

Book Reviews

Jonathan Leeman. *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age*. Nashville: Nelson, 2018. 239 pp. + 11 pp. (back matter).

Jonathan Leeman, a pastor and a theologian with a degree in political science, writes to test common American political assumptions against the standard of Scripture. In the first two chapters, Leeman articulates an alternative vision to the common American assumption that religious matters belong in “the private domain” while the work of government belongs in the public domain (12). Matthew 28 will not permit the sequestering of religion to a private realm: “Jesus said he possesses all authority in heaven and on earth” (12). So while Leeman affirms that the church and state are two separate institutions, he rejects “the separation of religion and politics” (12).

This places Leeman in opposition to two thinkers who have been formative for American political thinking: John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. Both affirmed that the state should rule over “outward things” while the church rules over personal, inward, religious matters. But Leeman observes that people who hold this view delude themselves into thinking that certain parts of life are not religious. For instance, the American values of “rights, equality, and freedom” may seem neutral. But when you ask, *freedom to do what? rights to what? equality in what respects?* it becomes clear that religious viewpoints are smuggled in under these allegedly neutral terms. A public square that claims to be neutral, but isn’t, damages the public good because it is a fiction. Leeman concludes, “What you really have is a square rigged against *organized* religion. Organized religions are kept out. Unnamed idols are let in” (34).

In chapter three Leeman turns to the challenge that Christians face in fallen world: the nations rage against the Messiah. Some address this challenge by proposing that Christ rules over two kingdoms in two different ways. Leeman rightly observes that the Bible presents Christ ruling over only one kingdom, and he proposes a politics of two ages: “We don’t live in two kingdoms; we simultaneously live in two ages, the age of the fall and the age of new creation” (64).

In chapter four Leeman begins to address in concrete terms what it means to live in a fallen age as a participant of the age to come. In particular, he examines the role of the Bible in the political realm. Leeman argues that “when it comes to thinking about politics, the Bible is less like a book of case law and more like a constitution. A constitution does not provide a country with the rules of daily life. It provides the rules for making the rules” (79). Leeman does not deny that the Bible makes some direct demands that should be translated into law. Laws against murder come to mind. But in most cases the Christian seeking to apply the Bible to the political realm needs wisdom. Leeman describes wisdom as “both the *posture* of fearing the Lord, as well as the *skill* of living in God’s created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing” (84; cf. Prov. 8:15-16). His point is that while there are some “straight-line issues” where the Bible can be directly applied (no murder means no abortion), most issues are “jagged line issues” where the Bible still applies, but not directly (e.g.,

health-care policy) (89). Leeman argues that churches can bind people's consciences on straight-line issues but should not do so with jagged line issues.

In chapter five Leeman turns to the Bible's teaching about the origin, purposes, and forms of government. "The American democratic tradition" teaches that "governments derive their powers ... 'from the consent of the governed'" (101). In this "social contract" proposal, people are imagined as having lived in a pre-political state until they consented to form a government. The formation of government created public aspects for everyone's life while leaving a substantial portion of life (including religion) private. Leeman argues that the Bible leaves no room for a "pre-political" state because everyone is "always under God's rule." When people form a social contract, they ought to do so under the rule of God since, according to the Bible "a government's authority comes from God" (Rom 13:1, 2, 4; Jn 19:11) (105).

Since governments receive their authority from God, they should fulfill three major purposes: (1) "To Render Judgment for the Sake of Justice" (Gn 9:6; 1 Kgs 3:28; Prv 20:8; Rom 13:3-4) (109). (2) "To Build Platforms of Peace, Order, and Flourishing" (Gn 9:1, 7; Prv 29:4; 16:12, 15; Mosaic regulations that provide for the poor) (112). (3) "To Set the Stage for Redemption" (1 Tm 2:1-4). A good government "clears a way for the people of God to do their work of calling the nations to God" (117). Though the government should clear the way for the church to do its work, Leeman does not think that governments should prohibit the exercise of false religions. He argues that Scripture authorizes no government, except Old Testament Israel, to punish people for false worship. Nor does government have the "ability to coerce true worship" (122). Notably, this argument for religious freedom is not based on the freedom of the conscience but on the authorization that God gives to government.

Leeman closes chapter 5 by raising the question, "What is the best form of government?" Americans may be tempted to answer, "democracy." But Leeman observes that a democracy functions well only when "the right kind of political culture must be in place" (e.g., rule of law, citizens of good character, valuing a stable system of government more than prevailing in particular elections, etc.). Leeman answers that the Bible itself provides "no abstract ideal form of government" (123). Instead, a good government is any government that fulfills the three biblical purposes for government noted above.

In chapter 6 Leeman discusses the role of the church. He emphatically rejects the claim that the church focuses on spiritual matters while the government focuses on political matters. Instead he asserts, "Every week that a preacher stands up to preach he makes a political speech. He teaches the congregation 'to observe all' that the King with all authority in heaven and on earth has commanded (Matt. 28:20)" (131-32). On the other hand, Leeman resists making the church into a lobbying organization. It is beyond the church's mission and competency to formulate public policy: "churches should ordinarily not seek to influence government policy directly.... It risks misidentifying Jesus' name with human wisdom. It risks abusing the consciences of church members. And it risks undermining Christian freedom and unity" (145). Leeman acknowledges there are certain issues that are so clear that the church can speak directly to them. In fact, he notes that "churches can sin and prove faithless *by not speaking up in matters of government policy when they should*" (147). But the church

has to be able to discern when to speak, concerning what, and to what degree of specificity. There are some issues regarding which it has the authority to bind consciences. But on other matters even Christians who agree on basic principles may legitimately disagree on particular policies or political strategies. The church ought not step beyond its mission or competence to address these particulars.

In chapter seven Leeman turns from the church to Christians. Leeman promotes Christian involvement in politics, but he cautions, “Be leery of being captivated by any political worldview” (181). Neither the right nor the left provide the Christian with a biblical worldview. To simply embrace a given party will result in conformity to the world in some areas of life. Leeman also warns Christians against worldliness in their political engagement: “There is a way of engaging that’s right on the substance but wrong on the strategy or tone” (164).

In this chapter Leeman also evaluates three common strategies for Christian political engagement: (1) find common ground (e.g., religious freedom arguments), (2) appeal to natural law (e.g., arguments that marriage must involve the potential for procreation), (3) demonstrate social good (e.g., arguments that two-parent homes have better social outcomes). Leeman does not object to Christians deploying any of these approaches when appropriate. But he does issue a warning about these strategies: “All three lack the force of conviction because the very thing they are good at—finding common ground—affirms our modern intuitions that all authority and moral legitimacy rests in every individual’s consent.” (184). It reinforces John Rawls’s argument that “we are morally obligated to only bring arguments that everyone can understand on his or her own terms” (186). Leeman calls this view “a Trojan horse for small-g god idolatry.” Governments do not make laws only about matters for which there is consensus. When there is no consensus, on whose terms is the decision made? Leeman argues that it is better to observe that everyone’s god is attempting to set the terms of the debate. There is no religiously neutral public square or religiously neutral public argument. Everyone should be open about the moral underpinnings of their argument instead of pretending to be neutral.

Leeman’s final chapter addresses the issue of justice. The primary responsibility of government is to ensure justice, and Americans have a particular viewpoint on justice. “Together Jefferson’s Declaration and Lincoln’s Address present America’s mission statement on justice: we are a people dedicated to the principles of equality, freedom, and natural rights” (204).

Leeman doubts that this view of justice works. Just as there is no religiously neutral public argument, so there is no religiously neutral approach to justice: “Pick your God or gods; out will come your views on justice. Pick your conception of justice; out will come your views on equality, freedom, and rights” (206). Leeman’s point is that “equality,” “freedom,” and “rights” are themselves empty concepts that will be filled with different content depending on one’s worldview.

Leeman also challenges identity politics. He notes that identity politics deny the Bible’s teaching about our “common humanity” and speak as if both truth and morality are social constructs generated by different groups (221). Instead of bringing about justice, identity politics pits groups against each other so that they cannot communicate with each other, much less work together as citizens. In contrast, Leeman says, “The Christian path affirms both our common humanity and our created differences. It requires color-blindness with respect to our oneness in Adam and (if believers) in Christ (Gal 3:28). It requires color-consciousness with respect to our different experiences, histories,

and cultural traditions, as well as the unique ways different people can glorify God (1 Cor. 12:13–14; Rev. 7:9)” (221).

Good books on Christians and politics are difficult to find. Christians are tempted to baptize current political philosophies (whether from the left or right) rather than testing these philosophies against Scripture. Leeman does an excellent job of letting the Bible challenge our customary ways of thinking. This is probably the best brief book on politics that is in print.

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Scott B. Rae. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 4th Edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018. 528 pp.

Scott Rae offers guidance to Christians in a field (ethics) whose practitioners are increasingly discarding objective morality in favor of relativism. Ethics tends to be dominated by arguments that are philosophically and psychologically dense, narrowly focused, culturally fashionable, and increasingly subjective. Many books, blogs, and lectures spend the bulk of their time presenting ethical conundrums, implying that life consists of impossibly difficult moral decisions; but Rae has chosen a more helpful path. By rooting all ethical decision making in Scripture and then by teaching a thoughtful procedure for making day-to-day moral choices, Rae trains his reader in the non-exceptional cases so that the reader gains both competence and practice before making harder ethical decisions.

Ethical Christian thinking is not proving to be fully resilient against secular culture, especially in the face of social media and other media pressure. Many believers find greater homogeneity with the thought processes of the world than they do with Scripture. These thought patterns erode a distinctly Christian ethic and shift believers toward pragmatism and relativism. Rae seeks to restate the value of Christian ethics and to reinstate biblical thinking about moral questions.

Each edition of *Moral Choices* has added significantly to the previous edition. The fourth edition includes new chapters on the topics of “Creation Care and Environmental Ethics” (ch. 12), “Violence and Gun Control” (ch. 14), “Race, Gender, and Diversity” (ch. 15), and “Immigration, Refugees, and Border Control” (ch. 16). By grounding each of these current issues in Scripture and a general pattern of biblical thinking, Rae achieves a measure of timelessness that will remain helpful for ethical thinking even as the specific issues fade or as the questions surrounding them shift.

The first three chapters of *Moral Choices* provide a background to ethics by discussing “Why Morality Matters” (ch. 1), “How to Think About Morality” (ch. 2), and “Christian Ethics” (ch. 3). The first chapter demonstrates that although human cultures differ and are corrupted by the Fall, each has a sense of morality, and each insists on adherence to moral norms. Chapter 2 walks the reader through the major ethical systems from Socrates to the modern era. Rae provides a concise and

understandable description of each system and points out the logical or moral problems with each. This chapter helps the Christian address the common ethical belief systems that he will find in his co-workers and surrounding society. Chapter 3 urges a scripturally based Christian ethic, which requires a thorough knowledge of the Word of God as the non-negotiable foundation for moral decision making. Rae then shows the reader that the best components of human ethical systems (e.g., justice when properly understood, and utility when constrained by underlying truth) were not originated by their leading philosopher. Instead, they already appear in Scripture as secondary guiding principles. Rae rejects “noble pagan” theories, in which unregenerate human thinking closely approximates biblical reality, and he observes that human ethical systems are fatally flawed because they have no ultimate authority underlying them. He also carefully distinguishes the ethics of *divine command* from that of *natural law*, and he emphasizes the superiority of the former.

Chapter 4 presents a seven-step model for “making ethical decisions.” Given Rae’s clear commitment to Scripture, it was a little disappointing to see the statement, “Biblical principles are always relevant and should be included,” as the only directly scriptural element in the process. Unless the reader has a prior commitment to Scripture, this statement seems to indicate that the Bible is reducible to one-among-many equal inputs. Granted, the author is trying to appeal to a wider audience than a merely Christian one, but the non-negotiable value of Scripture could have received stronger emphasis.

The remainder of the book treats specific ethical topics—applying the procedure from Chapter 4 and scriptural support to each. Chapters 5–6 cover “Ethics at the Beginning of Life.” Rae does not apologize for insisting that abortion is murder (p. 133). He correctly observes that although Scripture does not use the term *abortion*, it provides enough evidence concerning the personhood of the unborn child that all arguments attempting to support the alternative are biblically indefensible. All defenses of abortion resort to selfishness, pragmatism, and a misrepresentation of the nature, authority, and responsibility of humanity before God. Rae then moves to a discussion of reproductive technologies and surrogacy—ethical issues that no previous generation had to face. Chapter 7 addresses the ethical issues surrounding “Biotechnology, Genetics, and Human Cloning.” This chapter provides a detailed analysis of issues such as the ethics of gene selection, gene therapy, sex selection, designer babies, cloning, and trait enhancement through genetic manipulation. Chapter 8 shifts to the end of life and covers euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, termination of life support, and non-intervention issues such as “do not resuscitate” orders. Rae provides a carefully nuanced discussion of these, and, on the basis of the biblical statements concerning both compassion and the inevitability of death, he distinguishes accurately between *active* support of death and *passive* allowance of it. The entire discussion is undergirded with Scripture.

Rae turns to external social concerns in the remaining chapters. Chapter 9 addresses arguments for and against capital punishment. While Rae cites Scripture throughout, he does not always draw attention to the hermeneutical fallacies inherent in the position that opposes capital punishment. Christian opponents of capital punishment use New Testament passages on the *individual believer’s* responsibility to exhibit Christian attitudes and actions (an insistence on love, forgiveness, and a lack of revenge) to warrant the overthrow of a *secular authority’s* responsibility to carry out justice. But this

shift is a serious hermeneutical error. The New Testament never repeals the responsibility of government to carry out justice. By omitting these hermeneutical observations, Rae leaves both support for and opposition to capital punishment on the table as viable Christian responses to the crime of murder. Chapter 10 treats war and other forms of physical violence. While Rae exhibits sympathy toward pacifists, he ultimately seems to support *just war* theory and self-defense.

Chapter 11 unapologetically addresses “Sexual Ethics” from a biblical perspective. While Rae continues to show compassion for the fallen human condition, his treatment of premarital sex, homosexuality, incest, and transgenderism rest firmly on Scripture. Rae rejects the hermeneutical twisting of New Testament passages relating to homosexuality and shows that Scripture utterly forbids this sin. But a rejection of the sin is not the same as a mistreatment of the sinner; so Rae addresses the Church’s handling of sexual issues in relation to its own community and the surrounding world. Chapter 12 shifts to a discussion of the Christian’s responsibility toward the environment. Here, Rae displays a moderating position between environment worshipers and environment abusers, and he warrants this moderation through the Creation mandate and created order. Mankind is superior to the rest of creation; so the Christian cannot favor the environment over people. However, mankind has dominion over the environment; so the Christian cannot wantonly abuse his stewardship. Chapter 13 addresses “Ethics and Economics.” It raises issues concerning macroeconomic systems, labor relations, the acquisition of wealth, and specific examples of ethical lapses in business. Chapter 14 takes a moderate stance on gun control in which Rae offers a solution that allows for self-defense while restricting firearm ownership from those whom society deems unworthy of their possession. Since this is a book on ethics rather than on the viability of political mechanisms for determining who is “worthy,” Rae avoids the more difficult issues concerning those mechanisms. Rae does observe that self-defense is biblically justifiable, however, and that the U. S. Constitution recognizes a pre-existing right rather than enshrining a new one when it prohibits the government from infringing upon personal ownership of firearms.

Moral Choices does not shy away from confronting believers concerning their unbiblical attitudes when it addresses “Race, Gender, and Diversity” in Chapter 15. Again building on a biblical foundation, Rae observes that God authored the diversity that occurs in the world. He created the two, distinct genders and the single, unified human race from which various ethnic groups have arisen. While some biblically defined roles may differ, the mistreatment or oppression of other people on the basis of gender or ethnicity contradicts biblical instruction. Finally, Chapter 16 focuses on the recently developing issue of “Immigration, Refugees, and Border Control.” It uses a detailed argument from different Hebrew words in the Old Testament to distinguish between immigrants who are integrating into a culture and “strangers,” while defending the necessity of treating all people with kindness and dignity.

The reader should note a couple of weaknesses in *Moral Choices*. First, in his chapter on economics, Rae raises common critiques against capitalism without doing the same for socialism. While a Christian can answer the critiques against capitalism easily, the same cannot be said of socialism. But by critiquing only one of the major economic systems, he leaves the impression that socialism might be a valid option. A nuanced biblical critique of socialism could have exposed it as a

system pervaded by envy, theft, and tyranny. Second, the chapter on gun control is already outdated. As of the publication date in 2018, Rae could state, “Even the most passionate defenders of gun control recognize that gun ownership can be justified” (416), but this is no longer true. Radical leftists have dropped the pretense of mere “control” of firearms to reveal an agenda of complete eradication of the right of self-defense—an agenda that became clearer in the Democratic presidential debates. Similarly, the left abandoned any pretense of upholding the Second Amendment and has begun openly calling for its repeal. However, as of 2018 Rae could not have predicted this attempt to overthrow both the Constitution and the divinely given right of self-defense; so the shortcoming is entirely understandable.

The value of *Moral Choices* far outweighs its minor weaknesses. One of the most important aspects of *Moral Choices* is its presentation of the reality that the Bible often sets boundaries around an ethical question without addressing the issue comprehensively. To be a viable solution for a Christian, an ethical resolution must lie within those biblical parameters, but the existence of those parameters does not necessarily entail that all Christians will agree perfectly. Rae does not simplistically resolve the tensions by forcing his preference on the reader. Instead, he articulates the biblical parameters clearly and leaves the final ethical decision up to the individual believer. On the other hand, Rae tries to develop the key biblical fences around each issue in such a way that he excludes unbiblical thinking that is thinly disguised as Christian.

The reader will find that *Moral Choices* avoids unnecessary jargon without reducing the nuances of each ethical issue. Rae blends a clear writing style and excellent reasoning (by reducing flawed arguments to their premises and then dismantling them) with strong biblical support. *Moral Choices* also exhibits a high level of specificity on each issue. The author raises real situations and addresses them in a detailed and helpful fashion. The Christian Church would do well to read *Moral Choices* for its helpful treatment of ethical questions and its insistence on the unchanging and foundational qualities of Scripture for Christian decision making.

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Nancy R. Pearcey. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018. 264 pp. + 92 pp. (back matter).

Nancy Pearcey serves as professor of apologetics and scholar in residence at Houston Baptist University and is a fellow at the Discovery Institute’s Center for Science and Culture. In *Love Thy Body* she tackles “the watershed moral issues of our age” (9) and demonstrates that the secular worldview underwriting society’s immoral positions and practices is itself bankrupt. It “doesn’t fit the real universe” (11). Drawing on Francis Schaeffer, Pearcey describes this worldview as a two-story building constructed during the Enlightenment. The lower story houses objective facts; subjective values reside in the upper story. The first floor belongs to modernists who embraced Enlightenment

rationalism and empiricism. The second floor is the realm of romanticism's postmodern progeny. The book applies this "fact-value split" to modern anthropology, which severs bodies from persons, wreaking havoc on individuals and societies. By way of contrast, the Christian worldview presents "a reality-based morality that expresses a positive, life-affirming view of the human person" (15).

Chapter 1 overviews the two-story viewpoints of these moral issues. The dehumanizing yet increasingly influential concept of personhood has changed the nature of abortion arguments. Most bioethicists now admit that life begins at conception but deny that a breathing being inside a woman's womb is a person. Similarly, proponents of euthanasia have suggested "conditions" beyond mere life are necessary to validate personhood (27). The modern view of sexual relations divorces the physical act from love, encouraging the disentanglement of sexual union from personal relationship. Homosexuality severs the very evident teleology of human anatomy from sexual feelings and behavior, while transgenderism dichotomizes one's biological sex from identity altogether. Finally, the social contract view of human relationships disintegrates society's human fibers.

For Pearcey, a response begins with "a biblical philosophy of nature" (34), which affirms that God made us in His image as embodied beings and leaves no room for the Gnostic denigration of the human body. Though the fall of Adam and Eve marred this embodied image, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ provide powerful testimony of its significance. Furthermore, those who are in Christ will be raised bodily to inhabit a material creation, the new earth, forever. Pearcey addresses the common criticism that Christianity demeans the human body by distinguishing biblical anthropology from asceticism in the early church based on Platonic and Gnostic ideas. However, she also critiques modern "versions of Christianity [that] speak of the body as though it were shameful, worthless, or unimportant" and "sexual sins as the most wicked on the scale of sins" (41).

In chapter 2 ("The Joy of Death") Pearcey responds with simple logic to the alleged neutrality of abortion decisions such as *Roe v. Wade*: either a mother's fetus is a human person with rights, or it is not. She convincingly argues that abortion activists, not those who uphold the value of unborn life, are discriminating based on "personal views and values" and giving precedence to religion over science (60). Chapter 3 ("Dear Valued Constituent") shows that decisions about euthanasia, stem cell research, surrogacy, and transhumanism are moral, a result of worldview, whether conservative or liberal. Drawing from statements by noted atheists, Pearcey points out that, although transhumanists envision a biotechnological utopia, human rights have prospered historically in places influenced by Christianity. Unbelief in the Creator dissolves the only true basis for human dignity. Some trumpet the tolerance of ancient cultures such as Rome, but the NT ethic of Jesus and the apostles surpassed and eventually overturned cultural mores in the ancient world by valuing women, children, and slaves.

Chapter 4 ("Schizoid Sex") takes aim at the hookup culture, in which love is mental and emotional, but otherwise disembodied. Pearcey rightly asserts that "in reality [sexual hedonism] gives sex *too little* importance" (121). Free sex reigns on college campuses, but so does emotional carnage, as campus counseling center data attests. Nor is education alone to blame. Advertising and entertainment pump this deformed worldview through their seductive outlets. Studies are showing that pornography even rewires the brain. But as much as it feeds on raw impulses, the hookup culture is actually a "religion" (131). The purveyors of "today's politically correct sexual orthodoxy" promote

“a vision of redemption” (136), not just an erotic thrill but the quest for a liberated soul. On the contrary, the Bible teaches a positive, though countercultural, view of sexuality that is truly human and good. Severed from the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption, sex has no meaning.

Chapter 5 (“The Body Impolitic”) on homosexuality argues that potential genetic factors are neither “fixed” nor “unchangeable” (158). In fact, “the most reliable correlate with same-sex eroticism” is “childhood gender nonconformity,” not genetic or mental traits (159). The crucial question is whether an individual will understand his identity in terms of how he was created biologically rather than how he feels. Postmodern theory localizes the *self* in the upper story, where it is “free to impose its own interpretations on the body,” which becomes “raw material with no intrinsic identity or purpose” (165). Cultural authority first transferred moral categories (“right and wrong”) into scientific ones (“healthy and deviant”). Now some advocates of homosexuality insist that being “born this way” is a deficient, antiquated view that must be replaced by personal autonomy, “that we can change our sexual desires at will” (167). In response, Pearcey counsels a renewal of the mind in pursuit of sanctification and the integration of one’s body and thinking, while understanding that wholeness in this life is not promised. Being male or female is “not a meaningless or oppressive fact of nature but a reflection of history’s great storyline” (182). Accordingly, Levitical law prohibits any kind of homosexual behavior, a moral stance affirmed in the NT Gospels and Epistles.

“Transgender, Transreality” (Chapter 6) relates how sexual revolutionaries have turned ontological reality on its head so that “gender has become a purely mental trait with no grounding in physical reality” (203), and even biological sex is labeled a social construct. Pearcey traces back the evolutionary thought flowing from Hegel and Darwin that created an impression of universal fluidity, which has now been employed to reconstruct gender and assault “heterosexual morality” (207). The implications of a *transformed* culture are deep (and have only deepened since Pearcey’s publication in 2018), comprising realms ranging from public facilities to parenting. SOGI laws (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) trumpet the rights of transgender persons while muting the bases on which any inalienable rights are founded.

One highly significant statistic from secular studies is that “roughly 80 to 90 percent of children who experience some gender incongruence lose those feelings before adulthood” (223). If so, Pearcey opines, it is destructive to force one’s body into artificial conformity with one’s present feelings. The notion that gender is “assigned at birth” (and, therefore, can be reassigned autonomously) stems from *intersex* babies, but such *disorders of sexual development* provide no justification for transgender arguments. *Intersex* is a painful result of the fall; however, such anomalies do not overturn the binary norm but rather prove it. (It is worth noting that those “born that way” [Mt 19:12] were *men* who could not reproduce, not a *tertium quid* of human sexuality.) “Our only choice is whether we accept our biological sex as a gift from God or reject it” (225).

Finally, chapter 7 (“The Goddess of Choice Is Dead: From Social Contract to Social Meltdown”) discusses the reinvention of society in terms of human consent rather than biblical and creational realities. To the contrary, people are born into families by divine design. Though always imperfect, innate familial bonds provide a template for relationships. “The bonds of biology train us to extend love *beyond* biology” (237). These God-given social instincts factor massively into questions

concerning the life of the unborn and the public institution of marriage. Marriage is so much more than an “emotional commitment” (246), a definition that not only redefines marriage (i.e., *Obergefell v. Hodges*) but will render it extinct by unraveling society’s fabric, leaving individuals isolated and even more vulnerable, and transferring power to the state. On the contrary, humans did not construct society; God did. He saves his children to have truly loving relationships within the church that provide an authentic witness to and pattern for society.

Love Thy Body is well-researched, clear, and insightful. It presents a compelling narrative that exposes the vacuous nature and destructive outcomes of contemporary worldviews. Pearcey builds a strong case that true science supports the Christian worldview. Naturalism and its philosophical offspring actually promote a low view of the body. Furthermore, Pearcey ably demonstrates that these modern moral issues are interconnected philosophically in their appropriation of the fact/value split. Her commentary on these wastelands of the sexual revolution evinces the gravity of our times. Surely Pearcey is correct in saying, “Once a society gives up the bright line containing sex within male-female marriage, it is difficult to draw the line anywhere else” (189).

Pearcey’s solution is uncomplicated. Operating from a narrative framework of creation–fall–redemption, Pearcey consistently moves from dissecting the secular worldview that shapes current immoral stances to offering the Christian alternative that makes sense of reality, promotes human flourishing, and offers eternal hope. She repeatedly draws attention to early Christianity, arguing that its ethic protected and promoted human dignity. “From the beginning, Christians have not defended ‘traditional values.’ They have stood for truth *against* prevailing cultural norms” (188). This appeal to church history serves multiple apologetic purposes, not only challenging the false hopes propounded by modern sexual orthodoxy but also calling Christians to live distinctively. The church must perpetuate biblical morality. “A loving response also holds each person to the biblical standard of chastity” (176). To do otherwise is to recapitulate Gnostic dualism. Yet, serving those who have been duped by these false ideologies is also critical. “Christians must be prepared to minister to the wounded, the refugees of the secular revolution whose lives have been wrecked by its false promises of freedom and autonomy” (264).

Appreciation for Pearcey’s work notwithstanding, two weaknesses merit remark. First, *Love Thy Body* lacks theological precision in places. Pearcey warns of the “danger of overemphasizing the doctrine of the fall, tipping it out of balance with the other doctrines of Scripture” (45). Yet, all of Scripture after Genesis 1–2 entails the account and implications of the fall, a fact that should calibrate conceptions of overemphasis. Also, while it is true that “the Bible does not treat the body as the source of moral corruption” (43), the body is corruption’s base of operations. In relating sin and temptation Pearcey quotes the following testimony: “It’s not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted all the time, but He never sinned” (173). But the statement does not go far enough. Temptation that arises from within is not morally neutral; rather it manifests our innate sinfulness, often designated *indwelling sin*, and must be mortified (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5).¹

¹ See “PCA Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” (May 2020), 8, <https://pcaga.org/aicreport/>, accessed July 23, 2020.

Second, the book's eschatology tends toward over-realization, expecting from the *already* what belongs to the *not yet*.² Pearcey takes issue with the promotion of "an escapist concept of salvation," like the Lutheran pastor she once heard who emphasized "asking for God's forgiveness 'so we can go to heaven'" (41). While knowing one's eternal security in God's presence is not all that should be said about forgiveness, this reviewer struggles to conceive of a biblical eschatology that lacks this emphasis. (One possible explanation comes from the book's footnotes, which reveal theological sources such as Miroslav Volf and N. T. Wright.) Certainly, Christians should redeem our time to influence those around us for Christ's sake. But can the culture be turned around (191)? The heart of the remedy lies not in cultural influence but in a regenerated knowledge of God that matures in the members of Christ's body.

These cautions notwithstanding, *Love Thy Body* helpfully evaluates critical contemporary issues and asserts an apologetic for Christian anthropology. God's people need to think discerningly and live faithfully in response to today's massive moral issues. Pearcey unmask the dehumanizing effects of twenty-first-century humanism and paints a picture of humanity that offers hope.

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Benjamin L. Merkle. *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational & Covenant Theologies*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. x + 212 pp. + 22 pp. (back matter).

Forty years ago, there were two major competing theological systems: covenant theology and dispensational theology. That's not to say that either view was entirely monolithic; but they were the definitive camps comprising the two distinct orientations toward the intertwined fields of ecclesiology, eschatology, and hermeneutics. The last four decades have seen an astonishing burst of microevolution, with multiple permutations of each of those systems into new subspecies.

Benjamin Merkle (professor of NT and Greek, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a taxonomy for a range of six systems along a continuum of (dis)continuity that maps each system's perspective of the theological relationship between the Old and New Testaments. (Merkle's work is reminiscent of, and in some senses builds upon, John Feinberg's 1988 collection of essays in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, but with the benefit of 30 years of hindsight.) Merkle proposes four key questions to probe the differences between these systems and their relative locations on that continuum: (1) What is the basic hermeneutic? (2) What is the relationship between the covenants? (3) What is the relationship between Israel and the Church? (4) What is the kingdom of God? (7–24). Those questions (most consisting of specific sub-questions) form an evaluative rubric that gives Merkle's survey a sense of uniformity. His overviews are drawn primarily from the writings of three

² I am grateful to Bryan Smith for making this observation in a SITS worldview session, June 19, 2020.

key proponents for each system, and a concluding assessment of each system seeks to identify three strengths along with related weaknesses.

Classic dispensationalism is represented by Darby, Scofield, and Chafer. That alone is suggestive; when you have to confine yourself to representatives who have been dead since 1882, 1921, and 1952 respectively, you're probably not dealing with a live system. Still, the historical-theological perspective is helpful. Merkle's overview is, nevertheless, marred by few flaws. For example, he states categorically that "classic dispensationalists insist" on two distinct new covenants (38); but this is immediately contradicted when he cites Scofield's view that there is only one new covenant with "a twofold application" (39). (And, in fact, Darby held a third view.) Merkle cites the common criticism that classic dispensationalists taught different ways of salvation, but also includes Chafer's statement unequivocally rejecting that view (40–41); and yet his concluding assessment resurrects the criticism, ignoring his own principle that "if a person clarifies their position, that clarification should be honored" (50).

Revised dispensationalism is represented by Ryrie, Walvoord, and Pentecost—choices that are disappointingly predictable. Granted, these were major writers for the system; but why choose a tight-knit circle of dead men from one school to represent a view that is broadly held and still very much alive? Why not include Alva McClain, or any number of living revised dispensationalists (as Merkle does for covenant theology)? Merkle also limits old voices to even older works; Pentecost citations are almost exclusively from *Things to Come* (1964), even though he continued to write extensively long after that and—significantly—changed his views on certain dispensational interpretations. Again, Merkle's overview is informative even if occasionally less than objective. He cites only three distinctions between the revised and classic views: "less emphasis on typology"; a general rejection of any distinction between the kingdom of God and of heaven; and a "clear rejection of two ways of salvation" (so much for 'honoring one's clarification' after indicating twice in the previous chapter that classic dispensationalists *themselves* clearly rejected this view.) "Because of these differences, Blaising and Bock contend that 'revised dispensationalism is a distinctive form of the dispensational tradition'" (53). In fact, Blaising and Bock cite quite a few more differences to justify differentiating revised dispensationalism as a modified and improved version of the classic view. (Indeed, Ryrie himself insisted in *Basic Theology* that "no theological system should be so hardened that it is not open to change or refinement from the insights of exegesis").

Merkle rightly underscores the dispensational principle of maintaining a distinction between Israel and the church, but he misconstrues the hermeneutic as arising from the ecclesiology rather than vice versa; from the dispensational viewpoint (which is presumably what the chapter is intended to represent), the ecclesiology is not a random decision that then drives their hermeneutic but is, itself, derived from a literal hermeneutic progressing from OT to NT. In his assessment, Merkle laments that sometimes revised dispensationalists "unnecessarily impugn the motives of those who do not embrace a strict literal interpretation" (75), but in the theological atmosphere of the time motive-impugning was very much a two-way street; that hardly excuses it on either side, but it certainly contextualizes it more fairly. Merkle also critiques Pentecost's interpretation of the parable of the hidden treasure as signifying Christ's purchase of the treasure through his death on the cross. Calling

it “allegorical” (?), he asks, “Is that really the most ‘plain’ or ‘natural’ reading of the text?” (77). Merkle knows better than this; he already explained that a dispensational hermeneutic allows for figurative and symbolic language (57) and it certainly does in a parabolic genre, so his charge of hermeneutical inconsistency here is disappointing.

Progressive dispensationalism (Blaising, Bock, and Saucy) is represented more fairly and reliably than the two previous overviews; though the vast majority of citations come from works of the 1990s, Merkle frequently incorporates some of their more recent writings as well. He enumerates both the similarities and dissimilarities between the progressive and revised views (79). An important continuity, of course, is a literal hermeneutic, though “they reject as inadequate the traditional dispensational definition of literal as ‘clear, plain, or normal’” (80–81). In contrast, the progressive hermeneutic is more nuanced and incorporates a “complementary hermeneutic” in which the NT can expand the meaning or implications of an OT prophecy without changing the original intent or recipients of that prophecy (82). In addition, Blaising advances the argument that God’s promises are not merely words but *acts* that obligate him to do what he said for those to whom he made the promise (83). Progressives hold to an inauguration of the new covenant; its “spiritual” (soteriological) components have been graciously extended to the gentiles, while its “territorial/political aspects” (i.e., non-soteriological, Israel-specific components) await future fulfillment (95–96) when a converted Israel is restored to the land God promised to them (not only in the Abrahamic covenant but also in the new covenant). Merkle’s concluding critiques again sometimes ring hollow. Taking issue with Saucy’s explanation of “the fullness of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:25), he counters that “one must ask if that is the ‘clear, plain, or normal’ meaning of ‘fullness’” (106)—again, ignoring his own earlier explanation that progressives disavow those descriptors (81).

Progressive covenantalism is represented by Gentry, Wellum, and “key representatives of new covenant theology.” Despite the fact that Wellum distinguishes his view from new covenant theology, and Merkle delineates not only their separate origins but also several points of dissimilarity between the two views (109–10), Merkle treats them together. It’s also surprising that Merkle never explains one of the major distinctions between progressive covenantalism and historic covenant theology: the abandonment of the overarching theological framework of the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. It’s no wonder that “they prefer to see themselves as a distinct view” from covenant theology (109); and yet other similarities remain, including their view of Israel and its eschatological ramifications. Merkle’s critique of dispensationalism continues into this chapter as well. Progressive covenantalism identifies an Adamic covenant as “the foundation of all other covenants” and “sees this as a major distinction between them and various forms of dispensationalism, which all focus on the Abrahamic covenant as the foundation for the other biblical covenants.” That’s because “dispensationalists fail to fully appreciate the bigger picture of God’s plan to redeem humanity from the beginning” (120–21)—as though dispensational Bibles begin with Genesis 12. (Even revised dispensationalist Robert Lightner insists in *The Last Days Handbook* that dispensationalism “doesn’t deny the covenants of covenant theology.”) Progressive covenantalists also reject the notion of unconditional covenants; viewing covenants like the Abrahamic as unconditional is what leads dispensationalists to “unbiblical conclusions” like expecting the future fulfillment of the land promise

to Israel (122). (But the dispensational expectation of the land promise is rooted not merely in the Abrahamic covenant, but in multiple new covenant reiterations of that promise as well.)

At the same time, though Merkle doesn't call attention to this, surprising similarities with dispensationalism surface. Interpreting "according to the original intention of the author" yet accommodating "when the literal sense includes symbols and types" (111) could equally describe revised and progressive dispensationalism; "grammatical-historical-literary" (112) is the same language used to identify progressive dispensationalism's hermeneutic (81); and, Gentry and Wellum's explanation of the hermeneutical relationship between NT and OT sounds indistinguishable from Bock's definition of a complementary hermeneutic (112). All this is profoundly instructive, because it indicates that the reason these two views arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions regarding "the original intent of the OT authors" must lie deeper than the strictly hermeneutical level. Much of the answer lies in covenantalism's typological assumptions. For example, in Amos 9, "the promised restoration includes the land of Israel But since the land functions typologically, the fulfillment should not be taken literally" (117). Covenantalism's opinions vary on Romans 11:26 (including the possibility of a future conversion of ethnic Israel, 131) and on millennial views (135–37). But there's one thing they are all agreed on: "if the millennial kingdom follows the return of Christ, the nation of Israel will *not* be given the land of Palestine in fulfillment of OT prophecies" (137–38, emphasis added).

Covenant theology (Horton, Robertson, and Kline) combines "a literal interpretation in the sense of a grammatico-historical approach that interprets the Bible according to the intention of the author" with "a Christocentric or Christotelic hermeneutic that sees Christ as the fulfillment of all the promises of God" (142). Again, typology plays a "prominent" role (143). "For example, Robertson insists that the land of Israel is typological, anticipating new covenant realities" (144). Merkle compares this "to how the sacrificial system prefigured the offering of Jesus' body." The similarity is debatable, however, since the sacrificial system was not promised to Israel as an eternal possession or institution, but the land was; in fact, the repeated reaffirmation of the land promise is, itself, a "new covenant reality." Interestingly, Robertson and Horton do not entirely agree on what the land typifies (144)—which seems to signify that typology may, like allegory, be prone to hermeneutical subjectivity (though certainly to a lesser degree). The "three overarching covenants" of redemption, works, and grace form "the heart of covenant theology" (147). Merkle acknowledges that the covenant of redemption "is not explicitly referenced as a covenant in Scripture" (147). (Interestingly, covenant theologians Charles Hodge and John Murray say exactly the same thing about the covenant of works as well, though Merkle does not.) Instead he cites the "implicitly" covenantal arrangement of Genesis 2, a passing statement in Hosea 6:7 (with no reference to alternative interpretations), and even makes the surprising statement that covenant theologians "also look to the Westminster Confession as support for this covenant"—which seems rather retroactive, circular support for so foundational a covenant. One of Merkle's concluding strengths of covenant theology—"its rejection of 'replacement theology' or 'supersessionism'"—seems undermined by its corresponding weakness: "Unfortunately, not all covenant theologians agree here" including Reymond, Ridderbos, and LaRondelle (168–69). He might have added that supersessionism was historically the majority view among covenant

theologians. Fortunately covenant theology, like dispensational theology, has seen some needed biblical refinement over the years.

Christian reconstructionism (represented by Rushdoony, Bahnsen, and North) burst onto the theological scene in the 1980s with a flurry of publicational fury, though Rushdoony had been laying its foundations in the previous decade or two. Its version of covenant theology combines Calvinism, theonomy, presuppositional apologetics, postmillennialism, and dominion theology (171–72). To that list could be added preterism (178) and a vigorous defense of replacement theology (189–91). As to their hermeneutic, according to Merkle, “they reject the literalistic interpretation of dispensationalism” (175). And yet he reports (quite correctly) that they insist “that (most) OT laws must be followed literally” (176), that “*all law*, not just the Ten Commandments, *is eternally binding* and thus applicable to all people at all times and in all places” (185, original emphasis), that this includes OT sanctions for law-breaking “such as public executions and stonings,” and that to teach otherwise is “an act of heresy” (187). One is left dumbfounded, wondering how none of this qualifies as a “literalistic” hermeneutic—a label apparently reserved exclusively for dispensationalism. North identifies “the dominion covenant found in Genesis 1:26–28” as the Bible’s central covenant: “all the covenants of the Bible serve as reiterations” of that covenant (180–81). In keeping with “their larger framework of postmillennialism and dominion theology,” most reconstructionists (though not Rushdoony) anticipate a future largescale conversion of ethnic Jews per Romans 11:26 (189). Merkle’s concluding assessment is on target. More “traditional covenant theologians . . . criticize Christian reconstructionists for failing to see sufficient discontinuity” between the testaments (196). Despite their “high view of the law,” their inability to agree among themselves as to which laws are still applicable is problematic (198). Finally, their “optimistic” postmillennial eschatology lends itself at times to “triumphalism and even cockiness” (199).

Merkle’s concluding chapter (201–12) is perhaps the most helpful in the entire book, since he provides a concise summary of each system virtually devoid of editorialization. He also acknowledges that his survey is far from exhaustive in terms of the systems represented; he briefly describes the Lutheran theological model (favored by Moo) as a significant omission (201–03). If the last 40 years have proven anything about theology, it is that human systems—which is what both covenant and dispensational theologies are—are neither infallible nor static. Both have experienced exegetically induced evolution and refinement. Merkle avoids the kind of overt agenda that characterizes some other surveys (see the review of *Models of Premillennialism*); nevertheless, this work’s covenantal tilt is apparent throughout. Despite the sticky fingerprints of subjectivity here and there, Merkle’s side-by-side analysis can be a valuable tool for exploring these systems in relation to each other.

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Sung Wook Chung and David Mathewson. *Models of Premillennialism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018. xiii + 138 pp.

Chung and Mathewson, two faculty members at Denver Theological Seminary, divide the labor of outlining, analyzing, and comparing the major versions of premillennialism: Historic (aka Covenant) Premillennial, Classic Dispensational Premillennial, and Progressive Dispensational Premillennial. Two additional chapters address topics that I will comment on later in the review.

Overview

Chung's opening chapter first traces the key features of Historic Premillennialism: (1) a literal, futurist interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, (2) a chronological interpretation of Revelation 19-20, (3) a posttribulational rapture, (4) two resurrections, and (5) a millennial kingdom on earth. At first glance, with the exception of point (3) this may sound like an outline of both the Classic Dispensational and Progressive Dispensational views as well. Other differences emerge, however, including the nature of the millennial kingdom itself. The reasoning behind an earthly kingdom is rooted in (a) a necessary restoration of the primeval paradise on this present earth, and (b) Adamic Christology in which Christ himself is appointed to "restore the kingdom and dominion originally given to Adam" thus fulfilling "God's original plan and purpose for this earth" (6). Chung follows up with a lengthy historical survey of advocates (66% of the article), from the Ante-Nicene Fathers all the way up to modern day evangelical proponents. His concluding appeal is anything but coy: "In my opinion, the time has come for evangelical theologians to reconsider doctrinal unity within the large framework of historic premillennialism, with its ancient pedigree and its claim to be the most biblical doctrine of eschatology" (28).

The chapter on Classic Dispensational Premillennialism, also by Chung, acknowledges "significant commonalities" with Historic Premillennialism, while noting that adherence to a pretribulational rapture is "the critical and crucial discrepancy" along with other conceptual differences between these views. David Mathewson takes the chapter on Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism, tracing the view's key hermeneutical principles, the importance of OT prophecies regarding Israel, and the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 (which resembles the other two premillennial views). Careful to note that the roots of this view's "rationale for a millennial kingdom" on the present earth extend far beyond Revelation 20, Mathewson correctly concludes that "a future for national Israel is what primarily distinguishes a progressive dispensational approach to the millennium from a historic premillennial approach" (66).

The final two chapters treat rather specialized topics, "Thematic Millennialism" and "Historic Premillennialism in South Korea."

Critique

If you're looking for a single book to navigate the complex array of premillennial views that is fair and fully informed, here's my advice in two words: *keep looking*. What could have been a great book labors under the weight of Chung's blatant biases, verbal swipes, and astonishingly antiquated

and misinformed explanations. It is a book with an unveiled agenda; it is telling that of the 126 pages of text proper, 60 pages are devoted exclusively to presenting and praising historic premillennialism (Chapters 1 and 5). That, of course, is the authors' prerogative; but the reader should be aware of what he is getting. Rather than the even-keeled overview of different premillennial models that one might expect from the title, the book is a heavy-handed polemic for historic premillennialism.

Craig Blomberg's foreword sets the book's polemic tone when he asserts, "Dispensationalism has arguably remained as strong as it has . . . because of Americans' obsession with the avoidance of suffering" and that "many who opt for" that view "do so not because they can defend it exegetically but because they simply want it to be true" so that "they can count on getting out of at least the worst of human suffering" (viii). Apart from being simplistically reductionistic (treating pretribulationism as the sum total of dispensationalism), this is not a statement calculated to engender confidence in the book's seriousness or fairmindedness. Nevertheless, it is the note on which Chung opens his first chapter: it is the "trained biblical and systematic theologians [who] align themselves with the historic premillennial view. . . . While dispensationalism finds overwhelming support from the public, historic premillennialism continues to be the dominant view among evangelical scholars" (1–2). And it is a theme that Chung perpetuates (20, 27, 31)—the intelligent, the educated, and the scholarly are historic premillennialists, while dispensationalism is espoused largely by uneducated laypeople (mostly southern, p. 31).

Chung has a penchant for prejudicial terminology. The choice to describe the pretribulational rapture view as the church's "escape" (why not "deliverance"?) from the tribulation is not accidental (35). Occasionally, he dresses up the opposing view in silly language, again describing the pretribulational rapture as Christ's "welcoming the church to the sky" (37).

Equally as troubling as the quirky depictions and tiresome cheerleading for the historic premillennial view, however, are Chung's palpable factual errors. He seems to be unaware of any mediating position between Classic and Progressive Dispensationalism (usually identified as Revised or Traditional); his comparisons with the "dispensational" view invariably have the old "Classic" view in mind. Defending the reference to "God's people" in Revelation 13:10 (lit., "the saints") as a reference to the church, Chung asserts that dispensationalists would "of course . . . interpret 'God's people' here to be the left-behind Jews" (5)—an explanation he repeats later (37–38) without any documentation in either place. He attributes the rise of dispensationalism "to its present standing of fame and prestige" to the "popular literature" of Hal Lindsey, Jerry Jenkins, and Tim LaHaye (19). His overview of classic dispensational premillennialism (Chapter 2) repeats the unqualified charge that "different dispensations have different ways of salvation" (31).

The book's shared authorship results in an unevenly written end product. On the one hand, Mathewson is both fairer and better informed than Chung. For example, he offers twelve pages of uninterrupted, well-documented, even-handed presentation of the views of Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism. On the other hand, his overview departs from the pattern set by Chung, lacking the historical survey and list of proponents that the reader comes to expect after the first two chapters.

The book displays an odd unevenness in another way. Chapter 4 (by Mathewson) presents what he terms "Thematic Millennialism"—a view he acknowledges "cannot strictly be labeled

premillennial” (70). It is, instead, a highly symbolic view of the millennium that sees the “thousand years” not as a temporal reference nor the millennium as an earthly kingdom, but rather as a symbolic portrayal of “the ultimate victory and vindication of the saints who suffered for their faithful witness to Christ” (83–84). One wonders how such a view qualifies to be included in a book on *Models of Premillennialism*. And although Chung says that both he and Mathewson are convinced historic premillennialists (7), Mathewson presents Thematic Millennialism as his own view (76–79). Also, like his overview of Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism, the chapter on Thematic Millennialism lacks any historical survey, apart from a concluding admission that the view “is fairly recent” and “finds minimal support historically in the church’s understanding of the millennium.” A final evidence of the book’s unevenness comes in the “Concluding Reflections on Premillennialism” which asserts that the Thematic Millennial view is espoused not only by (some?) historic premillennialists but also by some progressive premillennialists (122, 123). This new and surprising piece of information is not only utterly undocumented but also at odds with Mathewson’s express contrast of the thematic view with both historic and dispensational views of the millennium (77, 82). In short, coordination of both quality and content is seriously lacking.

Evangelicalism would be well-served by a genuinely fair and fully informed comparative survey of premillennial views. Unfortunately, this isn’t it.

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Steven L. James. *New Creation Eschatology and the Land: A Survey of Contemporary Perspectives*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017. xvii pp + 142 pp. + 22 pp. (back matter).

Steven James, Assistant Vice President for Academic Administration at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern’s L. R. Scarborough College, offers an incisive overview of select key elements and proponents of what has become known as new creation theology. Written with crystal clarity, the introduction maps out exactly where the book is going, while each chapter conclusion succinctly condenses the salient highlights and their significance.

In chapter 1, James traces the recent “rising theological interest in biblical descriptions of a new creation” (2). The modern shift away from a predominantly spiritualized view of heavenly afterlife began with Anthony Hoekema’s *The Bible and the Future* (1979). Eventually, the emphasis on a physical afterlife in resurrected bodies began to gather steam through the writings of numerous theologians. In order to establish some of the core components of new creationism, James samples the writings of five representatives of rather diverse backgrounds: N. T. Wright, J. Richard Middleton, Russell Moore, Douglas Moo, and Howard A. Snyder. And he cites their own exegetical arguments to establish three themes central to new creationism: the coming of God’s kingdom (Is 11, 57, 60–61;

Dn 7; Rv 21–22, et al.); bodily resurrection (Jb 19; Dn 12; Rom 8; 1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 5); and the reconciliation of all creation (1 Cor 15; Col 1).

Chapter 2 opens with new creationism's affirmation of the future restoration of the old earth (*ex vetere*) into the new earth, rather than a complete annihilation and creation of the new earth (*ex nihilo*). This affirmation rests on a discussion of two key passages (2 Pt 3; Rom 8). James's purpose is to establish—again, through the writings of these new creationists—two important principles that emerge from new creationism's affirmation of restoration versus annihilation. (1) The principle of continuity between the present earth and the new earth means “that elements of the present material creation continue to exist in the new creation” (45). And, (2) the principle of correspondence of identity between the present earth and the new earth; just as Jesus' resurrected body was (despite certain discontinuities) essentially and recognizably the same body with the same identity, the new earth (despite certain discontinuities) will be essentially and recognizably the same earth with the same identity as the original creation. By the end of the chapter, James begins to raise a pertinent question: shouldn't the new creationist view of the essential continuity and identity of the new earth with the present earth have ramifications for “the presence of the territory of Israel” in the very OT passages on which they ground their view of the new earth?

Before fully exploring that question, James first extensively traces “the theme of land in recent theology” (chapter 3)—a 44-page essay that spans a considerable gamut of at least twenty theologians from von Rad, Davies, and Brueggemann up through more recent writers such as Dumbrell, T. D. Alexander, and Gentry and Wellum. The survey demonstrates two major facts: (a) wide recognition that the land is a massive thematic emphasis in the OT; and (b) an overwhelming tendency to interpret the OT references to the land metaphorically—generally either through spiritualization (or Christification—to be “in Christ” is to be “in the land”), or through universalization (“the land” has become the whole earth). Both of these views are metaphorical “in that the particular territorial promise to Israel finds its fulfillment . . . in something other than the giving of the particular land to a particular people,” so that “the original thing that is promised is replaced by something else.” Therein lies the irony and, James suggests, the inconsistency of most new creationist theologians: “those who are emphasizing the regeneration or renewal of the present earth in its materiality are interpreting promises regarding a particular territory of that earth in a metaphorical way” (94).

Chapter 4 explores that irony and inconsistency in more detail. “In arguing for continuity . . . between the present earth and the new earth, new creationists utilize OT prophetic texts which include language referencing the particular territory of Israel . . . while denying an enduring role for the particular portion of territorial Israel as part of that earth” (95). The result is that “new creationists are operating under an inconsistent hermeneutic” in that they (correctly) ground their view of a renewed earth characterized by continuity and correspondence with the present earth in many OT passages “while spiritualizing or universalizing the physical territory of Israel” described in those same passages (97–98). James locates the inconsistency not in a literal versus spiritual hermeneutic (or an arbitrary mixture of the two), but rather in a particularistic and material hermeneutic which proceeds to ignore or deny the particularism and materiality of the details of the text when it comes to the land of Israel in those same texts. The “OT prophetic texts connect the promise of a restoration of the particular

territory of Israel to the promise of a renewed earth”—the two are inseparable. Consequently, “a consistent treatment of the prophetic texts by new creationists should include the affirmation of territorial restoration of Israel as a part of the renewed earth instead of that territorial particularity being subsumed conceptually under cosmic reconciliation” (99). After demonstrating that new creationists use OT texts to describe not only the concept but also the nature of the new earth (100–110), James highlights the logical inconsistency of appealing to such texts to argue for the renewal of the whole while simultaneously rejecting the references in those texts to the particularity of Israel and Jerusalem as a part of that whole. He traces evidences of that particularity through multiple passages used by new creationists (Is 2, 11, 24–27, 35, 65–66; Jer 30–31; Ez 36–37; Zec 2). In short, the new creationist view is not merely implausible but self-contradictory *if* it simultaneously holds to a metaphorical interpretation of the land. Arguing that the particular land expands to become the whole earth (the metaphorical view of universalizing the land promise) is a nonsensical “material impossibility”: “*Would it not be more plausible to conclude that . . . the particular and the universal are complementary instead of mutually exclusive?*” (118, my emphasis). Arguing that “a particular land promise [is] fulfilled spiritually in a new creation conception that emphasizes a restored earth” (the metaphorical view of Christifying the land promise) is, likewise, nonsensical and self-contradictory: “how does one think of promises of earthly territory being fulfilled in a spiritual manner such as this” in the very context of a restored earth? (119).

Finally, James ices the cake (chapter 5) by arguing “that affirming the territorial restoration of Israel 1) represents a consistent utilization of OT new creation texts, 2) is harmonious with NT texts commonly used to deny territorial restoration, and 3) leads to a consistent new creation eschatology that emphasizes the materiality of the final state” (121). Again, James echoes Blaising’s argument elsewhere that seeing the whole and the particular as mutually exclusive creates an unnecessary and false dichotomy—it does not have to be either/or; it can be both/and (122). Despite certain NT texts not discussed by James that arguably reinforce the principle of territorial particularity (Lk 1, Mt 19; Acts 1, 3; Rom 11), the NT’s emphasis on the universal dimensions of eschatology are designed to complement “the OT teaching of place, not replace it” (122). Though briefer than one could wish, James’s treatment of Matthew 5:5, John 4:19–24, and Romans 4:13 is adequate to make the case that none of these statements are incompatible with the territorial particularity of the land promise.

Contrary to assumption, the view of new creation eschatology that James defends is not limited to dispensationalists but, in fact, transcends millennial viewpoints. The “small group of theologians who have argued that upholding the territorial restoration of Israel actually bolsters a new creation conception” includes not only Craig Blaising and Michael Vlach but also amillennialist Vern Poythress (131–34). James’s study is a fresh, thoughtful, well-informed contribution to an important and ongoing eschatological conversation.

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