

REVIEWS & RESPONSES

Review: John Bower, *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction (Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020). Hardback. xx + 415 pages. ISBN 978-1-601-78243-4. \$40.00. Reviewed by Alan D. Strange.

This important series, in which Bower's *Confession of Faith* is the latest volume, contains the six primary works produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, in its most active years (1643–1648), as part of the Westminster Assembly Project, currently in production by Reformation Heritage Books: The Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Public Worship, the Directory for Church Government and the Psalter. Each of the volumes, as noted in the series preface, "will include a historical introduction, the critical text, and parallel columns comparing original manuscripts and authoritative editions, retaining both the original spelling and punctuation. All texts are collated from original manuscripts and printed sources, rather than copies" (xii).

Of the six works to be produced in this series, we now have the first two, both by the meticulous labors of John Bower: *The Larger Catechism*, brought forth a decade ago (and reviewed by Lane Keister in an earlier issue of *Confessional Presbyterian*), and *The Confession of Faith*, recently produced, and reviewed here (hereafter WCF). One might think that sufficiently established and reliable texts of these documents must exist in abundance. This is not the case, and because different Presbyterian churches have versions that often diverge in some measure from what was originally adopted, especially among the American Presbyterian churches, there is manifest benefit in having a reliable critical edition of the original documents that were produced by the Westminster Assembly.¹

Also, the recent discoveries, begun largely by Chad van Dixoorn in the archival work that he did in writing his dissertation at Cambridge, highlight the need for new critical editions of the products of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Bower gives us his critical text, and then, by way of comparison, offers four parallel columns, permitting us to see how he arrived at his critical text (with the last chapter of the "Introduction," chapter 9, detailing his method of ascertaining such, of real interest to historians and critical redactors). We are happy to have here this excellent critical edition of the WCF.

These are the first critical editions published since S.W. Carruthers published his critical edition of the WCF in 1946 on the tercentenary of the Confession. Carruthers used the recently discovered manuscript of Cornelius Burges, about whom it might be said that he liberally used the comma. Carruthers certainly thought so and admitted that such frequent usage of "commas [as Burges employed] are frequently omitted by me" (Carruthers, *WCF: A Critical Text*, p. 87). A comparison of Carruthers' work to what is shown in this volume discovers that, indeed, Carruthers omitted a number of these commas. It is good to have Bower work through this and see whether the commas omitted by Carruthers were useful or not.

A good example of the need for critical editions as faithful to the original documents as possible manifests itself, among other places, in Westminster Confession of Faith 11.3. And here the question of the comma is at play, and this thus serves as a good case study of the comma question. As J.V. Fesko points out in his book on *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, WCF 11.3 in the Carruthers edition reads, "Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified." This contrasts with what Fesko takes to be the original 1647 reading: "Christ by his obedience, and death, did fully discharge...." Fesko argues that this comma is significant, because "in the original, two separate aspects of Christ's work [the active and passive obedience] are distinguished by a comma, which in later editions has been removed" (Fesko, p. 225).

In the critical text Bower furnishes us (and in the four major underlying texts/MSS), the text does appear with the comma—"by his obedience, and death, did fully" (Bower, 209; 278–279)—and supports, at least arguably, the point made by Fesko in his book and this reviewer in his book on *The Active Obedience of Christ at the Westminster Assembly of Divines*. The comma strengthens the argument that the divines intended to affirm both the active and passive obedience of Christ, a point of some contention, especially in recent years in the Federal Vision controversy.

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1. Since some churches, such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, are engaging in the work of updating the language of their adopted versions of the Westminster Standards, it is particularly important to have these primary documents of the Westminster Assembly in critical, definitive editions.

It should be noted that even before getting to the actual critical text proper, which does not begin until page 195, Bower favors us with a mammoth “introduction,” running for nine chapters, taking us through the necessary background and controversies that marked the Westminster Assembly of Divines, serving as a sort of “history of the writing of the Confession’s theology” (xv). The Assembly convened in July 1643, at the behest of the English parliament and in defiance of the king’s wishes. This lack of royal approbation caused the Assembly to lack royalist supporters in attendance, like Archbishop Ussher, who was appointed, and the strength of Puritanism (predominately Presbyterian) present among the divines diminished the influence of Erastianism there, stronger not only among the Royalists, but also among the members of Parliament itself.

The work that began in earnest that summer was to revise the Thirty-Nine articles in a more distinctly Puritan/Calvinist direction, all of which changed in September/October of that same year with the conclusion of the Solemn League and Covenant with Scotland. Focus now came to bear on matters governmental and liturgical with the intent of a more thoroughgoing Reformation of the Church. Work focused on polity and worship and the focus stayed there for some time, in the drafting of the Directories for Church Government and of Public Worship. Along with this new arrangement with the Scottish Church came the conviction and agreement that a revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles would not do and that wholly new doctrinal standards needed drafting and adopting. Work began finally on the Westminster Confession of Faith proper in July 1645, more than two years after the commencement of the Assembly, in the Three Standing Committees long active in the Assembly and with a committee to perfect the wording of the in-process Confession of Faith.

Bower proceeds to describe how the work of the Assembly proceeded, moving from the plan of redemption (WCF 1–8) to the application of redemption (WCF 9–19). These nineteen chapters of the WCF comprised the first edition, sufficient to create a stand-alone “body of divinity.” This edition was printed in October 1646. Eight weeks later in December 1646, the second edition appeared, completing the “what we are to believe concerning God” section with “the duty that God requires of man” chapters. These remaining fourteen chapters dealt with “godly society” that might be seen in those dealing with “parameters of service” (WCF 20–24) and “service to the church” (WCF 25–33; p. 49). A third edition came out at the end of April 1647, which contained the Scripture proof texts, in conformity to Parliament’s order to include them. Bower uses chapters three to six of his book to discuss this and then chapter 7 to describe bringing the Assembly’s work from manuscript to print, with chapter 8 detailing the bibliography of the first three editions.

Then the chapter, already described (chapter 9) on Bower’s method, appears, followed by the single-columned critical text of Bower (195–239) and the four-columned comparison of the four authoritative texts (242–341): column 1, edition 1; column 2, Braye MS; column 3, edition 2; and column 4, edition 3. Following this, there is a number-referenced comparison of the WCF and the Irish Articles and a critical edition of the Revised Thirty-Nine Articles. The Assembly worked through Article 15 of the Thirty-Nine Articles before that work stopped after the conclusion of the Solemn League and Covenant with the Scots. The rest of Bower’s work is a selected bibliography, glossary, and indices.

To place Bower’s work in establishing a critical, definitive text of the WCF in a broader historical context, the WCF and those derivative of it, among the Congregationalists and Baptists (Savoy, London, etc.), particularly, together with other confessions of the Reformation, are a testament to several things that scholars have noted in recent years concerning the Reformation. First, it has been customary more recently for scholars to argue that the Reformation ought properly not to be thought of as singular but as plural (there were a number of “Reformations” not simply a monolithic “Reformation,” noted by someone like Carter Lindberg in his recent book, *European Reformations*). And secondly, the plethora of confessions spawned by these Reformations, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, does not mean that these Reformations lacked unity or promoted an unhappy sectarianism.

These many confessions have some remarkably unified themes, particularly those having to do with soteriology and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (think, justification by faith alone), thus exhibiting a wonderful unity within the diversity. Though these confessions are many, they reflect also an essential harmony between Calvin (seen in the Gallican and Belgic Confessions, among others) and the Calvinists of the seventeenth century (seen at Dort and then, perhaps supremely, in the Westminster Standards, and other off-shoot “Puritan Confessions”). But harmony or unity does not mean uniformity. These confessions show the development in Reformed theology, from those in Zurich and Geneva in the sixteenth century, for example, which contain the earlier expressions of the Reformed faith, to those confessions of the seventeenth century that contain the full-blown federalism of the later period that comes to dominate, even in Geneva (think Turretin and the Formula Consensus Helvetica).

Perhaps more than anything, the publication of all these rich, diverse, yet unified documents testify to what Scott Hendrix, emeritus professor of history at Princeton Theological Seminary, has called “Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization” (in *Church History* 69:3, 558–577). Hendrix argues that, in spite of all the diversity that has prompted so many to speak only of “Reformations” in the plural, the

movement enjoyed an underlying unity, manifested in its impulse to re-Christianize a late medieval Europe that was Christian in name but frequently not very Christian in belief or conduct. Hendrix noted: "Surely this diverse confessional outcome challenges the position that the Reformation was a coherent sixteenth century movement to rechristianize Europe. The rise of different confessions, however, does not have to be construed as a decline from the original vision of the Reformation as if that vision projected a unified ecclesiastical or cultural embodiment of the early evangelical movement" (CH, 573).

In other words, the proliferation of confessions at the time of the Reformation does not reflect theological confusion, uncertainty, or diversity-without-unity. Rather, the movement of re-Christianizing so many of the nations of Europe saw the blooming of many different flowers, all testifying to the rich consequences of such a work of the Spirit. Hendrix argued: "The rise of [so many] confessions can be seen as the structural outcome of the Reformation agenda, which anchored new ways of being Christian in the culture. The faith could only be rerooted, it turned out, in diverse patterns of theology and piety and in different sociopolitical contexts, which we call the confessional groupings of early modern Europe. They become the forms in which that rerooting of the faith was preserved for generations and even centuries to come" (CH, 573).

That age was a confession-writing age because it was so gripped by the new light brought to the church—salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as taught in the Bible alone all to the glory of God alone—that it had to give testimony to the faith once for all delivered to the saints in the many expressions that are reflected in the multiple confessions, all coming to full flowering, arguably, at the Westminster Assembly of Divines, receiving its supreme expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith. That Assembly began, after all, with a stated desire to complete the Reformation begun under Henry VIII in the 1530s in the break with Rome and given further definition in the Book of Common Prayer and like instruments. The Assembly said that it wanted its documents to reflect the theology and practice of the "best Reformed churches" and heightened that commitment by the Solemn League and Covenant with the Scottish church and nation in September 1643, after its start in July 1643.

This re-Christianization of which Hendrix writes was, for Britain, quite imperfectly begun under Henry, vastly improved under his son, Edward VI, threatened to come to nothing under "Bloody" Mary, achieved some stability under Elizabeth, though again, only partially, had set-backs under the collateral Stuart line (though it was always uneven under the Tudors), and finally, came to a full-orbed expression at the Westminster

Assembly and in the Scottish Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith represents this theological high-water mark in the British context, going beyond the Scottish Confession of 1560 and the Irish Articles of 1615 (and certainly the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church), for which it served as a kind of *summum*. Thus, Reformed Christians and particularly Presbyterians, should all be thankful for John Bower's work and the appearance of this new critical text of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Review: Robert C. Bishop, Larry L. Funck, Raymond J. Lewis, Stephen O. Mosher, John H. Walton, *Understanding Scientific Theories of Origins: Cosmology, Geology, and Biology in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018). Hardback. 659 pages. ISBN 978-083-089164-1. \$89.99. Reviewed by Wes Bredenhof, Pastor at Launceston Free Reformed Church, Launceston, Tasmania.

This massive volume attempts to make a theological and scientific case for theistic evolution. It might be appropriate to describe it as the theistic evolution "Bible." All the authors are Wheaton College faculty and the material in the book is drawn from a Wheaton general-education science course, SCI 311, Theories of Origins. Of the five authors, only one (John Walton) is a theologian; the others are scientists.

I am not a scientist and therefore not really qualified to interact meaningfully with many of the scientific claims made in *Understanding Scientific Theories of Origins* (USTO). I am going to limit myself to evaluating and interacting with the biblical and theological claims. While reading, I did occasionally research certain claims made by the authors—for example, that Intelligent Design (ID) is not a scientific theory, but a philosophical view of reality (625). ID advocates have a different view worth considering. Similarly, USTO makes numerous historical claims. While I am better qualified to evaluate those, I will leave those claims to the side in my review as well. Let me just say that the claims made are not always supported by the evidence.

My focus will be on the biblical and theological side of things. There is plenty here with which to be concerned. I am going to argue that not only is USTO a repudiation of the Reformation view of Scripture, and not only is it a perversion of what Scripture teaches about creation, but it also has other serious theological problems. Some of these problems approach the edges of heresy.

SOLA SCRIPTURA

From the beginning, USTO affirms the authority of the Bible: "We believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God for faith and practice as believers" (1). The medieval Catholic Church prior to the Reformation taught the same thing.

However, the Reformation was a return to what the Bible says about itself—namely that the Bible *alone* is to be our authority for what we believe and how we live. The word “alone” is crucial. That word is missing not merely from USTO’s opening affirmation, but also in the theologizing that follows.

USTO frequently disparages what the authors term a “Bible-first” approach to the relationship between science and Scripture. They describe this approach thus: “In a Bible-first approach, Scripture is privileged over scientific inquiry, so scientific views must be derived from biblical texts to be relevant” (86). No references are supplied to back up this assertion—one which sounds like a straw man. Instead of this approach, USTO posits a “partial-views model.” Science and theology “can learn about and from each other, contributing to each other’s growth” (91). Different insights come from each of these disciplines and they complement one another.

While USTO claims that “biblical claims will receive priority” (13), in reality, the Bible and science are equal partners in the pursuit of truth regarding cosmological, geological, and biological origins.

Confessional Reformed theology has always acknowledged the special revelation of God in Scripture and the general revelation of God in nature. However, this is carefully qualified in three important ways. First, the scope/content of general revelation is narrowly limited to God’s eternal power and divine nature. Second, the proper interpretation of general revelation requires special revelation. John Calvin famously wrote of Scripture as the spectacles through which we come to see the true God revealed in nature (*Institutes* 1.6.1). Third, special revelation in Scripture not only reveals God’s person, but also his mighty deeds of creation, redemption, and renewal. In short, confessional Reformed theology privileges special revelation. Not only that, but we also believe that the Bible is sufficient for teaching us all we need to know about God’s person and deeds.

USTO speaks about special revelation and general revelation as well. However, it differs from Reformed theology. First, the scope/content of general revelation is vast. Second, each form of revelation requires the other for proper interpretation—and especially the Bible needs general revelation in order to be understood properly. Third, general revelation reveals a myriad of truths besides God’s eternal power and divine nature. USTO speaks of “creation revelation” as a subcategory of general revelation: “This is specific detailed knowledge about the creation through nature” (64). In fact, according to USTO, scientific inquiry is a distinctive form of revelation: “...creation revelation is the knowledge discovered by scientists” (65). This knowledge is needed to complement that found in Scripture. Scripture is not sufficient. How is this knowledge attained from creation revelation? Just like we need the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible, scientists

need the Holy Spirit to understand the creation revelation. The Holy Spirit “enables scientists to recognize and grasp knowledge about creation by coming under a form of provisional authority when conforming their thinking to nature” (67). In USTO, scientific conclusions parallel Scripture and have the same authority.

It is important to note that in both cases it is a *provisional* authority. When it comes to each form of revelation, there is rarely a “singularly correct, complete interpretation” (69). The Bible holds authority, but Christian interpretations of the Bible do not (66). Similarly, when it comes to nature, creation revelation is authoritative, but scientific interpretations aren’t. They can be mistaken. Therefore, USTO says, they only hold a provisional authority.

There are several problems tangled together here. But just take the issue of authority. Is it true that Christian interpretations of the Bible have no authority? Reformed theology has made a helpful distinction between magisterial and ministerial authority. The Bible has magisterial authority—it is our master, our teacher. As we will see shortly, the Bible is clear on its essential teachings. Ministerial authority relates to the church. The church makes creeds and confessions which serve by summarizing the teaching of Scripture. So long as they are faithful to the Bible, these creeds and confessions have an authoritative place amongst the churches holding them. For Reformed churches, we regard the Three Forms of Unity as a faithful expression of biblical doctrine, and so they do carry authority among us. To say that Christian interpretations of the Bible are not authoritative is, at best, imprecise.

SCRIPTURAL PERSPICUITY

According to USTO, understanding the Bible on origins requires an understanding of the broader Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) thought-context. This method has been championed at length by one of the contributors, John Walton, in his other writings. This method is related to his view of authority in the Bible. In USTO, Walton and his colleagues write that, in the Bible, God has vested authority in the human authors. Consequently, “the message of the author carries the authority of God.” But also: “our only access to the message is through the human author” (10).

But where does the Bible teach this about itself? Shouldn’t the Bible be our starting point for how we read and understand the Bible? This misstep has massive implications. The opening chapters of Genesis are treated as if they are any other ANE text. They are treated as human writings bearing a divine message, rather than as writings inspired by the same Holy Spirit who inspired the rest of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:21). As a consequence, instead of going to the rest of Scripture for illumination on points requiring explanation, USTO goes to the ANE context.

This approach compromises on what we call the perspicuity (or clarity) of Scripture. Scripture is a lamp for our feet—it sheds light (Ps. 119:105,130). The meaning of Scripture is accessible, even to those without a background in ANE studies or the Hebrew language. In referring to the Pentateuch, the apostle Paul wrote that the stories of Israel’s failings in the wilderness “were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Those Spirit-inspired words were written to the Corinthian Christians, some of whom may have been Jews, but many of whom were not. Paul expected that the Word would be clear and he understood that the book of Exodus, though written hundreds of years before, was intended by God to speak clearly also to the Corinthian Christians.

If we heed USTO, Christians today need background in ANE studies before they can properly understand the message of Genesis 1. In fact, with this approach, the church has been in the dark for centuries until these ANE studies were conducted and brought to light what had previously been dark. To the contrary, there is a simple and clear message in Genesis 1 and we should not allow academics to propose darkness where God has given light. Yes, there are difficult passages in Scripture and the doctrine of perspicuity does not deny that given what Scripture itself says in 2 Peter 3:16. However, historically, Genesis 1 was not regarded as a difficult passage. Taken in the context of the entire Bible (letting Scripture interpret Scripture), what it is saying is so clear that a child can understand it. It only became a difficult passage because of the challenges posed by unbelieving scientists.¹

USTO’S INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS

This brings us into a more detailed consideration of the arguments for how to understand the Genesis account of origins. USTO argues that Genesis 1 is speaking in terms of a functional ontology. In the ANE thought-context, things come into existence by reason of their function. Genesis 1 is therefore not describing the creation of material, but the taking of that material and ordering it and putting it into use (102).

We should note the false dilemma presented between material and functional. Genesis could be working with both categories. In fact, if we maintain the approach of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, this might well be our conclusion. Recognizing the functionality of what is described in Genesis 1 does not rule out its material nature or its historicity as an account of what really happened in those six days. Interestingly, this “both ... and” approach is what we find in article 12 of the Belgic Confession. God created heaven and earth and all creatures out of nothing (non-material to material), and he also gave every creature not only its “being, shape, and form,” but also to each “its specific task and function to serve its Creator.”

Related to the foregoing false dilemma, USTO overstates its case in regard to the Hebrew verb *bara*. The authors argue that the verb is always used in Scripture to refer to things not material in nature: “The verb *bara* does not intrinsically refer to materiality...” (106). However, readers should know this is a disputed claim. The following statement comes from one of the leading Old Testament dictionaries:

Though *br* does not appear with mention of material out of which something is created, it is regularly collocated with verbs that do (e.g. Gen. 1:26–27; 2:7,19; Isa. 45:18; Amos 4:13). More significantly, *br* is used of entities that come out of pre-existing material: e.g. a new generation of animals or humans, or a ‘pure heart.’ (Ps. 104:29–30; 102:18[19]; 51:10[12]; cf. 1 Cor. 4:6.).²

In fact, NIDOTTE states that John Walton’s view (which is what we encounter in USTO) is “somewhat misleading.”

GOD, EVOLUTION, AND DEATH

Any model of origins which incorporates the idea of macro-evolutionary history over billions of years is going to have to involve death. USTO discusses death in numerous places, oftentimes in a positive way. One of these discussions is early in the second chapter.

USTO aims to maintain the sovereignty of God over creation. However, it quickly turns out that, because of his love, God has actually relinquished control over his creation:

Parents practice freeing love toward their children when giving them relative freedom to develop and grow. Similarly, God in freeing love gives creation relative freedom to develop and grow into what it is called in the Son and enabled by the Spirit to be. God’s covenantal faithfulness to nature is what makes its relative freedom as a gift possible (20).

It ought to be noted that USTO provides no biblical support for these statements here. The case is made on the basis of an analogy to parents—as if creation is like a child of God.

1. Creation Without Compromise has previously featured work done by the late Dr. Noel Weeks on John Walton’s views of biblical background. See Noel Weeks, Critique of John Walton (<https://creationwithoutcompromise.com/2018/10/15/critique-of-john-walton-noel-weeks/>) and Noel Weeks, The Ambiguity of Biblical “Background” (<https://creationwithoutcompromise.com/2018/10/08/noel-weeks-the-ambiguity-of-biblical-background/>). The work of Dr. Weeks goes into much more detail and I commend it to you for your further study.

2. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997; Zondervan, 2012), 1.731.

This personalizing of creation continues when USTO attempts to account for the processes necessary for the evolutionary scientific narrative:

Similar to how in freedom humans stumble and struggle as we grow and develop, the creation's freedom in development is marked by its incompleteness. Disease, earthquakes, pain, and death emerge in God's good cosmos due to the relative freedom God gives an incomplete creation to become what it is called to be in the Son as finite, created, being (21).

In other words, creation was not finished at the beginning, but is an ongoing work. Moreover, it is something creation is working out from itself, using the relative freedom given to it by God.

In the midst of this ongoing creation over billions of years, disease, pain and death emerge:

Plants, animals, and insects all participate in their own becoming. In this relative freedom that God graciously gives to the creation to participate in its own becoming, disease, earthquakes, pain, and death emerge in an incomplete creation (21).

This is a thematic thread through all of USTO. Creation ministers to creation and so it participates in its own development. Crucially, death is part of this process. Life and death depend on one another in a sort of "ministerial dance," troubling as that might be to us (340). Because of its commitment to scientific "evidence" as revelation, they cannot escape the troubling notion that death is necessary for ongoing creation—including for the evolutionary development of human beings.

Behind all this is a quasi-deist understanding of how God relates to creation. God created the raw material at the beginning, his child, and then let that child go and develop in relative freedom, on its own from out of its own resources—"creation ministering to creation." As already indicated, no direct biblical support is given for this notion. An attempt is made to appeal to Psalm 104 as evidence of creation ministering to creation. However, that Psalm speaks at length of what God is actively doing to uphold the creation he has already made—not a creation undergoing evolutionary development. No, Scripture teaches that God, in his providence, is actively involved with every aspect of his creation. The hairs of our head are all numbered, and even sparrows do not fall to the ground apart from our Father (Matt. 10:29–30). He is directly in control.

Moreover, the idea of death becoming an intrinsic part of creation is reprehensible. Death is an enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Death has a sting (1 Cor. 15:55). Death came

into the world through sin (Romans 5:12). Death is not a good thing. Of course, some will say that all these passages just referenced are speaking about human death. But if you take an evolutionary perspective, it makes no difference. Death is then part of human evolutionary history and there is nothing disagreeable about that. However, if death is (or has become) an intrinsic part of creation, then why not have it remain so? Revelation 21:4 says "death will be no more." According to the Bible, death is not normal, not normal for humans, and not normal for the other creatures either.

DEEP TIME AND THE FUTURE OF EVOLUTION

USTO says the scientific evidence points towards the existence of deep time—in other words, "the best contemporary value for the age of our universe is almost 13.8 billion years old" (158). Furthermore, the evidence supposedly says that the origins of human beings (*Homo sapiens*) are out there in deep time as well. The fossil evidence indicates that humans originated in Africa by 200,000 years ago, but with an evolutionary history going back millions of years and potentially involving *Homo erectus*, *Homo heidelbergensis*, *Homo antecessor* and others (594). Ultimately, evolutionary theory argues that, because of their evolutionary history, "humans appear to share the most common ancestor with chimpanzees/bonobos, and next-most recent with gorillas..." (586). So, according to the scientific evidence USTO presents as credible, human beings have a deep-time evolutionary history.

The theological implications of this are not insignificant. If deep time exists, we must allow for the possibility that it exists into the future. In other words, we have to allow for the possibility that this present creation could continue for millions or even billions of years. When it comes to human beings, if human beings have a deep-time evolutionary history, we have to allow for the possibility that they have a deep-time evolutionary future. In other words, if the evidence presented by USTO is correct, we must allow for the possibility that *Homo sapiens* will evolve further into other species. Perhaps just as with *Homo erectus* and the common primate ancestors, *Homo sapiens* will not exist as the species we know them today two million years from now. Human beings will have evolved into some other species.

For the non-Christian scientist who does not believe in the Bible in any way, this is not a problem. An unbeliever can easily rest with the idea that humanity is not done evolving. But, for a Bible-believing Christian, there is a major theological obstacle to continuing human evolution over deep time: the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The incarnation is foundational to biblical, Christian faith. The same nature which has sinned is required to pay for sin. Human beings have sinned and therefore the Son of God had to take on a human nature in order to pay for sin. Fast forward two

million years from now and there are still sinful creatures, but they are no longer human beings, having evolved from their primitive ancestors. Must the Son of God re-do his redemptive work for these new beings? Hebrews 9:28 tells us his sacrifice was a one-off. The next time he appears it will not be to bear the curse of sinners.

Theologically, there is a knotty problem with USTO here. The only way out would be to argue that human beings will not have a deep-time evolutionary future—that Christ will return before the human race has the opportunity to evolve further. But how do we know that? The Bible certainly does not say that. The Bible says no one knows when the time of Christ's return will be except God (Matt. 24:36). From my perspective, it could be two million years from now and I have no problem with that because I do not believe the human race will evolve into other species.

USTO ends up in these theological quagmires because it does not take God's Word seriously. For example, they completely ignore Luke 3:38 which affirms Adam as "the son of God." Adam did not have *any* biological ancestry. He came directly from God. Similarly, USTO ignores Mark 10:6, "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female." Male and female human beings were made by God at the **beginning** of creation—not several billion years into a fabled deep-time history.

FUNCTIONAL KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY

Another major theme running through USTO is the theological significance of the incarnation. According to USTO, the Holy Spirit's work in the incarnation and in the life of Jesus is a parallel or analogy for how he continues to work in ongoing creation. As the Nicene Creed says, the Holy Spirit is "the Lord and giver of life."

A Bible-believing Reformed Christian will have no trouble with the Nicene Creed's confession of the Holy Spirit. He is the giver of life. The Bible teaches that this is true for spiritual life (1 Cor. 12:3) as well as for physical life (Ps. 104:30).

However, USTO works that out in ways that are not only wrong, but verging on heretical. The error is subtle and not easily discerned. Here are some quotes to illustrate the concern:

Jesus was fully and authentically human because of the energizing and enabling work of the Spirit. (25)

Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to the Father because he was enabled to freely and perfectly rely on the Spirit is power to lead a humble, obedient life.... In short, Jesus was sustained by the Spirit, perfected by the Spirit, served the Father's purposes by the Spirit, lived, died, and lived again through the Spirit. (26)

Instead, what is most remarkable about Jesus is that he lived as an embodied person in perfect relationship with the Father, always enabled by the Spirit. Moreover, he was sustained by the Spirit in his relationships with other persons and all of creation. (600–601)

All Jesus' miracles were performed through the power of the Spirit. (601)

And Jesus' humanity is the ultimate model from which we can learn by the Spirit is power to exercise our capacities as means through which God is restoring all of creation. (605)

There are many more such quotes from the book—as I said, it is an important theme strung from start to finish.

The emphasis is on Jesus as a human being empowered by the Holy Spirit to do amazing things, including obeying God fully. This parallels what creation can do in cooperation with the Holy Spirit—continue its evolutionary development. It also illustrates what it means to bear the image of God as human beings.

This teaching has a name: functional kenotic Christology (FKC). In God's providence, while I was reading USTO, I was also reading Stephen J. Wellum's *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Crossway Books, 2016). Wellum identifies FKC as a contemporary challenge to orthodox Christology. FKC is entrenched in "evangelical" theology; some of its advocates include well-known names like William Craig, J. P. Moreland, and Millard Erickson. According to Wellum, FKC is sometimes associated with "Spirit-Christology" and it is here that you find mention of Colin Gunton. Gunton was a British theologian whose work is cited extensively in USTO, including in the portions speaking about Jesus' reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

FKC does not deny the divinity of the Son of God. It teaches that when the Son of God took on a human nature, his divine attributes became latent. They were fully there, but not being used. The Son of God chose to live his incarnate life within the bounds of his human nature, including all of its limitations. This is the "kenotic" element of FKC. "Kenosis" is the theological term derived from the Greek used in Philippians 2:7 to refer to Christ emptying himself. Wellum explains further:

Thus when it comes to how Jesus has supernatural knowledge and exercises supernatural power in his miracles, FKC insists that Jesus does so, *not* by the use of his divine attributes, but by the power of the Spirit. Thus, in all of the incarnate Son's actions, even actions traditionally viewed as divine actions (such as his miracles), Jesus performs them by the Spirit, in a way sim-

ilar to other Spirit-empowered men and parallel to the Spirit is work in us. This is why Jesus can serve as our example, as he shows us how to live our lives in dependence on the Spirit—although he is the paradigm, interpreted more quantitatively than qualitatively. (*God the Son Incarnate*, 383).

The “functional” element of FKC comes from the manner in which this teaching addresses the work that Jesus did.

Debates about the doctrine of the person of Christ raged on through the early church. However, eventually the church adopted what’s known as the Chalcedonian Definition. Chalcedon is not officially part of our Reformed creeds and confessions, but the content of Chalcedon is found in both the Athanasian Creed (articles 29–37) and the Belgic Confession (articles 18 and 19). Advocates of FKC affirm Chalcedon formally, but as Wellum points out, “they depart from it at significant points” (Wellum, 396). This is particularly in regard to how they define “person,” their equating “person” with “soul,” and in their endorsement of the idea that the incarnate Son of God has only one will (monothelitism).

Wellum offers an extensive critique of FKC. I will just briefly summarize it—interested readers should go and check it out for themselves. He notes two main problems.

First, FKC does not readily account for what the Bible says about the divinity of Christ in his earthly life and ministry. The works Jesus does are “ultimately acts identified with Yahweh” (Wellum, 406). If you survey texts like John 5:16–30, Colossians 1:17, and Hebrews 1:3, it is clear that “in his state of humiliation, the Son *continues to exercise* his divine attributes *as the Son* in relation to and united with the Father and the Spirit” (Wellum 406).

Second, FKC sounds Trinitarian enough (and so does USTO), but in reality it fails to do justice to the Trinity, especially in developing Father-Son-Spirit relations. If the incarnate Son never uses his divine attributes, then his actions on earth were either purely human, or they are the actions of the Holy Spirit. Where there are actions surpassing what normal humans can do, the Son of God appears to be merely passive in his own actions. Moreover, the work of the Father in all of this is ignored. Wellum writes, “...it is not enough to focus simply on the Son-Spirit relations; we must also account for John’s Gospel, for example, which stresses predominantly the Father-Son relations” (408).

FKC is not a theological peccadillo. This is a major concern. Most readers of USTO are not going to have enough theological training to discern it. USTO makes it sound plausible—and they have some Bible texts that superficially support their claims. Moreover, it is a central part of their effort to integrate evolution with biblical teaching. It has sometimes been said that acceptance of evolutionary theory requires an overhaul

of every area of theology. The presence of FKC in USTO illustrates that this overhaul is underway.

THE EXTENT OF THE FLOOD

As already mentioned, USTO disparages a “Bible-first” approach. Instead, the Bible has to be understood, not only on its own terms, but also in terms of what God is revealing in the “second book” of scientific evidence. Not surprisingly, this leads USTO to reject the notion of a global flood in the days of Noah. They grant that the Bible describes some cataclysmic event of massive proportions; however, USTO insists that it was not global. Moreover, “the event is described with a specific theological and literary goal in mind” (241). It is not meant to provide us with a “hydro-geological” explanation.

Once again we are presented with a false dilemma: a global flood versus a “specific theological and literary goal.” This dilemma is false because if we understand the text to be referring to a global flood, that certainly does not rule out a theological and literary goal. Creationists understand that God reveals what he does in Genesis 6–9 for a theological purpose, but that by no means rules out the historical fact of what it describes.

In Genesis 6–9, one of the key issues is how we understand the Hebrew word *kol* (all). USTO concludes that the Hebrew word *kol* in the Flood story is used rhetorically—it simply means that a large area was inundated and large numbers of people were affected. *Kol* can be used rhetorically—no one questions that. However, Scripture must interpret Scripture. USTO ignores the key section in Genesis 6. In Genesis 6:5–7, God observes the wickedness of human beings “in the earth.” USTO would translate that as “in the land,” and yes, the Hebrew word for ‘earth’ can also be translated ‘land.’ But verse 6 militates against that, because it speaks of God’s creation of human beings “on the earth.” God did not create human beings “in the land,” i.e., in some region now under his scrutiny. This is universal language. That becomes further evident when Genesis 6:7 refers to the animals. God plans not only to destroy humanity, but also the “animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens” which he created at the beginning (cf. Gen. 7:4). This too favours a global understanding. Later in chapter 6, God speaks of “all flesh” having corrupted its way on the earth. Are we to imagine that there were pockets of humanity which were immune to this trend? Genesis 6:17 says, “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.” Notice the mention of “under heaven.” All flesh “under heaven” is slated for destruction. Again, that distinctly favours a global understanding of this event.

Moreover, the building of the ark itself witnesses to a global flood. The ark was built by Noah, not only to save himself and

seven others of his family, but also to save the animals. USTO has no explanation as to why the animals had to enter the ark if the Flood was something less than global.

In a sidebar, USTO interacts briefly with the New Testament mentions of the Flood. They claim that none of the New Testament passages “make a statement about its geographical scope” (243). Luke 17:26–27 is mentioned:

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

USTO claims that this is just speaking about “how people were living their lives day by day and were caught by surprise when judgment came” (243). But what is the nature of the judgment to come? It is **universal**. Just as the Flood destroyed all the ungodly in the days of Noah, “so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.” In case you miss the point, in the next three verses, Christ speaks about the days of Lot and the wholesale destruction of Sodom: “fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all.” No one escaped, except Lot. Clearly, Christ understood the Flood to be an event which destroyed all human beings except Noah and his family.

According to USTO, 2 Peter 2:5 “references God sparing Noah” (243). 2 Peter 2:5 says, “...if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...” It beggars belief to argue that Peter believed the flood to be anything less than global. It was the “ancient world” which was not spared and the flood came upon “the world of the ungodly.” The natural reading is to understand these terms globally and universally.

USTO also adopts an unnatural reading of 2 Peter 3:5–6. They argue that it just speaks about the world being deluged and destroyed and the Greek word for ‘world’ (*kosmos*) is being used in its broadest sense, and therefore it is not referring to the extent of the Flood. However, when you look at these verses in context, beginning with verse 4, it becomes evident how implausible that interpretation is:

They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

Notice how Peter writes about the creation of the earth—he is quite evidently not speaking about the creation of some portion of the planet. The same entire planet that was created was deluged with water.

If God is revealing through the scientific evidence that a global flood never happened, then we need to revisit our interpretation of Genesis and somehow bring it into alignment with this newer divine revelation. That is what USTO is doing. However, it is a revisionist approach to the Bible. It simply does not honour the Bible as God’s Word. We honour God’s Word when we take it on its own terms and then evaluate what we observe in the world around us in the light of what God has said. As the Psalmist says, “... in your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:9).

CONCLUSION

There are a fair number of other concerns could be mentioned, but these I believe are the most important. I began by saying that USTO could be described as the theistic evolution “Bible.” I said that intentionally because USTO not only contains content from the written Bible as we know it, but it also presents scientific evidence as a second “book” with additional revelation from God (albeit with a “provisional authority”). Whether this is a legitimate method of approaching origins is really the key issue. Because I am a Reformed Christian, I emphatically deny that it is.

I believe the Bible alone is our inspired, infallible, inerrant source for doctrine and life. The Bible teaches that about itself. Therefore, God’s Word always has to be our starting point. It is not that the Bible is a “textbook” for science, as USTO and others allege creationists to believe. Rather, science can only honour God when it takes its starting point from what God has said in the Bible.

I tried, but I could not read this book dispassionately. In this book, I heard the whispers of Satan in the Garden of Eden: did God really say? If someone is questioning my Father or twisting his words, even if it is done with the greatest sophistication, I cannot remain dispassionate. I also think of the sad fact that this book comprises course material at Wheaton College. Scores of impressionable youth have been and are being fed this content. Because it is happening at a Christian institution, they could be led to believe that this is an acceptable Christian approach. It is not. It is **unbelief**. I pray for students at Wheaton College that God will help them through his Spirit and Word to discern the truth regarding origins.

Review: Frank J. Smith, *Race, Church and Society* (Cumming, Ga.: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 2021). Paperback, xxiii, 226 pages. ISBN 978-0-9676991-4-1. \$14.99. Volume discounts are available from the publisher. Reviewed by

Dr. R. E. Knodel, Jr. (RPCNA, author of *LifeStyle: A Biblical/Philosophical Study of Christianity and the Culture it Produces*).

How wonderful is it when a faithful professor sheds biblical light on one of culture's thorny topics? How brave is it when faith ventures into the briar-patch of current controversy? We have such a book in Frank J. Smith's *Race, Church and Society* (hereafter RCS). But it's even better than that. In this case we have the skillful theoretician/theologian who has put his money where his mouth is. He has planted a thriving church in Urban Atlanta, in the so-called inter-racial war-zone of the Bluff. Joyfully and enthusiastically, the Rev. Dr. Frank Smith and his wife Penny labor to bring the epitome of biblical joy, the Gospel of Christ, to bear on the sadness of broken America. He loves his people, and his people love him.

As the title suggests, Dr. Smith deals with modern America's ideas about Race, Church, and Society from a redemptive/biblical perspective, examining our modern pagan cultural myths in the light of God's Word. He does this in an easy-to-read luminous manner. RCS has to be one of the great books of 2021. His work is summed-up in the title of Chapter 8, *The Audacity of Cross-Cultural Mission*.

In the way of this, in thirteen chapters and an epilogue, Professor Smith deals with such subjects as Race and its definition, People-Groups and ethnic superiority/inferiority, Cultural differentiation, God's relevant Covenant of Grace to the nations, Racial Conflict, Cross-Cultural Missionology, Koinonia, Cultural analysis, Black Lives Matter, Social Justice Warriorship, Reparations ... and the Bluff. While these themes currently divide and embroil America, most people have no clear definitions or clarifying insight about them. Frank Smith clearly does, and he grounds his opinions in God's millennia-old insight. Given the heat of our moment in time, it's humbling to consider the challenge of this book, but Dr. Smith consummates courage with insight as he works his way through his topic.

One example would be his treatment of Reparations (p. 182ff.). This presents itself as an extremely complex ethical issue, involving ethics itself, situational application, time, and cultural context. Smith shows how reparations must fit into a wider ethical context (the previous chapter), and then shows how modernity's overly facile approaches are in reality impossible! Using the logic of the *reductio absurdum*, Professor Smith shows the reader how impossible it would be to successfully negotiate a righteous program of reparations. It might sound appealing using an infantile definition of love, but in the end, if an idea is unworkable, is it not also a sign that the idea is flawed?

So, reparations work neither ethically nor pragmatically. He grounds his explanation on historical occurrences and

references that are frankly surprising. He knows his history and its enlightening insights, pulling from English Saxon/Baron history, Robert Lewis Dabney, and various historical Presbyterian reports and papers. Dr. Smith is as conversant with Black Conservative Thomas Sowell as he is with Dr. Glen Loury, the first Black tenured African-American economic Professor at Harvard. He argues that while reparations might benefit our cultural mandarins (the bureaucratic class), it would actually be destructive to the kind of people to whom he ministers in the Bluff.

Coupled with the meat of this study are its other resources found in the author's index and bibliography. Dr. Smith presents a cornucopia of resources for further study, as well as a capacity to search RCS for its positions and insights. His Scripture index alone is almost worth the price of the book, as he opens up scores of pertinent verses that the average reader has probably never considered!

Race, Church and Society is a must-read from both the perspectives of our concern for people and modern progress. If we truly love people and want the best for them, then we must eschew the demonic, which presses so insidiously upon us with its tentacles of deceit and false faith, and listen to God. Professor Smith helps us precisely here, with his twin spades of biblical and historical insight. *Race, Church and Society* is both a good book and a necessary book.

About the author: The Rev. Dr. Professor Frank J. Smith is a multi-graduate-degree Ph.D. published author who currently lectures in history at Georgia Gwinnet College in Atlanta. He is married to Penelope A Wild Smith who previously enjoyed a distinguished career in the British Royal Air Force. Dr. Smith is a widely published author, editor and journalist and has received an honorary doctorate from the Methodist Episcopal Church (USA) for his work in ecclesiastical journalism and interchurch relations. Simultaneously, he labors at the Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) in Atlanta doing street-evangelism unto building a local church in the Bluff area of Urban Atlanta. Dr. Smith is also an editor of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal.

Review: Cornelis Van Dam, *In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2021). Hardback, 400 pages. ISBN 978-1601788054. \$30.00. Reviewed by Dr. Benjamin Shaw, Professor of Old Testament, Reformation Bible College.

In the October 2021 issue of *First Things* (pp. 41-48), the evangelical philosopher William Lane Craig published "The Historical Adam." In this essay, Craig asks two questions, "What historical claims does the Bible make about Adam and Eve? And is belief in a historical Adam and Eve compatible with the scientific evidence?" (41). He proposes to treat these as

two separate questions, not wanting to read modern science into the Bible. These are essential questions and a laudable goal. However, many readers will be disappointed with Craig's conclusions. As to the first question, Craig bases his answer on two things. First, on a comparison with other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation texts. Second, on the definition of myth as "a traditional, sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form" (42). Craig concludes that Genesis 1–11, including the story of Adam and Eve, "functions as Israel's foundational myth" (42).

Given the apparent interest of this myth in history, seen in the genealogies, Craig's answer to the first question is that "Genesis 1–11 functions as mytho-history" and "need not be read literally" (43). After effectively dismissing the New Testament evidence for the historical character of the presentation of Adam found in Genesis, Craig moves to his second question. In this case, he begins by asking the question, "What qualifies as human?" Relying on the work of paleoanthropologists, he adopts their definition of human. Based on that definition and the conclusions of contemporary archaeologists and paleoanthropologists, Craig proposes that God selected two out of a population of human-like animals, by renovating their brains, perhaps by a genetic mutation that took place sometime between 750,000 and 1,000,000 years ago. Thus, the answers to the two questions with which he began are both yes.

One suspects that many Christians will find this a satisfying answer. It allows them to keep their Bibles (at some level) and keep whatever "the science" says.

Craig's essay provides the context for examining Van Dam's book. Before getting into the book's substance, we should consider the subtitle: *Listening to Genesis 1 and 2*. We are not used to listening to the Scriptures. Instead, we insist that they listen to us. Instead of hearing the Scripture's questions and listening for its answers, we insist on asking Scripture our questions and demanding that Scripture answer us. That is not the route that Van Dam follows.

His first three chapters serve as the foundation on which he builds the rest of the book. In the Introduction, he lays out his presuppositions, primarily about the need for faith and the character of Scripture. He then identifies the result of current mainstream assumptions: "these chapters have been made to yield meanings compatible with the current scientific understanding of the origin of the world and the human race even if such interpretations appear to contradict the clear testimony of Scripture" (15).

In chapter 2, Van Dam directly addresses Craig's assumptions in his essay: reading Scripture in light of the ANE sources, and natural revelation, reflected in the current scientific consensus, is not inconsistent with biblical revelation. While not denying the usefulness of the ANE material,

Van Dam's point is that it should not control our reading of Scripture. It is vital to consider the relevance and the provenance of these texts. For example, *Enuma Elish*, often called the Babylonian Epic of Creation, "actually has as its main goal not to give an account of origins but to demonstrate the hegemony of Marduk" (22). The author's careful discussion demonstrates that the differences between Genesis and the ANE "creation" texts far outweigh the similarities in purpose and substance. The ANE material thus plays at most a small part in the remainder of the book.

In dealing with science, Van Dam begins by responding to the canard, "the Bible is not a scientific textbook," by saying, "Of course not!" But he then asks the appropriate follow-up question, "Then what is it?" "It is revelation accommodated to common human understanding" (29). But as God's revelation, it is accurate and factual. He also recognizes that "creationist scientists" have not always made proper use of Scripture. "At the same time, the creation science movement is to be applauded for its defense of the infallibility of the Bible and taking seriously the historicity of the creation account and all that followed" (35). He then moves on to the question as to what general revelation reveals. There is a tendency to think that general revelation reveals God and scientific findings. In other words, the theory of evolution is part of general revelation. This idea appears in Craig's essay. But "general revelation reveals God's greatness and glory. Scientific discoveries are not divine revelation" (40).

Van Dam then discusses the limitations of science which is not a popular idea today. "The science" explains everything. The point is that nature provides all kinds of data. Those data are scientific facts. But what we make of those facts, the conclusions we draw from them, are influenced and guided by our presuppositions.

Modern scientific theories, such as evolution, are inherently materialistic and naturalistic. It cannot be otherwise. But we should recognize that such views do not constitute divine revelation.

The third chapter deals with the historicity of Genesis 1:1–2:3. The markers in the passage point to the genre being "historical narrative describing events that took place in the past" (65). Other passages from both Testaments are consistent with and support the idea that Genesis 1 is an account of historical events. As seen in Craig's essay, however, there is much pressure to dehistoricize the text of Genesis. Some of this pressure comes from the influence of historical-critical biblical studies. Older critical scholars distinguished between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. *Historie* is "what actually happened, as determined and reconstructed by modern scholars" (81). *Geschichte* is "what Israel believed to have happened based on their inferences from events they experienced" (81). Thus, what Israel testified to in the Old Testament may or may not

have occurred. A more recent development distinguishes between history and story. It asserts that the Old Testament narratives are stories, not history, though some actual events may be behind the account. The current hegemony of the theory of evolution in scientific studies also exerts pressure on those interpreters of Genesis who want to be scientifically respectable.

Having laid his foundation, Van Dam devotes the remainder of the book to building the house. Chapters 4 through 9 offer a detailed exegesis of the seven days of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3. He begins with a detailed study of Genesis 1:1 and how it relates to the rest of the chapter. Next, he deals with the length of creation days, giving a fair presentation of alternative theories before concluding on behalf of ordinary days. Chapter 6 deals with what is meant by “create.” This discussion is crucial due to the assertions by John Walton in his “Lost World” series and affirmations by other scholars. In chapter 7, “the heavens and the earth,” come in for review. A key element here is the discussion of “the firmament.” Is it a solid dome as so often depicted by drawings purporting to show the view of the world held by the ancients? Chapter 8 deals in a briefer fashion with Days 1 through 6. Chapter 9 focuses on the seventh day and its nature.

In chapter 10, Van Dam discusses the historicity of Genesis 2 and the Garden of Eden. In chapter 10, he connects the work of creation to the gospel since the gospel builds on the doctrine of creation as Genesis 1–2 presents it. Further, the theory of evolution has had a corrosive effect on biblical faith and morals. It is necessary for us as Christians to intelligently defend the truth of Genesis 1–2.

When a new book appears devoted to the early chapters of Genesis, a person is tempted to roll his eyes and mutter, “Not another one!” Potential readers must not ignore this book because Van Dam has done his homework. He has a firm grasp of the relevant material. In the reviewer’s view, his first three chapters are the most important. Though, the remaining chapters are all useful in their own right. They directly address the foundations of the current debate, so clearly seen in Craig’s essay. The reader who has mastered this book is in a position to respond with a clear and articulate rejection of Craig’s proposal.

Gyeongcheol Gwon, *Christ and the Old Covenant: Francis Turretin (1623–1687) on Christ’s Suretyship under the Old Testament*, Reformed Historical Theology, v. 51 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019). Paperback, 162 pp. ISBN 978-3525516416. \$88.00. Reviewed by Thomas Haviland-Pabst, Asheville, NC.

Gyeongcheol Gwon is Lecturer in Church History at Kukje Theological University and Seminary in Seoul, Korea. This

monograph is “a slightly revised edition” of the author’s doctoral dissertation, “submitted to Westminster Theological Seminary in 2016” (p. 12). The aim of it is to “explore” the debate between Johannes Cocceius (1603-1699) and Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676) regarding the role the “Mosaic law” plays in the history of redemption “through the eyes of Francis Turretin (1623-1687)” (p. 11). The author’s thesis is that while Turretin sided with Voetius’s side of the debate, there is no sign that he considered “Cocceianism his archenemy.” Instead, the author suggests that Turretin can be seen “as a moderate and peaceful Voetian” (p. 12).

Gwon notes three questions that inform the debate between Cocceius and Voetius. (1) “To what extent did the Mosaic law recapitulate the covenant of works?” (2) “How were the people of God saved under the legal economy?” And (3) “How did Christ reveal himself to his people before the incarnation?” The Voetius side of the debate argues, in sum, for greater continuity between the Old and New Testaments than the Cocceius side, stating that “the benefits of Christ’s sacrificial death were the same yesterday, today, and forevermore” (p. 11).

Gwon substantiates his thesis in seven chapters, with the eighth chapter summarizing his findings and an appendix which supplies the outline of the contents of Leydekker’s *Vis Veritatis*. In the first two chapters, Gwon discusses the need for a fuller scholarly treatment of Christ’s suretyship in the Old Testament and he situates Turretin in his intellectual (i.e., Reformed Scholastic) and historical context.

In the first chapter, he helpfully argues in line with contemporary scholarship that scholasticism for the Reformed orthodox “had more to do with methodology and philosophy” (p. 19). Moreover, he contends that since Cocceius was clearly not an “anti-scholastic” (p. 23), Turretin’s scholasticism was not the deciding factor regarding his alliance with Voetius in the debate. In the second chapter, after exploring Turretin’s life and his *Institutio* (i.e., *Institutes*), Gwon concludes both that Turretin “had a profound interest in repelling the archenemy, the Roman Catholic church” and thus he was “more lenient toward non-heretical Protestant parties” and that his tolerance toward the Cocceians was likely due to his own “personal connection with the Leiden theologians” (p. 35).

In chapter three, Gwon traces historical views of Christ’s suretyship in the Old Testament. Here, he discusses the period from Roman law to early orthodoxy, which provides the historical background for the Cocceian-Voetian controversy since, he notes, the “seventeenth-century controversy over Christ’s suretyship was generally centered on two synonymous words: *fidejussio* [sponsor] and *expromissio* [promiser]” (p. 37). Due to broader hermeneutical considerations, Cocceians divorced sponsor from promiser (though not Cocceius himself; cf. p.48), positing the notion that, during the

Old Testament, believers' sins were merely passed over and concealed, with full remission of sins not taking place until Christ's crucifixion. In contrast, Voetius rejected these "two modes of forgiveness" (p. 48).

With the fourth chapter, the author compares Turretin's *Institutes* with the anti-Cocceian polemical work *Vis veritatis*, authored by Leydekker, "an Utrecht theologian and professor," on the contested point of "Christ's suretyship under the Old Testament" (p. 53). He concludes that, while there is significant overlap in content (pro-Voetius), Turretin's tone is more irenic and therefore less polemical than Leydekker's. The fifth chapter continues the comparison between these two works, looking at the question of the status of the Old Testament Fathers. Gwon again demonstrates that Turretin and Leydekker are in essential agreement, yet it becomes clear that Turretin "took a more cautious approach ... [with] at least the possibility that he was willing to soften Leydekker's strong anti-Cocceian polemic," due perhaps in part to Turretin's "friendship with such Cocceians as Heidanus" (p. 98).

Due to Leydekker's clear dependence on Turretin's earlier work, *De satisfactione Christi*, Gwon gives attention to the content of this earlier work of Turretin, outlining its content as well as Leydekker's use of *De satisfactione*. Commenting on Leydekker's assertion that this work is clearly anti-Cocceian, Gwon argues that he is "vulnerable to the charge of anachronism" (p. 118). Despite this foible, Leydekker's engagement with this text, Gwon concludes, is still helpful as it proves some background knowledge regarding Turretin and the development of the Voetian position. Gwon, in the seventh chapter, gives attention to some of Turretin's sermons, looking "for any possible hint of the ... debate" in his later sermons. This chapter serves to confirm Gwon's contention that Turretin's greatest concern was with the Roman Catholic Church, distinguishing him from Leydekker's sustained opposition to Cocceians. The concluding chapter briefly summarizes the author's findings, presents some implications arising from his study (such as challenging the "central dogma theory" [p. 133] of Reformed Orthodoxy), and offers suggestions for further research.

By way of evaluation, this is clearly a mature work of historical theology. Especially noteworthy is the author's close and compelling reading of primary sources. Moreover, the author engaged generously with secondary literature and clearly situated Cocceius within the broader trajectory of Reformed Orthodoxy, demonstrating in turn the many ways he was building on the hermeneutical strategies and exegetical insights of those that preceded him. Gwon's greatest contributions with this work include (1) showing how the Cocceian-Voetian debate was received by the international Reformed community and (2) giving us greater insight into Turretin not only as a theologian but as a pastor concerned

for the spiritual welfare of his city, Geneva, given that, in Turretin's engagement with Cocceianism, we caught a glimpse of the major concerns and driving forces behind his mature, polemical theology. To conclude, this work is essential reading for scholarship on Francis Turretin and for students and scholars concerned with the exchanges between the various local expressions of Reformed Orthodoxy and the light this sheds on the international Reformed community as a whole.

Review: Theodore Beza, *A Learned Treatise on the Plague*, Translated by Edward Percival (1665), Modernized with an Introduction by Bennie Castle (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2020). 60pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1952410758. \$6.95. Ludwig Lavater, *Disease, Scarcity, and Famine: A Reformation Perspective on God and Plagues*, Translated and Edited by Michael Hunter (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021). 176pp. ISBN 9781601788634. \$14.00. Matthew A. Vogan, Matthew J. Hyde (editors), *Worship and Witness in Crisis: Has the Church Failed the Covid Test?* (Brighton, UK: Ettrick Press, 2021). 296pp. ISBN 978-1-8380775-5-6. £10.95. Ernest Springer III, Joel E Yeager, Daniel O'Roark, *Coronavirus and the Leadership of the Christian Church: A Sacred Trust Broken* (Willow Street, Pennsylvania: Old Paths Publications, 2020). 257pp. Paperback. ISBN 979-1716553638. \$14.95. Reviewed by Isaac T. Overton, Teaching Elder at the Reformed Church of Box Hill, Melbourne, Australia.

"Lockdown." Over the last year or more, that term has taken on a whole new level of meaning the world over. That single word summarises a legion of social, economic, mental, emotional, and spiritual trials and sufferings. Here in Melbourne, Australia, citizens have been intermittently restricted to our homes for well over 200 days now. At the time of writing, that is expected to continue to go on for at least another month. Many, many cities around the world have experienced similar mandates from civil authorities.

For the Church, this situation has presented us with a host of problems, not least of which has been the mandate to close our doors and cease public gatherings for corporate worship. This has raised an array of difficult questions, such as: Is locking down a population a good and right response to the Covid-19 virus? Is shutting the doors of the Church a good response? Do civil authorities have the right to issue such directives to the Church and/or in society? Should the Church comply with these directives? How important is public worship? Are broadcast services an acceptable substitute for in-person gatherings? How should we handle disagreements on these questions within the Church? How ought we to exercise pastoral care of God's people as we seek to navigate the answers to these questions? With the introduction of

Vaccination Passport-type policies across the world, the situation does not appear to be getting any simpler either. Rather, it promises to confront us with new and fresh challenges on top of those we are already facing.

How ought God's people to respond in the midst of these difficult times? In answer to this question, I am thankful for the opportunity to share four books with you that I trust will prove helpful for us all as we seek to discern the will of God as the Lord has laid it out for us in scripture.

We begin with a voice from the past, with John Calvin's successor in Geneva: Theodore Beza (1519-1605). Among Beza's publications, we find a short volume entitled: *A Learned Treatise on the Plague*. Those of us not yet able to read Latin owe a debt of gratitude to Edward Percival for his 1665 translation, to Bennie Castle for his 2020 modernisation, and to the folk at Canon Press for partnering with him to re-release this work. Beza aims in his treatise to answer two questions: (i) Whether or not the plague is infectious; and (ii) whether or not Christians ought to avoid ("shun") the plague.

As to the first question, although not directly applicable in modern times, I nevertheless found Beza to be a refreshing tonic. In the midst of the Covid narrative that has dominated public discourse, it is good to consider that, like us, people in the past have faced viral sickness before. Unlike us, however, the way that many have thought about this challenge has been fundamentally theological in nature. In all the public discussions about Covid-19 in the mainstream media, Beza thus unconsciously highlights for us that God is being omitted. This may be something that a good many Christians have lost sight of in the saturation of media coverage with which the world bombards us, and yet it is something that fundamentally shapes public discourse. In light of this, Beza unwittingly teaches us that we must expect that there will be significant differences between the response of the Church, and that of society more broadly. I leave it to you to ponder whether or not we have seen that pronounced difference in ourselves or our churches.

As to Beza's second question, here we find something more directly applicable to our own situation: Is avoidance a godly response when it comes to the plague? Beza describes two responses to this question that were common in his day. The first, held by some, was that avoiding the plague was a "heinous offence" in every circumstance. On the other hand, some argued that "flying" should be pursued without exception. Beza walks a middle path, ably pointing out problems in each of them, and discerning his own way using a singular key idea: "duty."

Duty is a recurring theme in Beza's treatise. In his concluding application, Beza counsels his readers to "learn out of the Word of God what his duty is" and "commend himself unto God and continue constantly therein" (pg. 48). Whatever

unanswered questions Beza leaves us in our time, this counsel is surely both timeless and relevant. How should we respond in the midst of Covid-19? At the very least, we should begin by learning from the Word of God what our duty is, and having learned our duty we must simply continue in it (for this reason alone, the understanding of our duty, I would commend a careful reading of all four volumes in this review!).

Beyond this, Beza does talk about what this duty is to some extent (though we might have hoped for a more fulsome discussion). "First of all, I think it is to be provided that every man summon himself to the judgement seat of God, regarding the plague as a foretaste of the wrath of God" (pg. 48). He sensibly applies the sixth commandment by saying that we should put neither our own lives, "nor the lives of any belonging or depending" on us in danger of infection rashly. There is much good, sanctified common sense to be gleaned here.

There is a notable lack in Beza's application, however, and this lack is felt keenly in these modern times in which the civil magistrate has come to play such a central role in society. Touching on the duties of the "Christian magistrate," Beza says that their responsibility is to "provide that those things which either breed or nourish the plague be taken away as far as... able" (pg. 51). Beza generally demonstrates what he's saying in this treatise from scripture, but on this point he does not. For us today, with the vastly extended control of the civil magistrate, we may wish that he did. While a development of this thought would have been helpful, however, even the emergence of the question is valuable. What is the duty of the civil magistrate before God? This is a key question and one for which, in the past, Reformed Churches have had a well-developed answer (see, for example, the Belgic Confession Article 36). It is a pressing question for which the church again needs to articulate an answer.

Beza's *Treatise* is worth reading, and at a mere 60 pages it is not too demanding. Moving on, we turn to another voice from the past: the Swiss Reformer Ludwig Lavater, who preached a series of series of four sermons (now republished by Reformation Heritage Books as *Disease, Scarcity, and Famine: A Reformation Perspective on God and Plagues*) to his congregation in the midst of plague and especially famine.

Lavater's opening exhortation on plague brings two points to our attention. First, that God is sovereign; and second, that God works through and is likewise sovereign over second causes. Again, in a media marketplace resolutely committed to rejecting God, these truths are reminders that we constantly need. Nothing unfolding in the present circumstances, be it the virus or the response of nations, is beyond God's control. What a comforting and wonderful thought!

The next question Lavater considers is: Why does God send disease on men? Again, it is a question that the world does not even ask, and yet we as believers must give it careful

consideration. The major answer that Lavater gives us is that God uses disease as a punishment for the wicked deeds of the world. He takes great pains to make his case, citing numerous scriptures to support it (Exod. 5; Num. 14; Lev. 26; 1 Chron. 21; Jer. 15; 21; 29; Ezek. 5; 14; 1 Cor. 11; Rev. 6; 16). According to Lavater: “Those who carefully unfold the histories will immediately discover that God has chastised with disease and other evils all races ... because of their contempt for His Word and their dissolute and wasted lives” (pp. 15).

As Christians committed to the truth of the Word of God, these are weighty arguments that we must seriously consider. Is Covid-19 a judgment from God for our wickedness? Does God punish the wicked with such things? The answer from scripture is clearly “yes,” and yet this answer alone does not represent the full council of God. Certainly, as Lavater later says, a time of disease and affliction is always a good time for reflection and repentance (if only the nations of the earth would have such a conviction!). According to Ecclesiastes, however, discerning the divine motives behind such afflictions is not so straightforward. In Ecclesiastes 9:2 we read: “It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil.... This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all” (RSV). So too in Ecclesiastes 9:11 we read “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong... but time and chance happen to them all.” There is, then, a common curse in this fallen world afflicting the just and the righteous alike. Practically, what this means is that we may not automatically assume that an affliction of disease is a direct or specific judgment of God. A time of sickness and trouble, whether individual or communal, is certainly a time for self-examination and repentance, but (arguably) it is not God’s will that we presume we are being specifically punished for something. Lavater’s meditation could—perhaps—have done with more balance on this point.

Nevertheless, he still offers a number of other helpful and thought-provoking applications. He notes that God may use widespread disease to examine and test the faith of his people. God also uses such times to powerfully remind us that life is temporary and fleeting: “For this is certain, that we are absolutely going to depart from this world, but when, where, and how is uncertain” (pp. 25). Similarly, such times are humbling to the pride of man. Whole cities and nations may be laid low by a microbe, and that is a powerful reminder of our curse and of God’s might over and above whatever technology we have or what progress we may have made. Difficult times may be used for spiritual quickening, they may wean us from our love of the world, and they are reminders of the ultimate and coming judgment. In other words, a time of widespread disease is a time when a fertile field for spiritual meditation is laid out before God’s people, and is used of God in our hearts

and lives. We would do well to pause, reflect on our own lives, and apply these meditations for ourselves.

As Lavater goes on in his homily, he affirms that “God instituted medicine to protect, preserve, and restore man’s health” (pp. 34), but he balances this consideration by saying that our care for this life should not be greater than our anticipation of the life to come. In times of disease, as we see that life is truly temporary in a powerful way, we should be reminded of the fact that to die is gain. In Philippians 1:21, the Apostle thus says: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” The trials of this life are therefore a constant reminder of the perfections of the next.

Similar to Beza, duty is a keynote in Lavater’s consideration of how we ought to conduct ourselves in a time of widespread disease. “We are absolutely right to use means that serve to protect and preserve life. Yet we must diligently be on guard that those means to which we flee are not opposed to the Word of God” (pp. 42-43). So then, a time of plague is a time to pour out much prayer to God; but it is also a time to serve and help those who are suffering.

One thing that Lavater says, which is a particular challenge to us today, is to point out the importance of public worship in a time of widespread disease. “We must not approve of the fact that those who have recovered from disease are kept away from sanctuaries by their fear of contagion. For from where can more efficacious comforts be drawn than from the sacred sermons?... Whatever happens, we Christians long ago learned from sacred literature what our duty is when disease arises.... Heads of households should exhort their children and, indeed, their whole family to frequent the sacred assemblies” (pp.46-48).

In a time when many churches have closed their doors, Lavater’s comments ought to give us cause to stop and think. Is widespread disease a justifiable reason to stop worshipping together? Without undermining the gravity of Covid-19 and the death that it brings, it does not compare with the danger of plague faced by previous generations. In times past, huge proportions of populations have died by plague. As you read Lavater, you certainly get a sense of this as he counsels God’s people in light of the nearness of death. And yet, in spite of the vastly greater danger that they faced, in Lavater’s judgment, worship was not to be neglected—rather it became all the more critical.

Thinking on this brings before us a very difficult question. It is a question that is not at all comfortable, but it is also one that we cannot ignore. It is deserving of our consideration, and indeed it is one that we are duty bound to answer. The question is simply: is the cessation of worship truly a justifiable

and righteous response to Covid-19? Certainly we should responsibly care for one another, and do what we can to avoid sickness and making other people sick, but does the cessation of worship fall in to that category?

There are considerations for us today that were not an issue in Lavater's time, and in this sense we face a different set of challenges than he did. A governmental lockdown, for instance, was not an issue that he had to consider. The civil magistrate in our day has become far larger and more controlling, there can be no question about that. That is an added layer for us to consider that Lavater does not address. Nevertheless, it is a situation to which we are called to respond.

As to his sermons on scarcity and famine, Lavater essentially argues that both are sent by God as judgment (e.g. Lev 26, Deut 28, Amos 4), and that we must respond with repentance. Again, Lavater expresses a desire to specifically identify the reasons for God's judgment in these things: "In all public calamities to which the human race is subject, two things especially come to be considered: by whom and for what reason these evils befall the human race" (pp.85). As a general principle, he says, famine is a punishment for sin (pp.88), which is a claim he supports from the Law and the Prophets. He speaks of contempt for God's Word, greed, oppression of the poor, fraud, pride, and other sins as being specific targets for God's righteous judgment.

In spite of these hard words, and even his applying of this judgment to the people of God, Lavater helpfully points out that "the pious and faithful must not despair, as though God is so offended by their sins that there is no place left for help and mercy" (pp.109). He then offers a series of helpful instructions as to how we ought to live in light of these things. I would heartily commend this selection of sermons, and believe that it will furnish the reader with a rich field of biblical meditation in a day when such seems to be lacking. Our brethren at Reformation Heritage Books have done a good work in bringing these previously untranslated sermons back to the Church at large.

It is in turning now to the third volume of our review that we begin to explore answers to some of the more contemporary questions that both Beza and Lavater naturally did not address. *Worship and Witness in Crisis: Has the Church Failed the Covid Test?* is a helpful, thoughtful, and robust collection of essays from a range of pastors and other Christians based in the United Kingdom. To start with, I would thoroughly commend this book to all believers. As the title tends to suggest, these articles represent the view that the church in the UK generally has failed to respond well in the present crisis. However, while the authors certainly take this view, they express it in a way that is measured, compassionate, humble, gracious, and—ultimately—hopeful. As Vogan and Hyde put it in the introduction: "In seeking to provoke prayerful

reflection on the church's response, *Worship and Witness in Crisis* is neither complacent nor condemnatory. It does not list our woes, apportion blame, or excoriate any particular scapegoats. Yet reflection is called for" (pp. 13).

Along these lines, Douglas Somerset's essay "How may the church preserve unity in the midst of disagreement?" is vastly useful, and offers an excellent set of principles for the Church to follow as we inevitably discuss, work through, and disagree with one another in the midst of this trial. He helpfully exhorts us to be humble, to beware of division, to maintain a sense of proportion, and to continue steadfastly in ordinary Christian work. This essay may just be the most important contribution of the book, to my mind, for it lays the ground of maintaining harmony in the church, and should—if followed—enable the right context for a full and free discussion of all the other issues that are facing the church in the midst of this crisis.

The other essays in the book helpfully delve into many of the other kinds of issues we are facing. Chapter 3 by Matthew J. Hyde offers a robust answer to the question: "Should the church ever suspend public worship?" Hyde makes a clear and compelling theological and historical case against suspending worship, before thoughtfully discussing some practical considerations. This chapter helpfully presses the issues at stake here, and leaves no space for neglect. One must either agree, or offer a good counter-case, and every body of elders the world over would do well to take up the challenge. In Chapter 4, Peter C. Wilkins considers an even more focused question: "How important is it for believers to gather together physically to worship God?" In light of the rise of broadcasting technology, this is an important question. Wilkins makes the case well from scripture that physically gathering is essential for worship, and offers a range of thoughtful observations on the limitations of "gathering virtually." Again—there can be no question that every single elder in the church today needs to take these insights seriously, and the authors are to be commended for raising the issues at stake here.

From Chapter 5 onwards, the essays tend to focus more on how the Church intersects and engages with the broader civil society in the midst of these challenges. The book continues the helpful trend of using specific questions as titles for each essay, and these questions include: "How should church and state interact during a crisis?" (Chapter 5); "Exactly how much must the church render to Caesar?" (Chapter 6); "What does loving our neighbour look like in a pandemic?" (Chapter 7); "Is it ever unloving to go to church?" (Chapter 8); "How far has our culture impacted the church's response to the pandemic?" (Chapter 9); and, finally, "How can we move on from this crisis?" (Chapter 10).

Time, and my already over-blown word count, would escape me to delve deeply into the points raised in each one of these chapters. MacColl in Chapter 5 offers a convincing

theological and historical argument that the civil authorities have overstepped their bounds in telling the church to close her doors. Matthew Vogan pushes the point home further in Chapter 6: “We may not be experiencing outright hostility and ill-treatment because of the church’s beliefs. Yet if the church chooses to stand on the principle of its spiritual independence we will begin to face civil penalties. The idea that we have liberty to surrender to the state until the point that they forbid preaching the gospel is fanciful. The more we give to the state the more they are encouraged to take” (pp.190). Strong words, and yet certainly in Australia we have watched this very scenario unfold before our eyes.

Overall, to my mind, this volume does not represent any particularly new or innovative thinking, but this is by no means a weakness. It rather seems to be a fresh and powerful application of time-honoured reformed principles to the present crisis, and with that in mind I have few real criticisms to make. The title of the work poses the question: has the Church Failed the Covid Test? By the standards of reformed orthodoxy, these essays make a compelling case to suggest that, yes, she has failed. The question might then be asked: Why? In light of the twin themes of worship and the authority of the civil magistrate running through this volume, we might suggest that it is on exactly these two issues that our churches are in danger of losing their reformed distinctiveness. Certainly, it would seem that the church needs to give renewed attention to these areas, and this volume is definitely a helpful contribution to that end. I would commend it as recommended reading to anyone willing to listen to my commendation!

The fourth and final volume of our review, entitled: *Coronavirus and the Leadership of the Christian Church: A Sacred Trust Broken*, is another contemporary collection of essays, although one which—overall—takes on a more confrontational character than *Worship and Witness*. In these essays the authors pull no punches, and throw the theological gauntlet down to the church. To my mind, this approach has at least one significant advantage, but it also comes with a significant disadvantage.

The advantage is that the authors offer fulsome, challenging, and biblically credible answers to the questions and difficulties facing the church today. They will be hard answers to swallow for many, but at least they leave no significant questions unanswered. In Chapter 1, Ernest Springer asks the most significant question of all: “Why has the Church Cancelled Biblical Worship?” While his definition of worship, taking up just a single paragraph, could be more developed, the essence of his argument is clear and compelling: “One rationale put forth is that we are subject to those God has placed in authority and are to obey them in all things lawful, not contrary to the Bible. That is true, but clearly the government *has* directed us to neglect the public worship of God

and do something that is contrary to Scripture” (pp.32). For those favouring submission to government mandates to cease worship, Springer’s insight here is one demanding an answer, and one which it must be said seems to remain unanswered or unconsidered by many.

In Chapter 2, Joel E. Yeager gives his own professional analysis of the mainstream response to Covid-19 from a medical perspective. He lays out what appears to be a fairly robust body of evidence to argue that Covid-19 has a higher than reported infection rate, and lower than reported death rate; that comorbidities are a key determining factor in the majority of deaths; that masks are ineffective; and that the idea of many people being asymptomatic carriers of the disease is a myth. Whatever you may think of Yeager’s analysis, to my mind at least one thing is certain here: the mainstream narrative is not accommodating healthy, professional debate when it comes to the response of our medical profession to Covid-19. This in itself is immensely concerning, as are the sorts of very credible questions that Yeager raises.

In Chapter 3, Daniel O’Roark opens up the issue of “fear,” using the strong kind of words that are characteristic of this book: “During the Covid-19 pandemic, the broader Church often mimicked (in greater or lesser degrees) the fear of the world in their thoughts, words, and deeds” (pp.113). Does he have a point? While it may or may not be a totally fair comment to make, certainly every Christian and Church should give themselves sincerely to self-examination on this. O’Roark could have strengthened his case by considering more fully the arguments of those who might differ with him in principle, but he nonetheless poses important questions of his own, and makes his point powerfully. When others correct us, there may be errors in the way that they have approached us, but it is our duty to hear them out and search our own hearts. A careful reading of Chapter 3 with this in mind will be profitable for all believers.

In Chapter 4, Yeager raises the important question of the Biblical Limitations of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power, and it represents another useful exposition of the orthodox reformed perspective on the power of the Civil Magistrate. As Kuyperian, and seemingly theonomic, this article certainly offers clear answers: “Given the preceding discussion, it should be evident that arbitrary quarantine of the multitude of a healthy and asymptomatic populace by a central authority without due process is absolutely unbiblical and unlawful.... Able-bodied, healthy men and women have been deprived of their right and duty before God to work and take dominion of the earth.... Even if Covid-19 was the ‘plague of all plagues,’ the civil magistrates cannot in any manner interfere with the ecclesiastical authority of the church, through her lawfully ordained officers, to decide as to what she should do in that circumstance” (pp.154-6).

These and other claims are certainly weighty, and not without credibility. This book deserves a careful reading, and will be of real benefit to those willing to do so. “The writers of this work desire that it serves as a primer and guide for the future of the Christian Church. It is our prayerful hope that Church leadership will take this to heart as coming from brethren who offer respect and honor for the serious undertaking of shepherding the flock entrusted to them by God” (pp.18). Whether you agree with all their conclusions or not, in *A Sacred Trust Broken* the authors have made an important contribution to the broader discussion of Covid-19 responses in the Church at large.

The disadvantage of the book, at least in the opinion of this reader, is that it could be more effective and fulsome in engaging with and addressing the positions and opinions of those who differ in judgment, and also perhaps a gentler tone at times (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25) might promote a more open ear to those who might otherwise find this volume hard to receive.

In conclusion, I would heartily recommend these volumes to the Church, and especially to the officers of the Church. Careful, prayerful thought is needed in light of the challenges before us today, and these books will certainly be profitable to that end. “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Pr 27:17). Soli Deo Gloria.

Review: Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020). Hardback, 672 pp. ISBN 978-1-4335-6003-3. \$60.00. Reviewed by Lane Keister (OPC), Pastor of Mومence Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Mومence, IL.

Lately, there has been a very welcome resurgence in publications concerning covenant theology. While it is a bit of a puzzle as to why Reformed authors ever flagged in their writing about the subject, it must nevertheless be admitted that the new millennium has seen quite a few more treatments of this central backbone of the Bible than has been common in previous decades. The highly useful annotated bibliography which John Muether contributes to this volume (598–622) covers most of the relevant literature. I would only add a few excellent recent publications, some of which are republications of earlier works, and others are brand new treatments.¹

1. See the facsimile of William Strong’s *A Discourse of the Two Covenants in the Westminster Assembly Facsimile Series* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011, original 1678); John Colquhoun’s two volumes, *The Covenant of Works* and *The Covenant of Grace*, both edited by Don Kistler, and published by The Northampton Press (2021 and 2020 respectively); and Jon Bonker’s volume *Ruin and Redemption* (Lulu Press, 2021), which, while self-published, constitutes an excellent summary of covenant theology based on the old classics of John Ball, Francis Roberts, Thomas Boston, and many others.

What is unique about the work reviewed is that it is a compilation of articles from authors associated with one set of seminaries in America, the Reformed Theological Seminaries. Thirteen articles cover the biblical material: one on the covenant of redemption, two on the covenant of works, one each on the *protoevangelium*, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and five on the new covenant (one on the prophetic material, the remaining four on the New Testament books). Seven articles cover the historical understandings of covenant theology: early church, medieval church, Reformation theology, post-Reformation developments, Dutch Reformed, Barth/Torrances, and recent theology. Seven articles address parallel issues and theological studies: ancient near eastern background, second temple Judaism, New Perspective(s) on Paul, Israel and the nations, dispensationalism, new covenant theologies, and assurance/sacraments. Lastly, Kevin DeYoung answers the “why” question, which is followed by Muether’s bibliographical essay. In the big picture, there are few major issues left unaddressed. A couple of small points on the coverage: it would have been nice to include discussion of covenant theology in the Psalms (Psalms 78 and 136 are obvious texts), in the much-controverted wisdom literature (what about creation/covenant theology in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, not to mention Song of Songs?), and the general epistles other than the Johannine epistles. The covenants feature prominently in the Petrine literature, for example, when Peter uses Old Testament language to describe New Testament realities, or when he describes how the Old Testament prophets regarded their own work in relation to New Testament believers. However, this is but a minor quibble. The overall assessment is that this work is one of the most comprehensive and helpful treatments of covenant theology ever assembled. That it comes from many different authors should not appear to the reader as a liability, since both agreements and disagreements about covenant theology within the Reformed community are clearly on display, thus allowing the reader to discern which points are of more central importance, and which are more peripheral. In general, the authors are representative of the Reformed community, showing mostly unity and some diversity.

Theologically, the authors are confessionally Reformed, firmly non-Klinean (though, thankfully, much more courteous to republication views than some recent shriller voices), and opposed to Federal Vision and New Perspective(s) on Paul. In terms of scholarship, there do not appear to this reviewer to be any significant gaps, though there are always more sources that could be consulted. The authors are to be commended for their judicious selection of interlocutors.

It is not advisable to skip the Forward, written by Ligon Duncan. In it, he propounds a view of the theological disciplines reflected in the rest of the work: a fully interdependent

view of the disciplines, especially those of biblical theology and systematic theology. Covenant theology is equatable with Reformed theology (23), and it is also a blending of biblical and systematic theology (24).

The introduction, written by the editors, firmly places the audience of this volume in the church (32). I would add that a more preliminary volume (such as Jonty Rhodes's excellent little introduction to covenant theology) would be necessary for most church-goers to read before being able to understand this volume. The volume is most easily understood by educated pastors, though laymen who have a thorough grounding in confessional Reformed orthodoxy will also profit greatly by it.

The editors make the all-important point, reiterated often in the volume, that covenant theology is about gaining the "something more" to which Adam always looked forward, the consummated state of glory (34). Therefore, covenant theology is eschatological, as well as historical; technical, as well as practical (34–38).

Guy Richard's article on the covenant of redemption lays out the biblical arguments for understanding such an agreement to be present in eternity. Richard is particularly sensitive to the common objection that such an agreement posits three distinct wills in God (Robert Letham objects to the covenant of redemption along these lines).² Richard's answer to the objection is that if intra-Trinitarian *dialogue* is possible without threatening the union of will in the essence of God, then neither would a *covenant*, an agreement being a form of dialogue (48–50, 59–61). In fact, he warns of the opposite danger: "[W]e cannot say that the covenant of redemption is unnecessary on account of the unity of the divine mind and will. To say this is to overlook the relations of opposition within the Trinity and to lose the threeness of God in his oneness" (60). This claim might be a tad overstated, since folk like Letham have posited an intra-Trinitarian counsel as an alternative to an agreement. Nevertheless, it could be doubted whether Letham's formulation is really an improvement on the *pactum salutis*.

Richard Belcher tackles the covenant of works in its Old Testament context. He argues, rightly, that there is a covenant of works, given the identification of the parties, the conditions, the blessings and curses, a principle of representation, and the signs (64–66). Hosea 6:7, when interpreted most plausibly, refers to the covenant of works (66–67). Mixing grace and works in the pre-redemptive covenant of works is dangerous business (69). The covenant of works is foundational for the covenant of grace, and the work of Christ (70–1). Getting it wrong here will have drastically bad consequences for our theology of salvation. In this regard, the Federal Vision comes in for critique (75–77) for the first time, as the covenant of works is one area of doctrine which the FV distorts.

Guy Waters picks up the threads of the covenant of works

in the New Testament, focusing quite expectedly on 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5, offering a thoroughly Gaffnian/Vosian view of the passages (81–90). He also takes an initial stab at the controverted question of whether Paul sees the Mosaic economy as a republication of the covenant of works, a question he answers in the negative. What about Galatians 3, then, one might ask? Waters answers the objection by understanding Paul to be talking about a more narrow view of the law than as a covenantal administration (94). This is somewhat similar to Cornel Venema's view that Paul is dealing with a misunderstanding of the law, not the law itself. Whether one agrees with Waters on this point or not, he offers a coherent reading of Paul on the covenant of works.

Next, John Currid offers a brief treatment of the *proto-evangelium* of Genesis 3:15. He understands the passage to be the first promulgation of the covenant of grace, offering Adam and Eve what they should have gained, but lost, and pronouncing judgment on the serpent. Most of the treatment is non-controversial. However, I must register a small quibble about his statement that the conflict between Eve and the woman had already begun during the temptation of Genesis 3:1–7 (104). It seems better to understand the *proto-evangelium* itself as the beginning of the enmity between Eve and the serpent, and the simultaneous breaking of the alliance temporarily forged between Satan and Eve during the temptation.

Miles Van Pelt helpfully defines the Noahic covenant as "a universal, unilateral, nonredemptive administration of the covenant of grace restoring and securing the principle of common grace in this world that was suspended during the judgment ordeal of the flood" (112). Somewhat controversially, he argues that the covenant of Genesis 6 is distinct from the covenant in Genesis 9 (118). This is based on the provisions being different, as it is just Noah in view in Genesis 6 versus all of creation in Genesis 9 (118). With others, he notices and accents the de-creation/re-creation structure of the Flood, making in the process an excellent argument for a world-wide Flood (120, fn. 50). He argues against seeing the incident in the tent as an echo of Adam's fall, claiming that Noah was more sinned against than sinning (131). If this were the case, however, then why mention Noah's nakedness and Shem and Japheth's solution to it? This chapter will certainly promote clear-headed and deep thinking on the subject of this iteration of the covenant of grace.

John Scott Redd is at pains to stress the unity of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12–22. While he doesn't mention Paul Williamson's work, one can detect, perhaps, the invisible sparring partner, as Williamson holds to two distinct

2. See Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 431–9, though note his softening towards the doctrine on page 438.

covenants in Genesis 15 and Genesis 17.³ Redd understands Genesis 12 to be the introduction, Genesis 15 to be the ratification, Genesis 17 to be an amendment, and Genesis 22 to be a confirmation (136–44). The rest of the article places the Abrahamic covenant in the context of the next covenants with Moses and David, as well as the new covenant.

To J. Nicholas Reid falls the somewhat unenviable task of explicating the Mosaic covenant, unenviable because there are so very many difficulties attached to the concept of law in the Bible. While recognizing the exile as “one of the key entry points” (150) in the discussion of conditionality in the Mosaic covenant, Reid’s position is opposed to that of republication, though he is generous and fair in his discussion of Kline, among others. Reid is very precise in locating the relationship of conditions to blessings in the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. His assessment is worth quoting in full: “[T]he difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is not the presence of conditions in the former and the absence of conditions in the latter. Rather, the distinction is the relationship of the conditions to the fundamental blessings of the covenant. In the covenant of works, the conditions must be met to receive the blessings of the covenant. In the covenant of grace, the blessings are received, and then the conditions are to flow out of gratefulness for the received blessings” (154). Reid explains the three parts of law, the three uses of the law, the summary of the law, the place of exile, and then carefully critiques Kline’s views on republication. Only one point I could wish he would have addressed is the quotation from Brian Estelle about the breakability of the Mosaic covenant (169).

Richard Belcher calls the Davidic covenant “a high point of Old Testament theology” (173). The joy of this covenant bleeds through Belcher’s treatment of it, as he connects the Davidic promises backwards to Abraham (183), and forwards to Christ (184–8). He makes an intriguing suggestion about Jeroboam’s sin: “Jeroboam disobeyed God by setting up opposing places of worship in the northern kingdom in Dan and Bethel to keep his people from worshipping in Jerusalem. This nullified God’s promises to him” (185, fn. 63).

In many ways, Michael McKelvey’s treatment of the new covenant in the major prophets functions as a hinge between the book’s treatment of the two Testaments. As a covenant promised, the new covenant is firmly situated in Old Testament revelation, and yet it also points forward to the New Testament. He argues that “the new covenant is a central concern of Prophetic Literature, as well as of the whole Old Testament” (192). The earlier covenants are foundational and

contextual for the new covenant (*ibid.*). McKelvey then expounds Jeremiah 30–33, Ezekiel 34, 36–7, and the servant of the Lord in Isaiah as representative passages that form the basis of our understanding of the new covenant. By and large, these comments are insightful, especially as geared towards Baptist interlocutors. I would register one small dissent. McKelvey argues that Ezekiel’s temple (Ezekiel 40–48) is a future temple (200). One does not measure a temple that does not exist. It is rather the heavenly, archetypal temple, measured at a time when there was no earthly temple to God existing on the earth.

Michael Kruger offers a wonderful exposition of the Gospels as covenant documents. This is a very refreshing take on the gospels that thoroughly connects them with the Old Testament writings, and “focus on the life of the covenant mediator, the deliverance of God’s covenant people, the inauguration of the covenant, and a new law delivered by the covenant mediator” (213). The covenant of grace is no longer ethnically limited, as the case of Zacchaeus proves (219, where Kruger insightfully points out that “It is Zacchaeus’s repentance and faith, not his ethnicity, that identifies him as a ‘son of Abraham’”). His synthetic statement at the end eloquently attests to the power of covenant theology in the gospels: “[T]he covenant concept provides the theological architecture of the Gospel accounts—it is the invisible foundation of the house, holding everything in its place” (226).

Guy Waters’s second entry in this book focuses on broader covenant theology in Paul, whereas his first article was on the covenant of works in the NT. Waters holds to a certain centrality of covenant theology in Paul (227–8), an architectonic principle (*ibid.*). Waters then looks at the OT iterations of the covenant of grace as Paul sees them: one covenant with various administrations, not neglecting or distorting the covenant of works, which underlines the first Adam–last Adam typology. Waters agrees with other authors in the book and with Venema that Paul corrects a misreading of the Mosaic covenant, rather than rejecting the Mosaic covenant itself (234–9).

It does not take much reading in Hebrews to see just how important covenant theology is in that book, as Robert Cara amply demonstrates, despite those who are naysayers on the topic. Cara argues that there are fully twenty-five references to covenants in the book of Hebrews (248). This represents a viewpoint of contrast within continuity (249–51). The Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants all make appearances in the book. The purpose of Hebrews in utilizing covenantal language is to connect vertical (earth–heaven) with horizontal (historical progression) to describe the priesthood of Christ squarely at the intersection of these realities (261). This is an important aspect of Christ’s high-priestly work that is often neglected.

The last biblical-theological article examines the Johannine letters and Revelation. Greg Lanier argues that the concepts

3. See Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenant Development in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP, 2007).

of covenantal theology are present in this part of the canon even if the words themselves are rare (267). The Trinitarian God makes covenants with His people, which covenants will reach a glorious conclusion and consummation in the new heavens and the new earth. In fact, Revelation ties together all the threads of Scripture (285).

The historical section of the volume proceeds in chronological order to function as a sort of history of interpretation of the covenants of Scripture. Ligon Duncan's article on covenant theology in the early church is a condensing of his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (completed at the University of Edinburgh in 1995). His overall assessment is that "the covenants were important in early Christianity on their own grounds and were deployed for their own hermeneutical, catechetical, apologetic, and polemic purposes" (291). Some scholars believe that covenant theology played little to no role in the early church fathers. Duncan shows from Clement, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus (whom he actually calls a covenant theologian, 302), and Tertullian that covenant theology was alive and well in the early church. It is important to know that Reformed treatments of covenant theology did not arise *de novo*.

Medieval theology is not exactly known for covenantal categories. What is there is more covert or implicit, without any kind of emphasis, as Douglas Kelly informs us (312–3). The way Kelly gets at the question is through the treatment of Scripture in Aquinas, Lombard, Gregory the Great; and the doctrine of God in Augustine and Aquinas. To me, it looks like there are echoes of covenant theology in the Medieval theologians, but they forgot how important it is to understanding the Bible. Kelly does not directly address the issue of why this is the case, but I would venture a guess that the Medieval quadriga might have something to do with it.

Covenant theology comes into its own in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, as Howard Griffith and D. Blair Smith demonstrate. Griffith looks at Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin in their respective treatments of covenant theology, whereas Smith examines more topically the development of certain ideas, such as the covenant of works, the *pactum salutis*, and the federal theology of men like Cocceius. Both authors show a high respect for the developments that occurred, and the clarity of thought that resulted.

Bruce Baugus looks at the Dutch Reformed tradition, as exemplified in Junius, Gomarus, Voetius, Cloppenburg, Cocceius, Witsius, a'Brakel, and some of the later theologians more briefly, such as Bavinck, Kuyper, and Schilder. Most helpful is the treatment of the debate between Voetius and Cocceius on the nature of Old Testament forgiveness and the structure of Old Testament covenants (392–5). Also helpful is his defense of the covenant of redemption from the critique of intra-Trinitarian tri-theism: "There is just one divine

will, but there is also a manner of willing that corresponds to each divine person's distinct mode of subsistence (*modus subsistendi*) and working (*modus agendi*)" (397). It should be noted here that the word "mode" being used in this context does not imply modalism. Modalism does not acknowledge distinct persons in the Godhead, whereas orthodox theologians have often used the term "mode of subsistence" to describe the distinct persons of the Godhead.

Moving up in time to the twentieth century (it might have been nice to see how nineteenth century theologians in the Princeton tradition, as well as formidable theologians like Patrick Fairbairn handle covenant theology, but one cannot have everything). Mark McDowell looks at Karl Barth and the Torrance brothers as "the most serious challenge to an account of covenant theology as it is articulated by the federal divines and taught in the post-Reformation tradition" (401). After placing Barth's ideas on covenant theology in the context of his complete work, McDowell issues some trenchant critiques, such as the missing Adam typology (413), and the flattening out of covenant theology (414, much like FV theologians do). With regard to the Torrances, McDowell agrees with Muller's dismantling of the historical-theological problems in their theology, in addition to answering their objections to the covenant of works.

Michael Allen looks at very recent developments in John Webster and Michael Horton, treating both very fairly and thoughtfully. Allen is, in addition, mostly positive towards the contributions of both, recognizing that Webster digs deep into the essence of covenant theology by asking questions about participation in union with Christ, ontology as related to revelation, the Creator-creature distinction, and Christology itself. As for Horton, Allen notes the interdisciplinary approach Horton offers, the speech-act theory Horton espouses, and the questions of identity so important to modern man. Allen offers a very stimulating set of principles for utilizing covenant theology in the future (443–4).

The third major section of the book, giving readers various ancillary studies, starts off with J. Nicholas Reid's treatment of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) covenantal material. Since the 1950's, many studies have sought to place the Bible's covenants within a context of ANE treaties and covenants. The idea of such studies is to clarify the types of covenants in the Bible. The process is fraught with difficulty and danger, however. Dating covenants to their rightful era alone is tricky. Besides this, there is the perpetual danger of forcing biblical material to conform to ANE literary and cultural standards, when there might in fact be an apologetic against the ANE materials. Reid is well aware of these dangers, to the point where he warns scholars of all such studies in the following words: "While the decipherment of cuneiform remains a significant development in scholarship, ancient Near Eastern evidence, in its current state, remains incapable of solving our key exegetical and

theological debates about the nature of the biblical covenants. Put differently, the background, while informative, should not be made the foreground of covenant theology” (448). In his examination of the ANE material, Reid is just as quick to point out the significant differences of ANE material with the biblical material as the similarities. Perhaps most importantly, Reid challenges the received wisdom (from Moshe Weinfeld and Meredith Kline) of categorizing all covenants as either “land grants” or “suzerain-vassal treaties” (460–3).

Peter Lee’s treatment of Second Temple Judaism (2TJ) in its covenantal assertions has as its direct target the category of “covenantal nomism” coined by E.P. Sanders. Lee measures Sanders against the sources and finds him wanting. As others have done before, Lee deftly points out the overly rigid structure of covenantal nomism as a way of describing 2TJ. In addition to obviously legalistic materials in 2TJ, the problem of Sanders’s own lack of systematic-theological expertise is exposed: covenantal nomism is itself legalistic as Sanders describes it. Lee levels similar critiques against James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright. Lee’s conclusion is that Paul’s battle with 2TJ is very similar to the Reformers’ battle against Roman Catholicism (483).

What are New Testament scholars saying about covenant theology these days? Benjamin Gladd addresses this question. A large part of this article addresses questions of the New Perspective(s) on Paul, as well as the apocalyptic proposals of those such as J. Louis Martyn and Douglas Campbell. Gladd finds all these proposals insufficient (though he agrees that we can learn from them), especially with regard to standard faith questions (500). More positively, Gladd notes the heightened attention in NT scholarship to questions of OT quotation, allusion, and echo (rightly pointing out and building on Richard Hays’s seminal contributions to such studies).

The relationship of Israel and the nations is the subject of O. Palmer Robertson’s article. He makes an intriguing suggestion that the genealogies of Scripture are historical and covenantal in nature (505–7). The reason this is directly relevant to his subject matter is his conclusion about genealogies: “In sum, this genealogical aspect of the covenants underscores both the reality of redemptive history and the inclusion of peoples from all nations alongside Israel in God’s covenants” (507). Robertson adds then, that the genealogies of the Bible function as the concrete record of the fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham, both in terms of the number of the blessed seed, and also the blessing Abraham was to be upon the nations (506). This is a great help to those who wonder why such long lists of genealogies are included in God’s revelation. The rest of the chapter details the relationship of Jew to Gentile in the various administrations of the covenant of grace.

I was very happy to see that an entire chapter was devoted to the subject of dispensationalism, a viewpoint still

quite popular in the West, despite many competent dismantlings of its arguments, and its fundamentally discontinuous view of redemptive history. Indeed, given covenantalism’s primary view of continuity among various administrations, Michael Glodo is right to say that dispensationalism is “covenant theology’s primary rival system” (526). Glodo’s treatment of dispensationalism is fair and insightful. He describes it (525–39) before critiquing it (539–50). Progressive dispensationalism is not forgotten either. Glodo properly rejects the language of supersession (545–6), since it does not adequately describe covenant theology’s viewpoint of organic and developing, but fundamentally continuous relationship of OT Israel and the NT church. This chapter functions as an excellent introduction and refutation of dispensationalism, and will be the first port of call I will point out to people interested in the question.

Another form of discontinuity that has gained much traction in recent years is that of New Covenant Theology (NCT), advocated in various forms by such highly respected scholars as D.A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and P.T. O’Brien. Scott Swain clearly and incisively addresses these questions in the penultimate chapter. The idea here is of fundamental discontinuity between old covenant and new covenant. Implications include a rejection of the Ten Commandments as binding on Christians (see 557). A key text in the debate is Jeremiah 31:31–34, which Swain treats to a masterful exegesis (559–62).

The final full chapter is Derek Thomas’s treatment of covenant, assurance, and the sacraments. This is a “so what?” chapter, in that Thomas’s burden is to prove the applicability and usefulness of covenant theology in the life of the believer. The sacramental signs offer objective promises capable of appropriation by faith, and improvement by grace. The covenants were meant for sinners, as the wonderful quotation from Dr. John “Rabbi” Duncan shows, concerning the Lord’s Supper as being meant for sinners (584, quoting William Barclay).

Kevin DeYoung offers an afterword concerning the why of covenant theology. In this, he sums up covenant theology as a way of helping us see the continuity of Scripture, presenting a familial structure to salvific promises, and foregrounding faith (598). Lastly, John R. Muether offers an annotated bibliography on scholarship on covenant theology. This is broken down into helpful sections of various historical periods, and includes both recent and older scholarship. This is a great place to start for anyone interested in delving deeper into certain aspects of covenant theology.

This volume has only a very few (and tiny) shortcomings. It is a heavy-weight entrant into the discussions of covenant theology, and should not be ignored, either by pastors or by scholars. Educated lay-people who have already read some of the primers mentioned above can also gain enormous benefit from the volume.

Review: Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2020). Hardback, 688 pp. ISBN 978-1629956510. \$49.99. Scott Cook is the pastor of Oconee Presbyterian Church and Instructor in Apologetics and Historical Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Westminster Seminary professor of theology Vern Poythress has written an idiosyncratic approach to the doctrine of God. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* draws together various themes in Poythress' thought, applying them to the attributes of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. *The Mystery of the Trinity* is an important work in at least two ways. First, Poythress is a Reformed scholar of the first rank. Poythress has garnered respect in the Reformed world for his academic credentials, contributions to a Reformed understanding of science, and his sincere defense of the inerrancy of Scripture. *The Mystery of the Trinity*, therefore, deserves careful reading by Reformed pastors and scholars. Second, *The Mystery of the Trinity* is worthy of note because of the debates surrounding Classical Theism in the American Reformed community. John Frame and Scott Oliphint have challenged the Confessional approach to the doctrine of God, commonly called Classical Theism. Classical Theism is both the historic Christian approach to the doctrine of God, as its name suggests. Classical Theism is present in the Reformed Confessions, both in the British and Continental traditions.

Where does Dr. Poythress stand on the question of Classical Theism? *The Mystery of the Trinity* shows that he, like Frame and Oliphint, rejects Classical Theism. As this review will demonstrate, Poythress rejects all forms of Classical Theism, whether the Aristotelian formulation found in Thomas Aquinas or a more Platonic form of Classical Theism as found in St. Augustine. Poythress does not appear to appropriate the "Covenantal Properties" approach to the attributes of God that Oliphint has advocated in the past. Rather, his skepticism towards Classical Theism and his constructive approach to the Trinity is closely linked to tri-perspectivalism.

This review of *The Mystery of the Trinity* will examine the basic layout and structure of the book. Particular attention will be given to key issues in the book that are contested between Classical Theists and Theistic Mutualists. Finally, the review will address what Poythress' approach to the Trinity signals for the future of Van Tillian influenced thinkers in the Reformed community.

OUTLINE AND STRUCTURE

Poythress' books are typically well organized and written with simple, lucid prose. *The Mystery of the Trinity* is no exception.

The book contains forty-eight chapters, organized in eight parts, with five appendices. The work spans some six hundred and fifty pages, excluding bibliography and indices. "Part 1: Beginning to Consider God" lays the foundation for the book. Poythress addresses the resources for knowing God and how man may know God. "Part 2: Classical Christian Theism" develops Poythress' basic understanding of the metaphysical attributes of God. As the title of the section suggests, Classical Theism is his main dialogue partner as he articulates his understanding of the nature of God. "Part 3: The Trinity—Mysteries in Diversity" deals with the basic issues of Trinitarian theology, such as perichoresis and the indivisibility of Trinitarian actions. Part 3 is surprisingly short, filling a mere 22 pages. While Poythress discusses the trinity throughout the book, it is strange that he devoted such a small section of the book to a systematic consideration of the elements of the doctrine of the Trinity.

"Part 4: The Trinity and Language" delves into the connection between God as triune creator and the creation of human language. Those familiar with Poythress' work will not be surprised that he dedicates significant time to the relationship between God and language. "Part 5: Philosophical Conundrums" grapples with the use of philosophical language in theology proper. Poythress appears to adopt a "Christ against Philosophy" stance, advocating for theologians to remove terms from Trinitarian theology that originate in pagan philosophy whenever possible (more in this later in the review). Poythress says, for example, that "substance" is not an ideal word to describe God because of its pagan Aristotelian use in philosophy (208–209).

"Part 6: Challenges in Classical Theism" is where Poythress tackles Aquinas and the Reformed Tradition concerning Classical Theism. Poythress is less than sanguine about Thomas' approach to the doctrine of God. Poythress finds Aquinas insufficiently Biblical in his thought and far too dependent upon Aristotle. The rest of Part 6 is devoted to the doctrine of God in the Reformers, Turretin, and Charnock. "Chapter 29. Attributes in the Reformers" is possibly the least satisfying chapter in the book. Poythress commends the Reformers for their commitment to Sola Scriptura and the importance of preaching. Beyond these general comments, Poythress offers no interaction with the Reformers regarding the doctrine of God. He does not examine a single doctrine in any Reformer. Had Poythress done so, this chapter would likely have been much longer since Reformers held to Classical Theism. Some Reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, did not write on the doctrine of God in detail. What they did write, however, was in complete agreement with Classical Theism. Such details prove detrimental to Poythress' attempt to separate Reformed Theology and Classical Theism. Moreover, more detail on the Reformers would have prevented Poythress from falling into

an unfortunate “Calvin versus the Calvinists” historiography where Poythress praises Calvin but criticizes Turretin and Charnock for unbiblical, philosophical formulations of the attributes of God.

“Part 7: Dealing with Challenges” charts a pathway forward for the doctrine of God without the encumbrances of Aristotelian thought. Poythress attempts to avoid both Theistic Mutualism on the one hand and a harsh form of Classical Theism on the other hand. In Poythress’ mind, Classical Theism under-distinguishes the attributes of God in its formulation of divine simplicity. This move compromises the personality of God (442) and runs contrary to the plain sense of Scripture. He seeks to affirm much of the strengths of Classical Theism without its dependence upon philosophical speculation. For instance, Poythress rejects the idea that there are no new relations in God by virtue of the act of creation. Instead, Poythress opts for a “gentler version” of the rule that God has no new relations (461–463). The relationship between God and the world is one of transcendence. This transcendence, however, is funded by the language of Scripture, not the language of Aristotelian philosophy. Classical Theism affirms the Creator-creature distinction but then, Poythress argues, smuggles autonomous human knowledge about God through the back door by using philosophy. By contrast, a revelation-based model of the God-world relationship is content to appeal to mystery and use only the language of Scripture.

Classical Theism is in desperate need of “enhancement” according to Poythress. This enhancement comes through the introduction of mystery and the Trinity into our understanding of the attributes of God. Poythress argues for “three moves” regarding the doctrine of God: reject any idea that God is mutable or temporal, adopt the language of Classical Theism regarding God being eternal and unchanging, and enhance Classical Theism with a “Trinitarian foundation” (500). What does this model look like? God experiences change and, in some sense, has a dynamic relationship with His creation. This dynamic relationship is qualified in three ways. God is the initiator of everything that comes to pass, God is sovereign over everything that comes to pass, and God directs the goal or telos of everything that comes to pass. In other words, God is in a real relationship with His people. God experiences change in his relationships with his people. However, God remains sovereign in his relationship with His people (507–516).

Poythress’s treatment of divine simplicity demonstrates how his model of “enhancing” Classical Theism functions. In Poythress’ mind, Classical Theism has guarded against

making the attributes too distinct from each other. However, Classical Theism failed to protect against making the attributes identical to each other (553). Poythress proposes a Trinitarian (read Tri-Perspectival) reading of the unity and diversity of the attributes in God. The unity of the attributes reflects the unity, diversity, and coinherence of the persons of the Godhead (553–554). God is in the first sense identical with the attributes because God is one. However, just as the persons are one and yet distinct, so from the perspective of distinction, the “attributes are distinct from God, but in a perspectival way that also affirms unity” (554). Finally, the attributes also have a coinherent relationship with each other and with God. But Poythress argues that coinherence applies not just to the persons of the Godhead but the relationships between God and the attributes. “The perspective of coinherence,” Poythress writes, “is our present case consists in focusing on the indwelling of the attributes in God and God in the attributes. This indwelling is reflectively derivative from the indwelling of the persons of the Trinity in one another. It is coinherent. Therefore, the attributes are not separable from God” (554).

SPECIAL ISSUES

Poythress’ Theological Method: Biblicism

One of the persistent themes in *The Mystery of the Trinity* is a commitment to Biblicism.¹ Poythress expresses concern that Classical Theism draws too much from sources outside the Bible, such as Aristotle. Instead, Poythress wants to return the doctrine of God to a Biblical, Trinitarian (and Tri-Perspectival) basis. The Biblicism of Poythress’ approach manifests in many ways but is best demonstrated through his use of the resurrection.

Poythress attempt to find a basis for all of God’s attributes in the resurrection of Christ. Nearly every constructive chapter in the book ends with a reflection on how a particular aspect of the doctrine of God is expressed through the resurrection of Christ. This approach works well for some attributes, particularly the moral attributes of God, such as love or mercy. However, other attributes of God do not work well with this approach. For instance, Poythress attempts to explain divine simplicity through Christ’s resurrection.

Given that the resurrection of Christ involves the person of Christ with regard to His human nature, it is awkward to argue that the resurrection of Christ displays the simplicity of the divine nature. How can the resurrection, then, be a demonstration of the simplicity of the divine nature? The resurrection shows that Christ is divine, and, according to Poythress, the divinity of Christ in the resurrection shows forth the non-decomposability of God. It is chiefly through Thomas worshiping the risen Christ that simplicity is displayed. “God is not decomposable,” Poythress writes, “and so the worship offered by Thomas is not decomposable into

1. By Biblicism, we mean a theological method that eschews a theological or philosophical method of constructive dogmatics. Biblicism prefers unsophisticated proof-texting to a theologically or philosophically informed hermeneutic. Biblicism moves from *sola Scriptura* to *solo Scriptura* in systematic theology.

worship that he would offer to some part of God or some isolated quality of God” (75). To say that divine simplicity merits the worship of God is logically coherent. To argue that Thomas worshiped the risen Christ implies that “the resurrection of Christ display[s] the simplicity of God” is, at best, a non sequitur. Poythress’ commitment drives him to similar exegetical and theological non sequiturs throughout the book.

Poythress and Classical Theism

Where does Poythress land vis-à-vis Classical Theism? Does his approach represent a rapprochement with Classical Theism, or does Poythress follow with Frame and Oliphint in expressing antipathy towards Classical Theism? Poythress is distinct from Frame and Oliphint because he shows more respect for Classical Theism than his colleagues. However, Poythress’ model for the doctrine of God deviates from Classical Theism in several ways. He rejects the Classical Theist idea of divine simplicity. While arguing that the attributes of God are, in some sense, identical to one another, he also introduces real distinctions between the attributes in God. His use of perichoresis to describe the relationships between the attributes (546–548) entails a metaphysical distinction between the attributes. The same holds for his tri-perspectival understanding of God’s identity with the attributes. God is, in one perspective, identical with all of His attributes. From the perspectives of distinction and perichoresis, God is distinct from His attributes yet cannot be separated from them because of His coinherent relationship with them (554). Poythress also shares concerns with Theistic Personalists that Classical Theism threatens God’s personal nature. Moreover, Poythress rejects Classical Theism’s tendency toward “monadic theology.” He rejects divine immutability in favor of a more dynamic model where God responds to creation from a position of sovereignty (503–517). The immutability of God is, for Poythress, more about the unchanging moral nature of God rather than the metaphysical unchanging nature of God (59–62).

Van Tillian Apologetics and The Doctrine of God

While Presuppositionalism per se plays a minor role in the book, Poythress’ idiosyncratic approach to the doctrine of God raises the issue of the relationship between Presuppositionalism and the doctrine of God. Cornelius Van Til famously criticized Aquinas’ apologetic methodology. He argued that Aquinas capitulated to autonomous human reason by incorporating the natural theology of Aristotle into his apologetic methodology. Except for his “One Person, Three Persons” formulation, Van Til appears to have held to Classical Theism. Second and third generation Presuppositionalists debate whether it is tenable to reject a Thomistic apologetic method while accepting a (largely) Thomistic doctrine of God. Poythress argues in *The Mystery of the Trinity* that one

cannot reject autonomous reason on the one hand while accepting Classical Theism on the other hand. The influence of Aristotle is too pervasive in Classical Theism to merely accept or re-pristiniate it without significant modification. The undercurrent, therefore, of Poythress’ work appears to be that one cannot be a Presuppositionalist and a Classical Theist without some compromise of either system. While the Reformed community needs a Presuppositionalist approach that articulates a doctrine of Classical Theism as Van Til did, *The Mystery of the Trinity* is not that book.

CONCLUSION

Poythress’ *The Mystery of the Trinity* is a worthwhile read for scholars within the Reformed community who wish to engage with Classical Theism. The author of this review is a committed Classical Theist and, therefore, cannot endorse the overall program of the book. Moreover, *The Mystery of the Trinity* shows the dangers of Biblicism and over-emphasis on antithesis for the Confessional view of the doctrine of God. Furthermore, Poythress’ application of perichoresis to the relationship between the attributes is novel and potentially destabilizing to the traditional view of the Trinity. However, Poythress’ thoughtfulness and his unique approach warrants a broad interaction with his work in the scholarly community.

Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021). Hardback. xxiv + 680 pp. ISBN 978-0801097881. \$54.99. Reviewed by Harrison Perkins (PhD, Queen’s University Belfast), who is a pastor at London City Presbyterian Church, part of the online faculty in church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, and a visiting lecturer in systematic theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

Historic Reformed theology has traditionally placed such emphasis on the doctrine of the covenants that any new literature on the topic is relevant to confessional Presbyterianism. This relevance is all the more so because of the recent increased attention covenant theology has received not only in other traditions but also in biblical studies. The abundance of new literature creates a difficulty for those serving in Reformed ministries of various kinds to keep up with the new ideas and forms of expression about covenants. This review, therefore, summarizes the arguments of Daniel Block’s new volume on the biblical covenants and coordinates it to traditional Reformed thinking about the covenant theology.

Block’s massive overview of covenants in Scripture uses a biblico-theological focus to examine how the Bible’s ongoing storyline is shaped by the continuity of the various covenants between God and his people. His main argument is that there are five “acts” to the one biblical narrative, which

are the covenants. In this thesis, God's singular goal has been for humanity to have a harmonious existence with him and the cosmos. Because of sin, which seemed to derail this purpose, God used the covenants to restore and complete that original goal.

This volume consists of four parts, each focusing on a different part of the Bible's covenantal storyline. Part 1 looks at the "cosmic" and "Adamic" covenants. Part 2 examines what Block calls the Israelite covenant, which he argues is one covenant in four stages: Abraham, Sinai, Moab, and the new covenant. Part 3 explores the Davidic covenant. Finally, part 4 looks at how the New Testament interprets and extends the covenantal idea. What then are this book's strengths and weaknesses? Block's work is marked by several strong features which interestingly all have corresponding shortcomings.

First, this volume contains a mountain of exegetical material. Its focus throughout remains upon expositing the biblical texts rather than engaging with various debates from the secondary literature. The exposition is detailed, looking closely at biblical passages and how they drive forward the covenantal storyline. As the caveat to this strength, however, the amount of detail often envelopes the main argument. Too many times, the point is lost because there is such winding discussion of various aspects of the text. This caveat is not to say that detail as such overwhelms main points but merely that Block frequently failed, namely in part 2, to tie the details of his exegesis back to any thesis statements or summary points.

Second, Block wrote with clear self-awareness of his personal theological background and how this volume relates to it. He was very clear throughout that he grew up in churches that sharply divided the storyline of Scripture as though each covenant did not contribute to one providentially orchestrated narrative. This self-awareness helps readers to understand why Block argues the way he does at many points of the book.

On the other hand, this self-awareness often makes the book very unique and overwhelms some important aspects of the discussion about how to put the covenants together into one consistent storyline. This uniqueness is clear firstly in how Block clearly formulated his own version of covenant theology without any deep interaction with how the covenants have previously been used for theological construction. This leads to several weaknesses.

Primarily, Block's presentation is one sided. His thought is set off balance by a concern to correct the theology of the covenants from his personal experience. More extensive reflection upon how theologians have understood covenant may have helped him see some of his blind spots. Block is so concerned to emphasize the unity of the covenants that he fails to do justice to their differences. Throughout the section on "the Israelite covenant" each "stage" is said to renew the same covenant. This argument means that the Abrahamic,

Mosaic, and new covenants are all identical and the same covenant. This argument goes against the Scripture's explicit teaching that the Mosaic covenant differed from the Abrahamic (Gal. 3-4) and that the new covenant is not like the Mosaic covenant (Jer. 31:31-32). Although Block's desire to affirm the Scripture's unity is highly commendable, his overstated interpretation falls short of reckoning with the biblical stated contours of redemptive history. This point relates to this book's third strength.

Third, Block does make some helpful theological points. At several junctures, Block explains how he believes that Christ relates to the various covenants of the "First Testament," as he refers to the Old Testament. His view, primarily in regard to the Mosaic covenant's animal sacrifices, is that these sacrifices never in themselves obtained the forgiveness of sin but in advance sacramentally applied the forgiveness had through Christ's death (pp. 271-72, 502-11). In other words, the types of the old covenant apply the virtue, efficacy, and benefits of Christ's work of redemption, even before he wrought it in the Incarnation, as Westminster Confession 8.6 states the issue. In this respect, Block comes very close to articulating the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace. His view is further commendable because it is even clearer than many explanations from recent confessional Baptist theologians, holding to the 1689 London Baptist Confession, which radically separate the Old Testament covenants from the covenant of grace, often failing to state how or even that the types and ordinances of the old economy applied Christ's benefits to believers.

Still, the corresponding weakness on this point is that Block regularly comes short of full-orbed traditional theology. Perhaps the most obvious example here is that he rejects a covenant between God and Adam, a view held by patristic theologians as well as in our Reformed confessions. After outlining good arguments for seeing a covenant between God and Adam, Block simply dismisses them as unpersuasive. This contributes to the individual uniqueness of this work, since he does not argue against the significant exegetical reasons he himself produced but simply waves them away in preference of his own idiosyncratic view. Even on this point, Block claims that a covenant creates or restores a relationship, so cannot be natural. This dismissal fails to reckon with those covenant theologians who have argued that God created Adam in covenant by nature.

There are other examples of this feature. Block waves away the law-gospel distinction as a poor Lutheran interpretation of the Old Testament (pp. 184-85). This in no way adequately reckons with the theological issues and principles involved in this issue, nor with how it pertains to other areas of theology, which is detrimental since Block never really accounts for soteriology. He then goes on to equate Reformed understandings of the law-gospel distinction with "new covenant

theology” which is a movement within Baptist circles to revise covenant theology. This move again shows Block’s idiosyncrasies. He does not reckon with classic Reformed theology but assumes that his own baptistic background is enough reason to focus on Baptist versions of covenant theology. Confessional Reformed theology, however, would agree that new covenant theology has mangled its interpretation of God’s law on several issues. Ironically, one of those issues is their rejection of natural law with which Block agrees (pp. 198–200). Block’s lack of engagement with truly theological sources has left his own theological assessment shortsighted and inadequate.

As one last point, this book’s crowning strength is its treatment of how the New Testament appropriates the Davidic covenant in application to Christ. This material is perhaps the best in print on the relationship between God’s promises to David and their fulfillment in Christ. This volume contains much to consider and develop, some helpful and some in need of correction. Still, Block’s exploration of the Scripture itself will prompt readers to look closely at the pages of the Bible and their thematic development of the covenants.

Books In Brief. Reviewed by Frank J. Smith.

Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson, foreword by Sinclair Ferguson, *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2020). Paperback, 177 pp. ISBN 978-1629957524. \$16.00.

Written by Puritan scholar and noted churchman Dr. Joel Beeke along with a young graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, this volume consists of four parts. Under Biblical Foundations for Coping with Criticism, the authors deal with Old Testament Foundations and Christological Foundations. The chapters in the lengthiest part, Practical Principles for Coping with Criticism, include “Receive Criticism Realistically,” “Receive Criticism Humbly,” “Respond with Sober Judgment,” and “Respond with Grace.” In considering Practical Principles for Constructive Criticism in the Church, the authors discuss how to give constructive critique to others and how to cultivate a church culture that is open to constructive critique. The fourth part, Theological Vision for Coping with Criticism, calls on the reader to “Reorient Your Perspective,” and offers this advice:

Brothers, in the midst of verbal opposition, let us show our people that we really believe the realities that we proclaim: the God-glorifying, church-building, judgment-day, otherworldly vision of the Scriptures is indeed our vision. That these are not “unfelt truths” that have never moved from our heads to our hearts. That

we have owned these biblical bifocals as our own. In the ministerial hostility we face, God is calling us to “exemplify the power” of these stunning doctrines (164).

An appendix addresses how to prepare “for the Fires of Criticism While in Seminary.”

Overall, the book is a useful tonic for assisting those struggling with criticism, whether deserved or undeserved. *Pastors and Their Critics* is, as one would expect from a Beeke book, thoroughly Biblical and informed by history.

Darby A. Strickland, foreword by Edward T. Welch, *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2020). Paperback, 352 pp. ISBN 978-1629956947. \$17.99.

A 1999 graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, Mrs. Strickland counsels and teaches at the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation in Glenside, Pennsylvania. Her book reveals the shocking prevalence of abuse in society as a whole and in the church as well. The work, which is virtually encyclopedic in scope, has three parts: Understanding Oppression; Uncovering Oppression; and Upholding the Oppressed. Among the types of oppression dealt with are physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and financial abuse.

The author advises her readers that abuse “is easy to miss, but it is even easier to minimize.” Over a long period of working with abused women, she came to “understand what rules the hearts of oppressors and how they seek to control their victims—as well as to control others’ perception of reality. We must understand the dynamics of abuse in order to minister to its victims effectively. Domestic abuse can be disorienting—it can initially be hard to get a handle on what is happening in a marriage.” The book’s goal has three purposes: so that “you will learn to pick up on cues that something is wrong”; “to draw out stories so that you can get clarity on the situations you encounter and their severity”; “to provide wise and Christ-centered counsel as you navigate the complex and often dangerous dynamics of abuse” (15–16).

Two of the appendices are helpful for those contemplating marriage: “Detecting Red Flags during Dating” and “Premarital Abuse Assessment.”

However, one weakness is that the book barely, if at all, touches on the situations in which it is the wife rather than the husband who is abusive. While one might argue that spousal abuse is in most cases a result of the man dominating the woman, the opposite is not unheard of, and this book would have been strengthened by dealing with instances when the basic problems in the home are a result of a woman’s rebellious attitude.

Christopher Watkin, foreword by Peter J. Leithart, *Gilles Deleuze* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2020). Paperback, xxxii + 167 pp. ISBN 978-1629957432. \$15.99.

A volume in the Great Thinkers series from P&R, this one dissects the views of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995). This French philosopher's views were hostile to Christianity. However, the author argues for a biblical theological perspective as well as a "problem-based approach [that] avoids the elaborate and sterile 'spot the difference' exercise that could issue from seeking to compare Deleuze and the Bible, in favor of asking how the Bible respond to, or rethinks, the problems from which Deleuze's philosophy begins." According to Dr. Watkin, "a problem-based approach will allow us to see Deleuze and the Bible not only at loggerheads, but also shoulder to shoulder in addressing common concerns. Perhaps most tellingly, we will see that Deleuze and Plato often share assumptions or positions in common that the Bible diagonalizes" (81).

This is Dr. Watkin's third offering in the Great Thinkers series, the others being *Jacques Derrida* and *Michel Foucault*. He serves as a senior lecturer in French Studies at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

Shao Kai Tseng, foreword by William B. Edgar, *Immanuel Kant* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2020). Paperback, xviii + 209 pp. ISBN 978-1629957012. \$15.99.

Another offering in the P&R Great Thinkers series, this is the book for those who just can't figure out the writings of a certain German philosopher. The impact of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is hard to overestimate. At the same time, trying to discern what exactly he was saying can be very challenging indeed. This book is of great help in understanding Kantian thought. One of the strong points in assisting the reader is an extensive glossary of terms.

Another noteworthy aspect of the volume is that the author offers a fresh look at Kant from a Reformed viewpoint. An example of his observations is the following paragraph:

Modern Christian soteriology has often been tempted to choose between Kantian transcendence and post-Kantian immanence. The former regards the incarnation as beyond the bounds of knowledge; the latter identifies God the Son with historical activity. Dogmatists such as Hodge and Bavinck are especially valuable against this milieu. Unwavering in their commitment to Chalcedonian Christology and historic Reformed soteriology, they are able to counter both Kantian positivism and post-Kantian historicism with distinctively modern rigor (150).

Dr. Tseng is research professor in the philosophy department of Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China. This work is very dense and definitely not for the average reader.

Robert Rollock, translated and introduced by Casey B. Carmichael, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021). Hardback, xxi + 253 pp. ISBN 978-1601787699. \$40.00.

A university man who was known especially as the first Scottish covenant theologian, Robert Rollock (1555-1598) was a prolific writer whose work is "straightforward and very clearly Reformed" (xi).

This volume is part of a series on Classic Reformed Theology. A preface gives three reasons for this series of critical English translations.

First, Reformed orthodoxy forms the intellectual background of modern theology which can only be understood properly in light of its reaction to and rejection of Protestant orthodoxy. Second, Reformed orthodoxy obviously merits attention by those who identify with the Reformed confession; it is their heritage and thus shapes their theology, piety, and practice whether or not they realize it. Third, despite the disdain, disregard, and distortion which Reformed orthodoxy suffered during the Enlightenments in Europe, Britain, and North America, contemporary scholarship has shown that, whatever one's view of the theology, piety, and practice of orthodoxy, on purely historical grounds it must be regarded as a vital intellectual and spiritual movement and thus a fascinating and important subject for continued study (ix).

Apart from the historical value, this commentary is valuable for its gospel-oriented and Christ-centered approach to this important Pauline epistle. As an example, in commenting on Ephesians 1:4-6, Rollock wrote:

We are united with Christ through the Spirit and faith, hence the union itself is called the communion of the Spirit (Phil. 1:21). But the Spirit of Christ cannot be burdensome to us. But as He is holy, and Christ, whose Spirit He is, is holy, so it is necessary that He work holiness in us and make us conformed to the image of Christ (that is, pure and whole), while the apostle says, in 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." And by this office He is called the Spirit of sanctification by the apostle (Rom. 1:4) (19).

John Flavel, abridged by J. Stephen Yuille, *Christ and His Threefold Office* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021). Paperback, xix + 151 pp. ISBN 978-1601788498. \$16.00.

John Flavel (1630-1691) was a prolific English Puritan writer known for his deep piety. Ordained when he was 23 years old, his ministry was focused in Devon, a county in southwestern England. Ejected from his pulpit in the coastal town of Dartmouth by the Act of Uniformity in 1662, he surreptitiously continued his preaching for the next 25 years when he was formally allowed to occupy a pulpit once again.

In the Preface, J. Stephen Yuille writes of Flavel's emphasis on the notion of communion with Christ, including "actual communion—'the life of our life, the joy of our hearts, a heaven upon earth.'

This communion by means of meditation on Christ's loveliness brings us to the present work, *Christ and His Threefold Office*. Flavel sees the salvation of God's people as resting on the eternal covenant of redemption between God the Father and God the Son. In eternity, the Father and Son enter into a transaction to bring about the salvation of the elect. In time, the Son becomes a man, fulfills the covenant of works, and dies to pay the penalty incurred by His people under that covenant. Having done so, He returns to His Father, from where He sends forth the Holy Spirit to unite His people to Himself. By virtue of that union, they partake of the blessings of the covenant of grace.

In Flavel's mind, therefore, the fulfillment of the covenant of redemption is linked to two great unions. The first is the hypostatical union between the divine and human natures in Christ, whereas the second is the mystical union between Christ and believers by means of the Holy Spirit. Flavel affirms that the first is the basis for the second. In other words, Christ must become one with us hypostatically in order for us to become one with Him mystically.

Yuille concludes:

The glory of Christ's threefold mediatorial office is the theme of this volume. Flavel's treatment of the subject is informed by Scripture and faithful to the historic creeds of the church. He is polemical when necessary and painstakingly detailed when he believes the truth is at stake. That said, his work does not fall within the traditional bounds of systematic theology; rather, it is an act of adoration, constituting a series of medita-

tions on "the transcendent excellency of Jesus Christ." Above all else, Flavel wants us to "behold the beauty of the Lord," that we might enjoy communion with the living God. This, therefore, is how we ought to read his work—thoughtfully, devotionally, and affectively (xvii-xix).

There are seventeen chapters, each one based on a particular Bible verse. An example of Flavel's earnest application to us can be found in his contemplation of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:2 ("For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified")—a verse which not only informs, humbles, challenges, trains, and comforts us, but which also warns us, in three ways.

First, ministers must take heed to their ministry. How?

(1) They must set Christ before their people. It is the minister's calling to woo and win souls to Christ by presenting Him in all His excellence, so that hearts are ravished with His beauty and charmed into His arms. (2) They must make certain that their knowledge of Christ is not barren or powerless. As it passes from their minds to their lips, it ought to melt, sweeten, and ravish their hearts.... (3) They must not withhold the knowledge of Christ from their people. They must remember that the Great Shepherd gave Himself for the flock, and that He gave them to the flock; therefore, their time and gifts are not their own, but God's. Christ died for the sheep. Ministers, therefore, must watch, study, preach, pray, and do whatever they can for their salvation.

Second, we must not reject or despise the knowledge of Christ. (1) We despise the knowledge of Christ when we despise the means to that knowledge.... (2) We despise the knowledge of Christ when we despise the directions and constraints of that knowledge....

Third, we must satisfy ourselves in the knowledge that we have attained. We must press on to perfection. Upon acquiring a few notions of Christ, many professing believers swell with self-conceit. This is a grave sin, especially when we see how deep the knowledge of Christ lies and what pains we must take to dig for it. To throw away the shovel of duty and claim that we do not need to dig is presumption. We must not let our candle go out. We must devote ourselves to this study. Whatever communion God maintains with us, it is by means of the knowledge of Christ. Thus, we must count all things as trash in comparison to the excellence of this knowledge (7-8).

John Flavel, abridged by J. Stephen Yuille, *Christ Humbled Yet Exalted* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021). Paperback, xix + 151 pp. ISBN 978-1601788511. \$16.00.

As noted in the review above of Flavel's *Christ and His Threefold Office*, this seventeenth-century English preacher suffered for his faith. In this present volume, J. Stephen Yuille explains more about the sufferings Flavel endured in his life.

His parents died of the plague, contracted while imprisoned for nonconformity. He buried his first three wives along with several children. He was ejected for nonconformity in 1662, exiled by the Five Mile Act in 1665, and generally harassed throughout his ministry. On one occasion, he managed to escape arrest by plunging his horse over a cliff into the sea and swimming to shore. Factoring in the strain of demanding pastoral duties, and wearying doctrinal disputes, coupled with the challenges of living without modern comforts and amenities, Flavel was deeply acquainted with affliction (ix-x).

Having experiential knowledge of great grief, Flavel is in a good position to counsel us as to the way by which to deal with similar circumstances.

By his own account, it was "joy" that "upheld and fortified" him throughout life's arduous journey. He defined Christian joy as "the cheerfulness of our heart in God" arising from "the sense of our interest in Him and His promises." Flavel was convinced that joy is ultimately rooted in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. "All the comforts of believers," says he, "are streams from this fountain" (x).

Through Christ's twin estate of humiliation and exaltation, He has purchased for us full and complete happiness.

And it is this knowledge of Christ that nurtures that "cheerfulness of heart" so prevalent in Flavel's writings. In the present volume, he shares his meditations on this glorious subject. He encourages us to develop a "sensible" and "practical" knowledge of Christ—that is, a knowledge that has its "seat in the heart." He explains, "A saving, though an unmethodical knowledge of Christ will bring us to heaven (John 17:2), but a regular and methodical, as well as a saving, knowledge of Him will bring heaven into us (Col. 2:2-3)" (xiv-xv).

The twenty chapters consist of the following topics: Christ's Humiliation; A Humble Life; A Prayer of Commendation; A

Commemorative Sign; Christ's Agony; The Nature of Christ's Death; A Lonely Death; A Lowly Death; A Prayer for Forgiveness; A Promise of Salvation; A Cry of Forsakenness; A Cry of Anguish; The Completion of Christ's Work; Christ's Burial; The Blessed Ends of Christ's Humiliation; Christ's Exaltation; Christ's Resurrection; Christ's Ascension; Christ's Present Session; and Christ's Triumphant Return.

In dealing with the Session of Christ, and based on Hebrews 1:3, Flavel wrote:

Christ is gloriously advanced to the highest throne. We do not need to consider ourselves dishonored when we suffer the vilest things for His sake. The very chains and sufferings of Christ have glory in them; hence, Moses esteemed "the reproach of Christ great riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). He saw an excellence in the worst of Christ's reproaches that made him forsake earthly honors and riches. He did not only endure the reproaches of Christ but counted them treasures. Surely there is a little paradise in suffering for Christ. If we consider how exceedingly kind Christ is to those who count it their glory to be abased for Him, it would make us love His reproaches (180).

Scott Christensen, *What About Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2020). Hardback, xix + 544 pp. ISBN 978-1629955353. \$39.99.

This is a massive tome, featuring 315 sources in the bibliography and an extensive glossary. The author, a graduate (M.Div.) of The Master's Seminary and associate pastor of Kerrville (Tex.) Bible Church, deals right up front with various views of theodicy (that is, the justification of God, particularly moral responsibility with respect to the problem of evil). In doing so, he first briefly lays out several options. The Free-Will Defense, which is "the most prevalent response to the problem of evil," posits that evil is "regarded as a risk that God had to allow in order to grant humans significant freedom and responsibility." The Natural-Law Defense emphasizes that "God designed orderly, repeatable, predictable laws to govern the world, and good and bad consequences can result from the proper or improper use of these laws.... Therefore, it is not God's fault when we misuse such laws." The Greater-Good Theodicy states that "God has multiple good purposes for evil in the world, which lead to 'greater goods that could not otherwise come. These goods outweigh the evils that they overcome.'" The Soul-Making Theodicy maintains that humans are born in an immature state and "must experience pain and adversity in order to mature.... Just as the fiery furnace purifies gold, evil and suffering purify and strengthen the human soul." The Best-of-All-Possible-Worlds Defense argues that an

“omnibenevolent God would create only a world that was the best possible world that could exist. Yet this world is imperfect and full of undeniable evils. Therefore, those evils must be necessary for God to bring about subsequent goods that make this the best possible world.” The Divine-Judgment Defense believes God’s retributive justice brings about pain and suffering, including the experience of hell. “Good comes out of judgment in the form of rehabilitation, deterrence, societal protection, and retribution. The hope of ultimate divine justice redresses the suffering of the innocent” (5-6).

The author’s view is that the most Biblically faithful position “is a specific version of the *greater-good theodicy* with modified traces of the *best-of-all-possible-worlds defense*.” While acknowledging that his view does not solve “every problem connected to evil in this world” (which would be “presumptuous”), he offers this theodicy as one which “seeks to resolve the broader issue of why evil exists in the first place.” In his eyes, “God’s greatest glory is found in Christ’s work of redemption. This work of redemption becomes unnecessary, however, unless there is a good world that was ruined by evil—a world that then cries out for restoration” (6-7).

Here is how he summarizes his theodicy:

1. God’s ultimate purpose in freely creating the world is to supremely magnify the riches of his glory to all his creatures, especially human beings, who alone bear his image.
2. God’s glory is supremely magnified in the atoning work of Christ, which is the sole means of accomplishing redemption for human beings.
3. Redemption is unnecessary unless human beings have fallen into sin.
4. Therefore, the fall of humanity is necessary to God’s ultimate purpose in creating the world (7).

Perhaps the major motif in this book has to do with storytelling.

God has hardwired human beings to long for heroes in redemptive roles whereby evil is defeated and good prevails. Literature and other storytelling mediums reflect a *monomyth*—one universal storyline that evokes a human longing for redemption even as pagan myths and secular stories corrupt the source and true meaning that stand behind this unified storyline.

Christensen declares:

Once the source for monomythic themes in the his-

tory of storytelling can be ascertained in the Bible’s grand storyline, this [greater-glory] theodicy will begin to make greater sense. It shows how God’s ultimate end in creation is to maximize the display of his glory to his creatures through the redemptive work of Christ. But redemption is made unnecessary without the fall. Therefore, God purposed the fall to magnify his glory in a way that an unfallen world simply could not do (10).

Eschatologically, the author is a premillennialist. However, as he notes, the theodicy he presents would be compatible with any of the three major schools of eschatology (premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism).

An appendix, entitled “Sullied by Supralapsarianism?,” argues that neither infralapsarianism nor supralapsarianism has properly framed the critical issues. He proposes to view God’s decrees from another angle, using “three controlling and indisputable propositions”:

Proposition 1: God’s ultimate end is delighting in the magnificence of his own glory.

Proposition 2: God is in no way required to display his glory outside the intra-Trinitarian self-delight it elicits.

Proposition 3: God freely chose to create the world in order that he might have a theater to display and thus to share the delight of his own glory with his intelligent creatures especially human beings (466).

He concludes by saying that his view

seeks to assimilate the primary concerns of both supra- and infra-lapsarianism while discarding each of their inherent limitations. Technically, my proposal cannot be considered as either, since election and reprobation are secondary considerations. Ironically, the fall (*lapse*) figures prominently in the lapsarian debate even though its purpose is not always made clear. While the fall along with all its attendant evils is not a first-order concern of God’s decrees, neither is it a mysterious accident. It is, as it were, a necessary evil (!) purposed toward the greater end of magnifying God’s glory in the redemptive work of Christ whereby he brings about our rescue from evil’s dark domain (Col. 1:13-14). While evil figures prominently in our experience, it is overshadowed by the blood-soaked tree on which Christ hung, and the empty tomb from which he gloriously emerged three days later (470).

John D. Currid, foreword by David W. Chapman, *The Case for Biblical Archaeology: Uncovering the Historical Record of God's Old Testament People* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2020). Paperback, xviii + 263 pp. ISBN 978-1629953601. \$29.99.

Dr. Currid is the Chancellor's Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. He has been working on archaeological and excavation matters for almost half a century; and his dedication to the topic shines through in this book.

But why study this subject? One primary reason for doing so is "to shed light on the historical and material contexts in which the events narrated in the Bible occurred. Archaeology helps to provide a life setting for biblical texts, that is, a *Sitz im Leben*. In that respect, archaeology can be a confirmatory tool, especially when the textual and archaeological evidence converge" (1).

At the same time, however, he is appropriately modest about this endeavor.

It is our contention that the purpose of archaeology (and related disciplines) is not to prove the Bible. The Bible doesn't need to be proved. It stands well enough on its own. As Charles Spurgeon once remarked, "Scripture is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose; it will defend itself." As George Ernest Wright once commented, "Our ultimate aim must not be 'proof,' but truth." Biblical archaeology serves to confirm, illuminate, and give "earthiness" to the Scriptures. It helps to demonstrate that the events related in the biblical accounts actually took place in history (3).

Professor Currid avers that demonstrating the historicity of biblical events is important for two reasons. One is the ahistorical nature of contemporary society, in which "for many people, history is irrelevant, is meaningless, and has little application to modern existence." Instead, there is an obsession with "technological innovation and cultural change that arrives with lightning speed." That ahistorical mindset "is one consequence of post-modernism, post-Christian thinking, and deconstructionism." By way of contrast, there is a reality to history, and archaeology is one way to underscore that reality. Another significant reason for affirming the historicity of biblical events is in order to address the present generation's thinking which is "biblically and historically *uninformed*." A recent Barna survey revealed that at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife, and another survey indicated that 50 percent of graduating high school seniors thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife!" (3-4).

The main part of this work is divided into three parts: Setting; A Journey Through the Land; and Aspects of Society.

Included in the first part is a chapter entitled "Geography of the Land of the Bible," which gives a basic overview of the geography and topography. The next chapter details the history of archaeology, including The Golden Age, 1918-1940 (think Indiana Jones). In another chapter, the author tells us of excavating tells, and follows with "A Short History of the Lands of the Bible."

Part 2 includes chapters on Galilee; the Jezreel Valley; the Negev; the Shephelah (Hebrew for "lowland," used as a technical term for "a strip of foothills to the west of the Judean Mountains and east of the southern coastal plain" [109]); the Jordan River Valley; the Southern Coastal Plain; and the Central Highlands.

Part 3 has chapters on Agriculture and Herding; Water; Architecture; Ceramics; The Hebrew Language in Archaeology; Burial Practices; and Small Finds (featuring various artifacts, including ancient artisanship, such as stoneworking, bone-working, woodworking, ivory working, and glassmaking).

There are three appendices, which present a basic timeline of the Ancient Near East; the kings of Israel and Judah; and extrabiblical references to the kings of Israel and Judah.

As one would expect, this volume has been praised by numerous scholars. For instance, Dr. Mark W. Chavalas (professor of history at the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse) wrote: "This book is a must of all serious Bible students, whether they plan to excavate in Israel or to work from their 'armchairs.' Dr. Currid is to be applauded for creating such a manual. It is hard to imagine anyone with more experience and knowledge of biblical archaeology."

But in addition to the obvious erudite nature of this work, Dr. Currid is also to be applauded for not succumbing to what so many of his academic colleagues have, viz., utilizing "B.C.E." and "C.E." ("Before Common Era" and "Common Era"), which terms are a direct attack on a Scriptural understanding of the calendar. Instead, he continues with the traditional abbreviations of "B.C." and "A.D." And the fact that he has refused to surrender to so-called experts is another reason why we can have confidence in this work and why we believe that it will stand the test of time.

John Shower, edited by Joel R. Beeke, *The Lord's Supper: Doctrines, Encouragements, and Duties* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications [an imprint of Reformation Heritage Books], 2021). Hardback, xvii + 381 pp. ISBN 978-1601788283. \$35.00.

A prominent nonconformist minister, John Shower (ca. 1657-1715) was forced into exile in Holland. After returning

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and thus to make His works and His speech partake of that peculiar glory that attaches to all organic growth, let us see to know Him as the One that is, that was, and that is to come, in order that no note may be lacking that psalm of praise to be sung by the Church into which all our Theology must issue.²⁷

Locating the mystery in God's acting and relating without undergoing change properly enables the church to worship the triune God as he has revealed himself in the history of special revelation. In his relation to creation "the Unchangeable, Eternal God" is "never the Becoming One." And though he "lives above the sphere of history" yet he "has condescended to work and speak in the form of time" so that no note may be lacking in the church's worship of the living and true God. This God, "who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy" says to his covenant people, "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isaiah 57:15). It is this living and immutable triune God who in his covenantal condescension said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) and who, in the person of his Son, said "I am the Alpha and the Omega," ... "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8). It is this living and true God, and not a mutable idol, whom the church worships in his self-revelation in Jesus Christ, our Lord (I John 5:21; Revelation 7:11,15-17).

Reviews and Responses. Continued from Page 182.

to London, his congregation had to relocate—twice—because of its growth.

This volume consists of three parts: Discourses before and after the Lord's Supper; Questions about Salvation, Assurance, and the Lord's Supper; and Sermons Related to the Lord's Supper. An appendix contains a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer.

Part 1 contains the following chapters: "Union to Christ, and the New Creature" (2 Corinthians 5:7); "Christ Going to Gethsemane" (John 18:1-2); "Spiritual Washing" (1 Corinthians 6:11); "The Communion of Christ's Body and Blood" (1 Corinthians 10:16); "The Sin and Danger of Unworthy Receiving" (1 Corinthians 11:29); "Christ's Last Passover and Its Accomplishment" (Luke 22:15-18); "The Feast of Christ's Love" (Song of Solomon 2:4); and "Christ's Cure of a Disciple's Weak Faith" (John 20:27-28).

Part 2 has these discourses: "How Much Assurance Is Necessary to Come to the Table?"; "Two Sacramental Questions

on Our Duty to Take Communion" (Are All Baptized Christians Bound to Partake of the Lord's Supper?; Why Do So Many Good People Live in Neglect of this Ordinance?); "Four Sacramental Questions on Those Unworthy to Take Communion" (Is the Lord's Supper a Means of Converting Souls?; Should I Partake if Unworthy Communicants Are Admitted to the Supper?; What Is an Unworthy Receiver of Communion?; What Is the Danger of Unworthy Receiving?); and "Wasn't Judas Present at the First Celebration of the Lord's Supper?"

Part 3 contains these sermons: "The Purposes of Receiving the Lord's Supper"; "The Cross of Christ, a Christian's Glory" (Galatians 6:14); "The Promise and Oath of God" (Hebrews 6:16, 18); and "Christ's Love for Us Like the Father's to Him" (John 15:9).

As one would expect from a Puritan writer, the material is not only strongly Scriptural and theologically accurate, but also warmly applicatory. Meditating on one of these chapters would be a very profitable exercise in terms of communion preparation. The book compares favorably to similar ones, such as a 1997 offering from Soli Deo Gloria Publications, *The Puritans on the Lord's Supper*, which featured a number of Puritan ministers. ■

27. Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., (P&R Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: 1980), p. 24.