

## Book Reviews

*Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell.* By David Torbett. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006, 230 pp., \$49.95 hardcover.

The impact one's theology has upon his view of ethical questions is highly significant in an age of embryonic stem cell research, illegal immigration and constantly changing medical technology. *Theology and Slavery* examines the impact of two of the nineteenth century's greatest theologians on the burning issue of their day, slavery.

Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell held very different views of Scripture and epistemology. These views affected their approach to the issues of slavery and race. Torbett examines their approaches based on specific criteria; theological approach, normative principles, anthropological assumptions, predominant loyalties and circumstantial considerations, which are defined in the introduction.

Attitudes toward slavery were ambiguous in the early days of the United States. Most Americans viewed slavery as something in the American experiment that would slowly fade away. With the westward expansion, the issue of whether or not slavery would be introduced into new territories brought increased political agitation. The extremists on both sides of the issue came to the fore. Radical abolitionists, such as David Walker, advocated the immediate overthrow of slavery, by violent means if necessary. William Lloyd Garrison was a pacifist, but still used fiery rhetoric to denounce slavery and call for immediate abolition. Radical defenders of slavery began to argue that it was not a temporary institution to be tolerated, but a virtuous necessity.

Charles Hodge was a conservative Presbyterian. He held a traditional Protestant hermeneutic, taking the literal, obvious meaning of Scripture as truth. Because of this, Hodge could not condemn slavery as sin *per se*, as the Bible does not condemn slavery. However, Hodge did point out the evils of slavery as practiced in the American South. His view of Scripture led him to find the essential equality of all peoples without regard to race. Therefore, racial slavery was wrong in his view. He also spoke out against the abuses of scriptural teachings in American slavery. These included preventing slaves from learning to read, the breakup of families through buying and selling of slaves, and physical abuse of slaves. Torbett noted several influences on Hodge's thinking; the Princeton tradition, the fact that Hodge was a slave-holder, and the Scottish "Common Sense" philosophy. While Hodge held some racist attitudes, his theology limited their effect. He did view Africans as inferior, but paradoxically held to the essential unity and equality of all men, including Africans. Hodge advocated gradual emancipation and re-colonization efforts for freed slaves, such as the experiment in Liberia. He felt this would be the best resolution for the race issue. Because he held the essential equality of all men, Hodge reluctantly saw the possibility of citizenship and suffrage for freed slaves.

Horace Bushnell was a Congregationalist preacher. He is called "the father of American religious liberalism" by many. He was influenced by the Romantic Movement, rejecting the confining rationalism of Hodges. Bushnell felt that

truth was revealed through the senses and emotions. It could not be reduced to definite rational statements. He was not bothered by logical contradictions and preferred a dialectical methodology. This allowed Bushnell to condemn slavery much more strongly than Hodge. His anti-slavery statements called for an end to slavery, although he rejected violent means. Bushnell's approach led to his acceptance of modern (1830's) scientific ideas. This included the polygenetic theory that races were not essentially equal and had differing starting points. He did not see all mankind descending from Adam and Eve. Bushnell advocated ending slavery and giving African-Americans full citizenship and suffrage. But he saw this as leading to their extinction. He viewed the races as unequal and that freedom would doom African-Americans who simply could not compete with Anglo-Saxons in a free society. Yet, he called for abolition because slavery was morally wrong.

An unforeseen consequence of both men's views was their use by supporters of slavery. Southerners would use Hodge when he argued that slavery was not condemned as sin by Scripture. The same writer would use Bushnell in presenting a perceived racial inferiority of Africans and argue that slavery was a paternal, beneficent institution.

David Torbett did an excellent job of presenting the views of both theologians. He selected the criteria for examining them quite well. It was in evaluating them that Torbett was not as successful. He correctly concluded that both men were consistent with their theological methods in approaching the ethical problems presented by slavery, although there were nuanced shifts in their positions over time.

His critique of their failures left some possibilities unexamined. Torbett concluded the lack of an objective standard caused problems for Bushnell's approach, but did not propose a particular standard for theological truth. He criticized Hodge by stating that his literal approach caused him to treat slavery in the abstract and ignore real human suffering. This criticism of Hodge appears to be justified, but could be attributed to reasons other than his literal hermeneutic. It could be the result of his desire for order, naivety, personal culpability as a sometime slaveholder, or other reasons.

There were a few disappointments such as several minor spelling and grammatical errors. More importantly, as this was published by Mercer University Press, it would have been interesting to note John L. Dagg's published views on slavery with Bushnell and Hodge. Dagg supported slavery by defending it as permitted by Scripture, reminiscent of Hodge. Dagg also supported slavery as necessary because of his assumption that Africans were inferior and could not succeed in a free society, reminiscent of Bushnell. Several Southern and Northern theologians and activists are cited, but not Dagg.

This was a very good book on a subject that some would consider long settled. But the thrust of the book is about how one's theology and worldview influence his ethical decisions, not just slavery. This is an issue that each individual needs to examine in light of the many controversial ethical concerns in the current age.

*The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity*. By Thabiti M. Anyabwile. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007, 254 pp., \$20.00.

Thabiti M. Anyabwile is the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman. He holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree from North Carolina State University. Prior to serving at Grand Cayman, he served as an elder/assistant pastor with Mark Dever at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., perhaps the most well-known of a new generation of reformed churches in Southern Baptist life. An African-American himself, Anyabwile's major premise in *The Decline of African American Theology* is that the last two centuries have witnessed a dramatic shift in African-American theology from an evangelical and reformed consensus of the late eighteenth century to a divergent set of beliefs strongly influenced by secularism in the early twenty-first century. He states his major premise by saying, "In effect, cultural concerns captured the [African American] church and supplanted the biblical faithfulness that once characterized it" (18). Anyabwile's hope is that a return to doctrinal orthodoxy within the African-American church will help it be more effective in addressing the spiritual and social needs of the members. While this is a work of serious theological reflection, one senses that Anyabwile hopes his work will be read by a broader audience.

A strength of *The Decline of African American Theology* is Anyabwile's well organized and systematic approach. The book has six chapters addressing major components of systematic theology: The doctrines of revelation, God, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, and pneumatology. Then, each chapter addresses the way African-American's have approached these doctrines in five different eras: the early slavery era through abolition; the reconstruction and "Jim Crow" era; the Great Depression and WWII; Civil Rights era; and finally, the end of the twentieth century and postmodern era (1980 – present).

The author himself adheres to a Reformed theological approach and uses this as a baseline for evaluating the perceived decline in African American theology. He does so for two reasons. First, Anyabwile claims the earliest African American writers were basically Calvinistic/Reformed in their doctrine and he spends a significant amount of time attempting to justify this claim. Second, Anyabwile believes "the Reformed understanding, especially the Reformed doctrines of revelation, God and salvation, best represent the biblical teaching on these subjects" (20). Whether one agrees with Reformed doctrine or not, the author should be credited for stating his bias so clearly.

Anyabwile demonstrates that some of the best work among African-American theologians revolved around the issue of theodicy. Because of the experience of chattel slavery, slaves who became Christians were faced with the immediate challenge of how to reconcile the Biblical claims of God's goodness with the very real evils they lived with every day. Early African American writers like Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), the first African American to be ordained by any religious body, answered the question of theodicy from an orthodox grid which celebrated God's goodness and sovereignty while addressing in a forthright manner the evil of slavery. Later African American theologians, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, tended to

answer the problem of theodicy in terms of liberation theology, with some even having pantheistic overtones.

Readers will find Anyabwile's critique of James Cone particularly interesting. In particular, he strongly suggests Cone is simply engaging in idolatry and says, "Because Cone so firmly entrenched God in the struggle of black people, his theology ultimately featured a small, provincial deity incapable of the kind of complex and universal rule of creation understood by African Americans through Reconstruction" (94). Anyabwile also argues that Cone's anthropology is flawed and offers this criticism: "If blackness and God were so reflective of one another, where, then, was the theological room for creation "in the image of God" of not only whites, but also Asians, Native Americans, Latinos and Middle Eastern peoples?" (131) Anyabwile also does an admirable job of demonstrating how some of the ideas which have culminated in the thought of James Cone were pre-figured in the doctrinal oddities of Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). The critique of Cone could have been strengthened at two points. First, Anyabwile assumes all readers will know what he means by "liberation theology." If the author hopes his book will influence a broader and not a more narrow spectrum of readers, a brief introduction to liberation theology in general would be helpful. Second, while Anyabwile gives an admirable description of influences on Cone's thought, he does not, in my opinion, do justice to the cross-pollenization between Cone's theological development in the 1970's and the broader liberation theology movement throughout the world, especially the work of Gustavo Gutierrez.

Anyabwile also addresses the rise of "Prosperity theology" in the latter half of the twentieth century. As part of this, he details T. D. Jakes' advocacy of "Oneness Pentecostalism" and corresponding rejection of the Trinity. Furthermore, he explains how Creflo Dollar's emphasis on continuing revelation via modern prophecy actually leads to a de-valuing of the authority of Scripture. Yet, it is Anyabwile's critique of prosperity theology that I think needs more thorough reflection. Anyabwile seems to say that Prosperity Theology is simply an outgrowth of modern Pentecostalism and the Azusa Street revival. However, such a simple understanding of Prosperity Theology misses the deeper origins of the movement in the New Thought movement of the mid-1800's. In fact, the historical background for most Prosperity Theology does not simply go back to Azusa Street, but can be traced in a trajectory that begins with Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), moves to E. W. Kenyon (1867 – 1948), and finally popularized by Kenneth Hagin (1917 – 2003). Furthermore, while Anyabwile rightly critiques Creflo Dollar's soteriology, he fails to address the defective Christology advocated by Dollar which contributes, in my opinion, more significantly to Dollar's flaws than any historical connection with classical Pentecostalism. Central to Prosperity Theology is the idea that Christ had to suffer in Hell and be tortured at the hands of the devil after his crucifixion. Then, Jesus became the first "born again man." Prosperity Theology teaches that all followers of Christ can become born again people in the same way that Christ was born again, and thus can do the things he did. A variation of this teaching is also known as the "little gods" doctrine and has been taught from time to time by Kenneth Copeland, a mentor to Creflo Dollar. Recently, Dollar has gone even further than some Prosperity teachers and ridiculed the doctrine of the

incarnation. None of these things are mentioned in the chapter on Christology, but understanding them puts the defective soteriology in a different light.

Readers may also be surprised that Anyabwile does not address Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at any depth. Dr. King's view of justice possibly has formed the popular opinion of more Americans than any other single individual in the last fifty years, especially his emphasis on social justice in the light of the systemic evil of racist segregation. What is less well-known is the degree to which Dr. King's Christology diverged from the orthodox consensus. *The Decline of African American Theology* would seem to be an excellent place to address both aspects of King's thought. Other significant African American theologians such as Henry McNeal Turner, Howard Thurman, and Benjamin Mays all receive extensive treatment.

Anyabwile concludes *The Decline of African American Theology* by saying, "Though African Americans are predominantly evangelical in their attitudes toward the Bible . . . we are no longer centered upon the Bible in faith and practice" (241). This work is a well-organized attempt to show why this is so. Anyabwile perhaps makes assertions that are too broad at times. For example, beyond a brief mention of Tony Evans, he does not seriously engage any modern African American theologian with a deep commitment to orthodox doctrine. In fact, many African American churches are deeply committed to the "faith once delivered to the saints" and are well aware of the flaws in both liberation theology and Prosperity theology. These areas for improvement noted, this book serves as a good starting point to learn about trends current in African American theology.

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*God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* By John C. Lennox, Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, 2007, 192 pages, U.S. \$14.99 + shipping.

John Lennox asked two "burning" questions concerning the current, ongoing, hotly debated issue of Intelligent Design and Evolution: "Has science buried God?" and "In which direction does science point – matter before mind, or mind before matter?" In answering these two questions, the reader is provided with a breath-taking survey of the current thinking of leading scientists doing cutting-edge research in the relevant sciences. The latest developments in scientific disciplines such as astronomy, biology, information theory, and mathematics are rigorously discussed in search for answers to the burning questions: Which came first, mind or matter? Is God really dead? Although Lennox's aim is to convince the reader that science agrees that God is alive and well, his scientific critique is exhilarating and enlightening, to say the least, regardless of one's particular position on the issue.

There are a plethora of books already available dealing with the Intelligent Design and Evolution debate, and more in the publishing pipeline; so the subject is covered from many perspectives and with varying depths of understanding. However, Lennox's book stands out because of its comprehensive scope (it touches on all relevant scientific disciplines), yet succinct treatment of vitally

relevant scientific subjects, which demonstrate a great depth of understanding of the issues involved. The resources and references he brings to bear on the subject are worth the price of the book in themselves.

Lennox begins by clarifying terminology. Much of the debate arises because evolutionists miss “a very important distinction between the *recognition of design* and the *identification of the designer*.” [Emphasis added] Is their evidence of design in nature? Lennox argues this is a legitimate *science* question. And he agrees that the question: “Who is the designer?” is a theological question; thus the *importance of the distinction*. He also emphasizes the very important fact that “*Statements by scientists are not necessarily statements of science*.” Such truisms are revealed in his excellent treatments of “the war of the worldviews” and “the scope and limits of science.”

To support his claim that *science* can help answer the question: Is their evidence of design in nature? Lennox examines several scientific disciplines for such evidence. The evidence seems abundant. Cosmology, astronomy, and physics have affirmed the “rational intelligibility of the universe;” and that its “fundamental forces are amazingly, intricately, and delicately balanced or ‘fine-tuned’ in order for the universe to be able to sustain life.” Even polemical atheist biologists such as Richard Dawkins affirm that “nature gives an overwhelming *impression of design*.” Origin of life studies “either end in stalemate or in the confession of ignorance.” Mathematics and information theory have led to the formulation of testable hypotheses which could either verify or falsify evolutionary theory.

Lennox presents an excellent discussion on “the nature and scope of evolution.” He critiques some of the so-called proofs of evolution that are found in most biology textbooks. However, one of the most helpful parts of this discourse is his dissection of the concept of “natural selection.” Here he documents a most interesting exchange that occurred in 1862 between Darwin and Joseph Hooker in which Hooker challenged Darwin’s use of natural selection. Hooker wrote: “Natural Selection is as powerless as physical causes to make a variation; the law that ‘like shall *not* produce like’ is at the bottom of [it] all, and is as inscrutable as life itself.” The scientific understanding in 1862 was that “like produced like.” Darwin had introduced a “new law,” which he termed natural selection, that contradicted the scientifically “accepted law” (like produced like). Hooker reprimanded Darwin for not first refuting the accepted law before claiming discovery of a new law. Darwin was understandingly shaken by Hooker’s argument since he could not scientifically refute the accepted law, but only postulate a “new law.”

An important aspect of the book is Lennox’s use of humorous analogues. For example, he uses his Aunt Matilda’s cake as an illustration to demonstrate the limits of science. The world’s top scientists could of course give an exhaustive *description* of the cake. They could identify the number of calories contained; every ingredient used; all the fundamental particles contained in each ingredient; how these particles relate to each other, etc., but when asked the question “*why*, for what *purpose* did Aunt Matilda bake the cake?,” none could answer with scientific certainty. The “*why*” or “*purpose*” question is beyond the limits of science; only Aunt Matilda knows for certain the correct answer. Why is there something instead of nothing? Scientists can *analyze* and *describe* the matter of

the universe, but they cannot answer through “doing science” *why* or for what *purpose* there *is* a universe.

Lennox further demonstrates that there are not only scientific limits but also mathematical probability limits that undermine the claims of evolutionists. Using another rather humorous (“the monkey machine”) analogy, Lennox handily demolishes Dawkins’s methodology for “climbing Mount Improbable.” Dawkins admits to the extreme improbability of evolution if based on chance alone. He therefore proposes as a solution to the improbability problem: “‘breaking the improbability up into small manageable parts, smearing out the luck needed, going round the back of Mount Improbable and crawling up the gentle slopes, inch by million year inch’.” While Dawkins’s word picture may be convincing to the uninformed and uncritical evolutionary hopefuls, rigorous mathematical probability analyses of his detailed proposal by Lennox and others reveal Dawkins’s argument as not only “entirely circular,” but also guilty of introducing *teleology* and *comparative intelligence* as a part of the concept of natural selection; the very concepts he so emphatically denies to exist in nature. Dawkins’s slope behind Mount Improbable is but another illusion, as shown by rigorous scientific argument.

John C. Lennox M.A., Ph.D., D.Phil., D.Sc., is Reader in Mathematics at the University of Oxford and Fellow in Mathematics and the Philosophy of Science at Green College. He has done a marvelous job considering the scope of material addressed. He has captured and elucidated in one book most, if not all, of the essential scientific concepts and principles underlying the Intelligent Design and Evolution debate. However, since scientific knowledge is expanding exponentially the job of the polemicists and apologists on both sides of the issue is an ongoing *work in progress*. A very recent scientific report from the ENCODE consortium (<http://www.geneome.org/cgi/content/full/17/6/669>) declared “The classical view of a gene as a discrete element in the genome has been shaken by ENCODE.” Scientists today are not even sure what constitutes a gene. The greater the scientific knowledge, greater are the mysteries.

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*Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* By Eric Christianson. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, 256 pp. \$84.95, hardcover.

In his second book, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, author Eric Christianson proves to be as much a raconteur as Qohelet himself as he weaves the reception history of one of the Bible’s most enigmatic books. Christianson organizes his work into two primary sections preceded by an introduction that recaps the reception of the book as a whole and followed by a short commentary on the ever-present allure of Qohelet.

He opens the narrative with a dozen or so pages of quotes from novelists, poets, and bards that serve both to show the reader just how diverse the interpretation of this book has been over the past few thousand years and to whet his appetite for the feast that is to come. Christianson then moves on to the introduction, which proves to be valuable even to the most learned of Qohelet

scholars. In this section he explores the reception history of the book as a whole, arranging the information loosely under the headings “pre-modern, early modern, and modern,” by which he primarily intends eras of time rather than philosophical schools, though that is by necessity present. He readily admits the danger of such an arrangement, but offers the reader an apology for his distinctions and allows for the fact that commentators rarely, if ever, can be classified under *only* one of the headings. As a result, the scheme he offers is a useful tool when one is sorting through the wealth of material written on Ecclesiastes.

After the lengthy introduction, which perhaps would have been better suited with a different title, he explores the reception of particular texts within the book. He breaks the text of Ecclesiastes into nine sections, giving some passages a significant amount of space, such as Ecclesiastes 1:2, while leaving out other portions of the text entirely. His rationale for this decision is that, as a relatively brief reception history, the work should primarily concern itself with those passages that have historically had priority. However, one should not think that Christianson has limited himself to merely repackaging what has already been said. As any good guide would do, he offers his own understanding of the passages at the beginning of each chapter, then goes on to discuss the various ways in which pre-moderns, early moderns, and moderns dealt with the issues raised.

The “hermeneutical postscript” and bibliography that round out the narrative may prove to be more valuable than the bulk of the book. Christianson gives a cogent explanation of the haunting draw of this strange book that causes the reader to want to explore for himself the ways in which Qohelet has influenced the great writers of the world. The bibliography makes such a journey less daunting, and even attainable. While *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* is by no means exhaustive, it nevertheless offers both the novice and the seasoned scholar an accessible introduction to ways in which Ecclesiastes has influenced the world in which we now live. Christianson is an exceptionally skilled author who makes the quest for understanding Ecclesiastes thoroughly enjoyable while also encouraging the reader to rethink his own understanding of the text.

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*Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament.* By Stanley E. Porter (ed.). Grand Rapids, MI. / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2006, xiii + 316 pp. US\$29.00 paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8028-2846-0

The study of the New Testament (NT) use of the Old Testament (OT) is one of the most fascinating areas of biblical studies and the volume edited by Stanley Porter offers ample proof to support this assertion. The last several decades have seen a wealth of contributions in this area, ranging from the still-indispensable work of D. A. Carson and P. J. Williamson (eds.), *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988) to the most recent one, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (eds.), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of Old Testament*

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007). This indeed has been a dynamic field of investigation, harnessing the efforts of some of the most able exegetes, with a significant presence and contribution from Evangelical scholars. As a prime result, a more refined understanding of the nature of the NT as Scripture has emerged, which highlights the organic link between the two testaments. The NT stands as the heir of and the theological outgrowth from the Jewish Scriptures in light of the climactic, filial revelation of God. The present book contributes admirably to heighten the appreciation for the complexities of this field as well as to strengthen and refine the ability to do research in it.

The volume coordinated by Stanley Porter assembles the essays presented at the 2003 Bingham Colloquium in New Testament, an event with an already significant track record in print, the prominent McMaster New Testament Studies series that have been published annually by Eerdmans since 1997. The collection of articles mirrors, with slight differences, the dynamics of the conference, in which each paper delivered benefited from a response from A. Köstenberger.

The editor of the volume sets the stage for the discussion in his article "The Use of the OT in the NT" with a brief overview of the *status quaestiones* and a helpful presentation of the main ideas and summaries of the eleven subsequent chapters. The opening two articles focus primarily on methodological aspects. Thus, D. Stamps advocates for an understanding of the NT use of OT within the parameters of rhetorical conventions available to and intentionally used by the NT authors. R. T. McLay addresses the thorny issue of the fluid state in which we find the sacred texts in the first century, texts used by the NT authors as source for their quotations, allusions and ultimately, theology.

The following four articles turn the investigation to the Gospels. M. Knowles on Matthew clarifies the role of Scripture both as the influence that shaped the mission statement of Jesus as well as the target of subsequent Christological interpretation. C. Evans on Mark proves that the theme of fulfillment, normally associated with the other three Gospels, features prominently in the earliest gospel as well. In Luke-Acts, S. Porter finds that the Scriptures stand as the shaping force behind the missionary philosophy and practice of the Early Church. P. Millers turns to John to find the fine balance between the way the Scriptures influenced Jesus' self-understanding, only to become, later, the subject of His interpretation.

Two articles are devoted to the Pauline corpus. J. Aageson surveys the OT function in the four major epistles, with 1 Cor. 10 as a crucial test case, while S. Keesmaat takes on the usage in the shorter epistles. The final group of NT canon comprising of the General Epistles and the book of Revelation is unevenly divided between K. A. Richardson's study on the singular NT reference to Job in the epistle of James, and a brief review by A. Köstenberger of the OT use in the remaining NT books, the Pauline Pastorals, the General Epistles and Revelation. Köstenberger's response to all papers read at the conference stand grouped together as the final chapter in the volume.

The choice for this sort of presentation of articles and responses makes the duty of any reviewer considerably easier, since each presentation has already benefited from a substantial critique printed alongside. Granted, the critique offered by Köstenberger was limited by time/space considerations and did not

target all the issues that might have deserved a rejoinder. A case in point is the consistent and nuanced article of T. McLay. In analyzing Deut. 32:43 quotation in Heb. 1:6, he concludes, “the citation ... provides an excellent illustration of the pluriformity of the Scriptures that were available to the NT writers”. This, for McLay, supports, if not proves, the assertion that since “there was no canon of Scripture for the NT writers ... there was no biblical text either” (p. 58). One can only say that this might indeed be the case for Heb. 1 use of Deut. 32, but it would be an exaggeration to derive a similar conclusion from all, even most, of the OT quotations in NT. This or other potential caveats should not dent the usefulness and richness of the way the collection covers the topic. The consistency of all chapters, as well as the helpful format in which the material is presented, stand out as the two clear advantages of the volume. To this reviewer, however, the most important aspect about it is that while the book invites its readers to hear the OT in NT, it also allows them to hear seasoned scholars reason and dialog about the issues involved. That in itself justifies granting the book a legitimate and deserved place among the reliable sources available to those who do research in the NT use of the OT.

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*Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another.* By Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet. Nashville, TN: B and H Academic, 2008, xi + 324 pp., \$24.99 paper.

I was recently discussing church planting partnerships with a friend at one of the Baptist State Convention offices. He was lamenting to me how difficult it is to find *good parents for church babies* these days. I immediately told him how pleased I was to find that exact language in a new book *Spin-Off Churches* (138). He told me that many of the pastors of their established churches lend the church’s name to the process of birthing a new work, but not much else. He thinks that the men want to brag about their missions to their buddies at the Convention. I told him I have a tough time believing that vanity motivates Southern Baptist pastors, and asked if perhaps they were just unsure about the requirements of good church plant parenting. Either way, we agreed, church plants need good sponsors, and established churches need the spiritual rush that comes from expanding the Kingdom of God. If ignorance is the problem, perhaps *Spin-Off Churches* will spell the end of administration-only sponsorships.

Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet’s *Spin-Off Churches* makes an important contribution to an area in need of development. Ten years ago, one could find little more than the Bible to help him plant a church. Today, books for church planters fill yards of shelves, but what about the pastor whose church wants to sponsor a new work? He wanders through the stacks wondering if Blackaby’s *Experiencing God* can meet yet another need. Eureka! *Spin-Off Churches* offers help in its pleasant and timely pages. The authors’ wealth of experience shines through in their personal stories from the field, and many practical principals. They arranged the book in a reference format, making it useful for many years.

“Part One--Sponsoring Church Fundamentals” gives the reader a foundational theology and background of church planting with a helpful and realistic picture to help church planting critics understand the purpose of new churches. They ask a great question in the first chapter, “Can the Great Commission be fulfilled with the planting of new churches?” (8). The answer is clearly no, it cannot, but while many established churches discuss their concern about the Great Commission, very few sponsor new churches. The dichotomy is glaring.

The authors might have helped their case a bit had they outlined the role of Baptists in the Free Church Movement (18-19). Additionally, it might be helpful to develop a brief history of Southern Baptists as a church planting people (19)—is that not how we grew so large?

In “Part Two—Attitudes Toward Church Sponsorship,” the authors offer a sampling of statistical analyses that reveal areas of agreement and disconnections between church planters and their sponsoring partners. While the tables and charts help some, a narrative approach to advance their points would be helpful. Not everyone can tolerate or understand banks of numbers.

Additionally, the statistical sample may not be as accurate as one would hope from a book published by an academic house. The readers of the *Church Planter Update*, do not offer a fair assessment of attitudes about church planting. Redoing the survey from a broader cross-section of Baptist life—readers of *SBC Life* for instance—might actually strengthen the authors’ case.

“Part Three—Finding the Church Planting Model that Fits” continues with brief sections on missionary support and strategy theories. The authors provide useful information on how to set up a support system for church planters that includes coaching and emotional support besides helping the planter meet his financial needs. The sobering statistic that only three percent of Southern Baptist churches support new works is cause for shame among us, but the authors at least provide a platform for change among willing pastors (65). Several broad categories offer types of churches to consider, including a methodology for redeeming a church split, which is the most pleasantly surprising chapter in the book.

A practical section on the stages of a church plant follows. Overall, “Part Four—Understanding the Phases of New Church Development,” would benefit from more emphasis on the role of listening to one’s community in developing a strategic plan. Excellent observations on what to do when one finds himself in an unfruitful area balance the chapter nicely (135).

In “Part Five—Finding the Resources,” the authors give readers several key principles on how to find resources to fund and staff a new church. The contribution and strategic importance of church planters who fund their salaries through secular employment is a key element. It might help to lose some of the stigma associated with the term “bi-vocational” if church planting leaders drop the term. Opt instead for a term I coined, *intentional employment*, to demonstrate that a secular job often provides the best evangelism field as well as a healthy financial base.

“Part Six—The Route to Spin-Off Success: Putting the Rubber to the Road” introduces readers the necessary details of written covenants, supervisory roles, and adds extremely helpful chapters on the most common mistakes that planters

and their partners make. The two “Top...Mistakes...” chapters alone make the book worth its cover price.

Summing it up, “Part Seven—Selling the Idea for Becoming a Sponsoring Church” offers proven techniques for helping others understand the vision and join the planting effort. Eight important Appendixes offer readers a quick reference library of lists and worksheets to move the process along.

*Spin-Off Churches* promises to increase the success of North American church plants, and (once the news get around) it may increase the number of sponsoring churches. I recommend that Baptist Conventions and Associations freely distribute copies to the leaders of their key sponsoring churches immediately. Moreover, church planters will want to read the book so they can know what to look for when they begin recruiting sponsoring churches. Seminary and Bible college missions, evangelism, and church planting professors will want to consider *Spin-Off Churches* as assigned reading for the students knowing that the book will spur lively discussions.

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*A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter* (Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Volume II). By Ben Witherington, III. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007, 432 pp., \$32.00.

Ben Witherington’s “socio-rhetorical” commentary series aims to root our reading of the New Testament within the rhetorical and sociological milieu of the first-century Mediterranean world. In keeping with other volumes in the series, Witherington’s 1-2 Peter commentary focuses on identifying the type of rhetoric that is employed in the biblical text, and how the author has structured his argument to reach that rhetorical objective. Along the way Witherington offers a number of historical and sociological insights that help clarify our understanding of not only the biblical material, but also what it must have been like to live as a Christian in first-century Asia Minor. This commentary format allows Witherington to showcase his greatest strengths as an exegete—his familiarity with ancient rhetoric, his vast knowledge of both Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds, and his keen and creative historical imagination.

Given Witherington’s strengths, it is perhaps the case that his most unique contributions to both 1 and 2 Peter are found in his introductory material, where he creatively and insightfully deals with a number of historical-critical issues such as authorship, audience, social setting, date of composition, and where he introduces the findings of his rhetorical analysis. With respect to 1 Peter, Witherington goes against the scholarly consensus and mounts to date the best argument for 1 Peter being written to a primarily Jewish audience—offering Hellenized Jews of Asia Minor an ethical monotheism that did not put up barriers with their non-Jewish compeers. That is not to say that Witherington views, as many scholars do, 1 Peter to be a text that advocates cultural accommodation. To the contrary, Witherington highlights how Peter (he affirms Petrine authorship) calls his readers to suffering in order to remain faithful to God, and how 1 Peter’s rhetoric (“deliberative rhetoric in an Asiatic style [45]”)

seeks to inculcate new values rather than maintain the status quo. Other contributions include the proposal that 1 Peter follows the style of Asiatic Greek, which would help explain such features in the text as (1) frequent usage of comparison, (2) accumulation of synonyms, (3) alliteration, and (4) highly emotive language. Witherington also modifies previous rhetorical outlines of the letter, which pastors may find helpful for organizing a preaching series on 1 Peter (49).

Witherington considers 2 Peter to be a document quite different from 1 Peter in a variety of ways. First, while he affirms Petrine authorship for 1 Peter, Witherington regards 2 Peter to be a composite document that includes testimony from Peter (2 Pet 1.12-21), as well as material from Jude. He does not, however, regard 2 Peter to be pseudepigraphical: "It bears neither the form nor the character of a pseudepigraphon, and since it includes genuine Petrine material, it is understandably attributed to its first and most famous contributor (271)." Second, he argues that 2 Peter takes up a different rhetorical objective: rather than inculcating new values, 2 Peter seeks to encourage its readers to continue to develop already-accepted values in light of the return of Christ (epideictic rhetoric; 274). Third, whereas 1 Peter was addressing Hellenized Jewish Christians, 2 Peter is "one of the first Christian attempts at 'mass communication' (266)," written to encourage all Christians in the empire.

Those who have read the previous review in this journal or who have worked through Joel Green's 1 Peter commentary will be interested to read Witherington's reflections on the enterprise of "theological exegesis" (255-259). While Witherington sees value in the approach taken up by Green and his like, he is concerned that the approach downplays the historical givenness of the text. Both Green and Witherington agree that something separates the twenty first-century reader from the first-century biblical texts. Green wants to stress that this gap has more to do with our own theological dispositions than with whether we understand the socio-rhetorical context of the letter. While Witherington agrees that our theological and ecclesiological perspectives influence biblical interpretation, he is unwilling to abandon historical investigation of the New Testament, or the enterprise of writing historical commentaries on the New Testament, since both are integral to a right reading of the text. Perhaps is not an either/or, but rather a both/and. Historical enquiry can, without question, open up our understanding of the Bible—and even reveal our own biases and false conceptions. But as the history of critical biblical scholarship has shown, historical enquiry in and of itself is inadequate to make theological sense of the biblical material. Perhaps the motto "faith seeking understanding" encapsulates how the two emphases of Green and Witherington hold together.

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*Evil and the Justice of God*, By N. T. Wright, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006, 174 pp., \$24.00.

Opponents of Christian theism have often argued that our God cannot exist, if evil exists. The complaint can be expressed as a simple deduction. If God is all-

knowing, he would know about the suffering in our world and would know, from a practical standpoint, how to get rid of it. If he is all-powerful, he could do whatever it takes to rid the world of that suffering. And finally, if he is morally-perfect, he would *desire* to banish suffering from our world. Indeed, since God created everything, no factors should have kept him from creating heavenly conditions *ex nihilo* in the beginning, rather than the world as we know it, complete its vulnerability to wars, rapes, plagues, and disasters. We cannot say in his defense, “He’s only doing the best he can with the raw materials that were available.” He made those raw materials. Come to think of it, the antagonist should say, a God who will change us someday—as he makes all things new—could surely change everything for the better right now, ourselves included. So goes the deductive problem of evil: if suffering exists, God cannot exist.

The argument sounds convincing, and it works quite well at the street-level, where one is less likely to be halted by informed rebuttals. Who knows why God does not annihilate the world’s Hitlers, Stalins, pedophiles, and pushers? Why does he suffer the strutting Masters of the Universe that surround us on all sides, to say nothing of fiends with global outreach? Why do we have hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and earthquakes? Or why do we have so many? It is worth pointing out, of course, that the basic dilemma, *Either God or suffering, but not both*, falls apart unless we have proved conclusively, *There is no morally sufficient reason why God should have permitted the suffering that occurs*. Yet no one has done the latter, and no one ever could. Thus we are left to ponder this foggy question: is God’s existence highly unlikely given that suffering occurs?<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the Scriptures will answer this last question, as they do so many others. We go searching there for answers, and yes: we certainly get them, even to the problem of suffering. But there is a catch here, and Tom Wright’s recent book, *Evil and the Justice of God* (= EJG), captures it. The biblical writers answer our questions about evil and suffering, but not theoretically or with exacting precision, as if to demonstrate why each teardrop must fall. On the contrary, they address the problem with reference to salvation history, assuring us that God will do something about evil, if we do not see him eradicating it just now. Indeed, looking back on the death and resurrection of Christ, we can see that God already has taken the most decisive step toward that end. Wright draws this sort of answer from the whole of Scripture and then outlines the new life that we Christians must live, now that God’s victory over all powers, including death, is under way, if not complete.

The first chapter of *EJG* observes our horrified rediscovery of evil in Western societies, after a long stretch of relative peace. We have seen exceptional progress on many fronts, especially since WWII, with the result that we expect to remain always in the storm’s eye. Wright argues that we scarcely notice worldwide suffering, much less do anything about it, until we face some of it ourselves—until it “hits us in the face” (p. 24), as the events of September 11 did. Wright argues that because Western people prosper and sleep soundly,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), Part 1.

we assume that everyone tends to do so. Evil can then surprise us; and when it does, we may overreact or behave somehow inappropriately. In fact, the word Wright uses most often to evaluate the response of the comfortable is “immature” (pp. 26-29), and their actions become instances of “lashing out” against the unexpected enemy (pp. 27-28).

According to Wright, “the official response (of the United States’ government) was exactly the kind of knee-jerk, unthinking, immature lashing out that gets us nowhere” (p. 27, parenthesis added). We Americans evidently thought that our country “as a whole was a pure, innocent victim, so that the world could be neatly divided up into evil people (particularly Arabs) and good people (particularly Americans and Israelis), and that the latter had a responsibility now to punish the former” (p. 27). So we invaded Afghanistan and Iraq because we were angry, having failed to count to ten, as it were, before losing it nationwide and thus globally. That is one interpretation of our nation’s response, and the *New York Times* and NBC News, plus several member states of the European Union, would smile on Wright as he says these things. But he does not address the practical question of our time. If we believe—in good faith, if not always correctly—that a rogue nation intends to do us harm, whether directly or by proxy, what shall our response be?

Other nations cannot invade countries and occupy them with minimal casualties on their own side, so they will not entertain military options. Ceaseless diplomacy and appeasement become virtues of necessity. But the United States can do this (albeit with mixed results), and so we ask: would President Bush have been derelict in his duty to protect the citizens of our country if he (a) believed that a rogue nation meant to do us great harm and (b) did nothing to disarm it? Wright suggests that we took military action as if to “solve the problem of evil” in our time (p. 28). But our representatives did not make that argument, if memory serves; nor did they present this effort as a war of the Sons of Light versus the Sons of Darkness, although they did call our enemies what they are, after all. Islamofacists are evil because, whatever their grievances with the United States, they chose to strike back *in this way*, with 9/11-scale massacres.

At the end of the day, we know that the United States is not an aggressor nation, whatever its flaws, as evidenced by the fact that we have not annexed Canada and scorched North Korea. But we thought that the regimes of Afghanistan and Iraq were aggressive, and this belief warranted defensive maneuvers. We do not claim any “right of the United States to rule the world, whether by economic or military means” (p. 35). On the contrary, we sense an unwelcome and expensive duty to export two blessings that unleash greater prosperity and peace wherever they take hold—viz., freedom and the rule of law. One mentions this misdiagnosis of United States foreign policy motives only because Wright uses the United States as his prime illustration of collective immaturity, and his otherwise fine book suffers because of it.

If the biblical answer to the problem of evil/suffering is the victory of Christ over fallen powers, certain practical conclusions follow—conclusions that would follow distantly, if at all, from an abstracted, ‘greater good’ theodicy. According to Wright, our “intermediate tasks,” whereby we practice the victory of Christ over evil and his inaugurated reign, include prayer and a commitment

to radical holiness (pp. 118-120). They also include, among others perhaps, a regenerated realism about the hazards of absolute power—i.e., power of just the sort now had by the United States vis-à-vis the world. Wright does not identify the USA as the example here, but he says enough throughout *EJG* to imply the connection. We cannot subdue evil once and for all with military strikes and imposed democracies, Wright argues, because the winners tend toward corruption themselves (p. 122). The situation will never reach equilibrium, and thus we must all insist upon checked power and the governmental imperative “do justice and love mercy” (p. 122). Islamic societies of the Middle East will have none of this, of course; and that might explain our commitment to regime change in a few cases, but yes: Wright’s overall point is well-taken. We have to be realistic about what fallen humanity can and will do once it has gained total control.

Wright’s most effective chapter, entitled “Deliver Us From Evil: Forgiving Myself, Forgiving Others,” takes Miroslav Volf’s, *Exclusion and Embrace* [Abingdon, 1994], as its starting point. The strength of Volf’s argument, as Wright captures it, is that it refuses to soften offenses for the sake of reconciliation. “Whether we are dealing with international relations or one-on-one personal relations, evil must be named and confronted,” versus pretending “it wasn’t so bad after all” (p. 133). The civil war in the former Yugoslavia and the fallout from South African apartheid illustrate the challenge of forgiveness that Wright dwells on in this section. We sometimes wonder how one can experience the joys of heaven at full strength when, all the while, we have our memories: we recall how others have violated us and we them. The answer, he argues, is that when any of us—God included—“offers genuine forgiveness to someone else, we are no longer conditioned by the evil that they have done—even if they refuse to accept this forgiveness” (p. 141).

Wright concludes *EJG* by treating the matter of self-forgiveness, which involves the same process of exclusion and embrace. We face our guilt squarely and recognize it for the offense that it is. Then, according to the promise of God, we accept the free grace that is offered to us in Christ. Something like self-love can then begin—or at least self-acceptance—though its basis will not be our own merits but our position before God in Christ. “This astonished and grateful acceptance of the free grace and love of God is what some traditions have meant when they have echoed Paul’s language about ‘justification by faith’” (p. 162). At the same time, Wright cautions, forgiveness differs from bland tolerance and global indifference to the sinner’s track-record. We do not show forgiveness toward embezzlers and pedophiles by letting them keep our books and mind our children once more. They have forfeited implicit trust in these areas, perhaps permanently so, and they will not get it back with a few episodes of tearful apology plus promises to straighten up. As Wright says, we must retain “at least some vestiges of common sense” (p. 150). But we can, in general terms, treat the offender as a brother or sister in Christ, which is our duty after all.

In the end, as Wright forewarned us, the Bible does not solve the problem of radical evil. We do not learn why God permits it to occur in his good world. But “what we are promised, however, is that God will make a world in which all shall be well, and manner of thing shall be well, a world in which forgiveness is

one of the foundation stones and reconciliation is the cement which holds everything together” (p. 164). And the “best news of all is that we don’t have to wait for the future to start experiencing our deliverance from evil” (p. 165). We might even work toward a world in which people seldom wish to become terrorists or, say, economic predators (p. 165). No one doubts that our lives can improve greatly with just behavior and non-coercive expressions of Christian peacemaking. Yet we can expect no progress along those lines without upholding basic standards of civility and protecting ourselves against those who mean to do us harm, by force if necessary, whether such threats are foreign or domestic. It is a sad fact of our condition, but it is a fact nonetheless: the bad people must restrain the even worse.

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*1 Peter* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary). By Joel B. Green. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007, 331 pp., \$20.00.

It would be entirely unfair to fault Joel Green’s 1 Peter commentary for what it is lacking. You will not find, for example, a consistent catalogue of scholarly positions on key passages in the letter; neither are there extensive philological studies, or regular discussions of the Greek grammar and syntax; the commentary is not overly concerned with historical-critical issues. This is by design, however. The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary series eschews conventional commentary features and instead seeks to offer a fresh approach that focuses on the theological task of exegesis, allowing hermeneutics and systematic theology to have their say at the exegetical table. In this regard, Green’s execution of the Two Horizons mission is exemplary—but perhaps this is to be expected since he is one of the series editors.

The commentary is divided into two parts. In the first section Green offers a well-written, paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of 1 Peter based on the Greek text that orients the reader to the letter’s theological concerns. Two characteristics that make Green’s exegesis particularly engaging are (1) his adeptness at hearing and/or tracing out the implications of Old Testament citations and allusions in the letter, and (2) his ability to draw together major sections of the letter to show the overall coherence of Peter’s thought. What is equally remarkable is how the exegetical section has been faithful to the aims of Two Horizons while also demonstrating an awareness of the scholarly debates, and of the historical, grammatical, and philological issues of particular passages, but without getting bogged down in the rehearsal of all the details.

In the second section of the book, “Theological Horizons”, having worked through 1 Peter exegetically, Green engages with wider theological issues that have been instigated by the examination of the biblical text. In this section, Green explores Peter’s contributions to the conventional theological categories of theology proper, pneumatology, Christology, anthropology, and soteriology. But he couples this with reflections on suffering, the narrative theology of the letter, Peter’s rhetorical strategy, his hermeneutical assumptions and how they should inform ours, as well as what 1 Peter might have to say regarding the

relationship between Christianity and politics—all topics you don't often find in more conventional commentaries or in discussions of systematic theology.

Of the many significant and intriguing contributions this commentary makes to the study of 1 Peter, three will be highlighted. First, Green demonstrates that 1 Peter is not merely the raw data for theology, but is also “an exemplar of the theological task” (190). In both his exegetical section and also with his theological essays in part two, Green persuasively shows that we not only learn theology from 1 Peter, we also learn how to *do* theology from 1 Peter. Second, Green continually underscores Peter's concern to shape and solidify Christian identity that leads to a corresponding lifestyle. One of the more helpful observations that Green has made with respect to identity formation is that Peter's reflection on Christ's suffering is not an end in and of itself, but rather serves to inform and enable holy living and faithful witness to the world. In other words, Christology serves to inform ecclesiology. Finally, Green suggests that our full apprehension of 1 Peter has less to do with the historical gap between us and Peter's first readers, and more to do with whether we are ready to embrace the identity that is put forth in the letter. Are we willing to acknowledge that we live in a place that is yet to be our home? Are we willing to undergo suffering (which for Peter includes social alienation) in order to remain faithful to God's calling on our lives?

Green's 1 Peter commentary will be of particular worth to those who are engaged in the preaching and teaching of 1 Peter in an ecclesiastical setting. Those who have longed to see a concrete example of what “theological exegesis” actually looks like will also want to get their hands on this commentary. And while this volume was not primarily written for the academy, scholars exploring the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, narrative theology, Christian identity formation, and the interface between the gospel and Roman imperial ideology will find this commentary to be thought-provoking and informative.

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*The God Delusion*. By Richard Dawkins. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. x + 406 pp.

A review of Richard Dawkins' latest book, *The God Delusion* (= GD), requires some apology to *MJT* readers for two reasons. First, the book came out in 2006; and here we are, two years later, set to offer commentary on it. But secondly, reviews of this kind highlight a work which hardly advances the debate over theism, given its repetition of standard atheistic objections.<sup>1</sup> Dawkins has all

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<sup>1</sup> Atheism puts its best foot forward in J. L. Mackie's, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (OUP, 1982), Michael Martin's, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Temple University, 1992), and Antony Flew's, *God and Philosophy*, Revised Edition, (Prometheus, 2005). All three function at a much higher level than the GD, because of their willingness to treat theism as having a case to be answered, as opposed to being essentially dismissed as a juvenile fairytale.

sorts of arguments in the GD tending toward decide; yet we have seen all of this before, and it has all been answered before. Let each one judge how well the battle goes: Dawkins, at any rate, adds little to it, save for a question-begging refutation of theism based on God's supposed complexity (more on this later).

Yet the GD tells us something valuable about Dawkins himself. We learn that he has long since abandoned the philosophical stance. Gone is the attempt to wrestle with alternative viewpoints sympathetically before taking up the gloves. Dawkins cannot wait to 'go polemic,' partly because he is good at it—a gold medalist in sassy putdowns.<sup>2</sup> But he also goes negative early and often because he hates theistic worldviews, especially the one featured in the Bible. 'Hates' is a strong word, of course; but for the doubters among us, one offers the following paragraph which the author regards as some of his best work (p. 31):

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

Dawkins actually recites this paragraph for Ben Stein, at the conclusion of *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, so he obviously stands by it; yet he never answers the question raised by his 374-page sneer: if he has fairly described the God of Scripture, why do so many people adore the latter? They fear him also: we know that, and they should do so. But they actually love and praise him, deeply and genuinely. Can Dawkins do no better in explaining this than to postulate their suffering from a 'mental virus'? He finds no trace of a just and loving God in the Bible, none whatsoever. One can state with some confidence, in fact, that he has not even tried.

In this sense, Dawkins falls short of the standard put forward by the philosopher Brand Blanshard, in his celebrated essay, *On Philosophical Style*:

Again, if a philosopher is a good human being, he knows that many of the beliefs he is attacking are intertwined inextricably with the hopes and feelings of those who hold them, and his controversial manner will take note of these involvements.<sup>3</sup> At a minimum, this "taking note" would include a stab at objectivity; and because Dawkins is an intelligent and gifted writer, he could have managed as much, describing theistic creationism sympathetically before drawing his sword. But he chose not to do so and produced instead a cruel and unjust work which, for that reason, misleads even his fellow infidels. Eventually, they will discover,

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<sup>2</sup> Greatly ironic, then, is Dawkins' contempt for Ann Coulter and simultaneous posturing as one who barely knows who she is (cf., GD, pp. 288, 321). Dawkins travels the same cable-news circles that she does and is Great Britain's answer to her. He too is an acid-tongued polemicist who shocks for a living.

<sup>3</sup> Brand Blanshard, *On Philosophical Style*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1969 (1954), pp. 16-17.

no doubt to their shame, that, *God created the heavens and the earth*, is nothing like milquetoast claim that Dawkins makes it out to be.

A foundational maxim of the GD is: *The more we learn about the natural world, the less convinced we should be that God exists*. Beside it rests the idea that Ockham's Razor defeats creationism, once Darwinism has become even vaguely plausible.<sup>4</sup> If we can imagine natural forces producing cabbages and kings, we must 'default' to the view that they have; for in that case, only one kind of thing exists and gladly so.<sup>5</sup> Supernatural causes have become needless and unwelcome as threats to naturalism's elegant simplicity. If an inference like this does not account for the enabling that Darwin's theory receives in the GD, one struggles to explain Dawkins' patience with it and why he thinks that Darwinism—plus Cambrian flights of imagination—subtracts God. Any 'just-so' story will do. The GD contains no positive case for the view that natural forces alone produced complex living things, only references to potential lines of research and a dismissal of Darwin's critics. But if Darwinian explanations always win just because of their naturalism, research itself seems hardly necessary.

The GD soon leaves the question of science and religion behind and strays into areas where Dawkins is both impatient and resolutely uninformed. All five of Thomas Aquinas' theistic proofs are treated in three pages of text. Within that span, Dawkins pretends to demolish both the Cosmological and Teleological arguments for God's existence. So, for example, the reason why the cosmological argument (= CA) does not work, according to Dawkins, is that worries about infinite regressions of causes would apply just as well to God himself (p. 77). In this complaint, however, he rushes past the insight that the CA does its best work not in proving that the God of Scripture exists but in *eliminating naturalism*, which requires an infinite regress of physical events. Naturalism must say this because, in its austere simplicity, it can say nothing else and thereby paints itself into the corner of absurdity. The singularity crouched at the ontological starting line for an infinite number of moments, waiting for some new cause to arise (from where?); then suddenly, when the time (?) was right, the expansion occurred, launching the singularity toward the year 2008 and beyond.<sup>6</sup> From a logical standpoint, this claim is on all fours with the statement, *Then Mt. Olympus spontaneously moved*. Rhetoric about antimatter and force fields cannot solve the basic problem.

We do not know precisely what condition God was in before creation (perhaps even before time as we know it); but his transcendence—which was

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<sup>4</sup> In this review, I am using 'creationism' in the broad sense to denote the theory that God brought living beings into existence, whatever concrete mechanisms were involved in his doing so. Some forms of creationism would, therefore, be incompatible with Genesis 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes called the "principle of parsimony," Ockham's Razor requires us to favor the simplest adequate explanation, such that we do not multiply explanatory assumptions or entities needlessly.

<sup>6</sup> The 'singularity' is what one gets to by compressing our universe back into the state immediately preceding the "Big Bang." It is the point of infinite density, where all laws of nature as we know them break down. Of course, if this cosmological model is incorrect, no references to singularities back then would be apropos.

not invented just to answer this objection—gives us elbow-room that naturalism forsakes in its commitment to explanatory simplicity above all else. Something will have to be a self-starter within or beyond our universe, as appropriate—either God, a conscious being with a freedom to choose, or the singularity from which the Big Bang emerged. But we *know* that the latter cannot have sprung causelessly into action. Naturalism itself does not have the explanatory resources to enfold that idea because it will not permit itself to say, in effect, “Some unseen, unknown force acted upon the singularity to jump-start the universe.” Nor can naturalists consistently argue that the singularity sprung causelessly from a ‘void’ of whatever sort, because such an entity would be above or below nature—choose your preposition—if anything is.

Dawkins treats the Design Argument (= DA) with similar techniques: the argument is taken to the first layer of rebuttal and set aside just in time. Long before the DA made its philosophical debut, biblical theists had agreed that God is not mechanically complex. He does not have parts that require precise assembly and coordination. He is a complicated being, to be sure, but only in the sense that personalities might be complex. Interlocking and functioning parts have nothing to do with it. Consequently, the simplicity of God is not an *ad hoc* hypothesis invented just to save the DA from an embarrassing rejoinder: “Why isn’t God’s complexity in need of a Super-Designer?” We would affirm this doctrine in any case, though we note its destructive effect on Dawkins’ “Ultimate 747 Argument.”

According to Dawkins, theists believe that nature’s improbably complex entities require a Designer; but in that case, he argues, God would have to be even more complex still. So we have his complexity to explain, and yet we cannot invoke a Super-God to deal with it. Why not accept the ultimacy of nature itself and take our leave of God? One has to stop somewhere, and we ought to quit before postulating another sphere of reality (i.e., the supernatural) so long as Darwinism still has a shot at accounting for what we see. Alongside this plea comes the complaint that intelligent design theorists misrepresent the role of chance in Darwin’s theory. Genetic mutations occur randomly but, Dawkins argues, chance has little to do with the different survival rates resulting from different body types. A Great Dane *will* outlive a Chihuahua, if both must survive an Alaskan winter: effect follows cause in a predictable way. In this sense, numerous slight modifications can “climb Mount Improbable,” taking unicellular organisms on an extended journey concluding with us—or so Dawkins argues (p. 122). But these arguments cry out for follow-up inquiries.

In the first instance, orthodox theism rejects the idea of God’s mechanical complexity. He has no parts that must fit together in a functional way, any more than one’s personality has actual sides or dimensions. Dawkins could have some other kind of complexity in mind for God, but he would need to make that clear; and he has not in the GD. As to the larger problem of Darwinism’s adequacy, we have this worry left unanswered by Dawkins. The latter’s defense of evolution presupposes gradualism. One gets from blindness to eyesight, for example, by infinitesimal genetic mutations: a little here, a little there; and as the ages pass, vision results. This constructive march works, according to Dawkins, because 1% of an eye or wing beats 0%, giving the one-percenters a reproductive advantage over their entirely blind or flightless cousins; and 2% is

even better (pp. 123-124). But this odds-making gesture leaves gradualism far behind, since the leap from zero to one is a Darwinian ‘saltation,’ a sudden change that he specifically proscribed. The question is not, “What advantage in survival (and thus reproduction) might 1% of an eye or wing bring?,” but rather, “What good is .00001% of an eye, compared with none?” That is the breaking-point of orthodox Darwinism, and Dawkins would have seen it long ago.

Like many of the New Atheists—including Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and the late Douglas Adams—Dawkins has a strong personal need to cast himself in the role of the martyr, as if his writing the GD were evidence of uncommon valor.<sup>7</sup> He joins a hunted minority of freethinkers who express the unmentionable, risking in it all in so doing (pp. 20-21). But the only boundaries faced by our village contrarians are ethical, not legal. They have an obligation to treat such matters in ways that help us think clearly about them, if not also to advance the discussion itself. Dennett is usually thought-provoking; some of the others as well, when their attraction to rhetorical bomb-throwing does not take over. Yet even now, in wake of their various offenses, nothing untoward has happened to any of them, save for some hate-mail (one assumes). They have indeed been on the run these days—viz., from television appearances to lucrative speaking engagements, from lavish book contracts to film roles. If this is persecution, may we all suffer with them.

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*God's Twilight Zone – Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible.* By T. Anthony Perry. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008, 208 pp. , paperback, \$19.95.

Anthony Perry received his Ph.D. at Yale and is Professor Emeritus at the University of Connecticut. He has also taught at Williams College, Smith College, Loyola University, Hebrew University, and Ben Gurion University. Dr. Perry has authored several books, including *The Honeymoon Is Over – Jonah's Argument with God* (Hendrickson, 2006). *God's Twilight Zone* is not an introduction to wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the book investigates specific texts which are outside the wisdom books yet dovetail with the wisdom genre. Perry specifically aims to interact with the ambiguity of these passages. He compares this exercise with viewing creation at twilight, when “things become blurred, open to multiple interpretations (p. xi).”

Although Perry focuses on alternate and multiple readings of texts, it is important to note that he is looking for legitimate readings based on the ambiguity of the original Hebrew. He states, “At the heart of the matter, in all cases, is the meaning of the biblical text, not what we would like it to mean but what in fact it does mean (p. xx).” His investigation is undoubtedly text-centered.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf., Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, (Penguin, 2006); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, (Norton, 2004); Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, (Twelve, 2007).

The Introduction of the book reveals the driving theory behind Perry's investigation, namely that wisdom is tied to the Creation story in the early chapters of Genesis. Perry believes wisdom passages display a "transfer from divine to human creativity" which was recorded "from the very beginning of the Hebrew Bible and remained a focus throughout (p. xvii)."

Fittingly, the first unit of *God's Twilight Zone* (Chapters 1-3) is called "Creating and Maintaining a Righteous World." These chapters illuminate the contrast between the "righteous" and the "wicked" within specific pericopae found in Genesis and Exodus. Perry argues that the "righteous" display their wisdom by preserving life, maintaining order, and appropriating other ideals put forth in the early chapters of Genesis. The "wicked," however, prove by their destruction to be the antithesis of such ideals and of wisdom itself.

The second unit (Chapters 4-7) is called "Interpreting the Twilight Zone." Chapters 4-6 focus, respectively, on passages about Samson, Saul, and Solomon. Chapter 7 examines Psalm 1 with the intent of going beyond its typical "wisdom" classification toward actually hammering out its ramifications for righteousness and wisdom development. In this unit the author utilizes these particular wisdom texts to investigate the literary nature of such pericopae and to display the complexities involved in interpreting them.

The third and final unit (Chapters 8 and 9) is called "The Rebirth of Vulnerability and Wonder." Chapter 8 examines the closing chapter of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) and focuses on living righteously and contentedly in this present world albeit with an awareness of its transience. Chapter 9 examines Proverbs 30:18-19, focusing particularly on the phrase, "the way of a man with a young woman." These chapters essentially deal with the wisdom of enjoying creation within God's parameters for joy. A brief conclusion to the work follows Chapter 9.

Readers need to be aware, maybe even wary, of Perry's presuppositions. He seems (I use the word "seems" because Perry himself can be quite ambiguous) to believe that wisdom is a late development in Israel's history. He sees wisdom as a movement to fill the void left by the gradual, steady decrease of prophetic activity (see esp. pp. 174ff.). If wisdom is "late," (yet Perry finds the influence of wisdom on texts in the Torah), then the reader is left to assume that Perry is still clutching to aspects of the outdated (yet difficult to slay) Documentary Hypothesis or a more radical view of the Torah's redaction. Although that argument may seem to be a slippery slope, Perry's failure to clarify his presuppositions leaves the reader out of necessity in such a wary posture. Also, Perry may find too much authority in extra-biblical sources. For instance, he asks the reader, "did not Abraham, in a world full of idols and violence, discover God on his own and with his own powers (p. 174)?" Here Perry is citing midrashic tradition as authoritative, not the Bible. Does he believe it to be on par with scripture? His ambiguity strikes again. On the one hand Perry engages rabbinic thought throughout the book as he tackles difficult texts, and the reader has much to glean from his efforts. On the other hand, he consistently treats these extra-biblical texts as authoritative, although the reader cannot say for sure whether Perry believes them to be so or not. He probably crosses the boundary between letting these sources inform the interpreter of scripture and placing them on par with scripture.

Another criticism of the book is that Perry can be guilty of the “overload fallacy,” or the tendency to cram all possible meanings of a word or phrase into one specific occurrence in the text (this common fallacy goes by several more technical names). In Chapter 3, for example, Perry investigates at length the meaning of *alah* in Exodus 1:10. Perry succeeds in displaying the ambiguous nature of this word, and is right to investigate all of its possible meanings, but he fallaciously tries to apply every meaning to this one instance. It is one thing to interact with ambiguity in the Hebrew Bible, but it is another matter entirely to cram every meaning of a word into a single occurrence.

While the book has faults, I must say that it is a fascinating and worthwhile read. Those seeking to learn the basics of the wisdom genre should look elsewhere, for this book is not an introduction to wisdom. It is, however, a text-centered book that is brutally honest about the ambiguity of the Hebrew language and forthright in its challenges to conventional views of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible. Observing Perry’s investigative method will help any student of scripture delve more deeply into the Hebrew Bible. I suspect future commentaries will begin interacting with Perry’s keen and penetrating treatment of certain texts within this book, much like they do with groundbreaking scholarly articles. I recommend *God’s Twilight Zone – Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible* as a challenging and stimulating read for students of scripture. It is one of those rare works which, although displaying certain phrases and presuppositions with which conservative evangelicals will be at odds, will benefit and expand the careful and attentive reader.

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*X-rays for Archaeology*. By Masayuki Uda, Guy Demortier, and Izumi Nakai, eds. Netherlands: Springer, 2005, pp., 308, \$189.00, Hardcover.

*X-rays for Archaeology* is a compilation of papers selected from the First International Symposium on X-Ray Archaeometry. The symposium took place in Tokyo, Japan in July, 2002. The aim of the symposium was to provide a platform for discussing results of experimental X-ray-based analyses of archaeological artifacts. Uda, Demortier, and Nakai have included twenty-four such papers from that symposium. The sections of the book are: Part I “In-Situ Measurements,” Part II “Use of Ion Beam,” Part III “Use of Synchrotron Radiation,” Part IV “Radiography,” Part V “Interdisciplinary Field between Art and Science.”

Throughout the book, great care has been taken to include the meticulous detail. To differing degrees, all the authors have included sections pertaining to their instrumentation, the settings of such instruments, and the rationale for the experiment/study. The essay “PIXE Study on Chinese Underglaze-Red Porcelain Made in Yuan Dynasty” by Cheng, Zhang, Lin, and Huang is typical. The article itself is very brief but illustrated with in-depth charts and tables. They explain their experiment using very technical terminology. They write,

Experiments were performed at the Institute of Modern Physics, Fudan University, Shanghai. External-beam PIXE was carried out for all samples using the 9SDH-2 beam line of the 3.0MeV tandem accelerator. Samples were placed at 10mm outside the beam exit window (7.5 $\mu$ m Kapton). After passing through the Kapton film and air, 2.8MeV protons with beam current of 0.05-0.5 nA hit the sample with a small spot of size 1mm in diameter. The induced x-rays were detected using an ORTEC Si(Li) detector with an energy resolution of 165eV (FWHM) at 5.9KeV. (p.152)

One can easily see the technological detail included in the work. The results sections of each article are just as thorough.

Also included in each article is a section of conclusions which attempts to disclose the application of the results. For instance, in "Characterization of Pigments Used in Ancient Egypt," Uda writes,

We confirmed that portable XRF (X-ray fluorescence), XRD (X-ray diffraction), ED-XRDF (energy dispersive X-ray diffraction and fluorescence) systems can be used very effectively to investigate pigments on monuments under non-destructive and non-contact conditions in the field. It is also highly probable that these portable systems can be used to study surfaces of other monuments in the field without difficulty. These methods may supply important information necessary for the conservation and restoration of the unique monuments of the world. (p. 24)

The most inherent weakness of *X-rays for Archaeology* is its very technical nature. The publishers insist that the book was written for professional and student archaeologists, among others like museologists, natural scientists, physicists, etc. Yet, the reader is faced with technical terms which only the X-ray scholar or student would understand without additional study. Admittedly, I am not an X-ray scholar, nor am I an X-ray student. My degree is in archaeology and Old Testament. But, that is exactly the point. As someone who continuously reads archaeological and biblical studies, I found very little common ground with this work. The problem was not the lack of professionalism or sloppy scholarship. No, exactly the opposite was true. The disappointment came from the work being so technically aimed toward the X-ray audience. The issue seems to be a lack of an agreed upon body of language, terms, and goals between these X-ray scholars and their intended audience—archaeologists.

While slowly working through the technical sections of the book, I eagerly anticipated the time when the author would tell how his or her particular work would be beneficial in archaeology. But, time and again I was met with the lack of applicable uses. The authors admirably demonstrated how mobile and inobtrusive X-ray can be. Yet, the uses of X-ray as presented in this book seems confined to determining provenance, particle make-up, paint or pottery composition, and conservation. All of these are certainly worthy uses, but only in limited and specific cases. It is difficult to imagine archaeologists needing the technology presented in *X-rays for Archaeology* on a daily basis, perhaps even

on a yearly basis. The use of X-ray technology presented in *X-rays for Archaeology* appears to be for a specialized needs basis.

*X-rays for Archaeology* is a scholarly work intended to be read by other scholars. Its price of \$189 (U.S.) will assure that the book will only be on the shelves of the most ardent students and scholars. The book is not a “must have”

or “must read” for archaeologists or students of archaeology. The individual articles could be helpful in specific situations. But on the whole, the work lacks a strong connection with archaeology, especially field archaeology.

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*Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality.* By W. David Buschart. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006, 373 pp., \$21.00

Dr. Buschart’s stated intention for his book is to help those people who stand outside the Christian tradition to come to a better understanding of the Christian faith, especially its Protestant variety, by becoming more familiar with its landscape as seen through the lenses of eight major strands of Protestant thought. Additionally, and this is where the book is most clearly aimed, the book seeks to foster a hospitality between the various theological traditions, not by reducing each tradition to some common denominator to which each can then ascribe, but instead by giving a fair reading to each tradition so as to understand both the historical formation and the main theological emphases of each. It is to this end that the book does not seek to engage in a polemical debate with each tradition, or to compare and contrast one tradition over against another. Quite the opposite is the case. Dr. Buschart has set as an agenda to be “primarily descriptive and affirmative rather than polemical or defensive.” It is in fact an invitation to theological hospitality as the subtitle states.

The eight traditions that are surveyed in the book are the Reformed, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Baptist, Anglican, Anabaptist, Pentecostal and Dispensational. Each tradition is dealt with in its own self contained chapter. Each chapter stands alone with no connections between the traditions so that each chapter serves as a general introduction to the tradition under consideration. Each chapter follows the same structural approach in which the historical and ecclesiastical background is presented first. The story of each tradition is traced from its founders, through its establishment as it was passed on from generation to the next, to the diversity that has resulted in the tradition over time. Having established the context of the tradition the book then treats the theological and hermeneutical method employed by the tradition. In this area the emphasis is laid upon the more scholarly writers within each tradition, instead of what is taking place in the local congregations. It is therefore more of a review of the traditions academic method and production. Having established both the context and the method, the chapter ends by highlighting two of the major distinctions of the tradition. For example, within Lutheranism justification and the sacraments are treated, while within the Baptist tradition it is ecclesiology and baptism which are highlighted. Each chapter then ends with a brief conclusion that seeks to encapsulate the major ethos of the tradition.

Overall the book does a commendable job of giving an introduction to each tradition. One of the book's strengths in this regard is also one of its weaknesses. Each tradition is allowed to speak for itself as regards its major theological emphases. While this allows the reader to see what that tradition holds as its most important tenets, it does not allow the reader an opportunity to see the diversity of views that exists between the traditions on particular subjects. While this approach may be more conducive to a hospitable dialogue in that there is a less likely chance that any of the traditions will have to go head to head over a difference within their respective tradition, it does not foster the type of deep hospitality that is able to confront those issues in which the various traditions find themselves in pointed disagreement in a manner that does not turn into vitriol, but instead results in being able to agree to disagree in Christian love.

Dr. Buschart lives up to his agenda of seeking to not be polemical, but instead to be descriptive and affirming. Each chapter is saturated with primary sources from the tradition under consideration, with minimal commentary by the author. It is only in the final chapter that Dr. Buschart reveals that he is within the Reformed tradition himself, and he not does reveal this in order to advocate for the Reformed position, but instead to urge believers to gain a deeper understanding of each tradition in order to foster dialog that is based upon a spirit of hospitality and not antagonism. While the call to Christian hospitality is a call that we should heed, Dr. Buschart issues a warning that responding to the call raises two dangers. The first is that identity crises can be created. As one begins to investigate, dialog, and partner with other traditions there might be a tendency to water down the distinctives that are foundational for one's tradition. Also, there is a risk of division within one's own tradition as people react against the dialog and cooperation that has begun. While both risks are real, Dr. Buschart advocates a Christian hospitality that is marked by both differentiation and embrace. He is not calling for a reduction of the distinctives between the traditions, but instead is calling for each tradition to retain its identity as it seeks to embrace those aspects of the other tradition.

The book accomplishes its agenda of offering Christian hospitality, but the conversation cannot end where the book leaves it. On its own, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, leaves the reader with no method to judge between the various traditions. One is left with no clear choice regarding what should be the criterion of truth that judges between each tradition. For example, when describing the "Oneness" movement within Pentecostalism there is no indication of the theological dangers of rejecting the Trinity, or any mention of its historically unorthodox position that would bring in to question its very inclusion within the broader Christian tradition to which the book seeks to appeal. In addition to the desire to be hospitable, one must also be willing to state what is the touchstone of his tradition, whether it is experience, the Bible, or the tradition itself. Until one has established the basis for judging between the differences, it would be difficult to enter into a dialog that progressed very far. If people disagree over the final authority in a dispute, the most that can be hoped for is a polite handshake and cordiality.

## Book Review Index

Anyabwile, Thabiti M. *The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity*. (J. Alan Branch)

Buschart, W. David. *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality*. (Rustin Umstattd)

Christianson, Eric. *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* (Russell Meek)

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. (Thorvald Madsen)

Green, Joel B. *I Peter* (Kelly David Liebengood)

Harrison, Rodney and Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet. *Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another* (Jack Allen)

Lennox, John C. *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Charles E. Warren)

Perry, T. Anthony. *God's Twilight Zone – Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible*. (R. Michael Fox)

Porter, Stanley E. (ed.) *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Radu Gheorghiu)

Torbett, David. *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell*. (Tony Auxier)

Uda, Masayuki and Guy Demortier, and Izumi Nakai, (eds.) *X-rays for Archaeology*. (Chet Roden)

Witherington, Ben III. *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter* (Kelly David Liebengood)

Wright, N. T. *Evil and the Justice of God* (Thorvald Madsen)

## List of Publishers

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