

Book Reviews

DeRouchie, Jason S., Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli. *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*. 40 Questions Series. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020. 382 pp. + 18pp. (back matter)

Kregel's 40 Questions Series has established itself as a solid but accessible resource for foundational material on a variety of biblical, theological, and practical topics. The recent volume on biblical theology carries forward the sequence with a helpful introduction to a vital field of study.

The work divides its forty questions into five parts. Naturally, Part 1 is dedicated to *defining* biblical theology. A shorter definition reads as follows: "Biblical theology studies how the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ." A longer definition continues, "Biblical theology is a way of analyzing and synthesizing the Bible that makes organic, salvation-historical connections with the whole canon on its own terms, especially regarding how the Old and New Testaments progress, integrate, and climax in Christ" (20). Nine chapters fill out these definitions, covering subjects such as the Bible's storyline, continuity and discontinuity between the biblical covenants, and typology.

The ten chapters in Part 2 explore *method* in biblical theology. In addition to surveying methods such as the analysis of books and themes, this section compares and contrasts biblical theology and systematic theology and considers the question of whether the Bible has one central theme. Also included is a description and evaluation of dispensational theology (including progressive dispensationalism), covenant theology, and progressive covenantalism.

Parts 3 and 4 *illustrate* biblical theology. Eleven chapters concentrate on tracing key biblical-theological themes such as the people of God, the law, and the temple. Another five chapters discuss the use of earlier Scripture in later Scripture, covering famous examples such as the use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 but also lesser-known cases such as the use of Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11a in Romans 11:34–35.

Part 5 *applies* biblical theology. Its five chapters explain how the discipline advances Christian living. They also give recommendations for how biblical theology can be integrated into the preaching/teaching ministry of the local church.

40 Questions about Biblical Theology provides outstanding reference material for scholars, pastors, and seminarians. Laypeople with some experience in reading theology will also benefit from the book. Several commendable features characterize the work. First, the authors approach Scripture with a firm belief in its verbal inspiration (13–15). Thus, unlike much of what goes under the moniker of biblical theology, they unashamedly highlight the divine trustworthiness and unity of Scripture.

Second, the authors are experts in their respective fields. DeRouchie is research professor of Old Testament and biblical theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Martin teaches Christian theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Boyce College. Naselli serves as associate professor of systematic theology and New Testament at Bethlehem College & Seminary. The combination of the writers' strengths makes for a robust and well-rounded blend.

Third, some chapters provide especially thorough coverage of their topics. For instance, chapter 10 answers the question, “What are different ways that evangelicals do biblical theology?” One would be hard-pressed to find in one place a categorization and documentation of contemporary approaches as comprehensive as what Naselli provides. DeRouchie’s exegesis is the most consistently detailed. His discussions of biblical themes and intertextuality masterfully weave together an enormous amount of exegetical argumentation in a small amount of space.

Fourth, in addition to expounding on biblical theology, the authors aim at equipping the reader to do biblical theology for himself. Parts 1 and 2 provide step-by-step instructions for various methodologies, and Parts 3 and 4 regularly refer back to these instructions as sample biblical-theological studies are conducted. This feature would make the book especially useful as a textbook or supplemental resource for a college or seminary course introducing biblical theology.

Fifth, though this work is academically robust, it is written in a refreshing devotional tone. This surfaces repeatedly in the emphasis on reading the Scriptures with a focus on Christ and his redemptive work. DeRouchie fervently appeals to the reader to take seriously his role in the Great Commission (280). One also reads of how a pastor’s biblical-theological preaching brought Martin and his wife to deeper worship and sanctification (374).

Without diminishing the book’s strengths, one also observes weaknesses. To begin with, the coverage of topics seems imbalanced at times. Extensive attention is given to tracing themes and analyzing intertextuality. The authors do not, however, provide any samples of a method whose importance they recognize (102–04): book theologies.

Likewise, apart from passing references, no attention is given to the history of the discipline of biblical theology. On the other hand, some of the chapters in Parts 1 and 5 overlap considerably. This material could have been consolidated in order to make room for some historical discussion. The authors presumably omitted such discussion so as not to become too technical in an introductory volume. While one can appreciate such concern, the omission contributes to what is the book’s greatest weakness: a fuzzy distinction between biblical theology and systematic theology.

As Martin suggests (131), Johann Gabler and others have argued that biblical theology and systematic theology differ in *both* nature and method. But as evangelicals have typically done, DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli emphasize primarily the difference in *method*. Thus, biblical theology is about unfolding the redemptive history or storyline of Scripture, whereas systematic theology looks at Scripture as a completed whole in order to form a comprehensive conceptual framework of truth. This is an important distinction, yet more needs to be said.

In terms of the *nature* of the disciplines, biblical theology devotes itself to the explicit teaching of Scripture, while systematic theology regularly moves beyond that teaching through logical deduction and extrapolation. Emphasizing this distinction does not necessarily create the problem Martin is concerned about: “an irreparable chasm” or enmity between the two disciplines (131). It can simply be an effort to distinguish God’s authoritative words from what may potentially be merely man’s thoughts.

Confusion can easily result when biblical-systematic distinction is not sufficiently maintained. This happens precisely when one is trying to do the kind of “whole-Bible biblical theology” that

DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli target. Given the immensity and the diversity of Scripture, the kind of synthesis required for whole-Bible biblical theology inevitably involves a good measure of systematic theology. Or to put it another way, making “salvation-historical connections” across “the whole canon” to determine how both Testaments “progress, integrate, and climax in Christ” (20) becomes an exercise in systematic theology at key points. This is because Scripture itself does not clearly indicate a number of the connections; they are inferred by the theologian.

This matter calls for emphasis because *40 Questions about Biblical Theology* approaches its topic from a particular theological stance. While the book provides fair discussions of dispensational theology and covenant theology (173–85), the authors clearly espouse progressive covenantalism (187–97). This approach colors the entire work, often explicitly so. It includes the interpretation of Israel’s land promises as fulfilled in the new creation rather than a future Jewish kingdom on the present earth (283–89).

Scholars have critiqued the progressive-covenantal approach from various perspectives. See, for example, Wade Loring Kuhlewind, “I Will Plant Them in This Land’: An Analysis and Critique of Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant* with Special Attention to the Progressive Covenantal Land-Promise View” (PhD diss., BJU Seminary, 2018). The point here is not to enter into such debates. It is rather to say that to associate progressive covenantalism so strongly with the label *biblical theology* gives the impression that this system definitively *is* what the Bible teaches. That is precisely the issue that theologians dispute. Any whole-Bible system will necessarily be a mixture of biblical theology and systematic theology, and *40 Questions about Biblical Theology* does not make this entirely clear.

Thus, the reader should remain aware of the progressive-covenantal orientation of *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*. With this important caveat in mind, I would still recommend the book as a worthy resource on contemporary approaches to biblical theology. One may not adhere to all the book’s argumentation and conclusions, but he will find much data and insight to advance his study of Scripture.

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Horton, Ronald A. *Alive to the Purpose: The Readerly Reading of Scripture*. Greenville, SC: JourneyForth, 2020. 14pp. (front matter) + 105pp.

In his latest book, published a year after his death, scholar of English literature and longtime Bob Jones University faculty member Ronald A. Horton (1936–2019) challenges his readers to rethink their attitude toward the Bible. Concerned that the Bible is rarely “really read” (xi), Horton combats what he perceives as a widespread failure among Christians to appreciate the Bible as story. Whatever

else it might be—theology text, primer for godly living, collection of wise sayings—the Bible is a book, a work of literature.

Christians tend to “[speak] to Scripture rather than allowing Scripture to speak to” them (23). They read the Bible with a variety of approaches (it is “studied and searched and scrutinized and analyzed and theologized and memorized and dipped into and skimmed and scanned,” xi), many of them beneficial; but an appropriate reverence for the Word of God too often turns into a distorted quasi-religious mindset that misses that Word’s literary character. True, the Bible alone among books is divine. Yet the Bible is a story, formed according to the highest standards of the art. To fully benefit from God’s revelation, Christians must “mind the story and the story line” with their minds ready to respond (xiv).

Alive to the Purpose is organized in three sections with five chapters each. In the first, Horton offers several general principles for reading and illustrates his method with examples from a variety of scriptural genres, both Old and New Testament. The key to the book is chapter 4, “Listen to Scripture” (23-25). He insists that whatever biblical book the Christian reads, the agenda for his reading should be the Bible’s, not his own (33). The second and third sections apply the principles over first an extended series of narrative passages and then several shorter selections.

Taking in the message of a Gospel narrative, says Horton, requires an imagination that picks up on the emotions of each of the story’s characters (3–8). Noticing all of the details without being held up by them, the attentive reader follows the story to learn truth, whether theological or psychological (9–12).

Horton brings a similar attitude to his reading of the epistles. Though they are not stories, a “readerly encounter” (16) with an epistle highlights the interaction between author and audience. Paul’s correspondence with the churches suggests a lesson in leadership (21), while the teaching of Romans carries more weight when seen against the background of the apostle’s missionary work.

In the second and largest section of the book (33–80), Horton meditates on the life of Elijah. As he progresses through the biblical account, he allows his mind to enter fully into the story, asking questions, making connections, and adding insights from other passages. Such thoughtful reading allows the story to speak as a unified whole. Horton’s comments on the biblical narrative exemplify the value of reading “without a specific targeted purpose.” The reader who familiarizes himself with all of Scripture and cultivates a “habit of imaginative reflection” is prepared to receive the maximum benefit from the Spirit’s ministry through the Word (80).

Christians are used to reading uninspired stories with full awareness of their artistry.¹ In *Alive to the Purpose*, Horton demonstrates that they can do the same with the Bible. “Reading with receptive, even a sort of passive, alertness” allows the reader to find the Bible’s true meaning rather than the meaning he thinks should be there (23).

If Horton’s work has a weakness (other than two or three small editorial peculiarities), it is that the ideas are incompletely developed. The flow of thought from one chapter to the next is not always

¹ To compare Horton’s reading of the Bible with his reading of other literature, see Ronald Arthur Horton, *The Unity of The Faerie Queene* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), which the author calls “a critical excursion in the obvious” (189). Every work should be taken for its full worth, just as it presents itself to the reader.

immediately evident, and the author makes no attempt at laying out a detailed Bible-reading plan. The reader looking for a how-to manual in Scripture reading will be disappointed. Yet such a disappointment would validate Horton's claim: the reader who comes to this book with a preconceived agenda will miss its point.

In fact, the weakness of *Alive to the Purpose* is its strength. A more prescriptive formula could not have communicated Horton's thesis as well as the suggestive examples he provides. Instead of telling his readers how to read, he shows them how to read. Further explanation would confuse. So he leads his readers on a journey through the Bible. They listen to him as he reads, and they learn from his example.

Along the way, the reader gleans many handfuls dropped by the skilled reaper. For example, when dealing with Philippians 3, Horton finds significance in Paul's description of a race "as a walk" (19). In Proverbs, he sees the woman of chapter 31 in the context of the two women portrayed earlier in the book (24). David's sojourn in Ziklag becomes material for a lesson in divine providence (96–100). Whether from an individual word or a lengthy story, Horton draws lessons that are immediately applicable to the Christian life.

The lessons come always in terse, elegant prose. Horton is a wordsmith of the highest order, and his choice of words conveys just the precise meaning he has discovered in his reading. For example, "When obedience to God becomes a no-brainer, many troubling life questions fall away or fail to appear" (39). "In the revival of persons as well as nations, if spiritual change is truly genuine, repentance will be followed by direct action" (56). "The Lord never asked His disciples to abandon their good for His. . . . They were to lay up for themselves treasures but in the right place" (90–91).

Some of Horton's most memorable language, perhaps, comes in his discussion in chapter 1 of what he elsewhere (21) calls "that last dark night" of our Lord. The night was followed by morning, "the saddest of all dawns" for Peter (11). "But it would not of momentous dawns be the last for Peter" (21). With the unexpected word order, the author points from the morning of Peter's failure to the morning of his restoration. The cockcrow heralds the rising of the sun.

Implicit throughout the book is the necessity of repeated exposure to the whole Bible. As Royce Short observes in the preface, following Horton's advice "requires a continuous (all the time) and comprehensive (all the Bible) reading plan" (viii). A skilled reader who comes to the Bible for the first time may pick up on elements that are missed by the average Christian who, though devoted to the Bible, has never learned how to simply read it. But insights such as Horton draws come readily only to one who has read the Bible enough to know all of its stories.

Horton states, importantly, that the kind of reading he recommends is not necessarily slow; if anything, it is more likely to be faster than normal because of the reader's interest in the text (23). But speed is not important. Reading is. "When we delight in what we read, we truly read" (23). Continual, receptive reading of the whole Bible makes one a well-instructed scribe, able to bring out the treasures contained in the Word of God. Horton provides the Christian reader with a worthy example to follow.

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Tennent, Timothy C. *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020. 25pp. (front matter) + 216pp. + 27 pp. (back matter)

The moral upheaval in contemporary culture has incited a focus on anthropology in recent evangelical literature. Timothy Tennent adds his counsel in *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body*. Tennent is president and professor of world Christianity at Asbury Theological Seminary and is a minister in the United Methodist Church.

After describing characteristic kinds of responses to the sexual revolution from both progressive and conservative churches, Tennent offers his diagnosis of the problem: “The church has failed to understand that these seemingly disparate issues are actually manifestations of a single root problem—namely, our failure to articulate a Christian view of the body” (xix–xx). One of the unfortunate effects is that “the society perceives the church to be merely *against* a range of behaviors or actions, but they have no compelling vision of what we are *for*” (xx). Alternatively, Tennent calls the church to “cease-fire” (xxi) in order to listen to “a positive vision of the body that arises out of Scripture and the consensus of Christian teaching” (xxii). The first half of the book considers this positive vision in terms of seven theological building blocks (“Our Bodies Are Talking to Us”), while the second half observes why this positive vision is crucial presently (“Our Culture Is Talking to Us”) and how this theology of the body should be applied pastorally amid the current cultural chaos (“A Way Forward”).

Tennent casts his theological vision with three pictures—“The Created Body,” “The Related Body,” and “The Sacramental Body”—that collectively consist of the seven building blocks. The first piece is that God’s creation is inherently good, trustworthy, and moral. The necessary implication is that the human body is not innately evil. Just as science depends on the reliability of the cosmos, so a proper anthropology hinges on the givenness and goodness of the human body. Gnostic separation of the mind (viewed positively) from the body (viewed negatively) distorts creation’s inherent structure. Relying on feelings while doubting the givenness of the body, as does gender dysphoria, skews Scripture’s teaching so that “matter does not matter” (18).

The second block of truth is that God created humans in his image. In particular, the fact that Jesus has a body holds massive implications for the significance of our bodies. This section explores two problems in light of the *imago Dei*: (1) sexual and gender confusion based on the presumption that God makes people a certain way and (2) transhumanism. Concerning the first, the author correctly declares, “We should never confuse our original design with our fallen inclinations and orientations” (32). Concerning the second, Tennent counters the quest to supersede natural limitations with the truth that Jesus showed us how to live with weakness in the power of the Holy Spirit. Resurrection, not technology, is the only true hope (37).

The book’s second section—“The Related Body”—begins by highlighting the importance of marriage as “an embodied icon pointing to the greater mystery of the church” (43). Just as Christ clarified the Pharisees’ mistaken notion of Deuteronomy 24 by going back to Genesis 2, so the church must renew its understanding of marriage’s purpose and design before it can speak effectively to society’s problems and needs. Tennent describes marriage as “unitive” (i.e., a one-flesh union), “procreative,” “binary between a man and a woman,” and “self-giving” (52–58).

In the fourth chapter Tennent declares, “Christians should value and honor procreation” (68), not only for the good of society but to reflect the “relational unity” of God (74). He then concludes this section with a fifth building block focused on Christian singleness and celibacy, which anticipate the eschaton “when all the redeemed will be married to Christ as his spotless bride” (89). He seeks to dissuade the reader from falling into the trap of either “denigrating singleness or honor[ing] the celibate life by disparaging marriage” (82). Tennent encourages the renewal of appropriate friendships between same-gender people but curiously commends Protestant monasteries as one of the “vibrant channels for the flourishing and growth of the church” (87).

The final two building blocks emerge in the third section—“The Sacramental Body.” Chapter 6 explains that baptized Christians are “mobile temples” who represent God to the world through their bodies (99). The author appeals to readers of diverse theological traditions for a hearing of these sacramental concepts while lamentably expressing “indebted[ness] to Eastern Orthodox Christians for their emphasis on the missional nature of the sacraments” (103). The final chapter in this section extols the worship of God in ordinary faithfulness since believers should do everything as living sacrifices (Rm 12:1) and in view of “our status as image bearers in the world” (109). (Note: The biblical theme of suffering, as it relates to the human body and discipleship, could have strengthened this chapter.)

Part 2 of the book transitions to hear what our society is saying. Modern culture’s penchant for objectification displays itself through “billboards and screens” (chapter 8) and “the landscape of sexual brokenness” (chapter 9), which Tennent discusses in light of 1 Corinthians 6. More generally, contemporary society has witnessed “the rise of the digital self” (128) with all its accompanying problems of diminishing and distorting embodied reality. Tennent acknowledges the place of digital technology but underscores the embodied historical realities of the Son’s incarnation and the church.

In considering the modern state of sexuality, Tennent exposes the error of typical frameworks for societal discussion: freedom of choice and civil rights. Underlying these common assumptions are “ethical egoism” and “a utilitarian view of the human body,” which establish personal fulfillment and autonomy as governing principles (136). In response, the author surveys key texts related to sexuality from both the OT and NT, providing a generally solid overview that affirms and succinctly explains a traditional understanding over against modern reinterpretations (137–52). Multiple times Tennent affirms God’s love for all, but he also clarifies that “we should never confuse the universal affirmation of the gospel with the radical transformation of the gospel” (152).

Part 3 consists of three chapters concerning “The Discipled Body,” which suggest application and implementation. In chapter 10 Tennent covers three issues that the church must address: biblical authority, irreparable harm/hate speech, and the loss of moral argument. He disavows “the hermeneutic of suspicion that undermines the authority of God’s Word” (161) but dedicates several pages to discussing the history and merit of the term *inerrancy*. Tennent favors wording from the Lausanne Covenant: “without error in all that it affirms” (168). His consideration of harmful speech distinguishes between right positions and angry postures and states scriptural points in opposition to the term “gay Christian” (171). He also explains how the modern politicization of sexual identity has rendered incomprehensible the phrase “love the sinner, hate the sin” (162–63).

The book concludes with guidance for Christian discipleship (chapter 11) and leaders (chapter 12). In essence, Tennent calls the church to find ways to connect theological themes related to the human body to the structure of its regular teaching since Christian discipleship, for new and old believers alike, is not only doctrinal (what one believes) but also ethical (how one lives). In his final chapter Tennent argues that the church should focus its efforts at home with Christian catechesis, rather than placing a premium on political efforts.

Timothy Tennent rightly calls for the contemporary church to connect the dots between today's pressing moral issues and to evaluate them theologically. His major themes, which he restates in his "Final Thoughts," are generally helpful (211–16). Drawing on a historic Wesleyan emphasis, Tennent admirably underscores the need for self-giving love in marriage and childbearing. He insightfully draws attention to the impact of COVID-19 on the church. His self-critique of evangelical reflection on culture makes sense as well: "We are quite adept at measuring where people *are* culturally, but we are careless in any sustained theological reflection about where they *should be* culturally" (206).

However, *For the Body* also falls short in two significant ways. First, the book seeks to salvage biblical authority but instead dilutes it. The author opines, "Much of the church's struggle over these issues today [concerning the body] can be traced back to an earlier abandonment of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God" (169). Yet the emphasis of this section obscures the problem by focusing on the perceived insufficiency of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and Hermeneutics. Other indications surface that scriptural authority does not consistently hold sway. In a paragraph encouraging common ground among Christians whose viewpoints on creation and evolution vary, Tennent says God breathed life into "humans" rather than mentioning Adam specifically (184). He also suggests that the church should engage the public square with general revelation and "quietly and faithfully embody the truths of *special* revelation in our public witness" (201). Certainly, natural revelation provides important resources for engagement, and living faithfully is crucial. But the reader is left with the impression that Christians should not foreground what the world refuses to hear.

Second, Tennent is optimistic that addressing a "fundamental problem" in culture "will help change the public perception that Christians are merely 'against' things rather than 'for' a stunning alternative that actually promotes human flourishing" (209). But does the Bible indicate that even the best of theology will positively alter public perception? (Consider John 6 and the response to Jesus' miracle and subsequent Bread of Life discourse.) Tennent points to the *imago Dei* to denounce violence against the LGBT+ community, which is indeed reprehensible. But when society thinks about the civil rights of this community, definitions of marriage and gender and freedom of religion are also at stake. No presentation of biblical truth, regardless how winsome and sincere, will satisfy the world's perception criteria. However, we should have confidence that speaking the whole truth in love will result in saving freedom for all those who believe (Jn 8:31–32).

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Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 407 pp. + 18pp. (back matter)

Carl Trueman is a historian of ideas; his skill in looking to the past has long made him an incisive interpreter of the present—especially when it comes to the politics of sexuality.

I will never forget this Trueman paragraph from 2008; I literally have parts of it memorized:

You can have the hippest soul patch in town, and quote Coldplay lyrics till the cows come home; but oppose homosexuality and the only television program interested in having you appear will soon be The Jerry Springer Show when the audience has become bored of baiting the Klan crazies. Indeed, evangelicals will be the new freaks.²

This kind of cultural insight and even power of prediction has become a Trueman hallmark. And now in his much-talked-about *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) he shows his historical homework: he builds out the Western philosophical narrative underlying his judgments about where we all are and where we are headed. Only they are not quite *his* judgments: he self-consciously appeals to the work of the utterly opaque Phillip Rieff, the rather prolix Charles Taylor, and the less difficult but still challenging Alasdair MacIntyre. His work builds on—and mediates to evangelicals—the work of these three thinkers.

Trueman sets up his overall narrative by raising an intriguing—and suddenly pressing—question:

Why does the sentence “I’m a woman trapped in a man’s body” make sense not simply to those who have sat in poststructuralist and queer-theory seminars but to my neighbors, to people I pass on the street, to coworkers who have no particular political ax to grind and who are blissfully unaware of the rebarbative jargon and arcane concepts of Michel Foucault and his myriad epigones and incomprehensible imitators? (36)

This question builds an expectation and a structure into Trueman’s long book. He has to show, as he moves (basically chronologically) from thinker to major thinker, how each helped turn the Western ship toward the dark and pagan waters of expressive individualism.

And Trueman delivers. He expends a great deal of scholarly energy talking through numerous Western philosophical figures of the past, patiently adding links to the chain from which the West has hung itself over the abyss. It is a dark and frustrating story. The biblical truths that would have won the West back to God at any point along the timeline are often so simple. Watching very smart men so obviously turn to worship the creature rather than the creator, and from ever more foolish angles, is painful.

At great risk of oversimplifying, let me abridge and summarize Trueman’s narrative with bullet points:

² “Goodbye Larry King, Hello Jerry Springer!” Reformation21, December 20, 2008.

- Rousseau gave us a psychologized man who is intrinsically good and is only corrupted by contact with society.
- The Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, and De Quincey (there is a name I confess I had never heard of) gave us a “modern ethical discourse [which was] really just a way of expressing emotional preferences, with no universal criterion by which competing moral claims can be compared or assessed” (161).
- Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin gave us “plastic people,” a man without a created order “whose very psychological essence means that he can (or at least thinks he can) make and remake personal identity at will.” (164)
- Freud—“the key figure in the narrative of this book” (203)—psychologizes sexuality, thereby preparing it to become what it is now: politicized.

This narrative occupies parts 1–3 of Trueman’s book, seven chapters; in the remaining part, three chapters, Trueman turns from the past to the present. He riffs off of Rieff by narrating “The Triumph of the Erotic” (chapter 8), “The Triumph of the Therapeutic” (chapter 9), and “The Triumph of the T” (chapter 10). The “erotic” is self-explanatory: the “pornification” of mainstream culture is evident. The “therapeutic” is short-term utilitarianism: whatever makes me feel better now. The “T” is transgenderism, the opening question and now ending point of Trueman’s tale.

Assessment

In an “age of cheap Twitter insults and casual slanders,” Trueman says, “it seems to me that giving an accurate account of one’s opponents’ views, however obnoxious one may consider them to be, is vital” (30). Trueman has practiced what he preaches. And I will add here my only criticism: Trueman’s recital of this Western intellectual history—in part because he couldn’t assume his readers’ knowledge of it (and I am glad he did not), and in part because accurate accounts of obnoxious views take time—gets a bit tedious. It is rather long. It lacks perhaps Trueman’s usual punch.

But when he finally gets to recognizable figures of today, and to observations about *my* world, observations of which I am a more capable judge because I live here, I felt I could look down the currents he had followed through intellectual history and see the track that ship had cut through the water. Trueman stands in 2020 and looks back over a huge mass of intellectual history. His trained eyes see the track, and they will help his readers spot it, too.

And he gets me to important answers. Just as defenders of same-sex marriage have wondered why conservative Christians object to what two men might do in the privacy of their own home, I have indeed wondered why they object so vociferously to our objecting to it. Trueman answers:

[In] psychological man or expressive individualism, ... personal authenticity is found through public performance of inward desires. And as the most powerful inward desires of most people are sexual in nature, so identity itself has come to be thought of as strongly sexual in nature. (52)

Aha. That is why we have such a huge and intractable cultural fight on our hands.

Many have praised Trueman's work; I myself have offered barely one mild criticism. I wonder how many reviewers, however, have the capacity, really, to question Trueman's read of the history of Western thought. How many of us have read enough Rousseau, Marcuse, Freud, Marx, Darwin, Wordsworth, Nietzsche, Singer, etc., etc., etc., to say anything other than, "Trueman quotes all his major thinkers often enough that—it seems to this reader who had only a small familiarity with most of them and who, embarrassingly, only learned of certain minor figures by reading Trueman's book—he represented them accurately"? So I will say just that; I have now said it.

But I do feel it important to share my own history as a reader and a possible insight arising therefrom: Trueman is not, in this book, the master of the house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Rather Trueman is melting down some "old" treasures (again: Rieff in the 60s, MacIntyre in the 80s, Taylor in the 90s and aughts), adding in a large number of studious book reports, and drawing some conclusions that will be especially welcome to and understood by contemporary English-speaking evangelicals.

I say this—and here is the insight I promised—in order to encourage readers to pick up at least one of the major thinkers that Trueman has relied on. I frankly failed in my first attempt to get through Rieff, and I am not sure I will ever succeed. His prose is almost impenetrable. I found James K. A. Smith's slim *How (Not) to Be Secular* much more congenial than Taylor's large tome, *A Secular Age*, though I still hope to get through the latter someday. But I did read through MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, and I received lifelong profit from the endeavor. There is something about the first-person synthesis provided by a true philosopher that is fresh and memorable. It is like what C.S. Lewis said about old and world-important books: they became important because they were readable (someone failed to mention this to Rieff). Sometimes they are easier to digest than modern introductions to them are.

If I say, then, that Trueman is a second-order thinker, this is not at all a slight. He is an outstanding second-order thinker who is able to popularize difficult arguments. "Popularize" may not be quite the right word for a 432-page book that many pastors will get bogged down in. But there really is no alternative to the slog, I think. Fly any higher above the fray and you lose the details. Dig any deeper into them and you multiply the size of the book exponentially.

Whither Shall We Go?

He does end the book with advice about where we go from here, and he offers hope. The modern self that has arisen and apparently triumphed has won a Pyrrhic victory. It has evacuated the value of community, creating a vacuum into which the church-as-community-love may step. If we are living in an anti-culture, then the culture of love created by the church may again appeal to worn out expressive individualists. The church, too, knows the profound truth about sex. It knows that "the kind of promiscuity promoted by the sexual revolution tended to favor men and actually turn women into playthings under the guise of liberating them" (394). But, Trueman says, "Protestants need to recover both natural law and a high view of the physical body" (405) in order to establish ourselves as clear, attractive alternatives to everyone doing that which feels right with their own sexuality.

A final note: I happened to read Trueman's book alongside Steven D. Smith's excellent *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018),

another book which attempts to tell a sweeping intellectual history. If anything, Smith shows that the story Trueman tells is one of “recrudescence,” of the reassertion of essentially pagan ideas, ideas that were discussed in Roman salons countless centuries ago. Trueman sees the parallel at the heart of Smith’s book, too. He ends *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* with this comment:

In the second century, the church was a marginal sect within a dominant, pluralist society. She was under suspicion not because her central dogmas were supernatural but rather because she appeared subversive in claiming Jesus as King. . . .

The second-century world is, in a sense, our world, where Christianity is a choice—and a choice likely at some point to run afoul of the authorities.

[But] it was that second-century world . . . that laid down the foundations for the [church’s] later successes of the third and fourth centuries. And she did it by what means? By existing as a close-knit, doctrinally bounded community that required her members to act consistently with their faith and to be good citizens of the earthly city as far as good citizenship was compatible with faithfulness to Christ. (406)

Mark Ward

Editor | *Bible Study Magazine*

Jones, Michael S., Mark J. Farnham, and David L. Saxon. *Talking about Ethics: A Conversational Approach to Moral Dilemmas*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2021. 384 pp.

Talking about Ethics is an introduction to ethics aimed at college students. Aside from the introduction, a chapter on ethical theories, and the conclusion, each chapter is written in the style of conversations between three friends who are taking a college-level ethics class. Other classmates and friends occasionally join in. One character is evangelical, one Eastern Orthodox, and one unbelieving. These varying character backgrounds allow for varying perspectives to be introduced. The text is written to be engaging to students who, though using this as a textbook, might not be interested in ethics. The authors do a good job of drawing the reader into each topic of discussion.

The ethical issues discussed include immigration, capital punishment, torture, animal rights, use and legalization of drugs, abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, organ transplantation, reproductive technology, premarital sex, homosexuality, gender identity, environmentalism, ways to combat global poverty and hunger, and war.

The first chapter surveys different approaches to ethics: an unsophisticated common-sense approach, cultural relativism and subjectivism, and various forms of ethical absolutism. Included in this last category are utilitarianism, duty ethics, virtue ethics, natural law, divine command theory, and divine nature theory. Each view is evaluated in terms of its logical coherence and consistency. Strengths and weaknesses are noted for each, and the weaknesses of many views are such that they are eliminated as viable ethical theories. Though the authors, publisher, and intended audience are Christian, the

argumentation in this chapter is not distinctively Christian. Instead, alternative viewpoints are critiqued until the ethical approach known as divine nature theory is alone left standing. This chapter excelled in surveying and critiquing various ethical viewpoints, but it would have been stronger if a positive, biblical case had been made for divine nature theory. I would have liked to see the Triune God explicitly affirmed as the foundation for all ethics. The book's conclusion does indicate that the authors hold that, apart from the fear of the Lord and Scripture, ethicists "are working at a disadvantage," but the authors seem to want readers to reach this conclusion inductively, having seen how the various theories fared in the conversations about ethical topics.

The chapters dealing with ethical topics generally follow a similar pattern: a brief introduction, a dialogue between the friends, and recommended reading. The level of certainty that the characters reach at the end of each chapter varies. For instance, no conclusion is reached on what a biblical approach to immigration might look like (though parameters are laid out) whereas the chapters on sexual ethics reach clearer conclusions.

The chapter on immigration raises talking points from various sides of the debate. The book notes that these observations (not all of which are accurate) tend to function as part of a utilitarian ethic. It brings up two main biblical principles: the Bible's concern for just treatment of the immigrants and the Bible's teaching about obedience to government. These are good principles, but students and teachers will need to go deeper if they are to formulate solutions to the immigration debate.

The chapter on capital punishment notes several arguments against the practice: the possibility of executing an innocent person, the biblical prohibition against taking life, Jesus's command to love one's enemies, rehabilitation rather than retribution as the goal of criminal justice, and racial disparities in capital punishment for comparable crimes. Counter arguments are given to each: wrongful executions and unjust disparities show weaknesses in the criminal justice system but do not demonstrate capital punishment is wrong, homicide and execution are different in motive, Jesus's words were addressed to private persons, and retribution sets limits on punishment whereas rehabilitation can be unjust. Kantian duty ethics, natural law ethics, and biblical ethics all support a retribution principle. The biblical case rested primarily on Romans 9; the authors seemed hesitant to defend capital punishment from Genesis 9 lest it imply that the United States is bound to Old Testament laws.

The chapter on torture does a good job of showing how ethical theories shape ethical conclusions. Utilitarianism is likely to find torture acceptable in certain situations while Kantian duty ethics would never find it acceptable. Both natural law and virtue ethics are more likely to oppose torture. Oddly, the authors find divine nature theory indeterminate on this point. The conquest of Canaan, the Inquisition, and jihad are given as examples where torture might be defended on the basis of divine nature theory. It is at this point that defining the deity whose nature underlies divine nature theory is important. A sidebar that addressed why the conquest of Canaan by Israel was just but not a model for war in general would have been a helpful addition to this chapter.

The chapter on animal rights unpacks Peter Singer's arguments for the fundamental equality of human and non-human animals. The chapter exposes some equivocations in Singer's view and defends the uniqueness of humans. It leads readers to a Christian view in which animals are valued by

God and to be wisely cared for by humans. Singer's approach is identified as a utilitarian view which does not take into account the different natures of humans and animals.

The chapter on drug use and legalization focused on marijuana. It makes a case that marijuana use has significant negative long-term and short-term effects, that the claimed health benefits of CBD are often unproven while the risks are real, and that THC has been effective in treating certain ailments. While the effectiveness of THC grounds arguments for legalizing medical marijuana, in practice legalizing marijuana for medical use has been a means for legalizing recreational use. The chapter notes that the Bible prohibits intoxication and that marijuana usage always results in intoxication.

The chapter on abortion rehearses a number of pro-abortion arguments. In response, it notes that the key issue is whether the unborn child is a person or not. It interacts with various attempts to define personhood. Those that exclude the unborn are rejected since they also deny personhood to humans who have been born. The chapter leads students to understand that personhood is rooted in the image of God and present from the fertilization of a human egg by a human sperm.

The chapter on euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide reveals that arguments for these practices are utilitarian in nature and tied to the avoidance of pain. However, there are utilitarian arguments against them which involve the potential societal effect of the value placed on the elderly. Natural law ethics and divine command ethics would both oppose euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

The chapter on organ transplantation rehearses a utilitarian defense for selling organs based on the potential effect of eliminating the shortage of donated organs. It follows this with a utilitarian critique of the practice as exploiting the poor.

The chapter on reproductive technology and human cloning again homes in on the fundamental issue of human personhood. It also notes that surrogacy violates the one-man, one-woman nature of the marriage covenant in addition to being potentially exploitative of the poor.

The chapter on premarital sex looks at the issue from natural law, relativist, and Kantian approaches. It concludes by drawing on the observation that sex is the giving of persons to each other. This is of such a nature that it is only appropriate within an exclusive marriage relationship between one male and one female.

The chapter on homosexuality deals with biblical, natural law, and utilitarian arguments against homosexual relations. It also deals with arguments that seek to reinterpret the key Scripture texts about homosexual behavior and desires. The chapter is indeterminate on whether homosexual behavior should be legal or illegal since not all sinful behavior is criminal behavior. The chapter indicates that "being a homosexual" is not sinful, but that homosexual actions are. It would have been better to have avoided speaking of homosexuality in ontological terms.

The chapter on gender identity affirms the biblical teaching of two sexes. It raises the possibility, however, that gender roles are culturally determined. Though it appeals to Deuteronomy 22:5 and 1 Corinthians 11 to affirm the linkage between the two, the introduction of creational norms in the opening chapter would have provided a helpful foundation for students to recognize that a natural order underlies cultural variation with regard to gender. In other words, gender is not merely

culturally constructed because each culture is having to interact with the norms built into the creation order.

The chapter on environmentalism surveys a variety of approaches, from biocentric egalitarianism in which all living organisms are equal and should be treated as such, to biocentrism in which evolutionary development can confer relative value, to naturalistic anthropocentrism, to theocentric anthropocentrism. These views are then brought into conversation with the various ethical theories.

The chapter on world hunger provides the authors with a chance to introduce John Rawls to students. Rawls proposed that since people disagree about what the good life is, justice needs to simply be about the proper procedures for administering a pluralistic society. These procedures can be determined by a thought experiment in which one steps behind a veil of ignorance. What world would you construct if you did not know what your religious commitments, economic status, race, gender, etc. Would be? The authors critique Rawls's theory on the grounds that it is not really possible to step behind the veil of ignorance.

The final chapter surveys ethical approaches to war, focusing on pacifism and just war theory. Secular views of pacifism are shown to be basically utilitarian. Christian pacifism is at odds with God's commands to Israel in the Old Testament and to Romans 13. Just war theory receives a thorough summary.

The preceding brief summaries of each chapter fail to do justice to the book or to convey the interest generated by its conversational style. At several points I wished that more biblical material had been imported or that a more sustained defense of the significance of biblical texts had been given. This textbook would work best in a class in which the teacher extends the discussions to bring more detailed and precise biblical teaching to bear on the ethical issues being discussed. The strength of *Talking About Ethics* is its accessible survey of different ethical approaches, including Christian ones.

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