

BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

Joel R. Beeke and Martin I. Klauber, eds. *The Synod of Dort: Historical, Theological, and Experiential Perspectives*. Reformed Historical Theology 68. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020. Pp. 235. \$60.00 (hardcover).

The Synod of Dort is both a historical and a contemporary document. Appearing in a particular historical context to meet needs arising at the time, students of Dort need to understand this context in some measure to appreciate the meaning and aims of its decrees. Simultaneously, Dort continues in use among churches that subscribe to the so-called “three forms of unity,” representing what they believe the Bible teaches. This reminds us that claiming to be Reformed always reflects identity with historical forms of Christianity and a particular way of understanding the Bible. Merging these two horizons, this book on the Canons of Dort introduces readers to historical, theological, and experiential perspectives on this historical benchmark of Reformed thought. Being both readable and interesting, this volume potentially has a broader appeal than what one might expect in an academic series of books, enabling readers to grasp both historical meaning and contemporary relevance.

Drawing from a group of pastors and professional historians, all with expertise in the areas treated, the authors execute the book’s purpose well. The historical section focuses on three areas of intersection between Dort and theologians in France. While French participation in Dort was restricted by the French monarch, these essays nevertheless show the crossover of ideas between French and Dutch Reformed theology, illustrating the reception and influence of Dort among French Reformed churches. This material contributes much to our broader understanding of the development of Reformed theology at the time. The “theological perspectives” following this material remain partly historical while shifting towards theological evaluation. Chapters 5 and 8 are mainly historical in scope, highlighting English Calvinism before and after Dort and ideologies regarding church-state relationships surrounding the Synod. The remaining essays in this section include assessments of the free offer of the gospel at Dort, Cornelius Van Til’s logical application of the theology of Dort in response to Barth and Berkouwer, and Michael Horton’s superb explanation and defense of the theological and practical importance of “particular redemption.” Presenting three “experiential perspectives,” the final section appeals to Campegius Vitringa as an illustration of the kind of piety that Dort produced in the subsequent century, adapting Dort’s teaching to inform the nature and aims of Reformed preaching, and an examination of the Holy Spirit in the Canons of Dort in relation to Trinitarian agency in salvation. A final chapter summarizes potential points of relevance of the teaching of Dort for the church today. While separating the historical material from contemporary assessments more clearly from contemporary uses would have resulted in a clearer presentation, intermingling them reflects the

overarching concern of the editors to address both sets of issues for the profit of the church.

At least one example shows the need for careful historical investigation in discerning classic Reformed ideas. Reformed orthodoxy is a challenging field of study, requiring many interdisciplinary skills and precise distinctions. As a result, many modern readers can fail to pick up nuances in classic theological expressions. For instance, one author in this volume refers to the idea of “the two wills within God” (54). However, Pierre du Moulin, whom he cites, refers to the will of God as “twofold.” Reformed authors often stressed that there were not two wills in God but that we need two categories for describing God’s will to understand the distinction between what he does according to his decrees and what he would have human beings do in reflecting his character. The will of God is one, but there is a “twofold” way in which people understand his will. God’s nature and attributes suffuse all that he does, while his creatures should imitate him in all that they do. Yet God’s sovereign action remains inimitable in many respects, which is why Reformed authors maintained a single divine will with a twofold division related to how we understand and respond to his decreative and revealed will. Far from detracting from the quality of this book, this single example shows why seeking understanding through historical theology is vital for contemporary evaluations and uses.

Dort will likely remain a set fixture in Reformed churches in the foreseeable future. Historic creeds are aids to understanding the meaning of Scripture better, but they also require some historical understanding. This volume admirably holds together the kinds of historical, theological, and experiential focal points needed to ensure that Dort remains relevant to the church today. Serving as a good starting point, readers can take up this volume as a handy starting point to explore some of the riches of a vital part of the Reformed heritage.

—Ryan M. McGraw

John R. Bower, *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction*. Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010. Pp. xii + 287. \$40.00 (hardcover).

John R. Bower, *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction*. Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020. Pp. xx + 415. \$40.00 (hardcover).

This important series contains the six primary works produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643–1648) as part of the Westminster Assembly Project currently in production by Reformation Heritage Books: The Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Public Worship, the Directory for Church Government and the Psalter. Each of the volumes “will include a historical introduction, the critical text, and parallel columns comparing original manuscripts and authoritative editions, retaining both the original spelling and

punctuation. All texts are collated from original manuscripts and printed sources, rather than copies” (xii).

Of the six works to be produced in this series, we now have the first two, both by the work of John Bower: *The Larger Catechism*, brought forth a decade ago, and *The Confession of Faith*, recently produced. One might think that surely sufficiently established and reliable texts of these documents must exist in abundance. Not so. And the recent discoveries, begun largely by Chad van Dixhoorn in the archival work that he did in writing his dissertation at Cambridge, highlights the need for new critical editions of the products of the Westminster Assembly of Divines.

Thus, these are the first critical editions published since S. W. Carruthers published his critical edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1946 on the tercentenary of the Confession. Carruthers used the recently discovered manuscript of Cornelis Burges, whom he admitted used “the comma . . . very liberally,” and for which reason Bruges “omitted” a number of them. It is good to have Bower work through this and see whether the commas omitted by Carruthers were useful or not (Carruthers admitted that many of Burges’s commas were helpful).

An excellent example of the need for critical editions as faithful to the original documents as possible manifests itself in Westminster Confession of Faith 11.3. And here, the question of the comma is at play. As J. V. Fesko points out in his book on *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* (reviewed herein by this author in v. 26, 2015), WCF 11.3 in the Carruthers edition reads, “Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified.” This contrasts with what Fesko takes to be the original 1647 reading: “Christ by his obedience, and death, did fully discharge.” Fesko argues that this comma is significant because “in the original, two separate aspects of Christ’s work [the active and passive obedience] are distinguished by a comma, which in later editions has been removed” (Fesko, 225).

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

Both books are especially welcome. The Westminster Confession of Faith has a prominent place as one of the most important such documents to emerge from the Reformation, particularly as it ripened in 17th century England and Scotland, among the Puritans, especially the Presbyterians. The Westminster Larger Catechism, however, has received comparative neglect, unlike the Shorter, which many memorize, or, in the continental tradition, the Heidelberg Catechism, which the Synod of Dort divided into fifty-two Lord’s Days to facilitate ease of preaching. The Westminster Larger Catechism, though Philip Schaff unwarrantedly speculated that it was also meant for preaching, has never quite known its proper place. T. F. Torrance may have been right that it was likely meant for pastoral instruction so that preachers might better teach and preach to their congregations. Whatever its clearest purpose—Scottish Commissioner George Gillespie saw as it for the more mature over against which the Shorter Catechism was for “weaker” Christians—it is time to recapture and

make full use of the Westminster Larger Catechism. Bower's critical texts of it and the WCF are most welcome for all Reformed and Presbyterian churches that wish either to maintain or recover a full-throated confessional faith.

—Alan D. Strange

Oliver D. Crisp. *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. Pp. 193. \$22.00 (paperback).

In recent theological treatments of the doctrine of the atonement, considerable debate, even within evangelical circles, has focused upon the common evangelical and Reformed teaching that Christ's work involved an act of "penal substitution." The confessions of the Reformed churches teach that Christ's work as Mediator involved his substitutionary endurance of the penalty due to sinners who justly deserve condemnation and death on account of their sins. God's truth and justice require either that sinners suffer the consequence of their disobedience against God's holy law or that Christ, having assumed the "likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), bear this consequence on their behalf in his sacrifice for sin. A number of modern authors have raised objections to this teaching, arguing that it represents a view of the atonement wherein God condones violence and engages in a form of "divine child abuse." According to these critics of penal substitution, the prevalent doctrine of atonement in evangelical theology needs to be rejected or modified in a way that resolves the serious problems that it poses.

Oliver D. Crisp, recently appointed professor of analytic theology at the University of St. Andrews, aims to engage this debate by offering a survey and critique of the main types or models of atonement doctrine that have been advanced throughout the history of the church. Though he does not view his study as a comprehensive defense of a new view of the atonement, he seeks to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of various atonement views to advance a more satisfying approach. One of the burdens of his analysis of the history of atonement doctrine is that the classic and influential study of Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor*, does not adequately distinguish the diversity of views and presents an overly simplistic account of the formulations outlined in the patristic period in particular. In the introduction to his survey and critique of atonement doctrines in the history of Christian theology, Crisp observes that his approach to the topic will involve a critical "interrogation" and "cross-examination" of distinct atonement theories (4–5). Employing a careful analysis of each atonement doctrine, he wishes to pose the question: does it provide a clear statement of the "mechanism" by which Christ's atonement reconciles sinners to God?

In the first chapter of his study, Crisp tackles the disputed question of the patristic accounts of the atonement. Due to the "fluidity" of patristic theology and the absence of any consensus regarding the atoning work of Christ, it is tempting for interpreters to oversimplify or mischaracterize the views of the early church fathers. For example, in Aulen's classic work, the patristic view is labeled the "classic" or "dramatic" view, as if there were a broad consensus among early Christian theologians regarding the atonement. Rather than attempting to sort through all the views represented in the early

Christian theology, Crisp treats “two patristic case studies,” the views of Ireneaus and Athanasius. Though there are differences between Ireneaus’ doctrine of “recapitulation,” which represents Christ’s uniting himself with our humanity to recapitulate every stage of human life so as to heal it, and Athanasius’ doctrine, which represents Christ’s union with our humanity to heal and restore our humanity to incorruptible life, each emphasizes a common theme: “Christ’s work is fundamentally about enabling human beings to participate in the divine life” (43). In the views of Ireneaus and Athanasius, there are vicarious elements or components of Christ’s work, but they do not involve an act of penal substitution. By means of his vicarious life, death, and resurrection, Christ “secures our participation in the life of God through our union with Christ” (45).

Chapter 3 of Crisp’s study is devoted to the ransom account of the atonement. Crisp observes that this account plays a vital role in early Christian theology, emphasizing the idea that Christ’s atonement included the payment of a ransom, buying something back by the payment of a price. Based upon the New Testament’s teaching, the idea of ransom is often closely associated with the theme of Christ’s victory over the power of sin, death, and the devil. According to Crisp, however, the themes of ransom and victory over the powers ought not be simply conflated, as is done in Aulen’s study. Furthermore, while these themes represent legitimate metaphors for Christ’s atoning work, they do not offer an adequate explanation of the mechanism of the atonement. For example, in many of the patristic accounts, Christ’s ransom is paid to the devil, an idea that Crisp properly argues is problematic. Since God does not “owe” the devil anything, why would he be obliged to pay a ransom price to the devil to secure fallen humanity’s liberation from the power of sin and death? In Crisp’s estimation, the ransom motif in its traditional formulation provides no satisfactory explanation for how Christ’s life, death, and resurrection involve an act of vicarious satisfaction. Christ’s death was not a payment to the devil but a vicarious endurance of death as a penalty for human sin that destroys its power and claim upon us. Unless the motifs of ransom and victory over the powers are related to the vicarious-substitutionary elements present in Ireneaus’ and Athanasius’ doctrine of atonement, they do not provide a satisfactory account of the way Christ’s defeat of death “deals with the penalty and consequences of human sin” (60). Christ’s ransom and victory require a “reparative” element that removes the obstacles that prevent fallen humanity from being reconciled to communion with God.

After treating diverse views of the atonement in the Patristic period, in Chapter 4, Crisp takes up Anselm’s satisfaction doctrine of atonement outlined in his classic work, *Cur Deus Homo*. Crisp’s treatment of Anselm’s doctrine of atonement is particularly insightful. Though Anselm’s doctrine shaped the Reformation’s view of the atonement in significant ways, Crisp rightly notes that it should not be too quickly viewed as a “penal satisfaction” theory of the atonement. Crisp identifies several assumptions that these views share: that divine justice needs to be satisfied; that human sin must be punished; and that only One is who both true God and true man can satisfy and uphold God’s honor or justice. Because Christ is God, he can make an infinite satisfaction for the intolerable dishonor that human sin entails. Because Christ is truly human, yet without sin, he can take the place and satisfy God’s honor on behalf of

fallen sinners. Through the means of his infinite satisfaction, Christ provides a mechanism whereby human beings may be reconciled to God.

The concluding portion of Crisp's chapter on Anselm's view addresses several objections often registered against it. These objections include the claim that Anselm's position represents the undue influence of Medieval feudalism, depends upon a theological form of reasoning that is divorced from the Scriptures, and approves divine violence in the work of atonement. Crisp offers several convincing arguments in response to these objections. For example, he points out that Anselm's doctrine of atonement is built upon several key Scriptural assumptions. The form of Anselm's argument is, according to his own testimony, an instance of faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). He also points out that Anselm views Christ's work as a satisfaction of the *penalty* for sin, not a satisfaction of the *punishment* due to those who have sinned. For this reason, Crisp believes Anselm's doctrine is not liable to the charge of approving divine violence.

In Chapter 5, Crisp offers a relatively brief account of moral exemplarism and the atonement. Terming this view the "moral exemplar" or "moral example" position, Crisp argues that this view reduces the work of Christ to an exemplary act that moves others to respond accordingly. Christ's selfless love for others becomes a model for human behavior. While Crisp affirms the legitimacy of an emphasis upon the exemplary character of Christ's work, he rightly argues that this view, at least in its pure form, does not constitute a doctrine of atonement. A doctrine of atonement requires some mechanism whereby Christ's work reconciles sinners to God. Moral exemplarism, however, especially in its Socinian and modern expressions, does not include such a mechanism.

Furthermore, the moral example view necessarily attenuates the biblical doctrine of sin, arguing that human beings are able to be moved by Christ's example without the provision of an atoning sacrifice for their sins. While critical of the moral example view, Crisp justifiably objects to the common assumption (popularized by Aulen) that Abelard represented this view. He also correctly acknowledges that any biblical doctrine of Christ's work should include a recognition of its appropriate impact on human conduct, though such recognition by itself remains inadequate.

In Chapter 6, Crisp treats the penal substitution view of the atonement, which he acknowledges to be the prevalent doctrine among evangelical and Reformed theologians. Though Crisp affirms the legitimacy of a modified penal substitution view, he acknowledges that there are serious objections to it. Crisp's definition of this view is relatively straightforward: "Christ's reconciling work has to do with his suffering the penalty of sin in place of human sinners. He takes upon himself the penal or legal penalty for our sin" (97). According to Crisp, there is an important "ambiguity" in this view: does it teach that Christ was "actually punished" for sin, or did he simply suffer the "penal consequences" of my sin? In the former case, Christ would be treated "as if" he were the guilty party who somehow must suffer the punishment due to the guilty. In the latter case, Christ would not be punished as if he were guilty but as someone who, though innocent, willingly assumes the obligation to pay the penal consequences of another person's sin. In Crisp's assessment of this ambiguity, the former view raises the question of how Christ can be regarded and

treated as a guilty person when he is, in fact, innocent. This seems to posit a kind of “legal fiction” that does not accord with the dictates of justice.

Much of Crisp’s treatment of the penal substitution view focuses upon several recurrent objections to it. The first of these objections—that it poses the problem of divine violence and “divine child abuse”—is especially prominent in contemporary discussions of the atonement. In his treatment of this objection, Crisp correctly argues that it “fails to get off the ground” because it doesn’t reckon with the doctrine of the Trinity (101). Within the framework of Trinitarian theology, the Persons of the Trinity are not “numerically distinct.” Since God is one in essence, it is improper to view the relation between the Father and the Son as though the Father “abuses” the Son or acts violently toward him. There is a perfect concert of will and action between the Father and the Son in the work of atonement. Though it involves an act that satisfies God’s justice in Christ’s suffering the consequences of human sin, this act is fully commensurate with and born out of the perfect love of the Triune God for those on whose behalf the atonement is made. Crisp also notes the common objections to penal substitution that the Socinians already raised at the time of the Reformation: that punishment of sin is incongruent with forgiveness; that the punishment of an innocent person is unjust; and the impossibility of transferring sin and guilt to an innocent person. In his response to these objections, Crisp concedes that there are serious problems in the traditional formulation of penal substitution. In his estimation, the most serious problem is the idea that Christ is “punished” for the sin and guilt of others, even though he is innocent.

Following his discussion of the doctrine of penal substitution, Crisp considers two atonement doctrines articulated by Arminian and Reformed theologians in the aftermath of the Reformation (Ch. 7): the governmental and vicarious atonement theories of Hugo Grotius and John Macleod Campbell, respectively. In his consideration of these views, Crisp shows how they sought to modify the doctrine of penal substitution to meet the objections of critics. The governmental view of Grotius emphasized the “rectoral justice” of God, treating Christ’s atoning death as a vicarious demonstration and vindication of God’s moral government. In this view, Christ does not suffer the punishment or penalty vicariously due to those who have sinned, but his death shows sinful humans that God’s just rule over his creatures may not be violated with impunity. In this way, Christ’s work of atonement serves as a deterrent to sin. In his assessment of the governmental doctrine of atonement, Crisp persuasively argues that it does not offer a view of the atonement that provides a clear account of how Christ’s death makes reparation for sin and thus reconciles sinners to God. Crisp’s analysis of the vicarious atonement view of Campbell is also remarkably insightful. The vicarious atonement view does not offer a clear account of how Christ could vicariously repent for the sin and guilt of others while being himself sinless and guiltless. Furthermore, the vicarious repentance view does not explain why Christ’s vicarious repentance required his death or how it provides an atonement for sin that enables sinners to be reconciled to God.

The last three chapters of Crisp’s book are preoccupied with contemporary debates regarding the atonement and offer a brief statement of Crisp’s proposal for approaching the atonement.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the common complaint in the contemporary theological discussion that the penal substitution doctrine approves a form of “divine violence.” According to this complaint, since violent acts are always morally objectionable, a doctrine of atonement that is achieved through violent means is “morally unsustainable” (131). After rejecting the typical conservative response to this objection as an instance of theological “question-begging,” Crisp offers a defense of a “double effect” view of the atonement. Borrowing this language from the field of medical ethics, Crisp proposes that we distinguish between God’s *intention* in providing an atonement for human sin and the *act* of atonement itself. God intends to heal and restore those for whom Christ’s work of atonement is accomplished. The violence of the soldiers who crucified Christ was not intended by God, even though he either foresaw their violence and permitted it to happen or more strongly ordained it to happen. According to Crisp, his “double effect” proposal “distinguishes intention and action, and suggests that God may bring about acts for good ends that included violence, though he does not intend violence” (145).

In Chapter 9, Crisp offers a taxonomy of contemporary approaches to the doctrine of atonement. In this chapter, he distinguishes between what he terms a “mashup” and a “kaleidoscopic” account of the atonement. By these categories, Crisp hopes to sort out and differentiate between two different approaches that contemporary authors have assumed in their approach to the vast diversity of atonement views in the history of Christian theology. By the “mashup” view, he refers to an approach that takes “elements of different existing atonement accounts” and mashes them together into a “new, amalgamated whole.” By the “kaleidoscopic” account, he refers to an approach that views the diversity of atonement views in terms of comprehensive theory about “models of atonement.” As the term “kaleidoscopic” suggests, atonement views represent a diversity of perspectives, each of which grants insight into some or another facet of the atonement, but none of which exhausts the unfathomable depth and riches of the atonement. In Crisp’s estimation, these two approaches do not provide a constructive proposal regarding the atonement but simply offer an inclusive summary of the principal models of atonement throughout history.

In the concluding chapter of his book, Crisp sets forth a tantalizingly brief account of his constructive approach to the doctrine of atonement. Appealing to the principal theme of early, patristic accounts of the atonement, Crisp argues for a “union account” that emphasizes the idea of participation in the divine nature through union with Christ. According to Crisp, the union account of the atonement resolves three issues that plague the model of penal substitution: 1) the notion that Christ was punished “in place of fallen human beings”; 2) the notion that the sin and guilt of Adam were transferred to the rest of the human race; and 3) the “legal fiction” that is inherent to the notion that God imputes the sin and guilt of Adam to the rest of the human race. Appealing to an offhand comment of Jonathan Edwards, Crisp maintains that the legal and moral consequences of Christ’s work of atonement are based upon a real union with and participation in Christ that undergirds them. Just as all human beings were “in” Adam, a participant in the organic unity of the whole human race, so all who are saved are “in” Christ, a participant in the organic unity of the new humanity.

As my summary illustrates, Crisp’s book contributes a stimulating introduction to recent theological discussions regarding the doctrine of atonement. Those familiar

with his analytical approach to the discipline of systematic theology will not be surprised by his penchant for sharp analysis and careful theological argument. Though his opinion is shaped by the contours of recent debates, especially within the orbit of evangelical theology, he provides an insightful account of the diversity of atonement doctrines that have been formulated throughout the history of Christian theology from the patristic period to the present. While Crisp's survey of atonement views may not displace Aulen's classic treatment, it is in many ways a more accurate and theologically precise review of atonement doctrine. For this reason alone, it deserves to be included on the list of books that offer a good summary of the history of atonement views and a helpful introduction to the present debate about Christ's work of atonement. Crisp's book will prove to be a useful resource for those who would like a window into the issues and questions presently in the center of discussion.

However, there are some problematic features of Crisp's approach. Crisp's analytic approach to theology includes little significant engagement with crucial biblical passages pertaining to Christ's atonement work. Crisp refers to and quotes several texts throughout his study. But he does not engage the Scripture's testimony on the topic in any exegetical depth. Furthermore, though Crisp rightly observes that the Apostle's Creed does not espouse a particular type of atonement doctrine, he does not treat the confessions of distinct church traditions that espouse fairly comprehensive accounts of Christ's work of atonement. Even though Crisp writes as a broadly evangelical and Reformed theologian, his constructive proposal regarding the doctrine of the atonement departs rather significantly from several consensus tenets of evangelical and Reformed theology. This becomes especially evident in the concluding chapter, where Crisp offers his proposal regarding the atonement. By his admission, this proposal tracks more closely with patristic types of atonement doctrine, including the Eastern Orthodox view of participation in the divine nature (*theiosis* or “divinization”). Though Crisp appeals to Jonathan Edwards to support his proposal of a “union account” of the atonement, I am not convinced that this appeal is warranted.

Even more seriously, Crisp frequently mischaracterizes the classic understanding of penal substitution as though it amounts to nothing more than a “legal fiction.” For this reason, he presents his “union account” of the atonement to resolve what he disparagingly terms a “transactional” understanding of Christ's work of atonement. In my estimation, Crisp's proposal raises serious questions regarding his understanding of Christ's atoning work, particularly regarding the doctrine of free justification. The grace of free justification rests upon the truth that Christ, though innocent, took our place and suffered the condemnation and death we deserved. Unless God grants and *imputes* to us the righteousness of Christ, which includes his obedience to the law's precepts and his endurance of the law's penalty, we will remain liable to condemnation and death. Though Crisp may not intend to undermine the doctrine of justification upon the basis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, his proposal for a “union account” of Christ's work of atonement seems to do just that. In the final analysis, the penal substitution view of the atonement, at least in its historic formulation, does not seem compatible with the approach Crisp proposes.

—Cornelis P. Venema

J. V. Fesko. *The Need for Creeds Today: Confessional Faith in a Faithless Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020. Pp. xix + 121. \$21.99 (paperback).

In recent theological discussions, some authors have argued that contemporary theology needs to rediscover the importance of the history of theology and the role of the church's confessions in theological study. These authors lament how theology has abandoned Christian theology's "Great Tradition" and adopted an a-historical, non-confessional methodology. Rather than receiving gratefully the contributions of theologians in the past, especially the ecumenical creeds and confessional symbols of the church, theologians have engaged their task as though they were not members of the holy catholic church. Rather than displaying a collegial attitude that values theological and confessional inheritances bequeathed to them, many theologians and church members seem to have embraced the individualism and a-historicism that characterize contemporary Western societies.

J. V. Fesko can be added to the growing list of such authors. Recently appointed professor of systematic and historical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, Fesko captures well the burden of his argument in the title and subtitle of his book. His thesis is that theology today needs to make appropriate use of the church's confessions. As his subtitle suggests, this need is especially pressing in an age that does not prize confessions as faithful summaries of the Bible's teaching. The witness of the church, if it is to be faithful and compelling, must be born out of an appreciation for the wealth of biblical wisdom codified in her confessions. As he puts it, "This book defends the thesis that confessions of faith are therefore necessary for both the being (*esse*) and the well-being (*bene esse*) of the church" (xvi).

The argument of Fesko's book is developed in five chapters. In the first chapter, Fesko lays the groundwork by exploring eight biblical texts that demonstrate the need for the church to create confessions of faith. The second chapter surveys the history of confessions in the Reformed tradition from 1500 to 1700. The third chapter explains some of the reasons for the growing disuse and disrespect for the church's confessions that have characterized many churches in the American ecclesiastical scene. In the fourth chapter, Fesko identifies a number of the principal benefits of confessions of faith for the witness and ministry of the church. The fifth chapter is devoted to a notorious episode during the proceedings of the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619. The case in question was the challenge to a duel that Gomarus, one of the leading defenders of Reformed orthodoxy at the Synod, extended to one of his colleagues. Though this chapter might seem to be an odd insertion into the sequence of Fesko's argument, he cites this episode as an instructive "warning" against an inappropriate and sinful approach to the defense of the church's confession. In preserving the truth of the Scriptures, as summarized in the confessions, the church and her members must remember that love for the truth must be closely linked with love for God and those who bear his image.

When I first became aware of Fesko's book, I must acknowledge that my initial thought was, "do we really need another book of this kind?" Not many years ago, Carl Trueman authored an excellent defense of the need for the confessions of the church (*The Creedal Imperative*). In his volume, Trueman deftly exposed the anti-confessionalist mentality that so often prevails in the modern church. Furthermore, he

located the environment for this anti-confessionalist spirit within the framework of what many term “post-modernism.” Within the soil of post-modernism, confessions can’t be viewed as anything more than museum pieces, each of which tells us about what Christian churches once believed at a particular time and place. But they may not be viewed as credible and authoritative summaries of what people must still believe in the modern period.

After reading Fesko’s book, however, I believe it offers a cogent defense of the need for confessions that serves to complement the arguments of previous books, including Trueman’s. Put somewhat simplistically, Fesko’s argument gives more attention to some of the historical factors that played a role in contributing to anti-confessionalism within the churches. For example, he devotes a chapter to the much-disputed question of whether the later Reformed confessions written in the seventeenth century (e.g., the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Standards) represent a declension from the earlier confessions of the sixteenth century. In this chapter, he helpfully details the historic occasion for writing these more detailed and precise confessions of faith. He offers a defense of their substantial harmony with their predecessors. Furthermore, Fesko correctly observes that, in the aftermath of the Reformation, the religious wars and political divisions that were representative of different confessional parties (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Arminian, etc.) gave birth to a growing wariness about the value and usefulness of confessions. These historical factors, alongside developments in modern philosophy and science, gave rise to antipathy toward ecclesiastically-sanctioned statements of faith.

Another feature of Fesko’s argument is worthy of notice. At several points in his argument, Fesko helpfully observes that so-called “post-modernism” ought instead to be called “hyper-modernism” (44, 73). In my estimation, this observation more accurately describes the spirit that predominates in much modern thought. The anti-authoritarianism that marks the modern period represents the outworking of the basic spirit of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment’s assertion of human autonomy. Behind the anti-confessionalism of the modern period lies a repudiation of the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures. The modern mind is hostile to the supreme authority of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. And it is equally hostile toward the church’s endeavor to set forth the truth of Scripture in the subordinate standards or confessions.

Fesko’s volume will prove a helpful resource for those looking for a relatively short and accessible defense of the need for and use of the confessions in the church and theology.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song*. New York: Penguin Press, 2021. Pp. xxiv + 278. \$30.00 (paperback).

Dr. Gates, a University Professor at Harvard and director of a center of black and African studies there, has also taught at Yale, Cornell, and Duke, after receiving degrees at Harvard and Cambridge (his Ph.D. there being in English literature). Gates

self-identifies as a literary critic and teacher, though he is widely identified as a leading public intellectual and expert on many aspects of black literature and culture. Interestingly, he has chosen to write a history of the black church in America, as he is neither a historian nor distinctly Christian, at least in any conventional sense.

A historian differs from a literary critic in that the critic can say what he does as long as he can justify whatever he says by some textual reference, and that may be a deconstructed text, in fact (Gates admittedly deconstructs texts in the tradition of post-structuralism and other literary approaches). The historian, on the other hand, even of a post-modernist sort, approaches a text so that he can situate his subjects in time and space, i.e., historically. Thus, it is always an interesting enterprise when the literary critic, the conventions of whose discipline differ from the historian, approaches texts that are chiefly historical with a view to using such in the composition of history. One might end up learning more about the author than coming most fruitfully to understand the history of the subject matter about which the author purports to write.

Is that the chief criticism of this book? Only in a measure. There is a great deal to learn from Gates about an important story that has often been neglected and needs to be told. And Gates does an excellent job of telling it in many respects. Gates is committed, to the chagrin and criticism of many, when it comes to black literature, to teaching it in a way that integrates it into the broader story of American literature. He is to be commended for not settling for a separatist approach. However, he does not quite have what it takes as a literary critic to take this story and place it into the broader picture of the church in America, as an American church historian would. It is not that Gates telling of the story of the black church is incompetent, not at all, but it is not as competent and compelling as Gates dealing with black writings in the light of the broader American literary canon.

Additionally, in literary studies and even in the other academic disciplines these days (given the pervasive perspectivalism of postmodernism), Gates views the black church through the lens of current intersectional progressivism. For example, Gates is critical that the black church in America has historically been unreceptive and unwelcome to those who identified as same-sex attracted. This seems like a short-sighted and somewhat bizarre observation on Gates's part because the same-sex agenda has only been on the church's radar in recent decades. It is ahistorical to read the history of any organization and judge it negatively based on the most recent commitments and views of an ever-evolving culture.

That having been said, there is much good to be gleaned from this book. The book is an "extension" (229) of the four-hour PBS documentary of the same name. It should be noted that this reviewer, whatever liability that may incur, has not viewed the documentary. One of the great takeaways of the book, unsurprisingly, is that the black church is not a monolith. Some within it have a more spiritual view of the church, and some have a more politically active view. Some believe that the Holy Ghost and all the manifestations of such (the "Frenzy," as W. E. B. Dubois described it, including glossolalia) properly characterizes the church, while others believe in a more orderly approach. Some laud an unlearned ministry and use a particular black vernacular style, while others want a learned ministry and more disciplined sermonizing. Somewhat allied to that was also the matter of music: spirituals, associated with slavery, hymns of a more conventional sort, and the development of gospel music with influences

from hip hop and other genres. Some believed that a preference for or insistence on ecclesiastical learning, order, tradition, and the like was merely aping “white churches,” while others felt that leaving slavery decisively behind and evincing discipline and respectability was necessary to gain the respect of white churches and whites in general. There are many approaches to the faith among black churches, and Gates sets them forth, though always showing a bias for the most “progressive” expressions.

Gates tells the story not only of slavery and the Civil War but also of the Jim Crow era and all that the black church developed to survive and even thrive, giving way to the Civil Rights Era and the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as Malcolm X. Again, the black community remained divided: Malcolm X, of course, was not part of the church (as a Muslim) and organizations inspired by him and others (like the Black Panthers) were partisans of violence, if necessary, as opposed to Dr. King’s commitment to non-violence. Interestingly, at some key points, Gates treats the black church and the black community as if they were the same thing, even when it is clear that he is talking about movements and parties that are not Christian or part of the church. He deals with many other figures, from the Johnson to the Nixon to the Reagan to the Clinton to the Obama administrations. He pays homage to Obama, whose role after the Dylann Roof massacre remains remarkable. The book is generally once over lightly in its treatment of all its many figures and events but useful, nonetheless.

This salmagundi of approaches to the black churches is most helpful in seeing that the black churches, in some respects, were variegated, as were the white churches. There is a difference, though. It is arguable that for most blacks, often oppressed, by dint of their race, whether slave or free, the church assumed a centrality and a significance in their lives that it did not tend to have in the lives of many whites. Whites dominated the culture and her institutions and thus had many avenues of expression. Blacks did not, and their corporate expressions were more confined. Yes, other black institutions (universities and colleges, social and business organizations, etc.) developed over time (after general emancipation), but nothing ever came to rival the church. When one is pressed down, nothing is more needed than a shelter in the time of storm, and for so many blacks, the church was that shelter and thus took on an unrivaled place in so many lives.

—Alan D. Strange

Crawford Gribben. *Survival and Resistance in Evangelical America: Christian Reconstruction in the Pacific Northwest*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 210. \$29.95 (hardcover).

Rousas Rushdoony, the father of Christian Reconstructionism, has made a comeback in recent years. Well, perhaps not so much Rushdoony himself, who died in 2001, but followers of his as they have developed and modified his thought over the years. In this new work, Crawford Gribben, a theologically astute academic from the UK, argues that Christian Reconstruction has been reconfigured by its various partisans over the course of time, many of whom have found a home in what is called the

American Redoubt (in the Pacific Northwest), a designation coined by James Wesley Rawles, author of a series of survivalist novels bearing the main title *Patriot*. Douglas Wilson and his group in Moscow, Idaho, are critical players in this movement that ultimately entails thousands of conservative Christians who have relocated to Idaho and environs (parts of Washington and Oregon, as well as Montana and Wyoming). Gribben observes that those who have thus relocated would like to see their ideas of church and state brought to pass in this part of the United States. He treats this soberly and not conspiratorially, though many who've moved there are quite conspiratorial in their viewpoints.

Gribben notes that while Christian Reconstruction seemed to fade away in the latter part of the twentieth century, it never quite did. It took root and was reimagined and reconceived, given expression in Christian schooling and homeschooling. As times are perceived to have worsened (especially regarding same-sex marriage and the LGBTQ+ movement), this revived and recast Reconstructionism has resulted in migration and re-settlement among its supporters in the northwestern United States. The first chapter chronicles this migration into this part of the country. Subsequent chapters detail the views on the eschatology of many of the migrants (postmillennialism, meaning that long term they expect the nation and world to Christianize), and on government (as theonomists, often, they support a civil government reconstructed along explicitly biblical—largely Old Testament—lines). There are also chapters addressing education (children must be distinctly educated biblically and often confessionally) and media, particularly setting forth the impact that Rawles, Wilson, and others have had on broader society.

Overall, Gribben treats Wilson and the others who have found a home on the Palouse fairly, both as to their theology and to their persons. This is not always the case, especially for a mainstream publisher like Oxford. This reviewer has reviewed a few of the recent works on both Rushdoony and the revived interest in him and Christian reconstruction: the book by Michael McVicar remains one of the fairest, with many others going downhill fast (in terms of fairness). Typically, books criticizing Christian Reconstructionism and its variants of recent years that do not operate under that rubric often demonstrate a lack of understanding of its distinctives and end up criticizing either Reformed distinctives or even broader Christian doctrines. Gribben seems sensitive to much of what concerns and causes these conservative Christians in this part of America to tick.

The NAPARC denominations have had reason to criticize Wilson and his followers in recent years, particularly for their embrace of Federal Vision. Federal Vision (FV) recognized that American evangelicalism, and, as they saw it, even Reformed and Presbyterian churches, were weak on the doctrine of the church and the covenant. However, the FV remedy for such was problematic: rather than realizing that the Reformed confessional tradition provided the needed remedies to any perceived covenantal and ecclesiastical deficiencies, FV sought remedies by recasting certain doctrines. This proved especially problematic for the key Reformational doctrine of justification, which in FV hands tended to be seen not in terms of justification by faith alone but justification by faithfulness, which had the unfortunate effect of introducing works into the definition of justification, from which the Reformers were careful to exclude works. Some claim that this and other FV problems

have been resolved. This writer is not convinced. These important matters are not the focus of Gribben in this work, but it is worth mentioning for those not aware of such.

There are other problems associated with the Moscow group (charges of poor handling of some serious abuse situations, expressions of unwonted patriarchalism, etc.) that Gribben acknowledges but also chooses not to deal with. Gribben writes as a historian, though much of what he treats may be more sociology of religion as it involves the lives of those that have established themselves in the Pacific Northwest. What the future holds for these movements is unclear. Still, it does behoove those in more recognized confessional Reformed and Presbyterian circles to stay apprised of what is going on in the Redoubt. One hopes that more books like Gribben's will afford light (and not only heat) and permit the wider Christian, and even secular, world to analyze and understand such movements.

—Alan D. Strange

Arnold Huijgen and Karin Maag, eds. *Calvinus Frater in Domino: Papers of the Twelfth International Congress on Calvin Research*. Reformed Historical Theology 65. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020. Pp. 370. \$163.00 (hardcover).

Calvin studies abound, showing no sign of abatement. This present work includes papers presented at the twelfth International Congress on Calvin Research. The main essays advance Calvin research by reassessing many contemporary issues and their aftermath in subsequent generations by focusing on political issues concerning the duties of civil magistrates surrounding religion, as well as the relationship between church and state, the main essays advance Calvin research by reassessing many contemporary issues and their aftermath in subsequent generations. The rest of the “short papers” in the book treat a wide range of questions, including yet stretching beyond political matters. *Calvin Frater in Domino* constitutes a searching volume, representing fresh research and many avenues for further study for serious students of Reformation and post-Reformation theology.

Themes touching the civil magistrate fill the first, and primary, section of the book. The first chapter explores exegetical developments via Calvin’s heirs in relation to the right of lesser magistrates to oppose higher ones (23). Following this analysis, the next chapter focuses on the relevance of divine law to the exercise of civil authority (40). Recognizing the importance of 1 Samuel 8 in post-Reformation approaches to opposing kings, the third essay places Calvin’s underdeveloped use of this text in the context of medieval and post-Reformation developments, again illustrating continuities and discontinuities (57–76). The last three chapters in this section treat prayers for the king in Reformed liturgies (with an eye to modifications of medieval practices; 77–102), Calvin’s use and modification of Augustine’s thought on church/state relationships (123–124), and the Thomistic background of Calvin’s teaching on good political order (125–148). The value of each contribution is that the authors set Calvin in the contexts of contemporary politics and social factors, his predecessors, and his successors, giving readers a sound model of historical theology and resulting in satisfying accounts of some previously unexplored questions. Finding

new material in Calvin research is a daunting task, given the number of publications related to his thought. By focusing our attention on the bigger picture and giving us a longer view of theological developments, the authors illustrate the vastness of history and that there is still more to say.

Beyond the scope of the general subject of church/state relations, several chapters stood out as particularly useful and thought-provoking. Moving beyond controversies surrounding Calvin's conception of eternal generation in the Trinity, David Barbee engages in the difficult task of finding the primary influences behind Calvin's Trinitarian theology, especially from the church fathers (161–174). Doing so illustrates the catholic nature and process behind Reformed thought in a way that better helps readers understand the critically evaluative process of retrieval among Protestants. Alden McCray's treatment of divine impassability in Calvin's commentaries usefully illustrates a classic Protestant approach to the divine attributes as well, despite his truncated list of attributes in the *Institutes* (295–307). Likewise, Win Moehn usefully connects Guido de Bres' work on the Belgic Confession with his earlier compendium of the church fathers, with an eye to de Bres' use of Calvin and other early Protestant sources in forming this widely-used Confession (309–322). The final chapter by Willem van Vlastuin presses areas in which Calvin redefined the early church concept of catholicity and pressed it in his own way, reflecting a burgeoning early-modern context with increasing stress on the individual (353–364). All of these chapters highlight the broader appeal of this volume to readers interested in a variety of aspects of Reformation and post-Reformation ideas and their development.

In short, this compilation of essays is fascinating, both in relation to Calvin studies and in connection to medieval and post-Reformation historical research. Church/state relationships loom large, but the scope of the volume's short essays has a broad reach that will interest various readers. The research is solid, and the contributions are even in quality. This work will prove useful to those interested in church/state issues as well as a number of other topics pushing into post-Reformation theology and history.

—Ryan M. McGraw

David C. Innes. *Francis Bacon*. Great Thinkers. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019). Pp. xxvi + 142. \$14.99 (paperback).

Professor David Innes of The King's College in New York City furnishes us with a fascinating portrait of the life and work of Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) as one of the newer installments in the *Great Thinkers Series* that P&R began publishing anew a few years ago. Some have downplayed Bacon's significance in recent decades, but Innes rightly argues his crucial role in the modern development of the scientific method and all that has emerged from there. Bacon's emphasis on induction and careful attention to evidence has been crucial in the move away from the deductive method of Aristotle and the lazy assumptions that often followed in pre-modern science. That's the good part of Bacon's contribution. On the other hand, in rejecting the fuller four-fold view of causation that Aristotle taught, Bacon tended to reject the teleological altogether and thus the theological. This ultimately leads to scientism,

materialism, and naturalism and to all the problems that attend the anti-supernaturalistic project of secularized science.

Bacon aimed high. In his *Great Instauration*, he set forth his desire for a total reconstruction of all of life and thought upon proper foundations, not those simply of Aristotle, but of the true science of induction (and the scientific method) as outlined in his *New Organon* and seen in his utopia, *New Atlantis*. These three works, carefully attended to, give us the breathtaking task that Bacon set for himself and for us all. Innes is perhaps at his best in dealing with the promise and the problem of Bacon's project (chs. 3 and 4).

Innes shows us how ambitious, even hubristic, Bacon was. He saw the Elizabethan and Jacobian world of his day, a world both mired in tradition and the past, and holding seemingly limitless possibilities for the future, as needing just the scientific and philosophical sensibilities that Bacon could bring to it. Bacon did not deny the Christian faith (though Innes rightly regards Bacon's Christian faith as dubious), as that was not tenable in his time and place. His approach, however, ultimately had no use for the Christian faith.

Bacon's project—the betterment of the world through the adoption and application of his inductive method—was redolent with hope, full of eschatological zeal. This hope was not a Christian one, however. Still, hope in his approach, which quickly devolved to scientism in a deistic then atheistic intellectual culture, was a material hope expressed in technology. Technology was to create a brave new world for us all, and it has in many ways, creating not only utopian dreams but also dystopian nightmares. Technology, in other words, has magnified our capacity to do evil as well as good. In a secularized culture that has rendered morality utilitarian, this has had and continues to have devastating consequences.

So much for the antithesis. What of common grace? The book deals with both throughout, but the last chapter (5) suggests ways in which “Redeeming Bacon’s Legacy: A More Godly Dominion” is possible. Bacon’s great insights need to be shorn of scientism so that a godly science might emerge, a science that enjoys philosophical humility and can appreciate more than just the material. Another need is for teleology to replace technology since the latter is hardly neutral, and it is folly not to care about purpose and ends. Innes talks about how man-centeredness, as opposed to God-centeredness, actually abases both, but the reviewer will leave the rest of this chapter to the reader. Bottom line: God’s people need most vigorously to be his people and to engage in all the spiritual disciplines, and to hold forth true hope to a world that has been dying on the vine for some time, mired as it is in the false hope of science as messiah.

—Alan D. Strange

Peter J. Leithart. *1 & 2 Chronicles*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019. Pp. xx + 267. \$35.00 (hardcover).

Peter Leithart is a remarkable polymath. Controversial, yes—his association with Federal Vision theology is well-known to and regretted by readers of this journal. And

yet, his theological writing, cultural analysis, and literary acumen are not often hindered by that association. Though not a biblical scholar narrowly conceived, that has not prevented him from wading into the waters of biblical scholarship, whether aimed at academic or popular audiences. In doing this, Leithart embodies an older version of scholarship (biblical and other), marked by interdisciplinary breadth rather than the myopic overspecialization so characteristic of scholarly efforts today. What is more, as a theologian rather than a so-called “pure” biblical scholar, Leithart is a perfect fit as a contributor to the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible.

The Brazos series makes a decided turn away from the anti-doctrinal/dogmatic trend that is a hallmark of most modern biblical scholarship. R. R. Reno, the series editor, cues readers expectations for the series: “This series of biblical commentaries was born out of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures. . . . For the reason, the commentators in this series have not been chosen because of their historical or philological expertise. In the main, they are not biblical scholars in the conventional, modern sense of the term. Instead, the commentators were chosen because of their knowledge of and expertise in using the Christian doctrinal tradition” (xii).

Of course, one might question whether this is what is most desirable in a commentary. Is this not a reversal of priorities? Does this undermine the dependence of theological claims on exegesis? John Murray once wrote: “Systematic theology is tied to exegesis. . . . But systematic theology will fail of its task to the extent to which it discards its rootage in biblical theology as properly conceived and developed” (“Systematic Theology,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982], 4:19). These are fair questions, and readers seeking to understand passages of Scripture represented by these commentaries will find themselves experiencing varying degrees of satisfaction with the interpretive assistance they receive. (Reviewers of other volumes regularly note the series’ unevenness from commentary to commentary.) Sometimes the theological method of the commentaries will provide stimulating expositions of the doctrinal significance of Scripture for the church; other times, readers will suspect overreading, if not outright eisegesis. Yet, at their best, the commentaries in this series will loosen blinders to the theology-laden character of Scripture itself and help readers recognize that the church’s confession of faith is not rightly conceived of as tradition detached from the text.

In *1 & 2 Chronicles*, Leithart offers an interpretation of these biblical books informed heavily by ecclesiology (6). He does not claim for it to be comprehensive, and he does not deal with synoptic matters between the books of Samuel–Kings and Chronicles, nor does he offer anything like a survey of the literature on Chronicles. (His bibliography contains a mere 35 sources taking up barely 1 ½ pages; see pp. 251–52.) Instead, *1 & 2 Chronicles* is “an attempt to discern the shape of the book, to follow thematic threads as they begin, develop, diverge, and come to rest. I pay attention to literary structures and stylistic features and attempt to tease out theological conclusions from both the events recorded and the pattern of the Chronicler’s record. It is an effort to make Chronicles preachable” (7). Leithart’s success or failure on this front will, of course, be assessed differently depending upon one’s convictions about what it means to preach the text of Scripture. Some of this assessment will relate to the challenges of theological interpretation itself, noted above.

Several strengths commend themselves to readers of this journal. Leithart's theological and literary imagination enables him to make numerous connections and identify literary patterns that many interpreters are prone to miss. What is more, Leithart's eye for application to contemporary political and cultural apologetic matters is especially valuable for preachers looking for a broader repertoire of application, especially those that relate to larger worldview patterns being espoused today in the west. Those who have read his commentaries on Matthew, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and Revelation, will find a similar value and approach in *1 & 2 Chronicles*.

Especially stimulating is Leithart's suggestion for the historiography assumed by and intertwined by the shape of the book: "Chronicles begins with the name Adam and ends with the decree of Cyrus. It is a hint that the Chronicler is retelling the entire history of the Old Testament in, with, and under the history of kings" (4). (Note that Leithart's eucharistic "in, with, and under" quip is part of his witty writing style, something some readers will find more distracting than others.) He then offers the following chart (from p.4):

Chronicles	Israel's History
Genealogies, 1 Chr. 1–9	Genesis
Saul's death, 1 Chr. 10	Slavery in Egypt
David, 1 Chr. 10–29	Exodus and Sinai, to the land
Solomon, 2 Chr. 1–9	Joshua's conquest
Divided kingdom, 2 Chr. 10–35	Period of judges, ending with Saul
Decree of Cyrus, 2 Chr. 36	Establishment of monarchy

Leithart fills in some details of this chart in the immediately following pages (4–6) and then utilizes the schema consistently throughout the commentary. It is indeed helpful to think of Israel's history typologically and as employing recapitulation motifs, yet readers need to be mindful of Leithart's interpretive "maximalism" and weigh his connections with discernment. His findings need not all be viewed with suspicion, yet the textual details that ground his typology are not all equally compelling.

Several items leave Leithart's *1 & 2 Chronicles* open to critique. In general, the volume is too thin and thus offers too sweeping of analysis for the kinds of detailed, recapitulatory interpretive proposals he is proffering. While the biblical chapters covered in each "chapter" of his commentary tend to be clumped together by topic in meaningful ways, the detail lost is often greater than the perspective gained from the sheer number of chapters considered together.

Additionally, though consistent with his *avoidance* of addressing synoptic issues between Chronicles and Kings (7), this limits the usefulness of the commentary both as a canonical/biblical-theological resource, but also as an exegetical one. For just one example: one can hardly appreciate the Chronicler's treatment of Manasseh without reference to the significantly different perspective offered from that of 2 Kings. Leithart's conclusions do not indicate the half of it when he writes: "No one in Judah's history is as evil as Manasseh, and no one turns so dramatically. His repentance is unprecedented in Chronicles, without parallel in the Old Testament" (228). Indeed, so

unparalleled is this repentance that Kings—whose emphasis was on Manasseh’s unique responsibility for the Babylonian exile—did not even record it! Yet Leithart’s complete silence on this synoptic issue is not simply a matter of leaving a pressing question open; it fails to present the jarring reality of the situation and thereby neglects a chief element of the Chronicler’s message.

As is the case in his other exegetical writings, Leithart posits a staggering number of chiasms, *many* of which are far too subtle to view as intentioned by the Chronicler. Leithart follows the path trod by David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), and understandably falls prey to many of the same weaknesses. Readers need to be extra cautious about Leithart’s proposals about literary symmetry and chiastic patterning. Additionally, his dependence upon gematria and other forms of numerical symbolism stretches credibility far too often. His claim that Manasseh is “a man of sixes, perhaps even a 666,” makes for riveting storytelling but is far too methodologically uncontrolled for cogent exegesis.

Nevertheless, having said all this, those familiar with Leithart’s exegetical approach will not find anything unexpected and will likely instead find his commentary to be an enjoyable “Leithart-like” read. Despite these methodological weaknesses, this reviewer rarely misses the opportunity to listen to how Leithart treats a passage; his interpretations in *1 & 2 Chronicles* are no exception. Though he will not answer every question, and though there are plenty of occasions to shake one’s head and say, “Hmmm, I don’t know about that,” his work in *1 & 2 Chronicles* will drive interpreters back into the text to test his results. Even where his interpretation stretches credulity, readers will more often than not be better off from listening to his musings and will likely find that a more restrained exegesis done in conversation with Leithart yields more insight than one without him. What is more, in the many places where he gets it right, readers will find further delight in a book of the Bible often overlooked and dismissed as redundant to the books of Samuel–Kings.

—R. Andrew Compton

Joshua M. McNall. *The Mosaic of the Atonement*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019. Pp. xxvi + 312. \$34.99 (paperback).

New contributions to atonement theology aimed at broad audiences represent important developments in Christian thought. In this conversational atonement primer, Joshua McNall delivers a new metaphor for harmonizing four traditional atonement theories: a mosaic of a body where each theory takes its place in relation to the others to form an “icon” of Christ. Rejecting tendencies to subordinate atonement theories to each other or calculate their value, he argues that integration is the best method for advancing our understanding of the atonement. In four parts, McNall “lays out” the pieces of his “mosaic” (feet, heart, head, and hands), but the true challenge is to bring life to this body by integrating the pieces. McNall frequently dialogues with Hans Boersma’s *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Baker, 2006) and the essays edited by Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in*

Constructive Dogmatics (Zondervan, 2015) but provides no bibliography beyond footnotes and an author index. The text is most valuable for those approaching atonement theology for the first time, perhaps as students or interested laypeople, though the fresh potential of the metaphor could intrigue any scholar.

The first part of the book takes Irenaeus's recapitulation theology as its theme, investigating the idea of Christ being the “spiritual head” of humanity as a gateway to understand how his work brings human beings to God. Recapitulation, ironically, forms the “feet” of McNall’s mosaic by mobilizing and grounding the other metaphors. McNall argues that Christ, being the perfect image of the Father, takes his place as the true head of humanity where Adam and Israel had failed and rebelled. Since, according to Irenaeus, all humanity was patterned after him in the first place, McNall refers to this aspect of Christ’s work as “re-headshipping.” McNall contemplates harmonizations of biological evolution with Genesis creation accounts, particularly the question of a historical Adam. These lines of thought coalesce into a consideration of what it could mean for Christ to have “authority to act positively on behalf of all humanity” (312). McNall argues that recapitulation forms an atonement model in and of itself since it brings explanatory force to the other models.

The second part explores penal substitution as the “beating heart” of atonement that gives life to the other models. McNall argues that any theology containing three essential elements of substitution, penalty, and divine sanction can be described as having a “penal substitutionary logic.” By distinguishing the “agency” and “sensory experience” of the crucifixion from the unseen reality of “incorporative participation” with Christ, McNall proposes that substitution is much more nuanced than typically thought. Returning briefly to Irenaeus, McNall briefly explores whether “propitiating the Father” is appropriate vocabulary for describing the death of Christ, even suggesting that his death as a high priest might have a separate meaning for Irenaeus than his death as the Lamb of God. McNall identifies “penal substitutionary logic” in early church writers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Augustine), the Hebrew Bible (addressing objections from John Goldingay and Tübingen scholars), and New Testament interpretation (addressing objections from Morna Hooker). McNall then gives brief treatment to the Gospels and Paul before concluding that his goal was to “demonstrate that a blanket dismissal of the model on the grounds of biblical evidence has been weighed and found wanting” (148), but stops far short of a thorough examination of all relevant biblical passages. The section goes on to answer critiques of penal substitution, such as whether divine mercy can be reconciled with wrath or whether the crucifixion amounts to “divine child abuse,” and provides suggestions for pastors to incorporate effective penal substitution language into sermons. The synthesis of penal substitution with other theories in the final chapter of this section expresses the epicenter of McNall’s thesis. Here he lays out, albeit briefly, his covenantal understanding of how the substitutionary suffering of Christ attained a victory over the Accuser and brings new spiritual life to believers that changes their motivations and actions. The essence of McNall’s atonement mosaic seems to be that “penal substitutionary logic stands only on the feet of Christ’s recapitulative identity (as the true Adam), and it is ultimately aimed toward the triumph of the Lamb, an event that is fully realized as the Spirit births a transformative moral influence in God’s people” (174).

Part three casts the crowning triumph of “Christus Victor” as the “telos” of the atonement, the purpose toward which the other models are oriented. Accordingly, the Christus Victor model becomes the “head” of the mosaic. In an extended conversation with Walter Wink regarding the “ontic status of Satan,” McNall ultimately skirts the question of what role dark powers play in the atonement, concluding that “Christ overcomes sin, death, and the devil. . . by leveraging satanic ignorance and self-deception” (228). Though mentioned throughout the book, McNall does not fully engage the idea of Christ’s death as a “ransom,” a critical biblical category for atonement theology and discussion of Christus Victor in particular. The reader remains unconvinced that Christus Victor forms an atonement model in its own right, given that McNall’s treatment describes the results of the victory rather than elucidating its distinctive mechanics. McNall hints at the importance of Christ’s resurrection and ascension by arguing that according to Paul, “the Spirit is the preeminent sign that the church has indeed been caught up in Christ’s ascended victory” (243). Not only has Christ accomplished a victory in his death, but according to McNall, he is accomplishing a victory in his resurrection, since “the kingdom comes on earth as Christians embody the posture of Christ’s sacrificial love within the here and now” (247).

In part four, the moral example theory commonly attributed to Abelard forms the “beckoning and restraining hands” of the mosaic, in conversation with Paul Fiddes and René Girard. McNall uncovers how Abelard’s teaching cannot be reduced to pure moral exemplarism since his writings also affirmed other models. In the end, Abelard’s writings support McNall’s integration: the moral example of Christ inspires the elect because it has intrinsic redemptive effects and purpose. McNall further develops the idea, which germinated in the third part, that the atonement goes beyond what happened on the cross to encompass the lives of Christ’s followers: “Christians participate rightly in Christ’s ongoing reconciliation as we turn toward God with loving gratitude and away from violent worldly passions” (287). The connections between the penal substitution, Christus Victor, and moral example models become quite clear. There remains, however, an unexplored link between moral example and triumph that might substantiate the Christus Victor model: the gravity of love demonstrated and the magnitude of evil exposed in the crucifixion can penetrate human hearts and dethrone the influence of dark powers when the cross is beheld. In the final chapter, McNall emphasizes the role of the Spirit in moral influence rather than Christ’s suffering, in conversation with Sara Coakley. While McNall establishes clearly that the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to “embody Christ within the world” and brings “divine futurity, or new creation,” the reader is left searching for the link that necessitates Christ’s death for believers to gain the Spirit.

Perhaps the most enduring impression from this work is the sense that when scriptural views of the atonement find their places in a great work of composite art, a striking portrait emerges of the Messiah’s body, broken for us, risen in glory. Only when we take them together, let them interact, make them interdependent can we see the person and work of Christ clearly. McNall demonstrates that atonement permeates every theological pursuit, and every theological inquiry might yield insight into atonement, for all things are brought in subjection to Christ and in him reconciled to God. Much work remains to be done relating McNall’s concept of atonement to other

Christian doctrines, particularly justification. The sweeping implications of the atonement mosaic present a challenge to McNall's work in that so many topics could be explored in detail that the scope of the work feels inconsistent. Alternating between macroscopic survey and microscopic scrutiny, the chapters nearly burst with details begging further exploration. McNall addresses significant objections so frequently (from history, biblical studies, theology, and culture) that the reader begins to wonder what positive account of the models the author means to defend. In particular, parts two and four assume a defensive posture that does not quite befit an introductory treatment of the subject. Other times, interaction with modern theologians and literary figures seem to distract from the task at hand. With more space given to synthesis, a thoroughly constructive approach could have served to more fully realize the potential of this book's thesis and communicate the captivating beauty that McNall has glimpsed.

—Ryan Johnson

Gary A. Rendsburg. *How the Bible is Written*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019. Pp. xv + 640. \$59.95 (hardcover).

The importance of pastors having a solid grasp of the biblical languages is a hotly debated topic. Many pastors admit—sometimes sheepishly, though sometimes proudly—that they have not opened their Hebrew copies of the Scriptures since seminary. For some, the busyness of ministry has caused them to cut corners in sermon preparation. This is a sad situation, though it might be remedied by a renewed focus on and attention to the centrality of preaching and teaching rather than capitulation to a seemingly more practical use of their time. Others feel that original language use has not yielded much exegetical and homiletical insight. If working through a passage in Hebrew does not affect sermon writing any more than studying it in English, perhaps the pastor's time is indeed better spent elsewhere.

One problem ministers face, however, is that they have not actually learned to *read* original languages. When consulting Hebrew is limited to brief word study or occasional parsing, the communicative intent of the original language is not so keenly felt. After all, in these cases English still structures the thought of the passage, and any original language consultation is merely used to bolster *that*.

In response to this, some Hebrew pedagogues have modified their approach to introductory Hebrew grammar to address this concern: "Instead of teaching Hebrew as an object to be decoded and then recoded into the students' native language (e.g., English), the goal of this textbook is to provide the student with competency in reading, listening, and even producing Hebrew. In other words, rather than mastering Hebrew for translation, our aim is that students achieve the ability *to comprehend Biblical Hebrew texts*" (John A. Cook and Robert D. Holmstedt, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew: A Grammar and Illustrated Reader* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013], 9).

But still, additional steps can be taken. Those who have taken Hebrew and have maintained or regained their Hebrew reading abilities can deepen their understanding

of how Hebrew writers have shaped their texts—how they have “played” with the language in their composition of biblical books. Several books offer guidance in these areas, and Gary A. Rendsburg’s *How the Bible is Written* is an especially valuable resource.

How the Bible is Written consists of an introduction and 29 chapters exhibiting literary analysis of several narrative texts and narrative/grammatical features. The chapters often are grouped together due to similarity of topic (e.g., “repetition with variation,” “alliteration,” “marking closure,” “wordplay,” etc.), and while each chapter is edited ably to relate to those that precede, the book is still more of a collection of individual studies that need not be read for one to benefit from its insights. The author acknowledges that this volume is based on a number of his previous publications. Readers familiar with Rendsburg’s work will recognize several of the chapters as reworked and reused editions of essays published elsewhere. But those familiar with his work will also appreciate the fact that examples of Rendsburg’s approach are now available in a single volume, easily assigned in classroom settings, and more easily archived for consultation.

As not all readers of this journal may be familiar with Rendsburg’s scholarly output, let me briefly survey what one may expect to find when reading *How the Bible is Written*. The author states his goal as “to reveal the manner in which language is used to produce exquisite literature, no less for the ancient Israelite literati who crafted the compositions that eventually were canonized as the Bible than for William Shakespeare or Jane Austen or J. R. R. Tolkien or any other writer whose literature we admire and continue to enjoy” (1). Put another way, “there are many books on what the Bible says; this is a book on how the Bible says it” (1). He laments that many readers approach the Bible with an eye to their “moral teachings, theological insights, historical information, and the like” and yet do so without sufficient attention to or awareness of the literary shape of the texts themselves (3).

Chapter 1, “Reading Creation,” is a close reading of repetition and variation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 that probes elements that structure and organize the creation account. It also provides an initial analysis of specific literary techniques that are shared by other biblical writers and will be explored in later chapters. Of note is the technique of repetition that does not simply reemploy an earlier phrase or elements verbatim (17). Minor changes, Rendsburg argues, do not encode “hidden meanings or esoteric significances,” but rather reflect literary and authorial skill (3), and demonstrate that ancient audiences were cued in to these kinds of subtleties (25).

Whereas critical scholarship has long taken such variations as the sign of the editing together of different and divergent source documents, Rendsburg has reclaimed an authorial unity for these kinds of features. And though he does not fall in line with a conservative, confessional reading of the creation account to which many readers of this journal might adhere (readers will find many turns of phrase that will elicit disagreement), he does provide a linguistic and analytical framework that will allow a conservative, confessional reading to rest on stronger poetical and prosodic grounds. (As an aside, chapter 22 is titled “A Challenge to the Documentary Hypothesis,” which shows how Rendsburg’s approach does overlap in places with conservative assertions of authorial unity to the Pentateuch.)

A number of chapters (2–4, 9, 12, 15, and 26) unfold the technique of “repetition with variation,” which Rendsburg describes as “one of the most essential building blocks of biblical Hebrew literature, both prose and poetry” (34). Again, whereas critical readers often see variation as the mark of multiple (often contradictory) sources being conflated, Rendsburg offers a more textured and creative reading of these variations, reflecting instead an interest by the biblical writers of presenting “their language with ‘many faces,’ never (or hardly ever) repeating the same expression in verbatim fashion” (41). Several chapters are devoted to alliteration (6, 7, 10, 11, and 16), wordplay/paronomasia (17–18), methods of marking “closure,” i.e., the end of a section (13–14), and the relationship between the form of a text and its contents (8 and 27). This last relationship is seen too in techniques such as “style-switching” and “addressee-switching,” wherein writers modify the linguistic shape of speeches to reflect the foreignness of a speaker or a story, especially northern (who Rendsburg calls “Israeli”) Hebrew speakers and stories (23–25).

Readers of this journal will not feel comfortable following Rendsburg’s readings in several places due to different theological and ideological stances taken towards the text. This is to say that literary analyses that purport to be theologically neutral or disinterested never actually escape the theological nature of the texts and often wind up drawing conclusions that are at odds with the texts themselves. Readers who wish to understand better how literary, theological, linguistic, and historical issues build upon and depend upon one another should consult Al Wolters’ insightful essay: “Confessional Criticism and the Night Visions of Zechariah,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 1 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 90–117.

But as many in confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churches have more facility in theological analysis than in literary analysis, Rendsburg’s *How the Bible is Written* will open up new sensitivities that can inform and enable more competent exegesis of the biblical texts. Most chapters are filled with numerous examples—often of verses well-known for posing interpretive challenges—and chapter 21 provides a full analysis of Genesis 29 that attempts to employ all the techniques discussed in a sustained analysis of a single unit of Hebrew prose.

This reviewer hopes that *How the Bible is Written* will serve as an impetus and encouragement for many students and pastors to keep up or regain their Hebrew and find a deeper appreciation for the brilliance and literary richness of the Old Testament. Such a literary emphasis can promote even more detailed attention to these texts and enable a more vibrant preaching of God’s Old Testament word.

—R. Andrew Compton

Karin Spiecker Stetina. *How to Read Theology for All Its Worth: A Guide for Students*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020. Pp. xv + 203. \$16.99 (paperback).

Karin Stetina has provided an extremely valuable resource for the church and academy, whether in high school or college. This book follows a similar style and

theme as the previous Zondervan publications *How to Read the Bible* pack. The reviewer is familiar with *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worthy* and *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, both written by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart.

Stetina adds a helpful resource to this growing *How-to* series. While it is beneficial to read the Scriptures from a grammatical, historical, exegetical way, one may also find it helpful and enriching to study the Scriptures more topically or according to a certain list of doctrines, the loci.

When reading this book, the author's goal seems to encourage those who are casual yet devoted readers of Scripture to become avid, serious students of theology. There is this type of encouragement from the beginning to the end of the book, namely for the reader to become more, read more, and study more (5, 159–70). In other words, Stetina is striving to encourage people to become theological students whether at home or in the church, or in the academy. She gives the tools and tricks of the trade, and this simple step-by-step approach is what makes this book so valuable.

The author begins by calling the reader to the call of studying theology. It is one thing to read the Bible every day, listen to a pastor or teacher, and what Stetina is calling us toward, which is becoming students of theology (1–7).

This call to being a student of theology is not enough, though. One needs training in what is necessary for said study. Stetina does this throughout the book. First, there is the call to "Discerning" as a reader. The author gives excellent questions for the beginner to consider when they pick up a theology book to read. For example:

- "What do the textual features and publication convey?" This question becomes the concern for chapter 3 (13, 31–50).
- "What is the context of the work?" The author answers this question and more in chapter 4 (15, 51–70).
- In chapter 5, the author takes this question, "What is the theological framework of the work?" (16, 71–88).
- "How does the theologian utilize sources?" Stetina considers this in chapter 6 (16, 89–108).
- "What are the theologian's views?" This question is considered in chapter 7 (17, 109–24).
- "What is the value of the work?" The author details how to determine the value in chapter 8 (17, 125–46).
- Finally, the author raises, "How to help others?" in the Appendices (147–84).

As can be seen with this brief outline, one can notice an organized approach as well as a general concern for proper God-honoring theological study and reflection. Such study respects and honors the words and reputations of those who have studied the Scriptures and written before us.

There are two areas that ought to catch the reader's careful eye. First, God-glorifying study will include prayer and the Scriptures. The author says, "Being steeped in prayer and Scripture are essential to Christian discernment and spiritual

flourishing” (22). And “Prayer should be a part of the whole reading process, particularly in discerning how to apply a theological work to one’s life. . . . Prayer acknowledges our dependence on God for knowing the truth and living it out. The practice of prayer invites God in the discernment process” (23).

As one can see, this focus is not to create more students but to help create more disciples who understand that the Christian walk contains good devotionally driven theological study. With this said, Stetina’s book is recommended for new students of theology who are possibly preparing to go to college or seminary. This book could also help anyone who desires to become better at reading and understanding a theology text.

—J. P. Mosley, Jr.

Carl R. Trueman. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. Pp. 425. \$34.99 (hardcover).

Carl Trueman, now a professor at Grove City College (formerly a professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary) and a ministerial member of the OPC, has penned a historical and philosophical narrative chronicling how we’ve arrived at our current place of sexual and gender confusion. The person in the pew of our biblical and confessional churches commonly expresses bewilderment over statements like “I am a woman in a man’s body,” trying to understand whence such a statement comes and what it means. Trueman readily acknowledges that such a statement, and many others of our LGBTQ+ times, sounds nonsensical. Still, he wants to help the reader see that, as unprecedented as that sort of sexual and gender confusion may seem, it springs from a long line of muddled thinking about the self and related matters that goes back, at least in modern times, to Jean Jacques Rousseau and then a host of other thinkers that followed in his train. Trueman skillfully employs vital insights from Charles Taylor, Philip Rieff, and Alasdair MacIntyre, especially as he takes along this journey of how we’ve arrived at our current confused and irrational understanding of the self.

These days, the individual person, in seeking to find himself, has lost himself amidst the panoply of available identities that have left people more lost than ever. This identity crisis has deep Western roots that Trueman helpfully exposes and traces. Rousseau, the other Genevan (clearly at variance with the previous one, John Calvin), taught that man, everywhere born free, is subsequently enchainied by the institutions of society, marriage, and the family not being least among them. This view that something external to us keeps blocking up our native goodness and cramping our human natures, which need to be “free to be me,” developed further in the Romantics, with Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake opposing all such impediments. If such poets were “unacknowledged legislators” of the untrammeled self, Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin became destroyers of traditional morality, champions of the oppressed, and purveyors of perpetual change (and earlier, a social Darwinism that we could not ultimately stomach).

"For Marx, as for Nietzsche and Feuerbach, religion is not so much a matter of metaphysical interest [which Nietzsche believed he had exposed as a myth], for it is an illusion. Rather, it poses questions regarding human psychology" (182), Trueman argued, providing the bridge to the all-important Sigmund Freud. Trueman sees Freud as understanding the self not as good, in the fashion of Rousseau and the Romantics, but in the train of Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin, as struggling, dark, and, at the core, and here's his contribution, an essentially sexual being. Defining the self as at core sexual is an important station along the line that leads us ultimately to people speaking freely of themselves as "gay, straight, and bi," terms that seem almost quaint now, to seeing themselves as fluid in terms even of gender (no longer a mere grammatical identifier!): thus you have a once-great male athlete (Bruce Jenner) proclaiming that he's finally his true self now that he's made the transgender journey. And no one bats an eye and acts as if we can now all outwardly be whatever we feel like we are inwardly, even acknowledging that that may change frequently.

Trueman's purpose in this book is to help church-goers not simply to throw up their hands and express utter bewilderment at the current and all-pervasive irrationality on every hand. He argues that it has been a long time in the making (one could arguably go back further than Rousseau). While it does tend to render discourse hard if not impossible, the expressive individualism of the hour has been on its way for a while now, in law (he discusses crucial Supreme Court cases), in the humanities, the arts, everywhere. Heraclitus has triumphed. This has been so in intellectual culture, and popular culture is now catching up with it. Or so it seems. Trueman does seem ready to conclude that something has happened that has irreparably changed if not damaged us. Perhaps so. But that is a sociological observation, not a historical one. It is too early for a historian to tell.

Only time will tell how widespread our current mania is. And how truly deep. One might also guess that many are parroting certain things that they do not believe and that the house of cards may come down to make contemporary convictions. Trueman does offer a few suggestions at the end (402–407): he urges the church to note the connection between aesthetics and core beliefs and practice; to be a real embodied community; and for Protestants to recover both natural law and a high view of the physical body. He concludes by noting that much that may be sought as precedent for these times is likely not and that perhaps the best antecedent is the second-century church, which was "a marginal sect within a dominant pluralist society" (406).

None of us, of course, knows what the future holds, but, trite as it may sound, we know who holds the future. We know that if what God said to an Israel in exile was true, how much more for us: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). It does not look that way by sight, certainly not now, but we walk by faith, and we know that he will complete in us, his church, that good work that he earlier began. He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. The church is always called to this and not to give way to fear. Perhaps more than anything else, the call of the hour for those of us

in Christ is to walk not in fear as dangers accumulate but in faith as we look to our faithful Lord and Savior.

—Alan D. Strange

Elliot Vernon and Hunter Powell, eds. *Church Polity and Politics in the British Atlantic World, C. 1635–66. Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020. Pp. 265. \$120.00 (hardcover).

Differences over church government marked one of the outstanding features of historic Reformed orthodox Christianity. While Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches retained their own brands of episcopalianism, churches being governed by bishops, diversity over church polity arose preeminently among Reformed churches. Such debates were particularly pointed and well-developed in Great Britain in the seventeenth century, beyond that of Reformed churches in Europe. These facts make studying church polity an important component of understanding the nature of classic Reformed thought and practice, highlighting a time and place in which these issues received the most intense attention. Showing the intersection between political and theological settings, the authors in this volume help fill an enormous gap in early modern Reformed theology studies. The essays in the book are excellent uniformly and serve as a model for the vital importance of setting the broad historical context in order to understand the development of theological ideas.

Following Elliott Vernon's presentation of the scope of the book in chapter 1, subsequent essays focus primarily on Presbyterian and Congregational church polity. The final chapter is an exception to this general rule in that it presents an interesting investigation into episcopal autobiographies during the Interregnum. While most historians have focused on Puritan autobiography and experiences of marginalization and persecution, few have considered similar experiences among bishops and those supporting them prior to the Restoration. Chapters 2 through 11 highlight issues such as early attempts to ground the polity of the Church of England in apostolic example, successes and failures in establishing congregationalist churches, the marginalization of Wales in regard to church polity, shifts in Scottish covenanting from national covenanting to internal spiritual experience, the struggle to categorize diverse viewpoints on polity at the Westminster Assembly, two-kingdoms theories versus Erastianism at the same Assembly, reassessing the New England way, Richard Baxter's relation to church associations following the restoration as well as his affinities with congregationalist principles, and congregationalist principles of church-state relations via Savoy and John Owen. Each chapter combines the history of ideas with social and political contextualization, which historical theologians, among others, can too easily neglect or underestimate. The social and political contexts of seventeenth-century Great Britain clearly constitute the primary reasons why church polity became a central matter of debate and development.

Two examples illustrate the importance of situating debates over polity in historical contexts. First, Chapter 5 insightfully unfolds the differences between Scottish covenanters and other covenant theologians on the intersection between

national covenanting and the visible church. While many Reformed authors applied the distinction between an external administration of the covenant of grace and its internal saving essence to the visible and invisible aspects of the church, the Scots transferred the first category to the nation. This meant that every citizen of the nation was entitled to baptism and church membership, encompassing the baptism of their children. Simultaneously, this idea of covenanting reflected emphases in Calvin (81) and contradicted most post-Reformation conceptions of covenant and church (85). Yet as the national covenant failed under Cromwell and after, Scottish covenanters shifted emphasis from the external aspects of the national covenant to internal personal piety. These things show the intersection of national, regional, and political shifts as they came to bear on theological ideas.

Second, chapter 6 by Chad Van Dixhoorn illustrates the complexity of ecclesiological questions by examining the variety of viewpoints among Presbyterians at the Westminster Assembly. The author shows dozens of minor and major differences among presbyterians at the Westminster Assembly and how polity was often in flux and under development during the Assembly debates. He helpfully zeros in on George Gillespie's polity as a reference point, bringing to the surface disagreements that persisted to the end of the Assembly's work. As Van Dixhoorn notes, the form of church government resulting from Westminster shaped all subsequent forms of presbyterian polity (104). Yet, he illustrates that elements of Congregationalist views of the rights of church members and the integrity of local churches, and some episcopal ideas of the relationship of regional to local churches, ultimately influenced people on all sides of length debates over polity at Westminster. Defying simple narratives of presbyterian dominance by achieving hegemony, this narrative shows how real ideas took shape among real people through lively debate and political pressure. Both of these examples remind us that history is complicated and often messy, blurring the neatly divided categories, which we rightly use so long as we acknowledge their limitations.

With the rise of studies related to Reformed orthodoxy, church polity has been largely neglected by students of this period of history. Political and social historians have devoted more attention to issues related to polity than historical theologians. The essays in this book help merge these horizons more fully into one, advancing the historical discussion and opening new avenues for fresh research. The resulting essays represent church history and historical theology at its finest, giving readers both content to digest and a model of how things should be done. This work should prove helpful and exciting to all interested in seventeenth-century Great Britain as well as Reformed orthodoxy.

—Ryan M. McGraw

Geerhardus Vos. *Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached at Princeton Seminary*. 1922. Reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2020. Pp. xii + 291. \$22.00 (hardcover).

This reviewer is as uncertain as he has ever been: how does one begin a review of such a collection of sermons? Many things could be said about this particular edition of

Vos's sermons: there are ten here not in the original, they are nicely bound and presented (as volumes turned out by this publisher tend to be), and things of that sort. More substantively, the sermons themselves are miniature masterpieces of Christ-centered exegesis, biblical and systematic theological brilliance, and beacons of and unto true piety. They are both profound and moving, and that still seems to fall short of what needs to be said about this book.

Geerhardus Vos is well known to many in confessionally Reformed circles. He taught at Princeton Seminary for almost forty years as a professor of biblical theology, a field often populated by skeptical biblical scholars who pit the historical development of the Bible against it being expressive of any universal truths. Vos never did that and was an excellent biblical and systematic theologian. Many know him for his more "academic" writings, especially those kept in print like *The Self Disclosure of Jesus*, *The Pauline Eschatology*, and his inimitable *Biblical Theology*. Sinclair Ferguson is undoubtedly correct in his Introduction when he wonders who—even among theological students—"could have taken in the substance of any of these sermons at one hearing" (xi)? He is also right when he observes that the "deepest and highest theology is not the exclusive preserve of the sophisticated intellectual, but has been given for the maturing of the whole congregation of the faithful" (xii).

The implication of this statement for theological professors, students, and pastors is not that we must in seminary chapel or, even more so, in the pulpits of our churches, preach just in the manner of these sermons. The richness of insight, the compactness of expression in which so much may be said in a sentence, and many other admirable traits of these sermons that make them appropriate for careful reading and re-reading over a lifetime do not properly translate into the way that the rest of us should sermonize. At least not directly so. However, Vos's power of biblical observation and exegeses not only of the texts but also of the profound nature of the listeners' sin and need must be brought into the pulpit. While we surely must be clear and intelligible to our congregants in a way that we would not be if we simply read these sermons to them or gave them a close equivalent, this reviewer is convinced that preachers must endeavor in their own time and place to do something of what Vos was doing in his time and place for the Princeton students for our own congregants.

Of the sixteen sermons in this volume, only three are from the Old Testament: one from the Psalms and two from prophets (Isaiah and Hosea). The first of these Old Testament sermons is the justly famous first sermon of the volume, "The Wonderful Tree" from Hosea 14:8. Vos unfolds that our fruition of God is in union with him, which is in Christ, grasped first in grace and fully and finally in glory. This highlights what this volume is all about: knowing Christ here (in grace) and hereafter (in glory) is the purpose and meaning of our lives, which are truly for our good and his glory, these two conspiring together in the person and work of Christ.

The baker's dozen that remain are on New Testament texts. These are pure gold, and certain ones are especially valuable for biblical/theological and redemptive/historical purposes. I have in mind specific sermons from 2 Corinthians and Hebrews that particularly highlight (as all of his really do, in truth) the glory of the covenant of grace in its New Testament iteration. Vos rings all the changes of the final revelation that has come in Christ over the partial and provisional revelation that proceeded him. There is no flattening out of redemptive history and allowing the

decrees to swallow providence as if everything was there all along and redemptive-historical development makes no real difference. As all who know his work in general would expect, Vos is especially good at situating his passage in its redemptive-historical setting, giving a proper treatment of the first horizon (as Stott would say), and thoroughly exegeting the text in its context before exegeting the congregation in its context. And this is something needed in our day, even in Reformed churches that tend to flatten history and preach Old Testament texts as if they were New Testament texts without accounting for all the richness of proper historical development.

It is challenging to pick a favorite among such gems, but I find myself drawn time and again to his fourth sermon, “Rabboni!” This is Mary’s response to Jesus in John 20:16, who in his post-Resurrection initial appearance to her she had originally mistaken him as the gardener and inquired of him where they had laid her Lord, whom she had discovered was not in the empty tomb. When Christ spoke her name, “Mary,” she immediately recognized that she was speaking with Jesus and addressed him as her master (“Rabboni”). There is an obvious emotional appeal in such a text, given the redemptive-historical nature of the whole situation, fraught as it was with salvific significance. There is also something potently personal and tender about the encounter that brings a tear to the eye and, in Vos’s hand, a focus on the hope of the ages, both then and now. Vos brings out all the drama of the narrative as well as all the meaning of the narrative. Of both the *Historie* and the *Geschichte* that German liberalism and higher criticism sought to divorce but that Vos always made clear enjoyed a perfect marriage in the living Word and the written Word that testified of him.

These sermons may be read slowly and repeatedly to great edification by the interested pew-sitter and for rich and instructive purposes by those who inhabit the pulpit. Watkins has written of the drama of preaching, and that is certainly evident in Vos in the way that he develops a passage in its original context and then how he places his hearer and his life within the story. He is a master of showing how our story, our lives, which are hidden with Christ in God, fit in the picture of his story of redemption. We have salvation in him, and how that is the Bible’s chief concern in place after place is not only asserted by Vos but also demonstrated in his preaching. Again, we preachers need to learn to take the best of this approach and make it our own, in our own voice in our times with our congregants.

—Alan D. Strange

John D. Wilsey. *God’s Cold Warrior: The Life and Faith of John Foster Dulles*. Library of Religious Biography. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. Pp. xv + 253. \$21.99 (paperback).

John Wilsey, a church historian at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville (KY), has furnished us with the latest in a long line in the publisher’s *Library of Religious Biography* series. Many, though not all, the subjects in this series are distinctly religious figures. Dulles is among those who are not (like Churchill and FDR). Thus, Wilsey looks at Dulles through a lens that magnifies the statesman’s religious convictions and life. This should be interesting for any students of twentieth-

century presbyterianism, as Dulles is a sterling example of what went wrong and what was wrong with the PCUSA in its embrace of modernism.

Wilsey makes it clear that Dulles is anything but orthodox. He struggled with even the liberal faith of his father, Allen Macy Dulles, flirting with atheism before settling on an ecumenical faith even more liberal than his father's. He defended Harry Emerson Fosdick, who preached the famous "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Dulles also defended the licensure of Henry P. Van Dusen (later President of Union Seminary, NY), those who promoted the Auburn Affirmation, and was, in short, opposed to all that J. Gresham Machen and the confessionalists stood for. He wanted peace and internationalism and saw Christianity, to the degree that it was at all useful, as furnishing a place where such values could be forwarded in an increasingly secular age that threatened to destroy all morality. One might say that his reaction to Nietzsche's revaluation of all values was to stress that the Christian faith could save the morality and social order of the West, over against nazism (though he earlier thought Hitler and Germany were preferable to communism) and Soviet threats.

Dulles was a committed husband and somewhat committed father who loved his country and wanted Western liberal values promoted (and nothing could do it better than an ecumenical Christianity) and communism defeated. His career as a lawyer and diplomat found its peak as Eisenhower's Secretary of State, in which he could maximally promote these values. He did have a kind of sentimental faith, lest anyone think that it was purely utilitarian. However, what motivated him more than anything was forwarding the American ideal of liberal democracy, much like it did Woodrow Wilson, one of his mentors for whom he did some diplomatic work as a young man. He reduced religion to ethics and, more than anything, saw the faith as supportive of moral law, the basis for human dignity. The great change of his career was that he put this in the service of internationalism and peace before World War II and afterward, in view of the communist menace, in the service of the United States, even promoting brinksmanship in the national interest.

Wilsey also gives us a rich personal side of Dulles, showing that he was a real lover of nature, being an avid outdoorsman and sailor. He enjoyed good food and good drink, though not lunch, a detail noted time and again. The place that he found for religion in his life, after his more skeptical years, is almost paradigmatic for much of liberal Protestantism in the twentieth century: it provided some personal comfort and was largely reduced to a civil faith. This he believed could ground public morality and bring the world around to the sweet religion of Jesus, whose kindness and humility could only do us all good. He was a nationalist, it should be noted, in the cause of an internationalism, hoping that the whole world would become America writ large.

Dulles's was a Christianity in which Jesus was reduced to an example. No greater moral teacher who practiced what he preached ever lived. That is quite true. If Jesus is reduced to a mere example, however, this degrades his unique person and work. Jesus is never first an example. First, he did uniquely in his life and death what only he could do. When doctrine is low-rated, as it was by the liberals in the PCUSA, and Foster helping it along as an active ruling elder in the church, then the living and dying of Christ so that miserable sinners might have eternal life is pushed to the edge and rendered irrelevant. This is an ever-present danger when we lose sight of the church's

spiritual mission and start to view it as an engine of social change, whether the politics are Democratic or Republican.

—Alan D. Strange