

***Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11.*** By C. John Collins. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 336 pp. Softcover \$36.99.

The author of *Reading Genesis Well* is C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Liverpool. He has published four other books to date, all of which are relevant to the complex subject matter this book seeks to tackle. Those titles are *The God of Miracles* (2000), *Science and Faith* (2003), *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006), and *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?* (2011). He has also published numerous articles and book reviews in many different journals.

The hermeneutical challenges that confront the interpreter of Genesis 1–11 are neither minimal nor insignificant. It is no surprise, then, that the author invests the first six chapters (157 pages—essentially half the book) methodically laying down his proposal for the best way to read Genesis 1–11 so that the reader comes away with how the original audience (mainly ancient Israelites farmers) would have understood it. Thus, he assesses various critical tools that are popular among Bible scholars today. Specifically, he examines linguistic analysis, rhetorical analysis, literary criticism, and genre criticism. While acknowledging that these disciplines all make a significant contribution to biblical scholarship, he nonetheless concludes that each falls short in one way or another. He is especially critical of those who are committed to a literal interpretation. Now, while that immediately sounds an alarm, once he explains and illustrates what he means, it is not so alarming (yet we'll issue a caution later). As one might discern from the titles of his other books (noted above), this is not to suggest that he discounts the historicity of the people and events in Genesis 1–11, nor the

possibility of the supernatural within the same. In fact, he repeatedly affirms this throughout the book.

Collins's main concern is to show that many interpreters, in their zeal to be faithful to each word of the text, fail to see the socio-linguistic and rhetorical impact that would have been understood by the original audience. He reminds his readers that communication consists of more than the simple word-level meanings (*locution*). Other factors (e.g., tone of voice, situational context, social conventions, etc.) allow the speaker to deliver an intended meaning that often transcends the words themselves (*illocution*) due to the "shared world" of the author/text and audience/message. Since all true communication involves listeners or receivers, then their response helps reveal their understanding (*perlocution*) of what the speaker conveyed. Perhaps one could say that Collins's first six chapters could serve as a primer in communication theory since he covers the following basics: *speech act theory, the function of metaphor* (chapter 3); *good-faith communication, world picture and worldview, sense, reference, and rhetoric* (chapter 4); *cohesion and coherence, audience criticism* (chapter 5); *use of anachronism as an audience aid, and literary style* (chapter 6).

One of the unique aspects of this book—one that had great personal appeal to me—was his use of C. S. Lewis as a model for his own "rhetorical-theological" approach. Recognizing Lewis as a literary scholar, he aims to avail himself of the "raft-load of linguistic and literary ideas" (25) he put forth (though not in any systematized way). Not to mention that Lewis was eminently qualified to do so, being trained in philosophy, classics, and English literature, as well as teaching the same at Oxford and Cambridge. Collins's ample citations and applications of Lewis are truly refreshing.

It is not until chapter 7 that Collins presents his "critical intuitive" approach (as he calls it). After carefully

laying the methodological foundation in the foregoing chapters, he proceeds to systematically work through the various sections of Genesis 1–11 (creation account, Gen 1–2; the fall and its consequences, Gen 3–4; from Adam to Noah, Gen 5; the great flood, Gen 6–9; the Table of Nations, Gen 10; the Tower of Babel, Gen 11a; and from Shem to Abram, Gen 11b). Collins provides the reader with many keen insights in virtually each of the above sections. Two of my favorites were (1) his insight on the Nephilim reference in Numbers 13:33; and (2) the stark contrast between the Lamech of Genesis 4 and the Lamech of Genesis 5. But there were many others. Now, that is not to say that he will always please the reader. There were a number of specifics that I took issue with (e.g., inflated numbers on the life spans in the genealogical lists; whether Adam really said, “Bone of my bones, etc.” in 2:23; his being non-committal about the universality of the flood; etc.).

The remainder of the book interacts with how other readers from ancient times have interpreted Genesis 1–11 (chapter 8); how to apply the rhetorical-theological approach to some of the more entrenched interpretations of familiar expressions, such as *whether the sun rises*, or *accounting for rain* in the pre-flood days, or *a three-decker universe*, etc. (chapter 9); how the reader of Genesis 1–11 should understand God’s action during the creation week: as a first or second cause? (chapter 10); and how Genesis 1–11 serves the redemptive history for both Israel and the world (chapter 11).

While there is much about this book that I found beneficial, I nevertheless come away with a serious caution. It appears to me that the subjectivity inherent in Collins’s method goes unchecked in certain places. This is most notably evident in chapter 10 (although in chapter 9 he expressly tips his hat toward the Big Bang theory). Supposedly an ancient Israelite farmer would have understood the reference to “waters above” and “windows of heaven” (in Genesis 1 and 7,

respectively) as a reference to rain clouds. Also, since the word for “kind” in Genesis 1 is not a scientific term, it does not indicate in any way as to whether a “kind” can eventually turn into a different kind or not (which, thus, allows for naturalistic evolution, or what he would call “biological dissent with modification”). According to Collins, the text is making no such point and contains no such implicature. And as for the record of Adam’s formation in Genesis 2 (as well as the creation of the plants, animals, birds—indeed, everything created during the creation week), the text says nothing about the process involved. Thus, God potentially could have used secondary causation (e.g., theistic evolution) to accomplish the task.

Overall, I see *Reading Genesis Well* as a helpful resource for the scholar to sharpen his hermeneutical tools and come away with many useful insights for teaching and ministry. But, as with so many of the books on my shelf, one must use it with discretion and care.

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***Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets.*** **New Studies in Biblical Theology.** By David G. Firth. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019. 218 pp. Softcover \$23.40.

*Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets* is another valuable addition to New Studies in Biblical Theology series. Although data concerning foreigners, God’s attitude toward them, and their relationships

with the people of God in the OT could be drawn from nearly all of the books of the Scriptures, David Firth chose to narrow his focus to the Former Prophets. While it is true that within the histories of this portion of the OT the greater emphasis is on the reporting of history, rather than commenting on it, Firth wants the reader to understand that the interpreter who concentrates on the genre, language, and things commended in the text will better understand the status, place, and purpose of the foreigners in and around Israel. He emphasizes that the foreigners found in these books are both numerous and neglected as far as systematic study is concerned.

In his extensive and intensive analysis of Joshua, Judges, the books of Samuel, and the books of Kings, Firth identifies the foreigners not by that designation, but by gentilics, social and physical location, or comments about the individuals that identify them as being foreigners.

Of course, Firth recognizes that much of the contemporary literature concerning these books is centered on ethical issues, for example, the foreigners as enemies of the Lord and his people (e.g., the Canaanites), and how God deals with them in warfare. He quotes some well-known paragraphs from Richard Dawkins to illustrate not only the atheist's perspective on the God of the OT, but also, with a less vituperative statement, a ghoulish summary of Joshua's destructive acts. Firth explains that many of the conquest narratives of the period are hyperbolic in language, emphasizing total victory, but not conflicting with the continuing existence of peoples and cities that had been devoted to destruction after decisive battles. In fact, it is because the Canaanites and others continued to live near and in Israel that there are so many foreigners to be explored in this study.

Firth is a careful exegete, providing a broad commentary on each of the books, and a detailed commentary of the foreigners found strewn throughout the books. At some

points the detail becomes a bit overwhelming because of his concern to provide background, context, relationships, contrasts, and comparisons for the foreigners studied; but it is worthwhile to track with him, for those non-Jews whose existence in the history of Israel and Judah taught valuable lessons.

Though not an exhaustive list, the following are many of God's valuable lessons pointed out throughout this book. First, God desired to accomplish his will through selected foreigners; and these were often presented quite positively. Second, Yahweh did more than tolerate foreigners in the land, but desired that they would come to him and join the family, enjoying his blessings. Third, the Israelites were not to become (like) the idolatrous Canaanites (in heart, mind, and behavior). Fourth, Yahweh would use the nations to punish Israel. Fifth, Yahweh intended the defeat of foreign armies to cause them to know that he alone is God. Sixth, God is not a God who discriminates, and his purposes have always included all peoples. Seventh, the people of God are to be a community defined by faith, not by ethnicity. The book concludes with a chapter applying lessons learned in the rest of the study to the lives of Christians today.

This book would be an ideal textbook for a course in the Former Prophets. Pastors and teachers of the Word would benefit greatly by reading this masterful unfolding of this part of the Scriptures and by meeting a host of foreigners used by the Lord to instruct Israel, and us.

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***The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic.*** By Christopher J. H. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 184 pp. Softcover \$ 18.00.

Christopher J. H. Wright's *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences* delivers new students of Scripture an insightful overview of the Old Testament's major storyline and its themes. Imitating the OT's own structure as a "grand narrative" (6), Wright organizes his overview with a similar narrative approach using "seven sentences" (each developed as a separate chapter) to identify the plot points in his retelling of the OT story. The seven sentences—taken from across the Law, Prophets, and Writings—successfully pinpoint the major elements of the OT's plot: the creation of the world (Gen 1:1), the selection of Abraham (Gen 12:3), the redemption of Israel from bondage (Exod 20:2), the establishment of a covenant with King David (1 Sam 13:14), the preaching of the prophets (Mic 6:8), the anticipation of the gospel (Isa 52:7), and finally, the encouragement and instruction from the Psalms and wisdom books (Ps 23:1). This volume does not attempt to introduce readers to the content of every book in the OT. Instead, Wright introduces new readers of Scripture to what he identifies as the crucial plot points of the overarching narrative of the OT's grand story.

Although Wright's organization around the OT's narrative provides readers with an excellent snapshot of the OT's big picture, his discussion of the Psalms and wisdom books is awkwardly placed and ultimately detracts from his storyline approach. In Wright's retelling of the OT story, his chapter six (entitled "Gospel") ends with the OT's concluding scene of Israel waiting in anticipation for God to act once more on their behalf. But instead of ending the book there—where the OT storyline itself ends—Wright doubles back to the Psalms and wisdom literature in the book's seventh and

final chapter. Not only does the return to Psalms and wisdom undermine the effectiveness of the ending of Wright's retelling, but it also gives the appearance that these books do not fit naturally within the OT narrative framework but are a sort of addendum to its otherwise complete storyline. In a book that is attempting to demonstrate the relatedness of the OT's contents within the framework of its metanarrative, the choice to place the wisdom books at the end fails to demonstrate to the reader their connectedness to that metanarrative. In short, a whole genre of OT Scripture—the wisdom corpus—appears as a disconnected, perhaps even expendable, portion of the OT. A simple solution might have been to introduce the wisdom writings alongside Wright's discussion of Solomon, wisdom literature's chief contributor. In so doing, the wisdom would be integrated into Wright's paradigmatic narrative approach, and the natural concluding scene of the OT—Israel waiting expectantly for God to act—returns to its rightful place as the story's final plot point.

Though Wright's handling of wisdom needs adjustment, his overall narrative approach proves exceptionally successful at providing new readers of Scripture a foundational framework for digging deeper in their study of the OT. While book-by-book introductions benefit readers by explaining the contents of Scripture's individual parts, Wright's narrative approach benefits readers by providing the necessary broader context for understanding the ultimate significance of that content. As Wright correctly observes, "Without the first three acts [of the drama of Scripture], Jesus becomes just another human savior of some kind. The story would lose its essential beginning (creation), its profound problem (sin), and the governing theme of God's promise of blessing to all nations. . . . The whole story [of the drama of Scripture] only makes sense *as a whole story*" (7, emphasis original). It is this "whole story" approach, condensed to a manageable seven sentences, that Wright's introduction

provides readers in order to equip them to contextualize their study of the diverse individual books that make up the OT.

Wright's introduction provides more than just a firm grasp of the OT's overarching storyline, however; readers are also directed toward a more sophisticated reading of that storyline through Wright's scholarly yet accessible explanations along the way. By including insightful observations of the OT's cultural context (60), helpful guidelines for understanding various genres of OT books (129–32; 142–46), succinct introductions to important questions of interpretation (27), useful overviews of major OT themes (84), and enlightening discussions of difficult passages (82, 128), the reader is treated to far more than just a simple retelling of the OT narrative. By including brief overviews of such topics amid his retelling of the “grand narrative,” Wright's volume strikes an excellent balance between breadth and brevity. In so doing, Wright plays the vital role of bringing the fruit of his years of scholarship back to the church for their edification and personal growth.

*The Old Testament in Seven Sentences* ultimately accomplishes its goal of providing new readers of the OT with a helpful starting point in their study by offering a satisfying introduction to the OT's major contents and themes. Though the primary audience may be new students of Scripture seeking to get the “lay of the land,” knowledgeable readers of the OT also stand to gain from Wright's work as he demonstrates an exemplary model—his seven sentences—for effectively condensing and communicating the big ideas of the Old Testament.

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*Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History.* Edited by Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 384 pp. Softcover \$34.99.

This intriguing collection of research essays focuses on “beating them at their own game.” The book is largely a response to another group of essays titled *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (2012), edited by Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne. This work argues that the various criteria used in NT studies that are part of the quest for the historical Jesus are flawed, sometimes fatally, due to anti-Christian assumptions flowing from form criticism and a number of other weaknesses that hinder the use of the criteria by the Church for its understanding of Jesus. *Jesus, Skepticism & the Problem of History* generally rejects this negative approach to such criteria. Instead, it argues that proper use of the criteria can be a useful apologetic tool to show that properly using the various rules invented by the skeptics will beat the skeptics at their own game. While skeptics use their criteria to enhance the idea that the Christ of faith (or the Christ of the Church) is not the real Jesus of history, Bock and his fellow essayists demonstrate that the criteria actually prove that we know more about the historical Jesus than the skeptics admit. Furthermore, there is nothing we know about the historical Jesus that contradicts the Christ of faith or orthodox Christology.

In light of the fact that the Bock and Komoszewski work responds to the Keith collection, the reader would be better served if he read the latter work first. It is also preferable to read the earlier and easier book by Darrell L. Bock titled *Who Is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith* (2012) in preparation for reading *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History* unless one is already aware of how the criteria work. In this way, the reader can see precisely how the various criteria (e.g., multiple attestation of sources and forms, dissimilarity, embarrassment, rejection and

execution, coherence) are used in the process of historically authenticating New Testament information about Jesus.

*Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History* is comprised of four parts. The first section gives three introductory essays on “The Value of New Testament Historical Studies.” Part two yields seven articles on “The Gospels and the Historical Jesus.” The work here demonstrates where most of the debate lives since the Gospels give most of what we know about the life of Christ. The third segment of the book provides two essays that deal with “The Book of Acts and Christian Origins.” The final part of the book gives three responses to the book. Interestingly, one of the responders is Scot McKnight, a contributor to the Keith and Donne book that is being answered.

The opening article by Bowman and Komoszewski (“The Historical Jesus and the Biblical Church: Why the Quest Matters”) introduces and surveys the various developments in the historical quest for Jesus. The historicity of Jesus matters because the earthly Jesus is the church’s Jesus, the canonical Jesus is the only Jesus we have, and the historical Jesus *is* the real Jesus. Therefore, the “church’s only interest is in following and believing in the historical Jesus—the real Jesus, the real man from Nazareth” since “there is no other Jesus” (42). In essence, the Christian faith is rooted in history. Thus, the church has an interest in studying the criteria which help us to authenticate biblical stories about the Savior.

Next, Craig Blomberg and Darlene Seal give an overview of the study of the historical Jesus in recent evangelical scholarship, a helpful summary for those who are not familiar with current NT studies in this area. In the following essay, Michael Metts responds to the charge from Chris Keith that the criteria for the historical quest are indebted on the whole to the failed enterprise of form criticism. He does so by noting the differences between earlier

questers who operated in the domain of form criticism compared to more recent attempts to engage the historical investigation. Consequently, the use of various criteria cannot be jettisoned with a kind of guilt-by-association argument by invoking the faults of form criticism.

Three of the articles from the second part of the book will be highlighted here. First, in his researched essay “Textual Criticism and the Criterion of Embarrassment,” Daniel Wallace reviews specific examples of how copyists might have altered Gospel texts because they were uncomfortable with various readings. Those who emphasize Matthean priority or external evidence might struggle with some of the discussion, but the issue overall deserves consideration. Second, Darrell Bock presents a detailed analysis of the use of criteria to investigate the charge of blasphemy as Jesus appears before the Sanhedrin. Third, in an extremely interesting article, Craig Evans and Greg Monette combine discussions about the criteria of multiple attestation, embarrassment, and verisimilitude with the burial of Jesus as well as bringing in some interaction with archaeology. For example, using various insights the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea proves to be reasonably grounded in history.

In evaluating the overall collection of essays in *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History*, one is immediately struck by the level of scholarship and writing. While an excellent work on both accounts, the level of the writing makes the book one written by scholars for scholars. While the well-read pastor or layman can follow the book, it takes some prior familiarity with the subject to be able to glean the full measure of what it offers. Nonetheless, the apologetic value of opposing skeptics such as those in the Jesus Seminar makes the book a significant work for the church. Consequently, more pastors should make themselves aware of this important debate.

Other positive remarks can be made about the book. First, the book presents a balanced approach to its critique of the anti-criteria slant. For example, in Bock's article on Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the following sensible statement is emblematic of the book's attitude: "My position is that a criteria-like approach is not the be-all and end-all for Jesus studies, but that it is an important and useful component in such a study" (207). Second, the level of discussion coupled with the variety of areas covered prevents any criticism of being overly theoretical or given to generalities. One sees close up how NT studies work. It is a practitioner's treatise, albeit a scholarly one. Third, the work provides an apologetic approach that is useful in defending the faith in a way that drives people to the details of the text of Scripture, always a good trait to have.

In the public square, the average person may be aware of the fascinations produced by works like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* or Bart Ehrman's *Jesus Before the Gospels*. However, behind the scenes is the vigorous research and responsible presentations of evangelical NT scholars who are engaged in important historical studies that beat the skeptics at their own game. In this vein, *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History* is a challenging but worthwhile read.

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***The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians.*** By N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 992 pp. Hardcover \$59.99.

Upon learning of N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird's *The New Testament in Its World*, I first questioned, "Why another New Testament introduction?" There are already almost countless introductions to the NT, such as those written by Carson and Moo, Burge and Green, Gundry, and Thielman. And all these have been produced by a single publishing house, Zondervan, in just the last handful of years! What makes *New Testament in Its World* stand out from the crowd?

First, some background. This book begins with Bird's description of how, in 2010, he suggested someone should condense Wright's massive corpus into a single volume. The goal was to provide "something of an N. T. Wright 'reader' or 'sampler,' written up in the genre of an introduction to the New Testament" (26). Nine years later, Wright and Bird released *The New Testament in Its World*.

This book is divided into nine parts. Part I, "Reading the New Testament," summarizes how the NT should be read as history, literature, and theology. Part II, "The World of Jesus and the Early Church," provides an overview of the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. Part III, "Jesus and the Victory of God," considers Jesus' identity as well as his crucifixion. Part IV, "The Resurrection of the Son of God," examines the purpose of the resurrection. Part V, "Paul and the Faithfulness of God," begins the actual survey of NT books, beginning with Galatians. Part VI, "The Gospel and the Story of God," surveys the four Gospels. Part VII, "The Early Christians and the Mission of God," surveys the general epistles and Revelation. Part VIII, "The Making of the New

Testament,” overviews topics such as textual criticism and canonization. Part IX, “Living the Story of the New Testament,” provides a summary and conclusion to the book. Those familiar with Wright’s other works in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series will notice that many of the section titles reflect and summarize Wright’s books by the same names.

At nearly a thousand pages, its size alone sets this book apart from other introductions. This allows Wright and Bird the chance to cover a considerable amount of territory. To review a book this long, I will focus on three strengths and three weaknesses. First, the strengths:

- (1) *The breadth of content.* I thoroughly enjoyed Wright and Bird’s focus on the historical setting of the NT. Wright is at his best when summarizing vast swaths of history. For those unfamiliar with this time period, Part II provides an invaluable summary—succinct yet robust—of the Jewish exceptions and the Greco-Roman culture.
- (2) *Survey of N. T. Wright.* Whatever one may think of Wright and his conclusions, it is quite astounding to consider the sheer number of books that he has produced. For those unfamiliar with his writings, *The New Testament in Its World* provides an excellent “CliffsNotes” version.
- (3) *The book itself.* I was surprised at the physical quality of this volume. It is a beautifully bound cloth text and contained high-resolution photographs throughout. Quite simply, it was enjoyable to read. Apart from aesthetics, it is clear that significant planning went into designing this volume. From detailed maps, diagrams, and summaries of chapters, to practical question and answer sections, this text is built for the classroom.

As for weaknesses:

- (1) *Wright's Theology*. If you already know Wright's views, you will not be surprised by what you read. This book is classic Wright. Wright holds to one (of many) views of the New Perspective on Paul. This undergirds all that he writes about the doctrine of justification. For example, in the discussion about Jesus' resurrection, Wright focuses on Jesus' "victory" and makes no mention of substitutionary atonement (e.g., 256–61). He claims that the focus of the early church seems "markedly different from the atonement theology of the later church" (257). Furthermore, Wright does not take the standard evangelical view of the OT's messianic nature. Rather, he concludes, "Jewish messianism grew out of earnest reflection on Israel's sacred traditions in the light of the social and political context of the Jewish people" (226). Therefore, OT passages often viewed as messianic in their original context should not be understood as such. Examples include Daniel 7, which Wright asserts should not be viewed as "'messianic' in its original setting" (223), as well as Isaiah 53, which he claims should be viewed as non-messianic (62–63). Ultimately, Wright and Bird argue that the OT should be read "retrospectively, moving backwards from messianic event to scriptural text" (64). Yet I find it difficult to see how re-reading the OT in light of Jesus would have persuaded first-century Jews that the OT actually points to Jesus. There are various other related issues, such as Wright and Bird's insistence that 2 Peter is pseudepigraphical (763–65) and that the resurrections described in Matthew 27:51–53 should not be taken as literal (324–25).
- (2) *Order of Chapters*. The chapter order is quite perplexing. Rather than proceed canonically, Wright and Bird begin with Paul's letters (specifically Galatians) prior to surveying the Gospels. I would have found it easier to follow if they had gone in canonical order.

(3) *Overly dismissive*. Although I often appreciate the style and tone of Wright and Bird, I found them unnecessarily dismissive—even caustic—of some views they do not accept. For example, when writing about the idea of a rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, they write, “Let me put it this way: if one day you look out of your window and see people rising up into the air, the natural thing to do is to say to yourself, ‘Well, I’ll be d\*\*\*ed!’” (425).

In summary, *The New Testament in Its World* is a unique volume unlike any other. Although one may not agree with Wright’s and Bird’s conclusions on every topic, this book provides a valuable summary of Wright’s works and contributions to the field of NT studies. I cannot think of a better way for someone to simultaneously gain familiarity with the world of the New Testament as well as with Wright’s corpus than by reading this volume.

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***God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology.*** By J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 416 pp. Softcover \$34.99.

When it comes to biblical theology, there are nearly as many proposed themes as there are theologians who write about them. Some assert that the central focus of the Bible is the kingdom of God. Others argue that the primary theme is promise and fulfillment. Still others claim concepts such as covenant, redemption, creation, or God’s glory is the central focus. In *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of*

*Biblical Theology*, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays offer a fresh approach to this issue by proposing that the central theme of all Scripture is the presence of God.

True to its title, *God's Relational Presence* makes the claim that the theme of the Bible is God's dwelling with his people. Duvall and Hays summarize, "Our basic thesis: the Triune God desires a personal relationship with his people and so makes his presence known to establish and cultivate that relationship. In other words, this relational presence of God lies at the heart of the Bible's overall message, at the heart of biblical theology" (325). The authors qualify what they mean by "cohesive center" by providing a helpful analogy. They do not claim the "cohesive center" is like the center of a wheel where "everything must connect directly to the hub of the wheel" (4). Rather, this "cohesive center" is pictured as the center of a spiderweb where "all the central themes and subthemes in biblical theology ... depend on the center for structural integrity and cohesion, even while the specific manner of interconnection ... can be complex" (5). Their point is that although there are many prominent themes throughout Scripture, they all depend one way or another on the concept of God's relational presence.

Besides the introduction and conclusion, *God's Relational Presence* is divided into six sections: (1) The Relational Presence of God in the Pentateuch; (2) The Relational Presence of God in the Historical Books, Psalms, and Wisdom Books; (3) The Relational Presence of God in the Prophets; (4) The Relational Presence of God in Matthew, Mark, and Luke-Acts; (5) The Relational Presence of God in Paul's Letters and in Hebrews and the General Letters; (6) The Relational Presence of God in John's Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse. In so doing, Duvall (who is a NT professor) and Hays (who is an OT professor) provide a robust consideration of both Testaments. Each biblical book is discussed, though some do receive more discussion than others (e.g., the Song of

Songs, where Duvall and Hays simply conclude, “the topic is one that does not directly involve the presence of God” [110]).

One strength of this book is the simplicity of its thesis. In the field of biblical studies, often centered on precise details and careful observations, there is a certain beauty to Duvall and Hays’s approach that is surprisingly refreshing. As they note, “Our starting observation is that Genesis is the plot-forming beginning and Revelation is the consummating end” (4). Rather than focus on the minutia, these authors paint with a broad brush that provides clarity and insight. This comes from years of experience explaining the overarching story of the Bible to students: “We both regularly encountered the need to explain the entire Bible and the flow of the biblical story to our students. Meeting this challenge has been our passion for the last twenty-five years” (9).

It was surprising to notice that in *God’s Relational Presence*, Duvall and Hays arrive at a different conclusion than they had in their previous biblical theology book, *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), cowritten by C. Marvin Pate, E. Randolph Richards, W. Dennis Tucker Jr., and Preben Vang. In that book, they asserted that the story of Israel is the center of biblical theology: “We believe that the story of Israel—the story of God’s creation, humanity’s sin and resulting exile, and God’s mission to restore his people—represents a prominent theological theme of Scripture” (*Story of Israel*, 278). This is compared to their assertion in *God’s Relational Presence*: “From beginning to end, and in virtually every chapter in between, the relational presence of God unifies and advances the biblical story” (327). Although these themes are not contradictory, it is clear that Duvall and Hays have adjusted and refined their understanding of how the Bible fits together over the past years.

Throughout this book, there were numerous “aha!” moments. Each chapter was filled with exegetical insights that

bolstered one's confidence that the relational presence of God is in fact the cohesive center of the Bible. Although some may still disagree that this is *the* central theme of all Scripture, based on Duvall and Hays's work, it is certainly at least one of the central themes of the Bible. Overall, I highly recommend this book. There are few resources that summarize the overarching message of Scripture as clearly and succinctly as *God's Relational Presence*.

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***Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation***. Edited by Barry J. Beitzel. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 792 pp. Hardcover \$39.99.

Barry J. Beitzel, the general editor of *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, presents an impressive set of credentials to serve as the general editor for this volume that consists of no fewer than 53 essays by an equally impressive team of nineteen contributors. It is the second of a two-volume set (with the first volume, published in 2016, dedicated to a geographic commentary on the Gospels).

I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised as I worked my way through this 792-page tome. I expected something more along the lines of a Bible atlas commentary, Bible encyclopedia, Bible backgrounds commentary, or even a Bible customs and manners book. But this was something much more. We often don't consider that spatial considerations necessarily influence a given region's culture. But this volume shows not only that they do, but that to ignore or bypass such considerations is to deprive ourselves of

critical insight into that culture's sociological and theological fabric, which, of course, is vital to accurate interpretation. This volume masterfully demonstrates how to do achieve this critical insight.

The layout of the book is as follows. There are two pages of endorsements from men who are generally well-known in the world of NT scholarship: Darrell Bock, Scot McKnight, Douglas Moo, David Pao, Klyne Snodgrass, David DeSilva, Grant Osborne, and Philip Comfort. Then follows the normal front-matter (Title page, verso, Table of Contents, Abbreviations), plus a very helpful "Series Preface" (7 pages) by Beitzel who argues convincingly that spatial considerations are a non-optional part of the hermeneutical process. After the "Series Preface" is a brief "Volume Preface" (2 pages), after which follow the 53 essays that form the heart of the book. There is an ample amount of back-matter (67 pages) consisting of six different sections: a first with 18 pages of maps, images, and charts; a second with 5 pages of brief biographical notations for each of the nineteen contributors; a third with a 12-page subject index; a fourth with a 16-page Scripture index; a fifth with a 15-page Image Attribution index; and a sixth and final one-page acknowledgement of Project Staff.

As for the heart of the commentary—the 53 essays—there is a standardized approach to which each author conforms. First, each essay begins with a title and the primary Scriptural reference(s) the chapter will focus on with regard to spatial (and its concomitant socio-theological) considerations. Second, there is a framed inset of "Key Points" on the opening page which quickly orients the reader as to what to anticipate as he moves through the content. Third, the authors provide an introduction which affords them an opportunity to convey to the reader their own nuanced approach as to how their geographic study has made an impact on their interpretation of the biblical material. Since this approach is what I consider to

be a significant contribution of this commentary, I will provide two examples below to illustrate the point.

In the very first essay, Mark L. Strauss provides a chapter entitled “Typological Geography and the Progress of the Gospel in Acts.” The key Scriptural references listed under the title are “Acts 1:8, 27:1–28:16; 28:30–31.” Then comes a brief two-paragraph introduction wherein he explains the nuanced approach he takes. He writes,

This article, however, is not about the geography of Acts per se.... It is about Luke’s geographical theology. For Luke, the journeys in Luke and Acts have not only historical significance, but also symbolic and theological significance. This article examines how Luke uses geography typologically to symbolize the paradox of the cross and ethnic progress of the gospel from Jews to all people everywhere (1–2).

Similarly, consider Cyndi Parker’s essay entitled “The Threefold Expansion of the Early Church: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria” (Chapter 3). The Scriptural focus is Acts 1:6–8. After observing that Galilee is omitted, she offers this comment in her introduction to the essay:

The instruction to take the gospel message out of Jerusalem is often explained as a geographical reference moving in concentric circles from the smallest location to the next larger location. While this explanation is true, the instruction has a more complex and nuanced meaning beyond geography. Given that Jesus is talking to his Galilean disciples, one would expect a purely geographical list to include Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and *Galilee*—especially since Jesus spent most of his public ministry in Galilee. But Galilee is omitted in favor of “the ends of the earth.”

A preferable explanation to the place names acknowledges that the places mentioned in Acts 1:8 are a cultural product derived from a combination of memory, religion, sociological, and political associations. Their nuanced meaning deserves careful attention. (42–43)

After the introduction is the commentary proper, peppered with footnotes throughout and followed by a bibliography. As for the footnotes, the bulk of these serve as documentation of the author’s source material. Some, however, are explanatory footnotes, which I often found to be enlightening. As for the bibliography at the end of each essay, the number of sources referenced are somewhere in the range of 10–50, depending on the length and complexity of the essay at hand. Beyond that, every essay is amply illustrated with color images of epigraphy, ancient and modern cartography, color drawings, photos of archaeological finds, etc. In fact, I mentioned above the 15-page Image Attribution index, which by my estimation provides attributions to more than 300 images. The reader should also note that the digital edition of this book in Logos Bible Software differs in terms of the number of images per essay and in terms of the additional media that is accessible through hyperlinks (e.g., videos, interactive infographics, expandable maps, etc.)—sometimes by even double the amount in the print edition.

I highly recommend *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*. While it is probably a bit technical for the average layman, it should become a “go to” for every pastor, preacher, and professor. Ideally, this would be a required textbook, along with its companion one on the Gospels, for any graduate-level New Testament Introduction course. Unfortunately, the size of even one volume would prevent the assigned reading of the whole of it. But either a judicious selection of certain parts (e.g., Johannine, or Pauline

sections), or perhaps parceling out all of it to the whole class with assigned presentations on their respective portions would creatively accomplish the learning objective.

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***James: Verse by Verse. (Osborne New Testament Commentaries).*** By Grant R. Osborne. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 204 pp. Softcover \$19.99.

Grant R. Osborne’s commentary on James, based on the NIV for his English text, is part of the Osborne New Testament Commentaries, an eleven-volume series. In the introduction of this commentary, Osborne shares his goal for the series: “I would like [these commentaries] to be interesting and exciting adventures into the New Testament texts. My hope is that readers will discover the riches of God that lie behind every passage in his divine word. I hope every reader will fall in love with God’s word as I have and begin a similar lifelong fascination with these eternal truths” (xi). Osborne, a theologian and NT scholar, taught New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for thirty-nine years. He died in 2018 at the age of 76, but his writings are theologically rich and sprinkled with practical application.

The subtitle, *Verse by Verse*, is very apt as Osborne leaves no verse untouched. This commentary is a good blend or balance of scholarly exposition and practical application. It is academic but written so that a layman who desires to better understand the book of James can easily understand the meaning. Osborne includes helpful and insightful Greek word studies, such as on *peirasmos* (trial; 24); *makrothymeō* (patient

waiting; 150); and *astheneo* (weakness; 163). Furthermore, he develops word pictures based on the etymologies for even clearer understanding, such as “perseverance” and “mature,” which are metaphors relating to agriculture and medicine respectively.

Osborne makes a careful distinction between Paul and James’s perspectives on faith and works, which he contends are not in conflict with one another, but actually complement each other (83-84). His interpretation of James’s reference to Rahab as an example of faith is well done, offering an excellent summary of her as an example of faith-based works (91-92).

His interpretation of a “harvest of righteousness” in James 3:17 is worth noting as he believes James uses the word *righteousness* ethically to refer not to right standing before God, but to the righteous behavior that flows out of it (118). Osborne comments that translating the quotation in James 4:5, “the spirit he caused to live in us tends toward envy,” is “immensely difficult” as the Greek can be translated three viable and preferred ways, which he gives on page 124. He does state that he believes the second interpretation (i.e., God jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us) as rendered in NIV 2011, NASB, NRSV, and the ESV, makes more sense and is the best one. In addition, Osborne makes a good distinction between judging and admonishing in James 4:11-12 (130) and provides excellent commentary on the wealthy’s disregard for God due to their self-centeredness, which leads to forgetting God and ultimately to their sinning. Finally, I appreciated his commentary on James 5:14-15a regarding prayer and anointing with oil (164-65). His conclusion about the use of oil for anointing along with prayer is worth quoting: “We must conclude that anointing is not required for healing, but it is commendable practice (especially for serious illnesses) for its symbolic value and

because it enables us to focus our prayers more thoroughly” (165).

I do take exception with his interpretation of “perfect” in James 3:2b. Osborne writes, “‘Perfect’ here goes beyond 1:4, where it refers to the ‘mature and complete’ Christian to point to sinless perfection. His point is that if you can completely control your tongue, you can control the whole body and every part of yourself, and thus attain to perfection in this life. The attainment of this perfection will come in our heavenly life to come, but we strive for it in the here and now” (97). I found this confusing double-talk and wondered, “Which is it?” But, he does seem to back track in his summary section where in referring to the Greek word, *telios*, which can mean perfect and mature. He writes, “While we will never attain to sinless perfection, we can reach spiritual maturity, and to do so we must avoid ‘stumbling’ in our use of speech among God’s people” (103). It’s one of those, “No, you’re wrong. Oh wait, yes, I agree,” parts of the book.

A strength of this commentary is Osborne’s summaries at the end of each chapter. I would call it his “CliffsNotes” for those who want the bottom line of what James wrote without reading the book of James or Osborne’s entire commentary, neither of which I recommend. Other notable features include a helpful Glossary (177-79), an extensive Subject and Author Index (183-93), and a scholarly Scripture and Other Ancient Literature Index (194-204).

I recommend this commentary on James and would gladly secure other volumes in this New Testament series by Osborne. If I were giving it a grade, it would be an A.

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***Acts: Verse by Verse (Osborne New Testament Commentaries)***. By Grant R. Osborne. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 576 pp. Softcover \$22.99.

The late Grant Osborne taught New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for thirty-nine years. His commentaries are based on his extensive class notes and are intended for pastors, Bible study groups, and Christians who desire a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. In addition to the useful introduction, he adds a glossary of theological terms for those who might not be familiar with the literature. The author's conservative evangelical perspective results in meaningful interaction with the theological intent of the passages. He does not shy away from drawing out the implications of his exegesis for life and ministry. A wide variety of information is given to assist the reader in comprehending the meaning and significance of the passage. No knowledge of Greek is assumed, so all terms are transliterated, and their meaning explained. There is geographical information, such as the insight that Antioch was 250 miles from Jerusalem (272) or that Derbe is 90 miles from Lystra (264). The commentary is based on the NIV, but Osborne does not shy away from discussing the best way to translate a phrase. For example, in Acts 13:40, the NIV has "I am going to do something in your days, that you would never believe," but Osborne prefers a more literal "I am working a work in your days, a work that you would never believe" (248). When Paul and Barnabas failed to understand the language at Lystra, this resulted in the people almost sacrificing to them. Osborne concludes from this that it is essential for missionaries to be prepared to speak to the people they minister to (260).

Inaugurated eschatology forms his framework for understanding Acts, which he concisely defines as "the view

that the kingdom is already here yet not in a final sense” (24). Along with that, he considers the church to be the new Israel, so it is questionable for him that Pentecost can be considered the birth of the church at all. In other words, he sees direct continuity between Israel and the church as the one people of God. On tongues, he aims for a middle ground between cessationists and non-cessationists, which he describes as “seek not, forbid not” (43). When he discusses whether Simon Magus was truly saved or not, he recognizes the difficulty of the issue; however, his remarks are inconsistent at this point, leaving the reader wondering what he really thinks. On the one hand, he wonders whether there ever was any true faith in Simon (162). On the other hand, he considers the magician to be “a carnal Christian rather than an unbeliever” (163). In harmonizing the events of the Jerusalem council with the chronology in Galatians, he chooses the common view that Galatians took place prior to the council and that the visit in Galatians 2:1-10 is the famine visit of Acts 11:27-30 (270).

Therefore, the commentary appropriately balances scholarship and academics for its intended audience. Application, historical background, exegetical detail, and theological implications are all dealt with at appropriate points. The pastor or serious Bible student will find much helpful information, whether or not he agrees with Osborne at every point. It is an excellent addition to Osborne’s New Testament Commentaries.

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***Two Commissions: Two Missionary Mandates in Matthew's Gospel.*** By James I. Fazio. El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary P, 2015. 112 pp. Softcover \$14.00.

In discourse surrounding the historical divide between covenantal and dispensational theologians, each tradition has, at times, been guilty of putting the systematic cart before the exegetical horse. When this inversion occurs, legitimate continuities and discontinuities that may be exegetically derived are lost in systematic expression. To over-emphasize similarities or differences for the sake of systematic harmony is to render God's polychromatic revelation in monochrome. Yet, as James I. Fazio maintains in *Two Commissions: Two Missionary Mandates in Matthew's Gospel*, rightly dividing the whole counsel of God requires attentiveness when the work of careful exegesis yields the fruit of discontinuity.

Fazio is Dean of Bible and Theology at Southern California Seminary in El Cajon, California, where he also serves as a Professor of Biblical Studies. His *Two Commissions* is an interesting work that gives exegetical attentiveness to critical, yet often overlooked distinctions between Jesus' commissions in Matthew 10:5–15 and 28:18–20. The work is a concise, direct, and clearly organized presentation of Fazio's thesis that the Gospel of Matthew contains "two discernible missionary mandates where Christ sent His disciples to two different people groups with two evidently distinct messages" (10).

Chapter One begins the work with a short introduction that presents the two commissions. Fazio also calls readers to careful Bible study, summarizes the issue of continuity and discontinuity, and outlines the book. Chapter Two presents the first or "Germinal Commission" (11) from Matthew 10, and Chapter Three presents the more familiar "Great Commission" from Matthew 28. Each commission is considered from the angles of context, content, complement, and consequence.

An additional consideration is also given from the angle of the intended audience. This pattern allows Fazio to carefully compare and contrast the commissions, which he helpfully summarizes in table form at the end of each chapter (e.g., 61). It is in these two chapters that the main argument of the work is set forth. Fazio posits distinction in the ministries, messages, and outcomes of the two commissions recorded in Matthew. Leaning primarily upon the Gospel of Luke, Acts, and the Pauline witness, Chapter Four presents analogous support for the conclusions drawn from Chapters Two and Three. Attention is given to Luke's presentation of the two commissions (Luke 9:1–6; 24:44–48) and his unique record of Jesus's sending of the seventy (Luke 10:1–16) as well as to a sketch of "Paul's gospel" (74–79). Here he argues that a distinction in ministry, message, and outcomes is observable in the Gospel of Luke and the post-ascension preaching of the apostles. The theological implications of the preceding exegetical summary are presented in Chapter Five. Fazio summarizes his understanding of the "continuous" (covenantal) and "discontinuous" (dispensational) views while demonstrating how his understanding of the two commissions differs from each tradition as presented. The covenantal view, according to Fazio's understanding, emphasizes continuity at the expense of observing revealed changes in God's economy (84–90). On the other hand, the dispensational view challenged by Fazio has driven a wedge of artificial discontinuity between the Great Commission and the post-ascension preaching of the apostles (90–94). Both views suffer from oversimplifying a nuanced issue and can be corrected by observing the distinctions highlighted in Chapters Two and Three. The work ends with a summary conclusion (Chapter Six) and an Appendix that presents a refreshing conversation between Fazio and Dr. Mark Strauss, formerly of Bethel Seminary in San Diego, California. The critical engagement by Strauss allows Fazio to respond to questions that may arise

for other readers. The inclusion of this dialogue strengthens the presentation of Fazio's thesis and the overall clarity of the work.

*Two Commissions* is thought-provoking. Fazio accomplishes his intention to "raise important questions" rather than to "draw conclusions" (4), especially as it relates to distinctions within the Gospel of Matthew. The primary strength of the volume lies in this approach. Moreover, Fazio's treatment of Matthew 10 and Matthew 18 within the framework of his clear structure allows distinction *within the biblical texts* to be highlighted for the reader to consider. Texts that are a challenge for any simplistic view of Jesus's earthly ministry (e.g., Matt 15:21–28) are allowed to sing with full voice. This is not to suggest that the work is completely neutral. Fazio submits upfront that the distinctions he identifies are best reconciled within a dispensational framework (12) and, as such, a dispensational predisposition cannot be denied. Yet, he labors to avoid the common cart-horse inversion mentioned earlier.

While the strength of the work resides primarily in the insightful study of Matthew's Gospel, weaknesses emerge in the presentation of analogous support and the summary of theological implications. After so carefully refusing to allow preliminary synthesis to determine exegetical conclusions in Matthew, it seems Fazio allows some of the distinctions identified between Matthew's two commissions to be over-applied in his reading of other texts. For example, it is claimed that authority over sickness and demons and escape from the coming judgment do not "characterize the ministry of the apostles after [Jesus] ascended to His Father in heaven" (68). Yet, the gospel ministry of the apostles was importantly confirmed with signs and wonders (e.g., Acts 3:1–16; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4) and included the reality of coming judgment as an impetus for repentance (e.g., Acts 17:30–31). Similar concerns arise in the volume's suggestion of distinctions in the

apostolic preaching of the kingdom (71), Christ's appellations (72), and Peter and Paul's gospel (77–78). Surely it can be acknowledged that the post-ascension preaching—indeed, the Great Commission preaching of the apostles—included an emphasis on the kingdom (e.g., Acts 28:23, 30 cf. Luke 10:9; 1 Thess 2:12). Further, the Lord's identity as Messiah-King does not seem to recede to the background of the apostolic message of salvation (e.g., Rom 1:1–4; 1 Cor 15:24–28; Col 1:13; Heb 2:5–8). As for Paul, it seems that his concern was Peter's failure to “walk straight” in practice with regard to the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:14) that Peter himself knew (2:15) rather than a hangover from the “Germinal Commission” in his understanding of the gospel. Concerning such theological implications, the book's synthesis may be truncated. This is understandable for a shorter work, but what is included left this reviewer with a desire for a more complete analysis and engagement with a broader range of scholarship, especially on the dispensational side. To his credit, Fazio is quick to acknowledge that many questions are left unanswered and conclusions are left unsynthesized. Perhaps the intent for the work to primarily present observations of distinction from his exegesis, which is a noted strength, works against the notion to include a robust synthesis of theological implications. An inclusion of this sort would certainly change the focus of the book.

Ultimately, *Two Commissions* models the notion that the details of every text are important and encourages each side of the covenantal-dispensational divide to account for every exegetical detail in their systematic expression. Simply put, Fazio's work is a helpful study that succeeds in its aim to highlight distinctions in Jesus's two commissions in Matthew 10 and Matthew 28. Students of Scripture will be well-served by supplementing their exegetical resources on the Gospel of Matthew with *Two Commissions*.

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***Do Christians, Muslims, and Jews Worship the Same God? Four Views (Counterpoints, Bible and Theology)***. Ronnie P. Campbell Jr. and Christopher Gnanakan, general editors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 240 pp. Softcover \$16.09.

Most teachers have been asked the question: Is the Allah of Islam the same as the Christian God? Or, Is the God of the Muslims and of the Jews the Father of Jesus Christ? As the title indicates, this study asks another, similar question: “Do Christians, Muslims, and Jews worship the same God?” Pastors and teachers in America, especially those who have had little to do with evangelizing Jews or Muslims, will often confidently respond, of course they do not! The beliefs of each of these religions are different and God is described quite differently, so they cannot all be the same God. Or, they may go as far as to say that as followers of Jesus, we worship the same God as the Jews; we just know more about him. But most of us will struggle to believe that though all three religions look back to Abraham and call themselves “people of the Book,” we all worship the same God.

The answer to this question is not as easy as it seems. First, one must ask what “worship” means and philosophically what does “the same” mean? Then there is the knotty problem of determining what exactly is meant by God? How is he defined and described? In addition, there is the reality that all three traditions have many subgroups, and the question could be raised: do all of the conceptions of God of the people in the various subgroups match up? In other words, do we all believe in the same God, but not exactly agree on who he is, even within the subgroups of our own major faiths? When we

approach a Jewish or Muslim believer, do we acknowledge that we are worshipping the same God, or are we obligated to convince the person in our evangelism that they need to convert to a God who is wholly different than theirs?

In assembling this book, the Counterpoints editors have done an excellent job of selecting the writers, who present their own views, ask and answer some of the above questions, and critique the thoughts of each other well. The general editors open the discussion with a brief introduction containing both an overview of the positions defended by the contributors and a summary of the non-negotiables of “evangelical” faith.

William. Andrew Schwartz and John B. Cobb Jr. follow with their position: “All Worship the Same God” (a religious pluralist view). They present arguments for a view that more than one path can lead to the God of Abraham. They begin by asserting that there is no one Christianity any more than there is one Judaism, or one Islam. They also claim that the ambiguity of the words *same*, *worship*, and *God*, adds to the difficulty of answering the question in the title of the book. Yet they are willing to rise to the challenge, and they use process theology to demonstrate the value of seeing worship of the ultimate reality—Being Itself/the Supreme Being—as the worship that is normative for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. To them, the benefits of this view are many, including world peace, generosity, greater humility, promotion of dialogue, etc.

Francis Beckwith presents another view of “All Worshipping the same God,” taking the perspective that since there is only one true God, all are ultimately referring to the same God. Using the story of three hypothetical individuals who move from atheism toward theism, each of them choosing one of the three Abrahamic religions, Beckwith argues that since there came a time when all three came to believe in God, they all entered their new faiths with belief in the same God. The

God they had come to believe in and to worship is the one true God to whom they had been introduced: “*the absolute, uncaused, perfect, rational, unchanging, self-subsistent, eternal creator and sustainer of all that which receives its being from another*” (46). Beckwith uses Scripture and history to further develop his argument that Christians, Muslims, and Jews worship the same God, despite their theological disagreements.

Gerald McDermott presents the view that Christians and Jews worship the same God, but the Muslims do not because of their profound disagreement about the nature and character of God. Christians and Jews worship the same God because the NT writers do not suggest that the God worshipped by the Jews and self-revealed in the OT was to be replaced with a new God. McDermott further explains that some of the characteristics of God treasured by Christian believers were already accepted by the Jews. McDermott clearly emphasizes that there is only one God, the Triune God of Christian orthodoxy, and that the god of the Qur’an is different in kind. This is not to question the good character of Muslims, only to emphasize the fundamental differences between the Allah they worship and the true living God.

The “None worship the Same God” view is championed by Jerry Walls. Much of his argument is based on Tomas Bogardus and Mallorie Urban’s “How to Tell Whether Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God,” in *Faith and Philosophy* 34:2 (2017). The critical terms that come from their argument are “reference shift” and “source of information in the dossier.” Bogardus, Urban, and Walls use Saint Nick as an example of reference shift. Since Santa Claus is often used as another name for Saint Nicolas, the question must be asked: “What characteristics of Saint Nicolas does Santa Claus possess?” Though their names might be used interchangeably in contemporary conversation, the world-hopping Santa in a flying reindeer sleigh has nothing in

common with the ancient Saint Nicolas, so the dossier of the one is completely unlike the dossier of the other. Similarly, if such a reference shift has taken place in Islam, Muslims who worship Allah do not worship the same God worshipped by Christians according to their core beliefs about him. In addition, Walls emphasizes that the NT revelation has changed everything, because through it we understand the Messiah, Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit, and other fundamental truths that undergird our worship.

Following each of these presentations, the writers of the other essays comment on the positions taken by the current presenter, often reviewing or contrasting points they had made with the present writer's essay. In addition, the presenter is allowed to respond to the others who have commented on his paper.

The final pair of essays, presented by authors who have been ministering to Muslims, approach this question with an eye toward the apologetic and evangelistic value or lack of value this question has in approaching Muslims. Their practical insights add value to the discussion by demonstrating how arguments like this are either helpful or destructive in their evangelistic endeavors. One could only wish that a third voice, that of one who has labored for years in Jewish evangelism, would have been added to the others.

Rather than run through all the counterarguments and responses given, the present reviewer prefers to describe two foundational issues that run like threads through the whole book. First, one can mention the question of whether it is proper to use biblical, doctrinal, or dogmatic arguments to answer this question. For Schwartz and Cobb, the answer is no. They object to the use of doctrinal differences because in their view the sameness of the God of the Christian, the Muslim, and the Jew is not to be found in such doctrinal discussions. McDermott and Walls would argue that a proper Christian presentation of the issue at question can only be

given through a thoroughgoing use of a biblically-based doctrinal presentation of who God is and why this Trinitarian God is worshipped on the basis of NT revelation.

The other frequently recurring question is whether the authors have either overemphasized the differences between the God worshipped by a Christian, the Allah of the Muslim, and the Jehovah God of the OT, or underestimated those differences. This proves to be an interesting discussion, because it leads to a consideration of the “mistaken beliefs” that believers in one faith have that the other worshippers of God do not hold to, and the difference it makes.

This book is a kaleidoscope of fundamental problems, issues, and debatable points. As such, it will serve well as a textbook for upper level college, graduate, and seminary students (especially those with training in logic) in a course such as comparative religions, or theism. It should be required reading for students of missions who intend to work with Muslims and Jews.

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***A Guide to Theological Reflection: A Fresh Approach for Practical Ministry Courses and Theological Field Education.***

By Jim L. Wilson and Earl Waggoner. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 185 pp. Softcover \$18.99.

As the subtitle of this work indicates and the back cover affirms, *A Guide to Theological Reflection* is written to serve a very specific purpose, though additional applications are possible. The book is divided into two sections. The first (15-54) focuses upon the process of theological reflection. Here the authors make clear the importance of theological reflection: to provide a bridge from the classroom to the

ministry field (16). As they put it: “Faithful ministry occurs when we close the gap between what we believe and how we actually live and minister” (21). To do this requires a “pause” in ministry activity in order to “learn from the past and prepare for the future” (23). During this pause, theological reflection moves through three stages: (1) *identifying* how beliefs, thoughts, and feelings influence actions; (2) *aligning* them with God’s truth; and (3) *exploring* possibilities for future endeavors (23-54). Rightly done, such reflection serves to transform the minister into becoming the kind of person God desires (26). In all of this process, the primacy of Scripture is upheld, though additional sources of truth from other fields of learning can provide helpful insights as they are submitted to scriptural authority (34).

The second section (57-172) discusses the “tools” by which effective theological reflection is enabled. Here the authors discuss the importance of what they term the “360-degree ministry support system.” Feedback from peers and ministry recipients as well as focused mentoring are the key aspects of this tool for facilitating reflection (62-76). Additional tools include journaling (77-115); case studies, defined as “summaries of multiple ministry episodes conducted over an extended period of time that allow patterns of attitudes, reactivity, and ministry responses to emerge” (118); verbatim reports, defined as “detailed summaries of isolated ministry events” (121); and “growth covenants,” which are intentional statements of more rigorous action plans designed to close the gap between “operational and confessed theology, theory or emotional health” (139). Through all of this discussion many illustrative and practical examples of these tools are provided.

All in all, the book accomplishes its stated purpose. At times, the discussion seems needlessly repetitive. Yet, a student or ministry intern who is brand new to this process may not feel this way. Also, it is not clear to this reviewer

what is “fresh” about the approach presented, since many of the principles and tools are quite familiar. Finally, the authors assume that the ministry intern is already competent in deriving theological truths and principles from scripture, since there is no discussion of how to do this. Nevertheless, this “guide” would be a useful tool for educational institutions which require ministry practicums and internships, as well as churches and other parachurch ministries that are seeking to develop a more robust approach to personal discipleship, ministry training, and staff development.

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***Every Believer Confident: Apologetics for the Ordinary Christian.*** By Mark J. Farnham. Sisters, OR: Deep River Books, 2019. 206 pp. Softcover \$15.99.

When it comes to the topic of apologetics, there seems to be no lack of resources available both to the scholarly community as well as to the average Christian. In the latter regard, Lee Strobel’s very popular “The Case for” series is just one noteworthy example. Yet, many Christians still feel intimidated by a culture that is increasingly contrary to and even hostile towards biblical truth and the gospel. Mark Farnham’s *Every Believer Confident* provides a ready solution to that reality (full disclosure: Mark is a colleague of this reviewer at Lancaster Bible College).

In this concise and eminently readable volume, Farnham puts into book form principles and guidelines he has been sharing primarily with church audiences over the last several years through weekend seminars and other venues. Many of the illustrations he uses are from personal experience,

but they are also of the kind that virtually any Christian can relate to them. His conviction is that the “average Christian can learn to defend the Christian faith, share the gospel, shake the unbelief of non-Christians, present the Christian worldview, and lead people, to saving faith in Jesus Christ” (20).

With Farnham’s Ph.D. in apologetics from Westminster Theological Seminary, it is not surprising that Farnham champions a presuppositional approach to apologetics, which he says, “begins with biblical truth and seeks to get at the heart of the unbeliever’s rejection of the gospel” (30-31). Yet, he is respectful of other approaches and even recommends some of them in his Bibliography of Suggested Resources. Farnham advocates a basic two-step approach: First, seek to demonstrate the incongruity of other worldviews, and then provide in a winsome manner the compelling truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He rightly views apologetics as “a distinct but inseparable part of evangelism” (24). Indeed, he briefly traces the Bible’s “defense of the truth” from the garden of Eden through the OT (39-42). His principal NT text for “the biblical warrant for apologetics” is 1 Peter 3:15-16. For Farnham, the primary means by which the believer “prepares a defense” [Gk. *apologia*] of his faith is by knowing that faith thoroughly (44). Indeed, such preparation “requires an investment of time, effort and sometimes money. It also takes careful thought, reading, studying and conversations to become an experienced apologist” (45). Sadly, there seem to be few Christians who actually share their faith on a regular basis, let alone aspire to such preparation. But Farnham certainly makes a compelling case that becoming more effective in apologetics and evangelism is within the reach of most Christians, if they are willing.

There is much I appreciate about this work. First, as already noted, Farnham rightly wed apologetics to the overall

task of evangelism. The Christian's goal should not be merely to successfully defend the truth but also to seek to lead people to Christ (99ff.). Second, Farnham rightly stresses the fact that apologetics is more a *spiritual* endeavor than a *philosophical* one and as such needs to be undergirded with prayer and undertaken in the power of the Holy Spirit (57-59). Third, he makes very clear throughout the book that becoming more effective as an apologist and evangelist is not so much a matter of becoming a "subject matter expert" as it is learning to ask the right questions that serve to expose the weaknesses and even the irrationality of non-Christian worldviews (80-92). To this end he provides a very helpful chapter on "strategies for effective apologetics encounters" (125-35), a primer on common logical fallacies (137-50), and a practical illustration of principles and guidelines with a very realistic "case study" (151-61). He concludes with an overview of important doctrinal truths (Scripture, God, Man and Sin) relevant to the task of apologetics (163-189).

One area of the book that could use additional support and clarification is the discussion of the terms of the gospel (117-23). He begins by citing Jesus' words in Mark 1:15 ("repent and believe in the gospel") as encapsulating the proper response to the gospel. As a dispensationalist, I would prefer Paul's words in Acts 20:21 ("repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ") to make this point. But, surprisingly, there are no other citations of Scripture to support his many theological statements in this section. Although I would readily agree with most of what he says, he could have done a better job supporting specific assertions with Scripture, especially since he criticizes other approaches at the beginning of the chapter. A relatively minor quibble is his overwhelming preference for the pronoun "she" in referring to a believer, presumably in the name of gender equality. In the evident absence of such equality in this book, I would prefer the use of neutral terms such as "one" or "they."

In summary, if you can't have Mark to your church to do his apologetics seminar, the next best thing would be to walk your church, your Sunday school class, or your mentee through the steps outlined in his book. Hopefully, as more believers accept Peter's challenge to "always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is within you," this book will become a go-to resource to help them obey that command.

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***Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World.*** By Paul M. Gould. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. 240 pp. Softcover \$11.99.

What does a "cultural apologist" do? He or she "seeks to help others see Christianity as *both* plausible and desirable" (91). In order to accomplish this purpose, Gould proposes "the reestablishment of the Christian imagination, mind, and conscience" (33). Cultural apologists fulfill their mission on a cultural scale "by creating and cultivating beauty, goodness, and truth in the spaces we inhabit, the lives we live, and the things we make" (212). On an interpersonal level, they accomplish their mission "by listening, prodding, discussing, providing evidence, inviting, and serving the tangible needs of the seeker" (213).

As a backdrop, Gould traces the relationship between perception and desire. In short, there is a "connection between what we love and our perception" (38). As a corollary, evidence for the existence of God is "widely available" yet "easily resistible" (38). "God does not force himself upon us. He desires genuine love, and thus the evidence for his

existence can, and often is, missed by those who think there is nothing outside themselves more important than themselves” (39). Rather than merely repeating the common storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, Gould prefers the basic narrative of home, away from home, home again. Beginning with an enchanted world created by God, humans have moved into a disenchanting world emptied by the suppression of truth. The missional endeavor is to re-enchant the world through an awakening of desires and a “return to reality” (44). A naturalistic reductionism has emptied the world of transcendence and sacredness. We are cosmic orphans who no longer perceive “a world infused with the supernatural” (56). Yet in losing the world, we lose ourselves as well (60).

Chapter 3 addresses re-enchantment. “The first step to re-enchantment is to reawaken within ourselves and others the deeper desires of the heart for truth, goodness, and beauty, which in turn will arouse the heart’s deepest desire—a desire and love for God” (69). How can the church respond to such deadened desire? It should appeal to the imagination, reason, and conscience. An approach from the imagination leads to the divine artist, an approach from reason leads to the divine mind, and an approach from objective morality leads to divine goodness (93). Corresponding to the triad of beauty, truth, and goodness, we find “Christ as the Beauty of all beautiful things, the Truth to which all truths point, and the Good of all good things” (94).

The “way of imagination” focuses on beauty exemplified through music and the arts. Adapting C. S. Lewis’s well-known sentiments on pain, Gould declares, “Beauty is a divine megaphone to rouse a disenchanting world” (104). Gould also taps into C. S. Lewis’s understanding of *Sehnsucht* (without using the exact term)—a desire for the transcendent. Beauty can be reflected in “the attractiveness of the Christian life” (105), but also in aesthetic works of

creativity (whether the topics are religious or not). Regarding literature, “all good stories point us to Jesus even if they do so indirectly” (113). Gould claims, “The Holy Spirit woos us through the beauty and imaginative stories depicted in these works of art” (73). In a theological hermeneutic, however, one could speak of common grace in such artistic contexts rather than a pneumatological immediacy.

Readers will most likely be surprised to learn that Isaac Watts (the famous hymnist) also composed a textbook on logic and reason: *The Right Use of Reason in the Inquiry after Truth with a Variety of Rules to Ground against Error* (1724). This specific example helps Gould move from the role of imagination (and beauty) to the role of reason (and logic). Although Gould’s cultural apologetics approach is broader than traditional models, he does not perceive it to contradict apologetic approaches that utilize logic and argumentation. Nevertheless, the goal of effective persuasion is not merely to win an argument but to be a faithful witness (142).

Gould’s third component of cultural apologetics is an approach through conscience (the moral approach through goodness). The quest for goodness finds expression in the longing for wholeness, justice, and significance (148). In response, one might argue that the longing for significance relates as much to the desire for transcendent meaning as it does to goodness. Regarding the facet of wholeness, Gould rightly notes that the biblical concept of *shalom* is more than the absence of conflict—it is a flourishing wholeness, a holistic well-being. Christians are called to be “agents of shalom” (152). Christianity should “make *this* world more inviting, more delightful, more flourishing” (163). Christian ideals include commitments to human dignity, personal liberty, and individual equality (163).

The facet of justice has become a complex prism in today’s culture. The longing for justice inevitably confronts alternative views of justice. Gould counsels, “We must attend

to how Christianity is perceived by the culture-shaping institutions, or Christianity will continue to be viewed as implausible and undesirable” (167). Yet the structural and ideational structures of contemporary culture differ from traditional Christianity regarding human nature, personal identity, and human flourishing—to borrow from the title of a celebrated work by Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* One senses that Gould’s response to the critique of God as a “moral monster” was somewhat of a punt, as he sent readers to the works of Paul Copan and David Lamb without his own developed response (192). He himself admits that his response merely “outlines the general direction” and that “much more can and needs to be said” (192). Gould’s discussion of the cultural barrier of Christian sexual ethics calls for imaginative responses that remain faithful to biblical ethics.

One could add to Gould’s analysis of culture through an additional lens of conscience and moral goodness. Humans share a longing for forgiveness, to have their mistakes, failures, and offenses expunged from their account. Our current culture has its own sense of justice, but often seems to lack a meaningful mechanism of reconciliation. Sentencing of guilt within a “cancel culture” has left many questioning how a sense of justice can be appeased and what counts as sincere and sufficient penance. While humans may live by differing perspectives of justice, this cultural phenomena still reflects an innate orientation stemming from the very nature of moral beings.

The final chapter discusses “home,” being reconciled to God through Christ. The Christian life is a Christocentric paradox. As Lewis declared, “Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in” (205). Our stories become enveloped in the good news of God’s proclamation: “God’s overwhelming love and mercy to us on the cross is the

sudden joyous return that provides the means for human beings to live forever as intended” (209). Therefore, the ultimate question is “What do you make of Jesus Christ?” (219).

Gould insists that a cultural apologist addresses both local and global concerns (211). At times, Gould’s critique of the malaise of contemporary life came through a subcultural focus that will resonate with many of his readers—those left unsatisfied by the accoutrements of a materialistic bourgeois existence, including streaming television, upscale restaurants, and endless sporting events (182). However, many Americans do not live a life characterized by commuting through a “manicured suburb carting kids to soccer” (82). Gould does attach a three-page appendix applying his model to non-Western cultures (217-19). But even Western, American culture is not monolithic. Nevertheless, beauty, truth, and goodness remain as significant signposts along the disparate journeys.

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***Faithful Theology: An Introduction (Short Studies in Systematic Theology)***. By Graham A. Cole. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 118 pp. Softcover \$14.99.

Graham Cole, Dean and Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contributes the first work in the Short Studies in Systematic Theology series titled *Faithful Theology: An Introduction*. For Cole, “faithful theology is a human project that arises from wise reflection on the self-revelation of God” (14). However, to do theology faithfully, one must know how to formulate theology from Scripture. Cole argues, “It is one thing to have

an evangelical's high view of Scripture. It is quite another to know how to derive teaching (doctrine or theology) from Scripture" (15). This distinction is critical because, as Cole explains, theology not only answers the question, "What ought we to believe?" but also "What ought we to value?" and "How ought we to live?" (15-16). Therefore, a correct theological method is essential for faithful theology and, in turn, a faithful Christian walk.

In response to this challenge, Cole presents a theological method with five components. First, Cole establishes Scripture as the epistemological base of sound theology and key hermeneutical rules for interpreting this foundation (chapter 1). Second, Cole explains the value of church tradition as a servant of biblical interpretation (chapter 2). Third, Cole reveals the impact of the fall upon theological reflection, with the major consequence being the nature of one's context as an influencer of one's interpretive decisions (chapter 3). Four, Cole explains how wisdom contributes to theological formulation, including how the theologian correctly uses reason, how one "ranks" doctrine, how one appeals to biblical theology, and what questions one asks and criteria one uses to handle difficult theological questions (chapter 4). Five, Cole concludes by establishing the importance of the ultimate goal of theological reflection, which is the worship of the Triune God (chapter 5).

Although *Faithful Theology* is a short book, Cole successfully presents the foundational elements of a solid theological method. Perhaps the greatest strength of *Faithful Theology* is chapter four, "The Work of Wisdom." This is where the "rubber hits the road," so to speak, and one begins to learn how to "do" theology and integrate the points established in the previous three chapters (i.e., how to read Scripture, glean knowledge from tradition, and humbly evaluate the challenges presented by one's context). I especially appreciated Cole's discussion of "Dogmatic Rank"

(76-78). Ranking doctrine is an important part of doing theology and one demanded by Scripture itself (compare Gal 1:8-9 and 1 John 4:2-3 with Rom 14:5). Cole's distinguishing of level 1 and level 2 convictions, with the first being essential to the faith and the second being those that establish denominational differences, is very helpful. While level 2 convictions are important and should be used to establish denominational lines, they should not keep believers from fellowship outside of an ecclesiastical setting. This point will be especially valuable as the culture becomes more secular and Christians come together and work through various theological issues. I also found Cole's discussion of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology (81-82) helpful. While proof-texting can have its place in theology (81), biblical theology as a step prior to systematic theology "safeguards us from citing texts out of context" in an attempt to bring the text into the present (82). This point is especially important for younger theologians who have been raised in a particular Christian tradition and may have been instructed to read texts in a certain way without considering the context of the passage in the Bible's redemptive storyline.

Nevertheless, and likely due to its size and scope, *Faithful Theology* could be enhanced in some areas. For example, in explaining the importance of sound hermeneutical principles, Cole argues that "plain Scripture is to interpret obscure Scripture" (27). While the principle is true enough, it requires nuancing. No Christian would deny that 1 Corinthians 15:29 is an obscure passage (cf. 29). However, believers do not agree on the clarity of all Scripture. For example, dispensational and historic premillennialists argue that Revelation 20:4-6 clearly teaches a future 1,000-year reign of Christ upon the earth. In contrast, amillennialists and postmillennialists insist that Revelation 20:4-6 is not clear and should be interpreted in light of other Scripture. Who is correct? Because of the nature of these sort of contested

passages, further clarification regarding the “Scripture interprets Scripture” principle would be helpful.

Another example is Cole’s explanation of the value of tradition. There is no denying that tradition is a valuable resource for theological reflection today (note especially Cole’s discussion of the importance of the historical discussion of the Trinity, 48-50). However, Cole’s defense of “positive tradition” relies heavily upon key biblical texts regarding Apostolic tradition (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-7; cf. also 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6) (43-44). While it is true that these passages defend “positive tradition,” Protestants and evangelicals would argue that apostolic tradition is categorically different than that of post-apostolic tradition, since the former is solidified as part of inspired Scripture. This is not to argue that Cole teaches a magisterial view of post-apostolic tradition, since Cole establishes Scripture as the final authority for faith and practice (cf. 24) and that tradition in church history is a “mix of healthy and unhealthy, even toxic” (44). However, since Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox apologists frequently appeal to these same biblical passages in defense of their view of tradition as a magisterial authority, it would be helpful to clarify the value of apostolic tradition as part of inspired Scripture and the positive contributions of post-apostolic tradition which, although valuable, is not inspired and thus has a limited value in comparison to apostolic tradition. Without clarification, this line can become blurred very easily.

These concerns aside, *Faithful Theology* is a solid introductory text to theological method. While *Faithful Theology* can contribute to the academic study of theological method, the text is primarily “addressed to pastors, theological students, college students, and interested layfolk” (17). These individuals will definitely find Cole’s work helpful and informative.

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***Coronavirus and Christ.*** By John Piper. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 106 pp. Softcover \$8.99.

This book was written at the end March 2020. Piper wrote, “For all I know, I will not live to see this book published. I have at least one relative infected with the coronavirus. I am seventy-four years old, and my lungs are compromised with a blood clot and seasonal bronchitis. But these factors do not ultimately decide. God decides. Is that good news? Yes” (43). Although Piper did live to see his book published, this statement strikes the balance between the fragility of human life and the sovereignty of Almighty God, which is a positive tension we live with every day, with or without the coronavirus.

In the introduction Piper writes in the context of the coronavirus, “...this is a time when the fragile form of this world is felt. The seeming solid foundations are shaking. The question we should be asking is, ‘Do we have a Rock under our feet? A Rock that cannot be shaken—ever?’” (8). Thus, this book is not limited to how a Christian should view the coronavirus only, but anything that disrupts and damages life. The principles articulated are cross-pandemic and applicable to whatever threatens to weaken our view of God and attack the safety and security of our lives. Regarding the Rock of certainty versus the sand of probabilities, Piper asserts, “This is a firm Rock under my feet. It is not fragile. It is not sand. That is why I am writing” (14). Piper further states, “The coronavirus demands hard reality, not easy imaginings. God and his word are the reality we need—the Rock under our feet” (58). Thus, Piper sets the table for what he is about to

serve, a 6-course meal (chapters 6-11) that answers the question, “What is God doing through the coronavirus?” (60)

In setting the table or providing the context for answering the question, “What is God doing through the coronavirus?” Piper describes “the Rock” as “hope now” or present hope which is a solid foundation, “not a mirage” (36). It is solid because “God’s word is granite” (21), and it is righteous because it is holy and good. He calls the coronavirus a “bitter providence” (22, 37), which is not a disparagement, but a description. We are “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10), the secret of which is “knowing that the same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus, yet doesn’t, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it” (23). In referring to God’s sovereignty, Piper states it “means that he can do, and in fact does do, all that he decisively wills to do....When he decides for a thing to happen, it happens .... everything happens because God wills it to happen” (39). Piper contends, therefore, that the coronavirus was sent by God (42). This is hard to read and hear, and should not be said apart from the context in which Piper states it. Furthermore, Piper adds that though it is a bitter season: “God ordained it ... governs it ... will end it” (42). One last statement about God’s sovereignty worth quoting is, “... If we try to rescue God from his sovereignty over suffering, we sacrifice his sovereignty to turn all things for good” (45).

The six answers to the question, “What is God doing through the coronavirus?” are given in chapters 6-11.

- (1) God is giving the world ... a physical picture of the moral horror and spiritual ugliness of God-belittling sin (61).
- (2) Some people will be infected ... as a specific judgment from God because of their sinful attitudes and actions (69).
- (3) The coronavirus is a God-given wake-up call to be ready for the second-coming of Christ (73).
- (4) The coronavirus is God’s thunderclap call for all of us to repent and realign our lives with the infinite worth of Christ (77).

- (5) The coronavirus is God’s call to his people to overcome self-pity and fear, and with courageous joy, to do the good works of love that glorify God (87).
- (6) God is loosening the roots of settled Christians ... to make them free for something new and radical and to send them with the gospel of Christ to the unreached peoples of the world (95).

Although Piper’s six answers relate specifically to the coronavirus, they apply to “all other calamities” (61). Thus, while Piper’s book is coronavirus specific, it is “all other calamities” general. He contends that whether the coronavirus or some other calamity, what may be meant for evil, God means for good, right from the start.

I recommend this book as it addresses a current crisis that will continue to have worldwide effects and affect Christians and the church. In less than 100 pages, Piper effectively addresses a current crisis common to the world and worldwide church, but gives biblical answers that have application far beyond the coronavirus. It could be subtitled, *Calamities and Christ*, or *Crises and Christ*. I plan to keep it handy as I minister to and counsel others to know how to be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

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***The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word.*** By Rick Read. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 160 pp. Hardcover \$13.99.

Pastoral ministry is rewarding in a myriad of ways. Many give testimony of the immense satisfaction that is experienced as the gospel of Christ is shared and as people are disciplined in the faith. It truly cannot be measured. However,

many will also readily share that it is not easy work and there are often many unforeseen challenges and pitfalls. *The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word* does not provide all of the answers to the dilemmas and struggles that a pastor will face, but it does address a core issue that each pastor should give diligent attention to in order to successfully carry out this calling. Even though pastoral ministry involves a deep work in the heart of others, it also requires careful attention to the pastor's heart.

At the time of this writing, the world is wrestling with the ramifications of a pandemic that is out of control. It was known that a pandemic could occur and a number of generations before us have experienced this feeling of helplessness and anxiety. But for the most part, the generations that are now living have not had to grapple with a pandemic of the type and magnitude that we are now experiencing. There is an urgency and a race to discover a vaccine that will address the issues of COVID-19 and prevent the continued spread of this dreaded virus.

In this brief book, *The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word*, Rick Reed addresses a problem of greater magnitude than a pandemic and one that there is no vaccine or cure and never will be this side of eternity. This problem, a pandemic of a spiritual nature, has not only affected everyone in the world, but spiritual leaders as well. Those who are called to pastoral ministry can obtain a magnificent education, possess great gifting, and be acutely aware that God has called them to this profoundly important and rewarding work, but still become "shipwrecked" before the mission is completed. Attention must always be given to the heart of the preacher. In Part I of the book, Reed focuses on 15 issues that test the preacher's heart and how God can use these issues to refine the heart. As the author addresses each of these problem areas, he devotes just a few pages to each area of concern. But in doing so, Reed arrests the

attention of the reader to how troublesome each issue is and whets the appetite of the reader to seek further exploration, diagnosis, and remedy, if needed. These heart issues are unlikely to merely “show up” rapidly, but rather can be quite insidious. Therefore, the pastor may be engulfed in a spiritual struggle and be unaware of how the root cause of that struggle gained its foothold. As this book is not comprehensive in addressing any one particular heart issue, it does motivate the reader to take a further and more careful look in order to determine a strategy to address it.

In Part II of the book, the author challenges the pastor to take practical steps to strengthen the heart. Reed stresses that being reactive as indicated in Part I is not enough. By being proactive through the ten admonitions that Reed sets forth in the second part of the book, a pastor is much more likely to build a resistance to the many manifestations of spiritual heart disease that are commonly experienced. Part II also does not provide a comprehensive study of the ten issues that are addressed, but similar to Part I, the reader will be challenged to pursue further study and application in order prepare fully for the testing that will surely be encountered.

This book is very beneficial for busy pastors. A brief pause taken to read the short but thought-provoking chapters may make a lifetime difference in the effectiveness of the one’s ministry. And doing so will not only bring glory to God but also will benefit his proclaimer of truth.

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***Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper.*** By Michael Wagenman. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 143 pp. Softcover \$8.99.

Michael R. Wagenman is Reformed Chaplain and faculty at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Bristol (UK). His dissertation focused on the theology and philosophy of power within the 19th and 20th century Reformed and Roman Catholic ecclesiology. His present writing is a first of two-part research on Abraham Kuyper. *The Power of the Church: The Sacramental Ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper* (2020) is the second volume and should be released in 2020.

*Engaging* contributes to the Lived Series produced by Lexham Press. According to the series preface, its editor's primary goal is to present the significant impact that great men had on the contemporary Christian way of thinking.

*Engaging* opens with a timeline of Abraham Kuyper's life, followed by eight exciting chapters. Wagenman presents a brief introduction to Kuyper's trajectory from being a pastor of a small church to becoming prime minister of the Netherlands. Abraham Kuyper was a man with many gifts. His footprint is virtually everywhere. Kuyper was pastor, journalist, theologian, politician, church reformer, and cultural critic. According to Wagenman, Kuyper lived motivated by one crucial concern: how the church relates to modern society. Kuyper was convinced that the church has "a God-given role to play in the civic marketplace of cultural institutions" (6). Furthermore, "this role cannot be carried out faithfully if the church retreats into the private sphere and adopts a defensive posture against the world or accepts the sacred-secular dualism and engages in a restricted ministry of only saving souls for heaven" (6). In other words, Kuyper strived to see the lordship of Jesus across a range of cultural endeavors. The rest of the book demonstrates Kuyper's main concern about

the six different areas of cultural engagement: identity, public discourse, education, church, society, and politics. Each chapter tracks Kuyper's foundational conviction that "Jesus Christ is Lord of all things" (8).

Wagenman shows the nuts and bolts of Kuyper's mindset on these matters and then points out some implications for today. On the subject of identity, for example, Kuyper identifies himself as a "confessional Christian," in opposition to "cultural" and "modernist." The first group, cultural Christians, describes those who "sacrificed the hard work of faithful Christian action to avoid contamination from the messiness of the world" (14). The second group, modernist Christians, views cultural, political, and scientific advances without a default suspicion. They moved the center of authority from God and Scripture to "individual human judgment revealed through the authority of science, politics, and cultural trends" (16). However, confessional Christians embrace the idea that faith, Scripture, and Christ should influence all human spheres "because [they] concern the whole of our human race" (19).

Kuyper should be applauded for his attempt to subdue every aspect of human affairs under Christ's lordship. However, one might ask if the Bible supports this vigorous optimism about society. Kuyper appears to ignore that the human problem is not a result of a social dilemma, but its cause. Thus, to solve those dilemmas will not solve the human heart's problem, which is the cause of injustice and evil in the present world. According to Wagenman, Kuyper did not believe "that the world would have to wait for a long-distant consummation of the kingdom of God. No, Kuyper believed that this project of extending compassion to the poor and reconciliation between rich and poor was a task that Jesus gave to the church for the present time" (85). One might ask if Jesus even charges his church with such a task. If he did, does he add the hope that this would be the way to produce the



theological, and methodological introduction to the history of preaching” (27). The goal, however, is not simply to describe the history of preaching, but also, based upon the biographical material, “to consider how to best move forward in our own pulpits and in the training of future preachers” (27). The theological and methodological emphasis within the biographies also serves to form future preachers who have a similar concern. The editors write, “Our hope is that this approach will yield fruit for present and future preachers as they formulate their own understanding of how to be a theologian from the pulpit” (28). The editors aim for the work to be of encouragement and help for the pastor, “heroes to imitate” for the student, and a helpful study aid for the teacher (29).

Sixty preachers are covered, each by a scholar with expertise on that preacher. Even with such a wide array of authors, the work has consistency and cohesion, with each author addressing the historical background, “theological aspects of the preacher’s approach to preaching” (28), the preacher’s methodology, his contribution to preaching in general, and also including a sermon excerpt. Each biography is written using footnotes and includes a bibliography. Each volume contains its own Scripture index and subject index. Volume one, *Apostles to the Revivalists*, begins with the apostle Paul and concludes with George Whitefield. Volume two, *Enlightenment to the Present Day*, begins with Charles Simeon and concludes with J. I. Packer.

*A Legacy of Preaching* is an overwhelmingly positive work for many reasons. First, the goal of the book to inspire us “to consider how to best move forward in our own pulpits and in the training of future preachers” (27) is accomplished through the masterful collection of scholars writing on some of history’s greatest preachers. Second, the editors manage an ambitious task well. Surveying sixty preachers is no small task, but the editors have accomplished it in a way that is

detailed enough to be helpful but not so large as to be inaccessible for the average pastor, student, or teacher. After two volumes, the reader has enough of the big picture of preaching since Christ to understand some of the distinguishing characteristics of preaching. Simultaneously, the reader also has sufficient information to learn from individual preachers in a meaningful way. Third, although not a primary purpose, the editors successfully utilize introductory sections to explain the historical contexts of the preachers. The preachers of the middle ages, for example, are preceded by an excerpt that notes the unifying characteristics of those who preached in the middle ages (157-58). These explanations help the reader better understand how the preachers were products of their times. Fourth, the editors chose from a variety of theological positions. Wesley and Edwards are chosen, along with Finney, Barth, and Packer. The variety of preachers helps readers to learn from those whom they may not have been inclined to learn from, thereby aiding readers in ways that may be new to them.

*A Legacy of Preaching* does not have many negative attributes. One potential area of improvement would be regarding the bibliographies at the end of each biography. Because of the substantial number of preachers surveyed, the biographies are relatively small. Inevitably, as one reads the book, some preachers will stand out to the reader over others, and the reader may be inspired to read more about a particular preacher. However, most of the bibliographies have over fifteen entries. The reader who desires to learn more about a preacher will find it difficult to know which works to begin reading from these lists. The editors could have encouraged the authors to include an annotated bibliography or suggestions for further reading that highlighted a couple of works that would be most helpful for the curious reader.

Overall, *A Legacy of Preaching* is a fantastic work that preachers, students, and teachers would do well to read as they seek to grow in their understanding of the marvelous responsibility to proclaim the word of God.

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***A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice.*** By John P. Burgess, Jerry Andrews, and Joseph D. Small. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 194 pp. Softcover \$14.30. Kindle \$11.99.

If you're a pastor, then what's your "pastoral rule"? If you don't have one, then what would it be if you did? Do you need one? These are the questions you'll be asking when you read *A Pastoral Rule for Today*. As the authors point out, pastors face a difficult calling. Pulled in many directions and juggling multiplied demands, their overwhelming task can generate confusion, consternation, and even burnout. To prevent such unfortunate results, this book encourages pastors to codify a set pattern of disciplines and practices to "help sustain pastoral ministry and contribute to the formation of faithful and vibrant Christian communities" (181).

*A Pastoral Rule* follows a straightforward approach. The introduction explains why pastors need a guiding rule and the conclusion explains how to formulate one. Then eight chapters of approximately 20 pages are the meat that's sandwiched in between. The first seven chapters shine the spotlight on successive personalities from church history, showing how a key principle or value guided each of their lives and ministries. The eighth chapter lays out a pastoral rule

that the Presbyterian Church (USA) commends to its ordained clergy today, albeit unofficially.

The authors of this book follow a “team” approach. Jerry Andrews (Ph.D., University of Chicago and pastor of First Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA) wrote about Augustine and Gregory the Great. Joseph Small, the former director of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Theology and Worship, wrote about Benedict and Calvin. And John Burgess (Ph.D., University of Chicago and Professor of Systematic Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) wrote about Wesley, Newman, and Bonhoeffer. In doing so, each contributes from areas of personal expertise and study, offering historical insights with contemporary relevance for pastors today.

This book focuses on what the authors call a “rule,” which refers to “a disciplined way of life that keeps us grounded in the principal calling of a pastor” (5). To demonstrate what this entails, they examine the lives of seven historical figures and their respective “rules.” In many respects, these “rules” resemble the modern concept of “core values.”

To identify these rules, each author relies on the published writings of each historical figure, though they also cite other sources such as biographers (especially for Wesley and Newman). By analyzing and surveying each figure’s lifestyle, teachings, sermons, and writings, they arrive at deductive conclusions. In this way, the authors identify the following associated rules:

- Augustine: Theological Friendship
- Benedict: Monastic Obedience
- Gregory the Great: Holiness and Service
- John Calvin: Ministerial Accountability
- John Wesley: Careful Speech
- John Henry Newman: Pastoral Study

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Physical Presence

As the authors explore these “rules,” they also demonstrate how the rules affected each figure’s mindset and lifestyle by shaping his priorities and influencing his choices in meaningful, clarifying ways. Those who enjoy church history will enjoy this perceptive, focused approach, which may have been missed in the big picture presented by prior church history classes or literature.

Throughout the book, readers will appreciate the various thought-provoking bits of wisdom that appear along the way. “Friends love each other most truly when they see more closely God in each other” (24). “The pastoral call is not so much about balance as it is about pursuing both the active ministry and the contemplative life” (72). “Today, in far too many congregations, pastors act as CEOs of an organization ...” (87). Then there’s my favorite tidbit, which is advice from John Wesley himself: “Always ... conclude the service in about an hour [and] never scream ...” (119). Any pastor will find something in this book that will challenge his thinking in a valuable way.

On a practical note, Chapters 1-7 end with a list of 4-5 discussion questions, followed by 5-6 suggestions for further reading. Though the final chapter doesn’t follow the same format, it intersperses multiple diagnostic questions throughout instead. These features make this book a useful resource for personal reflection and group discussion, especially among pastors.

Despite these positive aspects, the reader may be disappointed by several downsides. Most notably, the authors support their claims with scant biblical evidence, relying almost solely on the wisdom offered by select historical figures. An index in the appendix reveals forty-two Scripture references, equivalent to one reference per every 4.5 pages. More importantly, most of these references are no more than a

cursory mention that rarely contributes to the material in any authoritative or substantive way. For an entry on pastoral theology, this feels like a serious flaw.

Another potential weakness is the book's ecumenical paradigm. Though most evangelical readers will appreciate the inclusion of Augustine as an exemplary figure, many will question whether Benedict of Nursia (the "father of monasticism"), Gregory the Great (a Roman Catholic pope), John Henry Newman (a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Roman Catholic priest and cardinal), or maybe even Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Lutheran pastor and theologian) qualify as appropriate examples for evangelical pastoral ethics. This ecumenical approach may weaken the integrity of the book's central message. To be sure, a mature, discerning reader who is rooted in God's word should be able to glean wisdom from any of these men. As Augustine himself famously said, "All truth is God's truth." Yet for a book that is geared for pastors, far better exemplars exist, such as Theodore Frelinghuysen, Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, to name a few.

Finally, the central message of the book is weakened by an inconsistent application of what pastoral rule entails. Though the authors offer a definition (mentioned previously), they flesh out this definition in contrasting ways. For the first seven chapters, they present the rule as a single, defining principle or value, such as "theological friendship" for Augustine and "ministerial accountability" for Calvin. But when they propose a contemporary pastoral rule in Chapter 8, they describe it as "brief" with "three key components: personal disciplines, conduct in ministry, and structures of mutual accountability" (165). Then they unveil a "rule" that's fifteen pages long and looks more like a meticulous compilation of all seven preceding rules and more. Such a rule is hardly brief! In the conclusion that follows, they offer examples of other contemporary rules that are shorter, one featuring eight separate points and another featuring four.

Though these rules are more concise than what they showcase in Chapter 8, they are still more expansive than what the first seven chapters imply.

*A Pastoral Rule for Today* provides a reasonable service for pastors who wish to cultivate a more orderly, principled life. The book offers a fresh historical and pastoral take on what we normally discuss as mission, core values, and so on, which terms have a decidedly more contemporary sound and corporate feel. Nevertheless, the book suffers from token interaction with Scripture, an ecumenical bent, and some genuine confusion regarding how “brief” (or un-brief) a pastoral rule should be. With these things in mind, it’s fair to say that pastors will benefit from reading this book, as they might from any fair pastoral roundtable discussion, just not as much as they might hope.

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***Preaching as Reminding: Stirring Memory in an Age of Forgetfulness.*** By Jeffrey D. Arthurs. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017. 167 pp. Softcover \$17.22. Kindle \$9.99.

Though there is no shortage of books about preaching, this entry explores a function of preaching we easily forget. As the late influential and oft-repeated Haddon Robinson (and former colleague of Arthurs’s) prescribes in *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Sermons*, preachers should explain, prove, and apply the Scriptures. Yet as Jeffrey Arthurs observes, they should embrace a fourth aim as well—to remind. According to him, “the Lord God has commissioned and equipped ministers to serve as the Lord’s remembrancers” (8).

This book divides neatly into two halves. The first three chapters give sound and compelling rationale for viewing preaching as a ministry of remembrance, and then the final four chapters offer advice for doing this ministry well. This fourfold advice explains how to stir memory through style (effective language), story, delivery (nonverbal factors), and ceremony and symbol. This handy volume moves thoughtfully and efficiently from one section to the next, making it suitable for busy pastors and engrossed academics alike.

*Preaching as Reminding* demonstrates that remembering (and forgetting) is not an obscure, tangential topic, but is a major theme that permeates Scripture and should permeate the aim and approach of our preaching as well. Arthurs's survey and analysis of biblical data on this subject are worth the price of the book and merits serious reflection, if for no other reason than we seem to have forgotten to think much about it. Arthurs has done the church a great service by giving this reminder. Altogether, he provides more than a biblical foundation, but a well-researched perspective as well, writing in an accessible, thoughtful, and engaging style, not with dry, academic, or technical verbosity.

To begin, Arthurs points out that "in the Bible, 'remembering' is more than mental recall. It involves emotion and volition as well as cognition," as when the thief on the cross "asked the Lord to remember him" (Luke 23:42) (13). Arthurs highlights the meanings of the oft-used biblical terms for remembering, *zakar* (Hebrew) and *mimnēskō* (Greek) to verify that "memory is a whole-person activity" (15-18).

Against this semantic backdrop, Arthurs lays out a methodical survey that spans both the Old and New Testaments, showing how God remembers (and forgets). Then he shows how Scripture reveals the human propensity to forget God and his truth, a weakness that affirms the need for

reminding. Arthurs argues convincingly that “preaching as reminding is built on theology proper—the character and actions of God” (24).

Consequently, Arthurs touts the preacher’s responsibility to “help the children of God remember what they should remember [about God] and forget what they should forget” (45). To illustrate how preachers should help God’s children this way, he commends and explores the examples of “Moses in Deuteronomy, the [OT] prophets, and the apostles in the Epistles,” which is a helpful and motivating sequence of insightful observations (49).

In the second half of this book, Arthurs offers advice for effective pulpit speech techniques. He presents these techniques as aids (he calls them “tools” in each chapter title) that will equip preachers to be effective “remembrancers.” For each chapter, he opens with a section called “How It Works,” in which he explains how and why the technique promotes improved “remembering.” He follows this explanation with a section called “How to Work It,” which describes how to apply the technique in various ways. The advice in these chapters is valuable; it draws from a variety of sources, including frequent biblical examples, and corresponds with Arthurs’ personal gifting and expertise.

Some readers may criticize Arthurs’ inclusion of data from neuroscience and rhetorical theory since preaching is a spiritual exercise (cf. 1 Cor 1:21, et al.). Arthur draws from such sources midway through the first half (29-39) and intermittently throughout the second. Readers may also question his citation of various secular sources like Henry David Thoreau, a transcendental philosopher (88).

Arthurs acknowledges and allays this concern. For instance, when he says, “Neuroscience affirms the inseparability of thinking and feeling,” he follows with another paragraph saying, “Perhaps my emphasis on emotion and heart has raised some red flags in your mind. Let’s

conclude this chapter by giving voice to some concerns that you may have” (58-59). What follows is a series of thoughtful, biblical evidence for the validity of his claims, making clear his firm commitment to the authority of Scripture (58-64).

Arthurs exhibits this carefulness throughout the book, and a thoughtful reader will recognize and appreciate that he cites nonbiblical sources and data in a complementary fashion, either to illustrate or corroborate his points, while relying squarely on Scripture as the basis for his case.

As another point of critique, Arthurs repeatedly attributes to the Holy Spirit a contemporary ministry of aiding spiritual memory, cf. John 14:26 and 1 Coromthians 2:11-13 (9, 17, 64). Though some readers will agree with Arthurs on this point, others will relegate this “remembrance” ministry of the Spirit to the first-century apostles alone. This is a minor observation since Arthur’s case for the importance of “reminding” remains firm without this detail.

Arthurs speaks to a full range of evangelical denominations and traditions, which some may find uncomfortable and others may find unsatisfying. He gives a nod to the “Protestant zeal to guard against the excesses of sacramentalism” on one hand [high church] while also acknowledging some concern about “our roots in frontier revivalism, with its emphasis on human experience and decision” [low church] (134-35). Altogether, his broad target audience does not weaken his message, though it does limit what he can say regarding the significance of baptism as a ritual of remembrance, which is an admittedly minor detail in the book (142).

For anyone who hesitates to read yet another book about preaching, rest assured that this one adds fresh content to the conversation. Though it draws from neuroscience and rhetorical theory, it does so in a helpful way. Most importantly, it provides a thorough and thoughtful biblical analysis of a crucial yet overlooked function of preaching.

*Preaching as Reminding* deserves to be read by experienced pastors who may be surprised by how it enriches and expands their view of a practice which they may feel they have mastered. It should also be assigned as required reading that supplements standby texts like Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, especially at the masters level of seminary training, preparing preachers to enter the pulpit determined, skilled, and unashamed to remind the church of what it already knows.

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