9), overstate their respective cases. In order to move forward, he suggests that we focus on “how the two sources were harmonized.” This could be done by observing “how the Church [of England] handled theological issues that touched on both of these sources,” and while such a study is beyond the scope of his work, he aims to focus on “one distinctive of Reformed theology” and “how receptions of a particular church father ... factored into certain debates.”

The distinctive in question is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Collier defends this doctrine as the most viable for exploring Anglican identity. Although much attention has been given to predestination, this is not a Reformed distinctive. Many non-Reformed bodies have affirmed the unconditional election of the Reformed faith such as Jansenists and Lutherans, yet, “Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Arminians all recoiled at the notion that a person once possessing justifying faith could not lose it” (p. 10). Though not all Reformed confessions affirmed the doctrine, Collier suggests that, given the lack of explicit denial, “it allowed the doctrine to flourish among the Reformed” (pp. 11-12), resulting in “a distinct character to Reformed theology” (p. 12). He is careful to note though that while this doctrine was unique among the Reformed because they gave it “a significant hearing,” it wasn’t until after the Synod of Dort “solidified” the Reformed theological identity that affirmation of the doctrine was essential to being Reformed. Therefore, the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the doctrine of perseverance in relation to the Synod of Dort is important for Collier’s study.

Turning to the church fathers, Collier provides a number of reasons for choosing the Church of England’s reception of Augustine as his focus. First, Augustine is clearly an important church father. Second, he was often treated “as preeminent among church fathers” by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians (p. 14). Third, Augustine also wrote a treatise directly addressing perseverance (*On the Gift of Perseverance*) and dealt with the doctrine in other places as well. Fourth, the recognition of these treatises is important is evidenced “in their retrieval of English translations beginning in the reign of King Edward VI.” Fifth, while it has been recognized that reception of Augustine on perseverance influenced “subsequent church history,” there is a lacuna of research on this reception in Reformation and post-Reformation eras. Collier’s goal is to offer a sampling rather than comprehensive treatment of the reception of Augustine and its bearing on perseverance in England in order to approximate an understanding of the Church of England’s identity.

In the second chapter, “Cambridge Aflame with Controversy,” Collier describes the drafting of the Lambert Articles, which were nine propositions “authorized” (p. 20) by Archbishop John Whitgift on November 20, 1595, and the subsequent controversy that resulted from these articles. Eschewing the Calvinist vs. anti-Calvinist framework for understanding these articles, Collier suggests that perseverance was significant for the controversy surrounding these articles.

The reason for the emergence of these articles is a dispute between one William Whitaker and his opponent Peter Baro in the early 1590s at Cambridge University. The debate rose to such a pitch that Archbishop Whitgift was called in to handle the matter in 1595. Upon Whitgift’s involvement, a “determination had been held at the university” (p. 22) undermining the doctrine of perseverance. The debate continued to grow when William Barrett preached a sermon affirming the “defectibility of faith” (p. 23). After being ordered to retract controversial points of his sermon, both Whitaker and Whitgift became involved with Barrett’s case, which in turn gave rise to the Lambert Articles.

It was clear, so Collier argues, that “issues of the perseverance of faith and assurance of salvation” (p. 27) were of primary concern. Yet, this is often missed by modern scholarship given the focus on predestination and effectual calling. Two different versions of the articles existed: those originally submitted for discussion and those “finally approved by Whitgift” (p. 30). Notable at this point is that, contrary to the focus on election and calling in scholarship, “none of the revisions ... detracts from the solid Reformed convictions of unconditional election and effectual calling” (p. 31). Collier compares the Lambert Article 5 on perseverance (p. 32), noting their differences:

Proposed Article 5:

A true, lively, and justifying faith, and the sanctifying Spirit of God is neither extinguished nor lost, nor does it depart from those that have once been partakers of it, either totally or finally.

Approved Article 5

A true, lively, and justifying faith, and the sanctifying Spirit of God, is neither extinguished nor lost, nor does it depart from the elect, either totally or finally.

The change of note, namely, from partakers to the elect, Collier contends, is a substantial change. Partakers is not a synonym for elect; rather, while those affirming the proposed article could affirm the approved article, the use of ‘the elect’ suggests that “someone believing that the nonelect could be sovereignly converted by God and yet sovereignly allowed to not persevere would not be able to affirm the article initially proposed” (p. 34), a fact Whitgift knew. In support of this, Collier notes that Whitgift informed the Cambridge heads that they made Barrett affirm at points what was contrary to the most esteemed Protestant men. Thus, he explores which men Whitgift have had in mind when he revised Article 5.

After exploring the views of such men as Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker, Collier comes to the conclusion that Matthew Hutton and Adrianus Saravia were likely in mind. The former was a friend and correspondent of Whitgift’s during the controversy that would not have affirmed the proposed Article 5 and cited Augustine in support of his view of perseverance. The latter, also a confidant of Whitgift and “respected ... among the Reformed,” enlisted Augustine in support of his denial of “the perseverance of every true believer” (p. 50). John Overall is another figure that, while not directly influential for Whitgift, would affirm the approved Article 5, suggesting that this was not a position confined to one or two men, but “had a wider reception (p. 53). The appeal to Augustine is also characteristic of Whitaker’s defense, the author of the proposed Article 5. Thus, “[k]ey to the whole debate on perseverance is that there were different readings of Augustine, even among the Reformed,” leaving in turn room for “a minority opinion ... that satisfied itself with the perseverance of the elect” rather than of the saints (p. 57).

Chapters three and four give specific attention to the Synod of Dort, with the former describing dilemmas that arose at the Synod itself and with the latter describing troubles following Dort. The British delegate to Dort was given instruction by King James to “be conciliatory within confessional bounds” (p. 63). Collier notes that in the *Collegiate Suffrage*, the British

delegates “gave substantially more space to their discussion of perseverance than they did to the other four articles” (p. 64), each of which addressed an article of the Remonstrates. In the discussion of perseverance, they agreed with Dort’s affirmation of the full and total perseverance of the saints, with significant appeal to Augustine. Yet, matters become more complex when the British delegates are hesitant when asked “to place falling from redeeming grace in a list of errors to reject” (p. 83).

Collier suggests a reason for this. Though they likely saw their own view, consonant with Dort’s, as “compatible with their own church’s confession [Thirty-Nine Articles],” they could not exclude the apostasy option from this same confession. Also, the delegates explicitly offered four reasons for this move. First, they recognized that there were different readings of Augustine on the matter. Second, they recognized that condemnation of this view would upset the Lutherans. Third, they desired a Reformed consensus, and condemning such a view would rule out some “respectable men” (p. 87). Fourth, they asserted that some biblical texts could be understood to support the view that was being opposed. Despite the efforts of this delegation, the international Reformed community denied this conciliatory approach to perseverance, effectively disenfranchising “a strand within the Reformed tradition that could affirm the perseverance of the elect by solidifying ... the perseverance of the saints” (p. 92).

The fourth chapter gives attention to the controversy surrounding Richard Montagu’s views. Though accused of Arminianism because he did not affirm Dort, Collier argues that he was broadly Reformed. In fact, he argues that scholars have misunderstood Montagu’s views by employing the categories of Arminianism and Calvinism. His denial of perseverance of the saints was based on his reading of Augustine and those Reformed churchmen who followed that same reading not sympathies for Jacob Arminius, whom Montagu had never read. Montagu’s condemnation by his contemporaries highlights therefore “the identity crisis the English Church was experiencing” (p. 122) following the Synod of Dort.

Chapter five explores another dilemma that arose in the Church of England following Dort, namely, its understanding of baptism. Because the Church of England associated “baptism with bringing a child into a state of salvation,” which, in turn, appeared to conflict with “the Dortian insistence that believers cannot lose their salvation” (p. 158), three distinct strategies emerged. First, some stated that the English church need not subscribe to Dort to have a Reformed identity. Second, baptism was “proclaiming a conditional promise” (p. 159) not effecting salvation and so was in line with Dort. Third, some, such as John Davenant, limited “the efficacy of infant baptism to the remission of sins” and denied “the infusion of a habit of faith.” As a consequence, the impact of Dort moved

beyond perseverance, creating, additionally, a crisis regarding baptism in the Church of England.

Chapter six surveys the question of perseverance persisting among the Reformed “even after the triumph of Dort and Westminster” (p. 193). This was due, Collier argues, to different readings of Augustine. On the one hand, John Goodwin, followed by Richard Baxter, affirmed “genuine apostasy in some saints” (p. 192); on the other hand, John Owen and George Kendall argued for the perseverance of all saints. This chapter serves to reinforce the author’s claim that how one interpreted Augustine was a deciding factor in the debate on perseverance. Moreover, because the English Church was “[u]nable to resolve such tensions and maintain unity, [it] failed to maintain its Reformed identity among the nations” (p. 194).

With the seventh chapter, the author concludes the book with a summary of his previous findings. First, prior to Dort, there was an acceptable minority opinion on perseverance that denied its application to every saint. Second, there existed two distinct readings of Augustine among the Reformed. This appeal to Augustine in turn reflected their catholicity. Third, the author highlights a theme found throughout his monograph, namely, the fallibility and obscuring effect of labels. Most germane to this study, he argues that there is value “in recognizing both the Reformed churches and the early church as important sources of identity for the Church of England” (p. 203). Perseverance and the debate surrounding it give us a glimpse then into the Reformed catholicity that characterized the Anglican church.

By way of evaluation, there is not much to critique with this monograph. The author clearly and persuasively demonstrates the two sources of the Church of England and the two readings of Augustine and how these factors provide a unique window into the identity of this particular branch of Protestantism especially in light of debates surrounding perseverance of the saints. This work is a mature and intriguing piece of historical theology, and it gives the reader a sense of how the shape of a tradition can take place—in this case, the Anglican tradition. The more we grasp the complexities and diversity that attends the Reformed tradition, the more we are able to appreciate not only its breadth but also its depth. Collier has served us well by unearthing this obscured portion of Reformed history and so I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the

doctrine of perseverance, the roots of Anglicanism, or the impact of the Synod of Dort.

Review: Sam Waldron, *The Crux of the Free Offer: A Biblical, Confessional, and Theological Explanation and Defence of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel* (Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2019). ISBN 978-1-59925-602-3. 143 pages. Reviewed by Dr. Daniel Ritchie, Northern Ireland.

Sam Waldron’s latest book endeavours to set forth a defence of the well-meant offer of the gospel from a biblical and confessional perspective. The author is a Particular Baptist theologian writing from within the tradition of the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, yet this book is also endorsed by Reformed theologians including Joel R. Beeke and Richard D. Phillips. Such endorsements are indicative of the influence that it will likely have within the wider Reformed community. The latter author even goes so far as to argue that the well-meant offer “defines a vital truth in the Reformed system of theology.”¹ This reviewer believes that such claims are overblown and cannot stand up to objective historical scrutiny. Accordingly, the primary focus of this review is on the issues raised pertaining to historical theology in Dr Waldron’s work. Space precludes a thorough analysis of the questions that also arise from this book in relation to biblical exegesis.² Instead, this review begins with some confessional and theological clarifications in relation to the well-meant offer, considers the free offer in historical theology, and briefly assesses Dr Waldron’s views on the confessional doctrine theology proper.

CONFESSIONAL AND THEOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS

Dr Waldron uses the terms free offer and well-meant offer synonymously, viewing them as essentially one and the same thing. He states that “The ‘Free Offer’ in the confessional documents is and must be understood as a ‘Well-Meant’ Offer” (10). Thus, he interprets the phrase “freely offereth life and salvation” in chapter 7, paragraph 2 of the 1689 Baptist Confession, and in the equivalent sections of the Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration, as referring to the well-meant offer (a supposition that we examine below). The author is of the opinion, however, that the Second London Baptist Confession represents a more moderate form of Calvinism than that of the Westminster Standards. Unlike Alan C. Clifford who maintains that the Baptist Confession led to hyper-Calvinism, Dr Waldron claims that the framers of the 1689 Confession distanced themselves from the High Calvinism that was at least tolerated by the Westminster divines (51–58).³ Dr Waldron argues that the Westminster Confession, in its teaching on predestination, “leaves the false impression that there is a “symmetrical” relationship between election and reprobation and puts God in a harsh light” (56).

1. This comment is made in the endorsements of the book.

2. For reviews that focus on these subjects, see Martyn McGeown, “Editorial: A Critique of Sam Waldron’s *The Crux of the Free Offer of the Gospel*,” *British Reformed Journal*, 70 (2019–20), 1–19; David J. Engelsma, “Review Article: The Crux of the ‘Free Offer’ is the Cross,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 53.1 (November 2019): 100–15.

3. Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790, An Evaluation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 75.

This reading of the Westminster Confession is mistaken, as it does not even officially teach double predestination, let alone the error of equal ultimacy, which the Synod of Dort had previously condemned.⁴ The Confession carefully distinguishes between the “some men and angels [who] are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death” (3.3). With reference to the reprobate, moreover, the Confession is clear that “God was pleased ... to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath, for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice” (3.7). Those predestined unto life, by way of contrast, were chosen in Christ out of God’s “free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him therto” (3.5). If someone has gained a false impression from the Westminster Confession’s teaching on predestination, the fault lies with the reader and not with the plain teaching of the Confession.⁵

Dr Waldron also recognises that the central issue in the debate surrounding the well-meant offer is whether or not God has a desire for the salvation of all men. He states that “the crux of the doctrine of the Free Offer of the gospel is God’s indiscriminate desire for the salvation of sinners.... I am jealous to affirm here that this ‘Well-Meant Offer’ is both the natural and necessary implication of the ‘Free’ Offer confessed by the climatic confessions of the Reformation” (9). This point is crucial because other defenders of the well-meant offer have either shied away from or downplayed the importance of an ineffectual divine desire for the salvation of the reprobate as part of the well-meant offer. For example, David Silversides claimed that “The controversy over the free offer itself should not be made to hinge on the term ‘desire’” (*The Free Offer*, [2005], 85). In fairness, the Revd Silversides based his argument for the well-meant offer on it being an expression of God’s lovingkindness to sinners in general. Owing to his polemics against the Protestant Reformed Churches, it is understandable that he saw the notion of a general love of God as more crucial to the well-meant offer than the idea of a frustrated divine desire. After all, the first of the “Three Points” adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 against the teachings of Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof stated that “with regard to the favorable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect, Synod declares that according to the Scripture and the confessions it is determined that besides the saving grace of God, shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is a certain kind of favor, or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general” (*Acts of Synod*, Article 132, 145–46).

Conversely, it is highly debatable if we may, in the specific context of the dispute within the Christian Reformed Church, neatly separate the ideas of common grace and a frustrated

divine desire with respect to the well-meant offer. The Synod’s committee which investigated the teachings of Hoeksema and Danhof also concluded that, in addition to God’s gracious disposition to the reprobate, “God comes with a well intended offer of salvation to all men” (*Acts of Synod*, Article 100, 126). Even if we were to accept, for the sake of argument, the teaching of a general love of God, it is unclear why it would lead us to conclude that God desires the salvation of all men. Surely common grace is, by definition, not salvific in nature, so how could the existence of such a general love be indicative of a desire on God’s part for the salvation of the non-elect?⁶ Although the specific language of a proper desire for the salvation of the reprobate is not used in the findings of the Christian Reformed Synod’s committee, nevertheless, the appeal to texts normally cited to support this view (specifically Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11) indicates that this supposition guided their conclusions (see *Acts of Synod*, Article 100, 127). Louis Berkhof, who was a member of the Synod’s committee, later cited the verses from Ezekiel in defence of the proposition that “When God calls the sinner to accept Christ by faith, He earnestly desires this.... It is blasphemous to think that God would be guilty of equivocation and deception ... that He

4. The conclusion to the Canons of Dort condemned the notion “that the same doctrine teaches that God, by a mere arbitrary act of his will, without the least respect or view to any sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation, and has created them for this very purpose; that in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety; that many children of the faithful are torn, guiltless, from their mothers’ breasts, and tyrannically plunged into hell: so that neither baptism nor the prayers of the Church at their baptism can at all profit them; and many other things of the same kind which the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul.” James T. Dennison (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 4.152.

5. For more on this topic, see William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age*, ed. James Buchanan and James Bannerman, 2 vols, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), 2: 421–23; William M. Hetherington, “Introductory Essay,” in Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850), xviii–xix.

6. On the subject of common grace, we concur with the distinction found in Amandus Polanus: “The goodness of God is that by which he is the author of all good things. And he doth exercise this, either generally towards all creatures, or else particularly towards his elect. The former is called beneficence, the latter is called mercy. The beneficence of God, is that by which he giveth his gifts to all his creatures. Mat. 5.44.45. Act. 14.17. The mercy of God is that by which God doth good to his elect, although they deserve nothing of him but evil. Esa. 49.10.13. Eph. 2.3.4. Psal. 145.9.” Amandus Polanus, *The Substance of Christian Religion Soundly Set Forth in Two Books, by Definitions and Partitions, Framed According to the Rules of a Natural Method*, trans. Elijah Wilcocks (London: John Oxenbridge, 1595), 3.

would earnestly plead with the sinner to repent and believe unto salvation, and at the same time not desire it in any sense of the word" (*Systematic Theology*, 462).

While it is understandable that proponents of the well-meant offer would appeal to the concept of common grace or a general love of God, partly owing to the support for this idea in the writings of various Reformed divines, we believe that the author of this book is more accurate in recognising that the notion of a desire of God for the salvation of all men is the crux of the issue. After all, Professor John Murray, the foremost defender of the well-meant offer in recent times, stated in no uncertain terms in his Majority Report on the Free Offer to the Orthodox Presbyterian General Assembly in 1948 that "the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God **desires** the salvation of all men."⁷ The reticence of some to acknowledge that a proper desire on the part of God for the salvation of everyone without exception is central to modern debates on the well-meant offer is perhaps indicative that they find it difficult to reconcile with other doctrines. Given the seemingly incongruous nature of such a position with the doctrine of reprobation, a strict particularist understanding of limited atonement, and with the divine simplicity and impassibility, we can see why they wish to defend the well-meant offer on other grounds. Still, the impartial reader has no option but to agree with Dr Waldron that it is the crux of the matter. Until such a time as advocates of the well-meant offer jettison the notion of a frustrated divine desire for the salvation of the non-elect, the ensuing debates will centre around this subject.

As we have noted above, Dr Waldron contends that the usage of the term offer is expressive of "a proposal presented to someone which the one presenting it desires for that person

to accept" (10). He states that writers from the Protestant Reformed Churches, who follow the theology of Herman Hoeksema and his disciples, tend to also use the word offer in this way. Such usage is considered indicative of a general recognition by the modern opponents of the well-meant offer that the terms offer and free offer can only mean the well-meant offer (10–11). Even if we were to concede that there has been a lack of nuance among writers from the Protestant Reformed Churches on this subject, Dr Waldron's assertion is by no means applicable to all modern critics of the well-meant offer. Nor is it an accurate reflection of how the terms offer and free offer have been used in the history of theology.⁸ We do not dispute that some or indeed many Reformed divines used the term offer in a manner consistent with the likes of Professor Murray. We deny, however, that these usages constituted the only manner in which such terms were employed. Modern readers need to be careful to avoid falling into word-concept fallacies by assuming that the same term means the same thing every time it is used. The below discussion will demonstrate that Dr. Waldron's wholesale conflation of the free offer with the well-meant offer is historically untenable.

THE FREE OFFER IN HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

In the era of confessional formulation, some divines held the view that there was a serious will on the part of God for the salvation of all men. The Westminster divine, Anthony Burgess, stated that "The English Divines in the Synod of Dort held, that *God had a serious will of saving all men, but not an efficacious will of saving all*: Thus differing from the Arminians on one side, and from some Protestant Authors on the other side" (*Vindiciae Legis*, 107). As Burgess concedes, there were prominent divines who took the contrary view that there was no ineffectual divine desire for the salvation of each and every man. So, even a confessional theologian who favoured the well-meant offer was candid enough to admit that this view was not universally held among the Reformed orthodox. Dr Waldron, on the contrary, asserts that the Canons of Dort unambiguously affirm the well-meant offer in the Third/Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 8, "As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is acceptable to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to him. He also seriously promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe" (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4.136).

The historian Raymond Blacketer contests this reading of Dort. He maintains that "Dort picks up the Remonstrant language of a serious call but does not accept their requirements for such a call, namely, that God must sincerely intend and will to save anyone who receives that call." He states further that "Dort rejects the idea that God wills or intends to save all,

7. [John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse], "The Free Offer of the Gospel," *Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Meeting at Wildwood, New Jersey. May 13–18, 1948* (n.p. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1948), Appendix, 51 (emphasis original).

8. As a subscriber to the original Westminster Confession, this reviewer has obvious differences with the Protestant Reformed Churches on issues relating to covenant theology, divorce and remarriage, church-state relations, and eschatology. Still, it is possible for them to be wrong on any number of subjects and correct on this specific issue. John H. Gerstner's comment is germane here: "As a Calvinist, not associated ecclesiastically with the tiny Protestant Reformed denomination and sharply divergent from some of her doctrinal positions, I feel it absolutely necessary to hold with her here where she stands, almost alone today, and suffers massive vituperation and ridicule from Calvinists (no less) for her faithfulness at this point to the gospel of God." Foreword to David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer* (3rd ed., Jenison MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), xii.

as should be clear from Canons 1.6 and 15. What the Canons actually do in this article is explain how the call can really be serious when, in fact, God does not intend or will the salvation of the reprobate!” (“The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed,” 42). The author of the most recent commentary on the Canons of Dort, Daniel R. Hyde, argues that matters are not so straightforward. He writes, “No doubt some at the synod would’ve agreed; yet men like John Davenant could still affirm what the synod said while also affirming ‘in God a true will revealed in the Gospel of Saving all men that shall believe’” (*Grace Worth Fighting For*, 254). Given the diverse makeup of the Synod of Dort, we find the explanation offered by the Revd Hyde to be the most probable one available.

We can also cite a prominent Reformed divine writing in the era of Dort against the well-meant offer. Although the French Huguenot theologian Pierre Du Moulin was unable to attend the Synod of Dort for political reasons, he composed a treatise against Arminianism (published in 1619), which was clearly in full sympathy with Dort’s condemnation of the Remonstrants’ errors.⁹ Significantly, Du Moulin rejected the notion that “God doth equally love all men, and so desire their Salvation,” reminding his readers that “love in God is not an affection, nor passion, nor inclination of the mind, nor any desire; for God is not touched by these passions, as being impassible, and not subject to affections” (*The Anatomy of Arminianism*, 228–29).¹⁰ In other words, Du Moulin believed that the notion of a desire for the salvation of those that perish was incongruous with the impassibility of God. He also stated that the notion of unfulfilled desires for the salvation of the non-elect was inconsistent with reprobation: “For if God from eternity knoweth that this man shall be damned, in vain doth he wish from eternity, that he should be saved; and he doth from eternity know that he shall not be partaker of his natural desire, and his antecedent will” (*The Anatomy of Arminianism*, 27).

Such diversity of opinion as existed at Dort was also evident among the framers of the Westminster Standards. The influential Scottish Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, George Gillespie, stated that “Ministers do, indeed, offer Christ to all, upon condition of believing, being commanded to preach the gospel to every creature, and not knowing who are reprobates,” but that offer did not imply that there was a loving desire on the part of God for the salvation of the reprobate Judas Iscariot. Hence, Gillespie said, “Love and hatred in God, and in his Son Jesus Christ, being eternal and unchangeable (for *actus Dei immanentes sunt cetemi*), it followeth that if there was such a decree of God, or any such meaning or intention in Christ, as to give his body and blood for Judas, whom he knew infallibly to be lost, and since that same conditional meaning or intention could not be without a conditional love of God and of Christ to Judas and his salvation, this love doth

still continue in God, and in Christ, to save Judas now in hell, upon condition of his believing, which every Christian I think will abominate” (*Aaron’s Rod Blossoming*, 209–10). Gillespie expressly denied that there was such a thing as a frustrated intention on the part of God for the salvation of those that perish: “There is a most dangerous mistake in that which he saith of the intentions of God and of Christ. If he mean of what God intendeth or purposeth in the counsel of his own will, that, in this sense, God intendeth the conversion of those that perish, is to make void and frustraneous, the degree, will, and intention of God, which is gross Arminianism and Jesuitism” (*Aaron’s Rod Blossoming*, 245).¹¹

Gillespie’s fellow Scots’ Commissioner, Samuel Rutherford, likewise rejected the assumption undergirding the well-meant offer when criticising the Arminian notion of a universal covenant of grace: “The other bastard ground is, the natural antecedent desire and love of God to have all saved, moved him (say they) to make this Covenant of Grace with all.” Rutherford believed that such a concept of a frustrated divine desire was incongruous with God’s impassibility: “And what is this, but to say, God hath passionate desires to have all, Elect, and Reprobate, Men, and Angels, to obey and be eternally saved, but he cannot help the matter; and therefore must upon the same account, be sorrowful and mourn that he cannot get all saved, which destroys the power of grace and restrains the outgoings of free-love” (*The Covenant of Life Opened*, 56–57; cf. *Christ Dying*, 443–45). Even the Prolocutor of the Assembly, William Twisse, stated in a 1646 work, “Can you persuade your self that ever the world will be brought about to believe, or any intelligent or sober man amongst them, that God desires the repentance and life of them, whom he hath determined from everlasting to deprive of those helps without which no man can repent and be saved?” (*A Treatise of Mr. Cotton’s, Clearing Certain Doubts Concerning Predestination*, 233).

This divergence of opinion among confessional divines was on display during the Westminster Assembly’s discussions, as we can see from the debate between Edmund Calamy and

9. Du Moulin was one of the delegates chosen to represent the French Reformed Church at Dort, but King Louis XIII proscribed their attendance. See Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 133–34.

10. We recognise that Reformed proponents of the well-meant offer would agree that God does not *equally* love all men.

11. The attempt by David Silversides to cite the first quotation from Gillespie on behalf of the well-meant offer is scandalous. First, the quotation merely uses the word offer, but says nothing about the offer being indicative of a frustrated desire of God for the salvation of the non-elect. Second, the subsequent citations from *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming*, including one immediately after the section that the Revd Silversides quoted, are at odds with this notion. See Silversides, *The Free Offer*, 69–70.

Gillespie over hypothetical universalism. Arguing against Calamy, Gillespie rejected the concept of a universal love of God as being at odds with reprobation: “I cannot understand how there can be such a universal love of God to mankind as is maintained. Those that will say it must needs deny the absolute reprobation; then alone [a love] to those whom God hath absolutely reprobated both from salvation and the means of salvation.”¹² Calamy, however, asserted that there was “A general love to the reprobate, and the fruit of this, a general offer, and general grace, and general reformation.” Gillespie remained unconvinced and countered Calamy’s claim by asserting that “The reconciling of a general love with absolute reprobation is not answered.... The general offers of the gospel are not grounded upon the secret decree” (*Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, Sess. 522, 22 Oct. 1645, 152, 153–54, 155–56).

Dr Waldron, following Joel Beeke and Mark Jones’s *A Puritan Theology*, claims that the Puritans generally embraced the well-meant offer (13). The debate at the Westminster Assembly is enough to cast doubt upon this assertion, but, even if it were correct, many Puritan writings could also be cited on behalf of hypothetical universalism. One point that is often noteworthy in discussions surrounding the well-meant offer is how reluctant its advocates are to acknowledge hypothetical universalism as within Reformed orthodoxy, yet they will cite hypothetical universalist works on behalf of the Reformed pedigree of the well-meant offer. Dr Waldron is adamant that it is wrong to indiscriminately tell sinners that “Christ died for you,” making several useful arguments against doing so (123–30). Yet he mentions in passing the phrase “Christ is dead for you” from Edward Fisher’s *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (125), which, as Jonathan D. Moore has decisively proven, means the same thing as Christ died for you (*English Hypothetical Universalism*, 117–24).

Given that Puritan authors, writing before and after the Westminster Assembly, may be cited in opposition to the well-meant offer, we believe that Dr Waldron’s conclusion is oversimplified. One such voice was the influential William Perkins. He argued that “there seems not to be in God such a will or (as they use to term it) such a wishing will, whereby He will indefinitely and upon condition that all and every man of all ages should be saved. For first, it argues a finite power and insufficiency in him that wills. For whatever any one desires and earnestly wills, that he will bring to pass, unless he be hindered” (*The Manner and Order of Predestination in Works*, 6.345). It is also noteworthy that Mark Jones, when passing remark on Martin Foord’s work on John Owen, stated that

12. In a footnote, Struthers offers the reading “or ‘a love’” and this is the rendering Chad Van Dixhoorn gives for the Minutes. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652*, 5 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.695.

“Owen holds essentially to a hyper-Calvinistic position on the gospel offer, as opposed to Thomas Manton” (*Antinomianism*, 15n). While it is wrong to apply the pejorative label of hyper-Calvinist to Owen, there is no question that Owen rejected the well-meant offer.

In Owen’s book on limited atonement, *The Death of Death*, he affirms that a gospel minister must “offer Christ in the preaching of the gospel.” Yet Owen defines this offer from ministers as being to “command and invite all to repent and believe,” which did not signify any intention on the part of God to save all of those to whom the offer and invitation was addressed. Recognition of this point rendered the offer “neither vain nor fruitless,” as it was declarative of man’s duty and of what was pleasing to God if it be performed. To assume that the offer indicated that God desired to save everyone was, for Owen, irreconcilable not only with election and reprobation but also with God’s infinite perfection, as it implied a weakness. Owen clearly understood that we are to interpret language concerning God desiring what does not come to fruition in an anthropopathic sense. To interpret anthropopathic descriptions of God literally made no more sense than to assert that God has bodily parts on account of the Bible’s use of anthropomorphic language (*The Death of Death in Works*, 10.299–301, 311–12, 321–23, 401). Judging by the evidence presented, it would thus appear that there was not a settled consensus among the Puritans on this subject.

We find another seventeenth-century example of the gospel offer being defined in a manner that does not imply the well-meant offer in James Durham’s exposition of Revelation. Commenting on Revelation 22:17, Durham asserted that Christ was freely offered to sinners without money and without price:

The second *Come*, that commendeth the excellency of this Book, *Let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.* Is there yet any body that is not clear in their interest, let them come and take this word before Christ come; for, he will not get another word: as if He said, I have made many fair and free offers, and now I close My last offer with a good word, *Who ever will take Christ, and life through Him freely, on the terms of free grace, let him come, and take Him without money and without price, Isa. 55.1.* This is our Lord’s farewell, that He may press the offer of the Gospel and leave that impression, as it were, upon record amongst the last words of the Scripture; and His scope is to commend this Book and the offers He hath made in it, as most free and on the terms of grace, wherein Christ aimeth much to draw souls to accept it, And teacheth us that all that would expect comfort of His coming, and pray for it with a well-grounded confidence, they would first come to

Him, and close with Him, and make use of His offer. This maketh a comfortable meeting with Him, and who cannot say the first *come* to Christ, that he may come, let themselves come to Him, and hear and answer His call to them, that so they may turn over their request to Him (*A Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation*, 780; cf. 763–65).

Notwithstanding this clear affirmation of the free offer, Durham denied that there was any proper will on the part of God for the salvation of the reprobate. When commenting on the church at Laodicea, Durham criticised the French Huguenot theologian, Jean Dailé for asserting that God had a will for the salvation of all men:

Because he putteth *cold* and *hot* in the same balance together: so that whatever difference otherways be in His estimation of being *hot*, beyond that of being *cold*; yet in this place they are made equal, and nothing is asserted concerning the one, but is also asserted concerning the other: which doth clearly shew, that the Lord's expression is to be understood after the manner of men, (as was said) that is, as men use to express their hating of any thing, by this, I wish it were, or had been any otherway: that same is the Lord's intent here. I cannot therefore but somewhat wonder, that a Learned man (*Ioannes Dallaeus* in his *Apologie, &c.*) doth draw this place of the Lord's wishing that *Laodicea* were hot, to confirm that assertion of the Lord's having a will and desire of the salvation of all men, besides His signifying of what is acceptable to Him as considered in it self, by His Word (*A Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation*, 212).

Durham is clear that we are to understand God's wish or desire that the Laodiceans were either cold or hot after the manner of men. In other words, it is an anthropopathic description; it is not indicative of a real or frustrated desire for the non-elect's salvation.

Even as late as the nineteenth-century, the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian theologian, William Symington, did not use the term offer in the sense of the well-meant offer. Symington stated that "The universal offer made of Christ in the Gospel" was the same thing as the call to preach the gospel to every creature. He was careful, however, to point out that "the Gospel call may be regarded as expressive of man's duty, rather than of the divine intention" and that "the unlimited offer of the Gospel proves only that it is the duty of all men to believe in Christ for salvation, and not that it is the design or intention of God that all should be saved by him, or that he should obtain salvation for all" (*The Atonement and*

Intercession of Jesus Christ, 209, 211). Clearly, Dr Waldron's understanding of how the terms offer and free offer have been employed in historic Reformed theological discourse is much too simplistic.

Part of the reason for this mistake is that Dr Waldron assumes that John Calvin is the gold-standard of Reformed theologians who set the "historical backdrop for the climatic Reformed confessions" (11). While we reject the outworn Calvin versus the Calvinists thesis, Dr Waldron's analysis betrays an over-exaggerated view of Calvin's importance. Calvin was certainly a significant voice in the formulation of Reformed theology, but he was one voice among other significant Reformed theologians.¹³ Even if we accept that Calvin taught either the well-meant offer or hypothetical universalism, that concession does not automatically mean that the later confessions oblige us to hold to these views. The private opinions of John Calvin have no constitutional authority in any Reformed church, though they may be useful, when employed in a discriminating fashion, in helping us to ascertain the original intent of the confessions.

The author's recognition that the Reformed resurgence in the mid- to late-twentieth-century may be attributed to the influence of Banner of Truth and Westminster Theological Seminary (13–14) perhaps goes some way to explaining why so many mistakenly think that the well-meant offer and a strict particularist understanding of limited atonement are the only acceptable options from a confessional Reformed point of view.¹⁴ This reviewer would suggest that one of the reasons why there has been an increased interest in both hypothetical universalism on the one hand and in Reformed opposition to the well-meant offer on the other is because a growing number of people are coming to a more sophisticated understanding of Reformed orthodoxy from reading the original sources. The author basically concedes this point when he admits that the growing interest in the Reformed scholastics has raised questions in the minds of their readers as to the correctness of the well-meant offer (101). The obvious reason why it has done so is that at least some of their writings are not friendly to the position.

Sadly, Dr Waldron refuses to see the matter as an area of honest disagreement among Reformed brethren but resorts to calling critics of the well-meant offer hyper-Calvinists. When concluding his exegetical thoughts on John 5:34, a text

13. For more on this subject, see Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2012).

14. An exception to this point is A. W. Pink, whose book *The Sovereignty of God* rejects the well-meant offer. The fact that Banner of Truth published a highly edited version of this book to fit better with their own prejudices perhaps only serves to further confirm the thesis. For more on this subject, see Ronald Hanko, "The Forgotten Pink," *British Reformed Journal* (March 1997): 1–24.

which he views as crucial to the whole debate, he labels as “Hyper-Calvinistic the attempt to deny or obscure the reality that God desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel” (33). Remarkably, he then cites the Scottish Covenanter, George Hutcheson’s commentary on this verse in opposition to the well-meant offer notion of a divine intention for the salvation of all, which effectively means he attributes hyper-Calvinist sentiments to Hutcheson, who affirmed that Christ “intends the salvation of his own, whom his love doth follow when they are among a crowd of enemies” and rejected that “he intended the salvation of all these ...” (*Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 88). The same pejorative label must also apply to Francis Turretin, whom he cites to the effect that the revealed will of God is not properly volitional. Turretin stated that the revealed will “does not properly include any decree or volition in God, but implies only the agreement of the thing with the nature of God (according to which he cannot but love what is agreeable to his holiness)” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3.15.11, i, p. 222).

Oddly, Dr Waldron severely criticises Matthew Winzer for making effectively the same point as Turretin (103, 110).¹⁵ From a Reformed viewpoint, it is difficult to see why this claim is controversial. The distinction between God’s decretive and preceptive will exists to clarify how God can command something while properly willing the opposite (Blacketer, “The Three Points,” 43). As John Owen surmised, “Commands do not signify what is God’s intention should be done, but what is our duty to do; which may be made known to us whether we be able to perform it or not: it signifieth no intention or purpose of God” (*The Death of Death in Works*, 10.243; cf. p. 344). In other words, the preceptive will of God is not the proper will of God. Samuel Rutherford, furthermore, stated “that *voluntas signi* in which God reveals what is our duty, and what we ought to do; not what is his decree, or what he either will, or ought to do, is not God’s will properly, but by a figure only, for commands, and promises, and threatnings revealed, argue not the will and purpose, decree or intention of God, which are properly his will” (*Christ Dying*, 416).

One point in this book which will likely find agreement with critics of the well-meant offer is Dr Waldron’s

15. The precise point that Matthew Winzer makes is that “the word *will* is being used in two different senses, i.e., equivocally, having two distinct points of reference. It is only the will of decree which is the will of God in the proper sense of the term, as an act of volition, for therein God has decreed what shall be done.... The will of precept has no volitional content, for it simply states what God has commanded *ought* to be done by man. Whether man wills to do it is absolutely dependent upon whether God has decreed that he shall do it. So it is quite inappropriate to say that God wills something *to be* with reference to His will of command, for the preceptive will never pertains to the *futurition* of actions, only to the *obligation* of them.” Matthew Winzer, “Murray on the Free Offer: A Review,” *The Blue Banner*, 9, 10–12 (October/December, 2000), 4–5.

interpretation of John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4–6, and 2 Peter 3:9. He argues that John 3:16 refers to the effective purpose of God to save the world of the elect, which seems best to fit the local context of the passage (132–33). Nor does he see 1 Timothy 2:4–6 as referring to “a benevolent will of God for the salvation of every man without exception.” Instead, he believes that it “teaches God’s saving purpose toward all mankind, that is, every kind of man” (133). After a lengthy discussion concerning the meaning of 2 Peter 3:9, he concludes (apparently in opposition to Calvin) that contextual considerations make it unlikely that this passage is referring to the well-meant offer (137). In this opinion, he differs from John Murray, who claimed that it did refer to God’s desire for the repentance of all men without exception (“The Free Offer of the Gospel,” 60–62).

Strangely, though, Dr Waldron had previously appealed to the John 3:16 proof-text to justify his opinion that the confessional phrase “freely offereth in the gospel” refers to the well-meant offer (52–53). While divines such as Edmund Calamy interpreted the passage in a manner similar to modern well-meant offer advocates, Samuel Rutherford, speaking before the Westminster Assembly, interpreted the text as referring to the elect church: “Christ speaks of a particular special love.... The love of one giving his life for his friends ... the love that moved Him to send His only-begotten Son. ... If the love in the iii. of John be the same with those, as in those places is meant the special particular love of God commensurable with election ... not one scripture in all the New Testament where it can be expounded for the general.... 2. The love in the iii. of John 16 is restricted to the Church” (*Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, Sess. 523, 23 Oct. 1645, 158).

THE CONFESSATIONAL DOCTRINE OF THEOLOGY PROPER

The reviewer also finds it regrettable that Dr Waldron’s commitment to the well-meant offer appears to cause him to downplay the importance of the catholic and Reformed doctrine of God’s simplicity. In a footnote in the section of the divine simplicity, Dr Waldron comes to the extraordinary conclusion that “No historical clarity exists in the Reformed tradition with regard to the attempt to more carefully define the way in which the divine attributes belong to the simple being of God.” He asks, “Is this distinction between the attributes a distinction of some kind in the divine being itself? Or is this distinction between the attributes a distinction simply in the conceptions of the human mind?” The assertion that “Such questions are not given clear answers by the tradition” (15n–16n) is clearly incorrect. Any serious reader of the major Reformed dogmaticians from the sixteenth- to the eighteenth-century knows that they believed that the divine attributes are one in God and thus identical with both the divine essence and with each other, but only diverse in our

conceptions. Subsequent equivocations by later Reformed theologians on the divine simplicity are aberrations from Reformed orthodoxy's Augustinian and Thomistic approach to theology proper.

To substantiate this point, one need only carefully read the second chapter of the Westminster Confession "Of God, and of the Holy Trinity" and pay attention to expressions such as "infinite in being and perfection," "without body, parts, or passions," "most absolute," and the description of the three Trinitarian persons being "of one substance, power, and eternity" to understand that the Westminster Assembly viewed the divine attributes as one with the divine essence and with each other (2.1, 3). Hence, the Confession speaks of God ordaining the non-elect to wrath for their sin "to the praise of His glorious justice" (3.7). The underlying presumption here is that God is his justice and glory, and his glory is just, and his justice is glorious.¹⁶

While Dr Waldron professedly affirms the simplicity of God, he shies away from what he sees as mere "interpretations" of the doctrine (115). Thus, he cannot maintain that the "divine love is inseparable from the divine will" (114). Similar problems emerge with the author's understanding of divine impassibility, as he paraphrases the Southern Presbyterian theologian, Robert Lewis Dabney as teaching that "while God has no passions, he does have affections" (117). In addition to the earlier citation from Du Moulin, where passion and affection were used interchangeably, the idea of God possessing affections was strenuously rejected by Reformed scholastics such as John Owen in his critique of Socinianism (*Vindiciae Evangelicae in Works*, 12.109–10). With reference to God's eternal love, Owen asked, "Is it an affection in his eternal nature, as love is in ours? It were no less than a blasphemy once so to conceive" (*The Death of Death in Works*, 10.275). And the Formula Consensus Helvetica of 1675 stated that "God is infinitely removed from all that human imperfection which characterizes inefficacious affections and desires, rashness repentance and change of purpose" (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4.521–22). While we do not assert that the well-meant offer, in and of itself, is outside the bounds of the Westminster Confession, it does appear that the desire of its advocates to defend the position is leading them to adopt views of theology proper that are inconsistent with the confessional doctrine of God.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the historical evidence offered in this review presents a significant challenge to the claims of the author that the well-meant offer represents the teaching of the Reformed confessions. The most charitable conclusion we can reach is that the well-meant offer is extra-confessional and should not be made a test of orthodoxy among Reformed

brethren. Sinclair B. Ferguson's observation on the diversity of the Westminster Assembly is worth remembering here:

Uniformity was their goal. But it is evident from the way in which they achieved it that the spirit of their Calvinism was inclusive rather than exclusive. Unity in the church of God, they believed, required a sufficiently clear statement of the truth to exclude manifestly false teaching, and a sufficiently broad expression of its nuances to avoid excluding those who were in heart and head truly orthodox, whatever differences might remain ("An Assembly of Theonomists," 349).

Given the divided state of the conservative Reformed world at present, we would exhort confessional brethren to desist from needlessly dividing on this subject. If your zeal for the well-meant offer is so hot that you would exclude Gillespie, Rutherford, Perkins, Du Moulin, Twisse, Durham, Hutcheson, Turretin, and Owen from the pale of confessional orthodoxy, it is fair to conclude that such zeal is not according to knowledge.

Review: Jordan Cooper, "Prolegomena: A Defense of the Scholastic Method" A Contemporary Protestant Scholastic Theology (Weidner Institute, 2020). ISBN 978-1-952295-25-6. Paperback. 350 pages. Reviewed by Angelo O. Valle (OPC), Pastor of Christ Reformed Church at Alexandria, Pennsylvania.

Jordan Cooper's most recent work, *Prolegomena: A Defense of the Scholastic Method*, is an apologetic calling for a revival of Lutheran scholasticism as opposed to the various forms of Radical Lutheranism. In engaging the various players of Radical Lutheranism (e.g., Gerhard Forde, Steven Paulson, and Oswald Bayer) Cooper's desire is to winsomely present a favorable light on the Lutheran scholastic tradition as a better alternative. It should be noted that this book is a reworking of his doctoral dissertation and the first volume in a series that will include treatments on: the Doctrine of God; Theological Anthropology; Christology; Justification; Union with Christ; Law and Gospel; the Church and Sacraments; and (most fittingly for the end) Eschatology. What must be emphasized is that though this book is chiefly a historical theological work, it is hoping to be more than that. Cooper writes, "[this work and those to follow] are an attempt to bring the work of [the Lutheran scholastic] thinkers and apply them to contemporary debates in both theology and philosophy." (4)

As a whole, Cooper presents a very well-organized

16. Space precludes us from citing all the relevant primary sources on divine simplicity. We refer the reader to Peter Sanlon, *Simply God: Recovering the Classical Trinity* (Nottingham: IVP, 2014).

monograph for his readers. In each chapter, he provides a clear trajectory in the beginning and review at the end. Though that may sound elementary, its fluidity and comprehensive summation provides the reader with a clear understanding. His intentional structure is reminiscent of a professor guiding his students through a syllabus. The book itself is divided as such: 1) Introduction; 2) Current Scholarship on Theological Method; 3) Theological and Philosophical Foundations; 4) A Defense of the Scholastic Method; 5) Implications for Contemporary Issues.

The Introduction sets the tone for the rest of the book in its opening paragraph, “the scholastic theological method is one that can and should be used in the modern era.... Thus, I contend that it needs to be revived.” (1–2) Cooper’s own theological presuppositions are laid bare as he displays his own theological convictions in the confessional Lutheran tradition. In addition, Cooper’s own intellectual foundation comes forward in his self-admitted dependence on the 20th century contributions from historians such as Robert Preus and Richard Muller; both men being the leading voices for the resurgence of studies in the scholasticism of the Post-Reformation era.

The second chapter of the work is guided by the question, “What is the current state of scholarship concerning theological methodology within the Lutheran tradition?” (13) Cooper’s initial engagement provides his readership with their introduction to Radical Lutheranism. He defines the movement by a few players (Gerhard Forde, Oswald Bayer, and Steven Paulson) and some of their commitments such as a consistent concern for “justification [as] the central tenet and theme of all Christian theological discourse.” (14–15) In addition, there is a shared emphasis on divine speech-acts, a linguistic centered theological model, and a general rejection of an Aristotelian essentialist metaphysic. One of the difficulties with Radical Lutheranism is their redefining of traditional terminology. Justification no longer concerns itself with a “forensic declaration” but concerns itself (according to Forde) with God’s act of declaration by means of the pastor.

Gerhard Forde’s elevation of divine speech-acts establish proclamation as the heart of theology. Forde argues against the traditional confessional Lutheran formulations because of their emphasis on *being* rather than *act*. (18) By necessity, Forde is looking to reject anything that presents God in what He considers a static abstraction. His division between *primary discourse* (direct speech) and *secondary discourse* (speech about something) lies at the heart of his rejection of historical confessional Lutheranism in general, and the Lutheran scholasticism in particular. He argues that they never engage God, only ideas concerning Him which leaves God “inaccessible to the human creature.” (19)

Moving on to the second main contributor to Radical

Lutheranism, Cooper turns to Oswald Bayer. Bayer’s commitments to a linguistic-focused philosophical theological foundation leads him along the same lines as Forde. Like Forde, there is little concern for a metaphysical or abstract consideration of God. Bayer’s propensity towards linguistics redefines theology itself as “in essence a dialogue between God and man.” (24) Justification is again elevated to a central position; it is the means of identifying God. His emphasis on direct speech with God is his means of removing any gaps “between the practical and speculative approaches.” (25) Bayer’s metaphysical commitments are rooted in what he terms “relational ontology” which prioritizes the relationship between the Creator and the creature above and beyond a more traditional essentialist or Aristotelian metaphysic typical in the Protestant scholastic tradition. The core of the relational structures for Bayer are rooted in the law-gospel distinction, which are established in God’s divine speech-acts. For Bayer, theology is not rooted in concepts, but in the act of God. What Forde, Bayer, and Paulson have in common is their belief that “Luther functioned on the basis of linguistics rather than ontology ... [that] the central element of theology is the divine speech-act.” (41) Therefore, their main grievance against the Lutheran scholastics is that they are: 1) unfaithful to Luther’s theology; 2) pursue Aristotle and his philosophical convictions rather than those of Luther.

Steven Paulson is the third Radical Lutheran presented by Cooper. Paulson builds upon the intellectual trajectories of Forde and Bayer. His linguistic-focused approach emphasizes that “all theology should arise from preaching.” (35) Any sense of abstraction or theology apart from preaching leads to a “naked God” who is worse than useless, because this “God only brings wrath.” (35) The accusation that comes against the Lutheran scholastic tradition by Paulson is that it retreats into the speculative errors of the medieval church. What is most unexpected is that Paulson believes his theological discussions are a return to Luther’s theology. He sees himself as pursuing a purer Lutheranism. Paulson’s divergence from orthodox Lutheranism continues as any sense of the law as eternal and a reflection of God Himself is untenable, and a blatant rejection of Luther’s own theological primacy on proclamation. Like Forde and Bayer before him, Paulson rejects both the Thomistic and Aristotelian philosophical components in the Lutheran scholastic tradition.

Continuing in his explication of the current state of Lutheran scholarship, Cooper continues to examine those who would be committed to the confessional standards of Lutheranism (i.e., the Formula of Concord) while being influenced by the aforementioned Radical Lutherans. This list includes William W. Schumacher, Robert Kolb, and Charles Arand. Beginning with Schumacher, Cooper notes his priority of *becoming* over *being*, his emphasis on linguistics over essentialist metaphysics,

and the centrality of justification as the heart of all theological method. These priorities place Schumacher alongside the Radical Lutherans. Though committed to confessional Lutheranism, Schumacher prefers relational ontology and the primacy of linguistics. (51–53) His ideas are summarized in this way, “Speech is not merely one way that God acts but is definitive of who God is . . . theology is essentially a linguistic enterprise.” (54–55) With divine communication functioning as the core of justification, sin at its core is redefined as the “breaking of communication between God and his creatures.” (55)

Thereafter, Cooper redirects his readers to the resurgence of Protestant scholasticism in the twentieth century under the work of Robert Preus and Richard Muller. Preus and Muller are two sides of the same coin, with the former being committed to the Lutheran scholastics, and the latter to the Reformed scholastics. Both men by their work have highlighted that the enterprise of Protestant scholasticism at large has been primarily concerned with the adoption of an inherited methodology, as opposed to theological conclusions. Cooper clarifies for his readers, “the use of the scholastic method does not equate to an adoption of medieval theology.” (74) Contrary to the “Luther against the Lutherans” view that was more common in the earlier twentieth century (e.g., Rudolph Bultmann, Werner Elert, Albrecht Ritschl, Gustaf Wingren), Cooper highlights “the scholastic theologians” and their “purpose was not to depart from Luther and create their own theological system.” (61)

Instead the historian finds an intellectual continuity, and purposeful care from the Lutheran scholastics to advance theologically in a manner that was both intellectually consistent with Luther’s foundations, and devotionally applicatory. Scholastics, both of the Reformed and Lutheran persuasion, were concerned with doctrinal purity, and building upon the codification of the works of the first-generation of Reformers as seen in the creeds, confessions, and catechisms established by the second-generation of Reformers. Consequently, Preus argues for “a significant amount of continuity between Luther and the seventeenth-century writers who write in his name.” (64) This is central to Cooper’s thesis. Part of his main argument is that “Scholastic theology is the natural development of Luther’s theology, despite differences in the employment of philosophical categories.” (65) The Reformers and their heirs were “thoroughly steeped in the medieval scholastic tradition and sought to systematize their own theological developments.” (73) In other words, “Protestant scholasticism melds together influences from medieval scholasticism, humanism, and exegetical theology.” (74) As Cooper will express in subsequent chapters, the critical use of Aristotelean philosophy and metaphysics in Protestant scholasticism is not inherently at odds with Luther.

The third chapter of Cooper’s work, “Theological and

Philosophical Foundations,” ably traces out the historical development of Lutheran scholasticism. What was most helpful was not only the historical survey of the origins of Protestant scholasticism (which will certainly assist students of both the Reformed and Lutheran persuasion in discussions of Protestant scholasticism) but also the relationship of reason with faith. Cooper highlights the faith/reason dynamic in Luther’s thought in this manner, “scriptural truths are to be accepted on the basis of revelation rather than human logic, but this does not negate the usefulness of reason and philosophy as a secondary source of authority, even in spiritual matters.” (100) In addition, Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard are the main Lutheran scholastics in view throughout this chapter as they are, according to Cooper, “the most significant Lutheran voices after the Reformation era.” (83)

In standing on the intellectual shoulders of Preus and Muller, Cooper defines scholasticism as “a particular academic method of theology, wherein doctrines are studied systematically with the use of technical philosophical and theological terminology, and with emphasis on the formation of various theses and refutations of various objections to these proposed theses.” (88) Scholastic theology is concerned with method, not with conclusions. Though much of the discussion this far is rather common in works surrounding Protestant scholasticism, Cooper’s careful analysis of Luther, Aquinas, and Aristotle are an asset to the reader. Cooper notes that Luther’s philosophical eclecticism makes it impossible to state that Luther wholly and uncritically observed the metaphysical structures of any individual. (93) When considering commonalities between Luther and Aquinas, Cooper emphasizes the necessity of nuance. (104)

The remainder of this chapter does trace out the historical influences of the medieval scholastics, Luther and the Lutheran scholastics. The topics include: the Utilization of Essentialism Categories; Platonic Essentialism; Aristotelian Essentialism; Essentialism in Lutheran Scholasticism; Causation; The Archetype/Ectype Distinction and Analogical Predication; Toward an Aristotelian-Platonic Synthesis; Platonism: An Evaluation; and Aristotelianism: An Evaluation. As the litany of topics covered make clear, “Luther and later thinkers did not draw purely on one philosophy in order to construct their thought. Instead, they borrowed from earlier Christian sources, and fluctuated between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas.” (172) This sort of fluctuation is highlighted by Cooper in the Aristotelian precision in Gerhard’s dogmatic works, and Augustinian/Platonic emphases in his devotional works primarily in discussions of participation. (177–179) The intellectual grid by which the Reformed and subsequent generations approached pagan philosophy, according to Cooper, was to ascertain simply which conclusions were consistent with special revelation. (182) That which was at odds with

Scripture (e.g., Aristotle's claim of an eternal created order) was rejected. The critical reception of pagan philosophy is regularly highlighted as these "benefits [of utilizing Aristotle's distinctions] do not imply a complete adoption of an Aristotelian metaphysical system by the Lutheran scholastics." (185) Discussions on participation were also intriguing as they provided some discussion on a Western Catholic approach towards divine participation from a Thomistic angle, building on Aristotelian and Platonic elements "without subscribing to the pantheistic tendencies of Neoplatonism." (190) Following the Lutheran Scholastics, Cooper hopes to maintain the Creator-creature distinction even while speaking favorably of participation (both in its general and mystical union). (194)

What is made most clear by the end of this chapter, and this work as a whole, is that ideas are never neat and tidy. There is the reality of cross-pollination and adaptation. But there are philosophical foundations whose effects permeate (for better or worse) through the conclusions of those who adopt them. Here we might consider the philosophical commitments of the Radical Lutherans to linguistics and its impact for doctrines such as justification and sanctification. What Cooper consistently and regularly articulates for his readers is that "the use of Aristotelian concepts does not necessitate a complete adoption of his philosophical convictions." (194) He echoes these very sentiments for the reappropriation of Thomistic and Neoplatonic ideas by Christians as well.

The fourth chapter engages the "linguistic-existentialist approach" of Radical Lutheranism. (198) Cooper contends that the modern Radical Lutherans "are without grounding" and rest upon "misunderstandings of essentialism." (247) They are fundamentally eisegetical of both the biblical text as well as the "historical Lutheran documents." (247) With the rejection of essentialist categories, the Radical Lutheran conclusions lead to a rejection of "divine simplicity and impassibility ... in favor of a God who is himself impacted by the process of history." (279) One of Cooper's regularly repeated arguments is showcasing Luther's own propensity towards affirming a Platonic metaphysic in his Heidelberg Disputation; the clearest of Luther's works on the subject of metaphysics. (281) Cooper's critique against existentialism does not necessitate a wholesale rejection. Instead he follows Luther's eclecticism by allowing places for existentialism's usefulness. He affirms, "there is a strong existential element to Christian theology, and Lutheranism in particular." (282) But a bare existentialism cannot ground a Christian philosophy. Cooper's last sentence summarizes his point well, "without a substance-ontology as its root, these existential ideas are completely inadequate in giving any comprehensive theological system." (283)

Cooper's conclusion reiterates the central dogma that ideas have consequences. There are no theoretical aspects of theology that fail to impact the church practically. To that end,

Cooper's final chapter discusses the practical import of Radical Lutheranism for Lutheran identity, apologetics, and most appropriate to the present context, the "contemporary debates surrounding gender in the church." (285) To that latter point, Cooper contends in his closing comments that an essentialist ontology is equipped to guard the teaching of Scripture. Cooper writes, "the human person is not linguistically, relationally, or societally constructed, but persists within God-given categories of nature and gender." (328) Here the practical application of Cooper's contentions come forward. Therein lies Cooper's central question: What approach best cares for Christ's sheep in a post-modern, post-Christian world? Cooper is convinced that there is an ideological fork in the road between Radical Lutheranism and Lutheran scholasticism and that only the latter is able to engage the post-Christian culture and defend against its false ideologies by "providing logically coherent and convincing answers to difficult challenges that arise." (332) In short, Cooper concludes his work resolved to stand under the banner of Lutheran scholasticism and invites his readers to join him. For he contends, "There is simply no other option." (332)

In the author's opinion, Cooper is very talented in his ability to organize as well as communicate these complex topics in such a way that this book may become a valuable resource in years to come for those seminarian's looking to be acquainted with the intellectual grounding of Protestant scholasticism at large, and Lutheran scholasticism in particular. Though he is chiefly concerned with the Lutheran scholastics, he does provide some helpful comments on some areas of cross-pollination of Reformed scholasticism with Lutheran thought (e.g., Francis Junius' distinction between archetypal/ectypal theology and its impact on Johann Gerhard). (161) His own careful review and comparison of Luther's philosophical commitments alongside that of the subsequent Lutheran scholastics was sufficiently articulated. Cooper's theological formulations and observations were always returning to a historically contextual reading of the moments which birthed them, recognizing that theology does not occur in a historical vacuum.

Some basic concerns for this initial work are more preferential than substantive. The chapters could have been further divided to allow for the ease of those being introduced to the subject of Lutheran scholasticism, especially if the aim of this work is for the seminary. In addition, the lack of an index will limit in part this work's usefulness, though by no means detracts from its substantive contribution. It ought to be noted that Cooper's talents as a writer make the work as a whole easy to follow, and enjoyable to read. His take on a subject often caricatured as both "dry and boring" has been made a pleasurable and informative delight for the reader. If the subsequent volumes of this series bear the same lucidity and historically contextualized awareness, they will be a vital tool for those interested in the Lutheran scholastic world.

Review: Benjamin Shaw, *Ecclesiastes: Life in a Fallen World* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019). ISBN 978-1-84871-868-5. Paperback. viii + 156 pages. Reviewed by Lane Keister.

The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Shaw (currently teaching at Reformation Bible College, previously at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary) has, unfortunately, not published much. Readers can hope that this publication presages more to come. He is a confessional Presbyterian teacher and minister, ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America.

Shaw's exposition of Ecclesiastes is condensed, well-researched (though the scholarship is worn lightly, a discerning reader can see the depth of understanding and broad reading behind the volume), witty, and conservative, although he is not afraid to go his own way at times. He does not quote often, and there are very few footnotes. However, when he does quote or reference another source, he uses quite a broad spectrum of voices, ranging from Jewish sources to cultural references to the Byrds' famous song "Turn, Turn, Turn," and the famous line about communication from *Cool Hand Luke*. This review should be seen as enthusiastically positive, with the few criticisms being seen as very minor points. Anyone seeking to gain a better understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes should turn to Shaw as one of their first ports of call.

Shaw defends Solomonic authorship of the entirety of Ecclesiastes (vii., 1–4, 129). He is aware of the objections regarding the supposed late Hebrew, as well as the objection that Solomon, husband of many wives, would not have written 9:9 ("Consider life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vaporous life which he gives to you under the sun, all your vaporous days," Shaw's translation), and he offers very plausible answers. Even if one were to disagree with Shaw on Solomonic authorship, the utility of the volume would not be much affected.

Shaw's positions on the important architectonic issues of Ecclesiastes are important to note. He argues that the much-discussed Hebrew word *hebel* (הֶבֶל) means "vapour," representing "that which is passing, or insubstantial" (6). Teasing out the meaning further, he says, "The person who tries to hang on to it will ultimately be frustrated and disappointed because it does not last" (7). The phrase "under the sun" (שָׁמַיְמָה) "means the here and now, the life that we can access by our senses. It does not mean, as some seem to think, the world apart from God" (7). In this, Shaw shows his independence of judgment. Shaw does not, therefore, see the book as having apologetic intent, as, for example, Phil Ryken would.¹ Shaw includes an intriguing suggestion as to the outline of Ecclesiastes, tying the organization of the book to the early chapters of Genesis (10–11). One could wish that Shaw would have come back a bit more often to this suggestion in

the remainder of the book. In addition, the outline suggested on 10–11 does not always correspond to the sections of comment. For example, on pages 10–11, he argues that 5:1–12 is a unit echoing Genesis 4:26. However, when he comments on chapter 5, the division is different (4:17–5:6, 5:7–17, with the titles of the two sections being "Fear God" and "The Problem of Stuff," not obviously connected to men beginning to call on the name of the Lord. Maybe there is a deeper connection present. If so, however, given that this is a more popular-level commentary, it might have been helpful for Shaw to be more explicit about that connection. Shaw's view of Ecclesiastes in relation to the person and work of Jesus Christ is unique, as far as I know. He argues that Christ is "in the warp and woof of the book.... Solomon speaks as Christ to the people of God of the Old Testament. So what we hear in the book is the voice of Christ. We do not need to scour the book looking for hints of Jesus, because his voice speaks in every word" (11). Given that Solomon is portrayed as *Qohelet*, the preacher; and Jesus is the Preacher par excellence, this way of formulating the matter seems very cogent.

Insights into the text of Ecclesiastes abound in this book. Fortunately for the reader, Shaw's style of writing is very clear and free of jargon. Shaw has the happy knack of discussing difficult or complex ideas in simple language. Shaw explains why the book of Ecclesiastes makes readers uncomfortable at times: "And I hated life' (2:17) is the cry of the child who has just discovered that life is not fair. It is a true cry that adults have learned to stifle, and that is why *Qohelet's* blunt statement of it makes us uncomfortable" (26). On the famous passage about times in chapter 3, Shaw remarks that "[M]an does not create these times. They have been appointed by God. Man merely learns to recognize them" (37). On the difficult 3:18, Shaw's interpretation rings true: "Even in a fallen world, where nature is 'red in tooth and claw' men ought to treat one another better than they do. Yet if one considers carefully the behavior of men, they treat each other no better than the beasts" (49). When it comes to governmental oppression, Shaw warns the reader not to be surprised by it, since Ecclesiastes does not see humanity as basically good (68). People today seem shocked by such behavior among rulers. Solomon was not so shocked. This makes the reader wonder if the hints at Solomonic oppression in 1 Kings 1–11, especially toward the end of the passage, might make Solomon's words here a study

1. Phillip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), esp. 21. I am wondering, though, if there is quite as much difference between the two perspectives as Shaw's statement seems to imply. If the focus is on the here and now, on what our senses can access, then for a lot of people, at least, such would seem to exclude God from the picture, at least on occasion. I favor, at any rate, a more apologetic intent to the book than Shaw would.

in self-awareness. On 7:1, Shaw offers a penetrating analysis of how the two lines of poetry (seemingly disconnected at first sight) actually work together, namely, that death is what finalizes a person's character (90). Wisdom with an inheritance will prevent the inheritance from being wasted (96, commenting on 7:11). Shaw offers as good an explanation of 7:28 ("What my soul seeks I did not find. One man among a thousand I found and a woman among all these I did not find," Shaw's translation) as any I've seen. Often adduced as evidence of sexism in the book, Shaw's explanation completely clears Solomon of any such problematic thoughts: "What he has found is that one man among a thousand he has been able to understand, but he does not understand women at all" (106). Shaw thus interprets the soul-seeking of the verse to be a search for understanding. Shaw offers a highly nuanced treatment of 8:14 ("There is a vapour that is done upon the earth: that there are righteous treated according to the deed of the wicked, and there are wicked treated as the deed of the righteous. I said that this is vapour," Shaw's translation): "Solomon is not counselling complacency in the face of injustice. He is, however, calling on people to recognize and understand the fundamentally disordered state of the reality we inhabit" (119). The reader can see fairly clearly how this might apply to current racial tensions in the United States. Injustice is thus not systemic to only one people group. Injustice is systemic to the entire human race.

Chapter 12 is often seen to contain an extended metaphor of aging in the first verses. While Shaw cautiously accepts this (but without tying individual images to particular aspects of aging), he adds an important layer to the discussion: "[T] here is a certain eschatological slant to several of the images. I think the combination is intentional. There are really two *eschatons*, one for the individual and one for the world. The two bear not only a certain relation, but also certain similarities" (150). The reason this added layer is so important is that it puts aging within the larger context of a fallen world where humanity's sin leads to death, and so life also leads to death. Fortunately, this is not the final *eschaton* of the story. There is a way of escaping the ultimate end of the deathly pathway. It involves the fear of the Lord, salvation in Christ, and the way of life everlasting, which last part can be summed up with Shaw's understanding of 12:13–14, "It is 'for this is the all of man.' The idea is that this is what makes man whole. This is what fulfils man. It doesn't look like it from our fallen perspective. But if we have learned the lessons that Solomon has laid before us, then we realize it is this obedience to the commands of God that enables us to live profitably in this ephemeral world" (155–6).

2. Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

3. A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

As said earlier, this review is enthusiastic in recommending the volume to the reader. There are some questions and a few criticisms I would have. These criticisms and questions are very small matters, in general, and do not affect the usefulness of the book at all. Most of the time, Shaw is very clear on what he thinks the text means. There is one instance, however, where Shaw mentions two interpretive options regarding 2:25 without telling us which one he favors (33). Maybe this means he himself could not decide between the two. If that were the case, however, it would be better for the reader to know that this was the conclusion reached. Shaw mentions the fact that "surrounding cultures had a vigorous belief in the afterlife, and had very developed views of what took place after death" (50). I have no doubt that Shaw is correct on this point. It would have been nice, however, to see an example or two proving the point. I am not convinced, regarding the proverb of 4:12 ("And a three-fold cord is not quickly snapped," Shaw's translation), that it is simply 'a proverbial saying quoted to round off the argument' (Shaw, p. 57, quoting Reichert and Cohen). Maybe Shaw wants to head off a too-facile reading of the passage as referring to Christ. It does not seem to me, however, that Solomon is in the habit of simply adducing proverbs to round off an argument without thereby meaning much of anything by the quotation.

A very tiny quibble indeed I would have regarding his claim about World War I (Shaw mentions this in passing, such that the idea is hardly essential to his main point) that no one saw it coming (101). Having recently read Barbara Tuchman's Pulitzer Prize winning *Guns of August*,² I was struck with how many people not only knew the war was coming, but had plans for the first offensive over twenty years prior to the onset of hostilities. Now, maybe Shaw merely means that no one thought the war would look the way it did. This can certainly be said about the Germans, who expected to be an irresistible force.

My last quibble would be with Shaw's understanding of the heart in the Old Testament, which he regards as "not the seat of emotion, but the seat of the intellect, of the understanding" (149). I am not so sure that the emotions and the intellect/understanding can be so easily separated as that. I agree more with Craig Troxel's recent formulation that the heart is the seat of the mind, the desires, and the will.³ This would not exclude the emotions.

While the book is brief enough that an index might not be strictly necessary, it might still have been nice. I found only two typos in the volume (139, 155), so the volume is well edited. This book is heartily recommended to all readers, ranging from high-school age through seminary education and pastoral ministry. ■