

Moore, Russell. *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America*. New York: Sentinel, 2023. 256pp.

The title of Russell Moore's book might lead readers to guess that he is writing about the increasing number of "Nones," the people who identify with no particular religion or religious body. While that topic is certainly germane to Moore's discussion, it is not his chief point. When he writes about "losing our religion," he has two main ideas in mind.

The first is the distinction, often drawn in evangelical preaching, between religious people and true followers of Jesus Christ. Preachers sometimes tell sinners that religion cannot save them; only Jesus can. People can go through the forms of religion and even adopt a religious identity while rejecting Christ, just as they can receive and follow Christ without putting on religious airs. Moore believes that a significant proportion of modern evangelicalism is using religion, and particularly the religious structures of evangelicalism, to mask a departure from devotion to Christ. Moore believes that evangelicalism needs to lose this religion and to get back to following Christ.

The second sense in which Moore uses the expression "losing our religion" is in the sense of failing to exercise informed, righteous anger. He believes that some evangelicals have become involved in so much religious pretense that they are saying and doing things that should provoke justifiable anger from biblical Christians. He says (and shows) that he personally is angry about some of these things.

What sorts of things make Moore angry? One is perceived hypocrisy in the conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The other is Donald Trump. Moore is at his angriest when these two converge. Indeed, he suggests that his anger over this convergence was the very thing that led to his exit from the SBC.

For some years, Russell Moore was a poster boy for success in the Southern Baptist Convention. After earning his PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he served briefly as an associate pastor. He was then offered a professorship in ethics and theology at his *alma mater*. Within three years he had become dean of the School of Theology and was promoted to the vice-presidential level. He then served four years as pastor of an SBC church in Louisville, simultaneously taking an increasing role in convention politics. Then in 2013 he was appointed president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), a subsidiary organization of the SBC. He was one of the brightest rising stars in the Southern Baptist sky.

Moore's trajectory began to change with the candidacy and then presidency of Donald J. Trump. Like many evangelicals, Moore expressed alarm over Trump's personal morality. Additionally, Moore echoed the concerns of many Trump opponents over issues such as race and immigration. Vocalizing these concerns placed Moore at odds with a segment of the Southern Baptist leadership that supported Trump.

Around this time, accusations were leveled against a couple of prominent Southern Baptist conservative leaders. These accusations also came at roughly the same time that the "Me Too" movement was riveting American interest with its demand to "believe all victims." Moore echoed these concerns within the SBC.

Moore's willingness to criticize old-line SBC leaders and his refusal to support Donald Trump led to closer inspection by powerful figures in the convention. These figures decided that his position on issues such as race and immigration was less like theirs and more like that of their political opponents. Soon there were accusations that Moore was "woke" and that he was a "cultural Marxist." This controversy eventually led to Moore's departure, not only from the ERLC, but from the Southern Baptist Convention altogether.

This background (which Moore references throughout his book) is essential for understanding *Losing Our Religion*. The book is an indictment specifically of the SBC, but also of the political tactics and internal inconsistencies of political versions of conservative evangelicalism. Moore says at the outset that he is angry, and the text shows it.

What upsets Moore is that (as he sees it) evangelicals who have aligned with Donald Trump have given up their biblical witness. The titles of his chapters disclose what he thinks they have lost in the process: their credibility, moral authority, identity, integrity, and stability. Of course, the problem that Moore perceives is larger than Trump, but Trump is the focus. On average, Moore singles Trump out by name every six pages, besides alluding to the former president many more times without naming him. Outside of God and Jesus, Trump is the most frequently named individual in the book.

Is *Losing Our Religion* simply an exercise in what some on the Right would call "Trump Derangement Syndrome?" No, Moore's work cannot be so easily dismissed. Donald Trump really does confront biblical Christians with a dilemma. On one side of the dilemma is a history in which evangelicals used to insist that character matters in political candidates (a fact of which Moore reminds his readers). Trump is clearly not a man of character. His repeated infidelities, his demonstrated disrespect of women, his willingness to engage publicly in gutter talk, and his eagerness to default to personal abuse rather than measured argument are the marks of an unprincipled man.

Moore thinks that evangelical leaders have backed Trump so they can gain political influence. As Moore sees it, these churchmen have been willing to trade their moral reservations about Trump in exchange for access to the levers of power. Such leaders have been willing to excuse their promotion of Trump by claiming that they are not voting for him to be a pastor, by minimizing the significance of his transgressions, by denying that he has committed them, by claiming that he has recently trusted Christ and is now a baby Christian, and even by claiming that Trump has done God's work.

Moore's accusations are easy to substantiate, but the situation is a bit more complicated than he portrays it to be, which leads to the other side of the dilemma. Most evangelicals who have voted for Trump have probably not done so because they wanted power or because they admired or even liked the man. More likely, they have been voting against the alternatives. Before Trump took office, the Supreme Court had forced the entire nation to pretend that two people of the same sex could be married to each other. The Obama-Biden administration was moving toward forcing people to recognize that men could become women or *vice versa*. Children who questioned their "gender identity" were to be given drugs and even surgeries to make them look like children of the other sex. The promoters of this agenda intended to apply it eventually to all institutions, including Christian churches, schools, and adoption agencies. There were to be no religious exemptions. At the same time, people who affirmed a realistic and biblical view of marriage, sex, and gender were to be denied

privileges that were available to the rest of the public. They were even to be subjected to civil penalties. Hillary Clinton made it clear in advance that she would further these policies; the Biden-Harris administration has consistently tried to push them.

Under these circumstances, evangelicals could (and can) perceive Trump as the lesser of two evils. Indeed, when men are being admitted into women's and girls' private spaces, when men are trouncing female competitors in women's sports, when children are being mutilated because of gender confusion, and when violent male criminals are being imprisoned with women, Trump's transgressions pale to the point that he can seem virtuous by comparison. That is why many evangelicals have held their noses and voted for him.

Moore knows all about this dynamic. He replies by noting (with Hanna Arendt) that choosing the lesser evil is still choosing evil. Moore seems to think that the solution lies in rejecting both alternatives and trusting God for the result. His point is certainly defensible, but it is not the only conclusion at which biblical Christians can arrive without violating Scripture or conscience. To substantiate his point, Moore appeals to the example of certain kings in Israel and Judah who appealed to Gentile alliances for help, noting that God uniformly condemns those appeals. The status of Israel and Judah as a covenant people, however, limits the usefulness of this analogy. No clear teaching of Scripture requires Christians to become Never Trumpers.

As Moore sees it, the same attitude that excuses the transgressions of Trump was also used to excuse the misdeeds of certain Southern Baptist leaders. Oddly, he never names those individuals specifically, though his descriptions make it clear whom he means. While Moore was head of the ERLC, various pastors and other leaders were accused of sexual predation. Among these were prominent architects of the Southern Baptist resurgence. On Moore's view, too many of these accusations were excused or swept under the rug. He himself spoke out against them, with the result that considerable ecclesiastical pressure was brought to bear against him.

The story Moore tells is believable, even to a non-Southern Baptist. What Moore describes is something that happens somewhere in nearly every circle of organized Christianity. He is right to be angry about it. What is not right is that he should be surprised, let alone shocked. Moore says that he believes in total depravity. He should not be surprised to find that people—even Christian people—act depraved. He should not be surprised to discover that people are willing to cover up depravity when it suits their purposes. But that is not the main problem.

More to the point is the way that the SBC works. In the SBC, churches have formally banded together to erect institutions, including the ERLC, to serve them. While the churches remain technically autonomous, the convention formally ties them to the structure of seminaries, missions, the Cooperative Program, and (among others) the ERLC. Rule number one in this situation is that convention employees must not offer public criticism of other convention entities, and particularly of the presidents of those entities. There is no quicker way for an employee in an SBC institution to face disciplinary measures than to offer such public criticism.

Moore was a convention employee. When he went after pastors, churches, and heads of other institutions, he broke the rules. He should have anticipated what would happen. The reaction may not have been right or fair, but it was foreseeable.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty with Moore's book is his uneven handling of the Left and Right. He holds the evangelical Right responsible to behave in a thoughtful, reasoned, and biblical way. Yet he minimizes the degree to which critical theory (cultural Marxism) has begun to reshape evangelical and Southern Baptist sensibilities from the Left. He seems to dismiss concerns that evangelicals are increasingly woke. Nevertheless, critical theory has begun to set the agenda for many evangelicals. Many see critical theory as a helpful analytical tool. Surely that is at least as great a threat to biblical integrity as the concerns that Moore addresses.

So why not rebuke the Left? An easy guess is that Moore was not spanked by the woke crowd. In fact, the more he protested Trump, the more he became their darling. No, Moore was spanked—hard—by convention polemicists and Trump supporters. Evidently, the locus of Moore's spanking still hurts.

Moore's work has value, but it could have had a much greater value. The concerns that he raises are real, and Christians ought to face them. He channels his pain to energize and direct his presentation. Unfortunately, that same pain leads him sometimes to exaggerate the faults of those he criticizes while simultaneously blinding him to the related and opposite concerns—concerns that may well be more important than the problems he attacks. If Moore had provided a corresponding critique of critical theory and an account of the spread of wokeness within evangelicalism and the SBC, his work could have been much stronger. As it stands, it lacks balance.

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Bauder, Kevin T., and R. Bruce Compton, eds. *Dispensationalism Revisited: A Twenty-First Century Restatement*. Plymouth, MN: Central Seminary Press, 2023. 278pp. + 15pp. (front matter).

This book is a festschrift for Charles Hauser Jr., who taught at several institutions, including Denver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary (an institution now carried on by Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa) and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. The authors of the various chapters were students and/or colleagues of Charles Hauser. The authors include both traditional/revised and progressive dispensationalists, but the book reads more traditionally since the progressive dispensationalists wrote on topics of dispensational agreement whereas some of the traditional dispensationalists argued for points of distinction in the intramural dispensational discussion.

Some of these chapters are excellent statements of standard dispensational positions. Ryan Martin provides a fine exegetical survey of Romans 9–11 that ably demonstrates that these chapters disallow any form of supersessionism. Edward Glennly contributes a clear articulation of the premillennial position coupled with brief but cogent critiques of amillennial readings of Revelation 20. This chapter provides a superb introduction to the premillennial position, and those who would take the time to track down the sources mentioned in the footnotes would be led to some of the best resources from all sides of the debate. Jonathan Pratt provides a solid defense of the pretribulational rapture. The latter part of the chapter, where Pratt makes his case from Revelation 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4–5, was more convincing than the arguments mounted earlier in the chapter from 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 and Revelation 12:5.

Other chapters argue for distinctives of traditional dispensationalism. Douglas Brown explains why the glory of God was included as a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, though it is also a significant feature of other systems of theology. Brown notes that this was an effort by the traditional dispensationalists to posit a unifying principle of history in response to charges that dispensationalism undercut the unity of Scripture by having two purposes for two peoples of God.

Roy Beacham defends a very specific understanding of the literal interpretation of prophecy: “Any hermeneutical viewpoint that espouses any form of other-than-, less-than-, or more-than-literal fulfillment of God’s foretelling negates the declared purpose and evidentiary worth of this genre” (41). There is wide agreement among dispensationalists with Beacham regarding “other-than” and “less-than” fulfillments, but the exclusion of “more-than” is a point of contention among dispensationalists. If everything God predicted happened exactly as God said it would, but more happened in addition to what God predicted, how does the “more-than” negate God’s purposes for prophecy or violate the integrity of the Promiser? In a footnote Beacham explains his view of how “more-than” interpretations work: “God promises to do *x* but instead he does *y*, which, in their view, is $> x$ ” (51n32). But promising *x* and doing *y* does not describe an *expansion* of the promises; it describes *replacement* under the label of expansion. Nonetheless, Beacham concludes the footnote by arguing against *expansion* in principle. However, it is difficult to see how *expansion* can be eliminated without predictive prophecy being exhaustive. For instance, is not the fact that the fulfillment of certain prophecies regarding Christ is

divided into events that happened in the first advent and events that will happen in the second advent an expansion upon what was revealed in the OT?

Beacham is also critical of canonical interpretation. He is right to be concerned about appeals to canonical interpretation that negate promises made to Israel. But canonical interpretation seems simply to be the way that related texts are read. If a person is reading a series of novels and one character seems ambiguous or evil in earlier volumes while a later volume reveals him to have been a secret agent working for the good, that later information will necessarily reshape how those earlier scenes are understood. Likewise, when the seed promise of Genesis 3:15 is read in light of the progressive revelation that develops that promise, readers gain a richer understanding of the promise. The abuse of canonical readings does not negate its proper, even inevitable, use.

Bruce Compton makes the case that the kingdom of heaven/God refers only to the rule of Christ on earth in the coming millennial kingdom. He denies that the kingdom is present in any sense during the church age. Compton makes the best case for the millennium-only view of the kingdom that can be made, and if one feels compelled to accept such a viewpoint, the exegesis can be made to work. However, the biblical text itself seems to push interpreters in another direction. Matthew 13, for instance, is a problem for Compton's thesis, for it seems that its parables do precisely what Compton proposes Jesus never did: teach that there will be a phase of the kingdom in the inter-advent period. These parables envision a time when Christ's kingdom will appear insignificant and invisible and in which the sons of the evil one co-exist with the sons of the kingdom. Compton does land significant critiques against those who limit the reign of Christ to his spiritual rule in the lives of believers. But his objections do not land with those who believe that the realm of the kingdom is the earth even in this inaugurated stage when Christ rules in the midst of his enemies. Compton concludes his chapter by observing that his approach helps keep the church on mission by not giving the church a social mandate. However, there are those who hold to the presence of the kingdom who also are reticent about a social mandate for the institutional church. The kingdom is a broader category than the institution of the church, and sphere sovereignty provides a theological category to distinguish the mission of the institutional church from the mission of Christians in other institutions.

Kevin Bauder's chapter on Israel, the church, and the people of God was the most thought provoking. Bauder notes that *people* can be "plural for *person*" with "people of God" meaning "the sum total of all saved individuals." However, it is another usage of *people* that is in play when discussing the church and Israel: "*people groups*" (72). Israel was identified as a people of God because it was a nation chosen by God. The church is also identified as God's people, even though it is a multi-ethnic group. Bauder argues that the church can be considered an ethnic-group equivalent because all of its members are united to Christ. After the return of Christ there will be many peoples of God as the nations turn to God for salvation *en masse*.

Bauder's chapter provides an excellent survey of the evidence that shifted my thinking from a simple affirmation of a single people of God to a more complex view. A weakness of the chapter is the absence of the role that covenant plays in forming a people of God. Israel was God's people because God entered into a covenant with Israel (cf. Exod 19:5). In the NT, Israel can still be identified as the people of God (e.g., Luke 2:32), but the people terminology can also be applied more broadly to all

of the redeemed because all the redeemed are in covenant with God (e.g., Matt 1:21; Heb 2:17). The church is also referred to as the people of God, often in passages quoting OT texts that referred originally to Israel (cf. 2 Cor 6:16–18; 1 Pet 2:9–10). Contrary to Bauder, it is not necessary to find a way to make the church another ethnic group in order to apply the *people* language to it. Rather, terms that were ethnic when originally applied to Israel are applied to the church metaphorically because the church is the New Covenant body of people possessed by God just as Israel was the Old Covenant people possessed by God.

Though initially dubious about Bauder’s proposal of many peoples of God, I found myself persuaded by the evidence. For example, the most plausible textual variant in Revelation 21:3 refers to peoples of God: “God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God” (CSB). Thus, in this last statement of the covenant formula the plurality of the peoples of God is emphasized. And yet, this phrase is announced from heaven at the descent of the new Jerusalem, which is described in terms that reinforce the unity of the people of God. So is there one, two, or many peoples of God? The answer is “yes,” depending on the sense in view. The Bible uses the “people of God” terminology in various ways. It can be used of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. It can be used of the church as the New Covenant people of God. It can be used of all the redeemed throughout the ages. And it can be used of redeemed nations in the new creation. This formulation differs somewhat from Bauder’s but is indebted to his thought-provoking chapter.

Other essays in *Dispensationalism Revisited* cover topics such as the covenants, Israel and the church in Acts, and patristic views of Israel. Overall the book contains a number of excellent, persuasive essays. Other essays, though less persuasive in my view, nonetheless provide strongly argued cases for traditional dispensational positions.

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DeRouchie, Jason S. *Delighting in the Old Testament through Christ and for Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. 286pp. + 26pp. (front matter) + 50pp. (back matter).

Jason DeRouchie's volume is a study in how to read the OT as a Christian from the perspective of progressive covenantalism. After an introduction in which he makes the case that the OT is an important part of the canon for Christians to love and read, the book divides into four parts. In the first part DeRouchie argues that the OT writers knew that God was giving them revelation that would become clearer "and more meaningful for those living in the messianic age of restoration," which he takes to include the present era, "than for those living before it" (17). Thus, the OT must be read with the knowledge of the coming of Christ and his accomplishments in the history of salvation if it is to be rightly understood. In part 2, DeRouchie argues for a "redemptive-historical, Christocentric model" in which Christ is seen as the goal of salvation history and the one in whom all the OT promises are fulfilled (73). Part 3 expands on this final point. It "considers why and how *every* promise is 'Yes' in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20)" (132). The fourth part examines the Christian's relation to the Mosaic law. DeRouchie argues, "The Mosaic law does not *directly* bind the Christian in a legal manner, but we treat all the Old Testament laws as profitable and instructive when we read them through the lens of Christ" (193).

This book exhibits several strengths. While making a case that "God gave the Old Testament for *new* covenant believers" (19), DeRouchie notes his agreement with Walter Kaiser that the interpreter should first interpret texts in light of preceding revelation. He also expresses that he is "highly sympathetic" to those who "limited meaning to *human* authorial intent," though he notes that E. D. Hirsch (on whom biblical scholars embracing this position rely) has revised his firm distinction between *meaning* and *significance* (25n14). He does argue that "the full meaning of some Old Testament texts can transcend the human author's understanding . . . because God's purposes often far exceed human understanding (Deut. 29:29; Eccl. 8:16–17; Isa. 55:8–9) and because he was authoring not simply individual books but *a* book (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) whose parts were 'incomplete' until Jesus 'fulfilled' them by his coming (Matt. 5:17; 11:13; Rom. 10:4)" (25). But when he makes a case for a Christocentric reading of the OT, DeRouchie insists, "Significantly, the redemptive-historical, Christocentric model I am proposing does *not* appeal 'to a hidden divine layer of meaning on top of the biblical writers' intent.'" (73; replying to a charge made by Abner Chou in *TMSJ* 33.2 [2022]: 219).

Part 4's treatment of the law and the Christian is another generally strong point in the book. DeRouchie summarizes this section of the book as follows: "The thesis is this: The Mosaic law does not directly bind the Christian in a legal manner, but we treat all the Old Testament laws as profitable and instructive when we read them through the lens of Christ" (193). In establishing this thesis DeRouchie builds on Brian Rosner's excellent volume, *Paul and the Law*.¹ The law as the Mosaic Covenant is "repudiated" and is "replaced" by "the law of Christ" in the New Covenant. Nonetheless,

¹ *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013).

Christians “reappropriate” all of the Mosaic law as it testifies to who God is, as it prophesies the person and work of Christ, and as it provides wisdom for Christian living.

DeRouchie also outlines four ways that Christ fulfills the law (208–9). (1) “*Maintains (no extension)*.” This would include laws like those found in the second table of the Decalogue. (2) “*Maintains (with extension)*.” This would include laws in which cultural particularities are taken into account in application or when the principle embodied in a law is extended to a new situation. (3) “*Transforms*.” DeRouchie holds that the Sabbath command is transformed into spiritual rest in the New Covenant era. Certain laws that required capital punishment within Israel are transformed to require excommunication in the church. (4) “*Annuls*.” DeRouchie cites the dietary laws as an example of this category. With this category especially, he emphasizes that these laws still retain a pedagogical value for the believer even though they have been annulled. He helpfully outlines a method for Christian use of the law and provides four case studies that align with each of these four categories.²

However, DeRouchie’s treatment of the law includes a few stumbles as well. In an otherwise good critique of theonomy, DeRouchie argues that passages about the nations’ walking according to the law of Yahweh (e.g., Isa 2:2–3) refer to individuals from many nations being brought into the body of Christ in the present age. On this point DeRouchie exemplifies the weakness of progressive covenantalism regarding a biblical theology of the nations. Progressive covenantalists tend to dissolve this biblical teaching on nations into the multiethnic church. The theonomists are not wrong in seeing the conversion of the nations in Isaiah 2; they are wrong in applying a passage about the (pre)millennial reign of Christ to the present age.

DeRouchie also argues that neither the law of Moses nor the law of Christ is the standard for the state. Rather, “the principles of nature (i.e., image bearing and community justice) associated with the Adamic-Noahic covenant” form the standard against which civil laws are measured (226). The Mosaic law, as fulfilled in Christ, remains relevant for the church, not the state. However, if the Mosaic law is, in part, God’s implementation of natural law or creational law to Israel’s cultural context and place in redemptive-history,³ the neat separation that DeRouchie sees between the Adamic and Noahic Covenants and the Mosaic Covenant is not so neat. Without succumbing to the theonomist error, Christians who are active in the political realm can still learn from God’s implementation of creational law to Israel in their implementation of creational law in their own contexts.

The most significant weakness of this volume is found in the third part. DeRouchie’s thesis for this part of the book is as follows: “Through Jesus, God empowers Christians to appropriate Old Testament promises faithfully without abusing them” (132). His deployment of 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him,” seems to imply that all the promises of God are for Christians. However, the fact that all the promises of God find their “Yes” in Jesus does not mean that those promises are “Yes” for all believers in the same way. In one place DeRouchie acknowledges this. He notes that Micah’s prophecy that Christ would be born in Bethlehem is fulfilled only in the life of Christ. He also observes that the wisdom promised to Solomon was secured for Solomon (and

² For additional assessment of DeRouchie’s categories for applying the OT law, see Ken Casillas, “Evaluating Progressive Covenantalism’s Approach to the Application of the Mosaic Law,” *JBTW* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 30–33.

³ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 40–41.

only for Solomon) by Christ on the cross. With these two examples DeRouchie implicitly acknowledges that some OT promises have particularities that preclude an ecclesial fulfillment. And yet DeRouchie also argues that the land promises given to Abraham and his seed are transformed in the New Covenant so that God's people, including the Gentiles, will inherit the new creation. This creates a significant theological problem. If a promise is "transformed" so that the actions performed are other than what was promised for someone other than for whom it was promised, then the promise was not kept. Elsewhere DeRouchie acknowledges that "*Christ Maintains Some Old Testament Promises with Extension*" (178). The land promises better fit this category. These promises will be fulfilled for Abraham and believing Israel within the borders promised, *and* the land promise will be extended for believing Gentile nations in the new creation in their own lands (cf. Rev 21:24).⁴

It is evident from this book that Jason DeRouchie delights in the OT and desires for God's people to do so as well. Parts 1, 2, and 4 are generally reliable guides for reading the OT as a Christian.

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⁴ Compare Wade Loring Kuhlewind Jr., "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., Bob Jones University, 2018).

Little, Tim and Angela. *Song of Songs for Singles: Lessons on Love from King Solomon*. Ankeny, IA: Faith, 2023. 266pp. + 8pp. (back matter).

This book is authored by a professor of OT at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary and his wife Angela. The target audience is high school students and above (11). The book arose as Tim recognized the need for singles to hear the Bible’s message about sexual intimacy to counteract the worldly ideas that otherwise shape their thinking. The book progresses sequentially through the Song of Songs; so in one sense it could be read as a commentary on the Song. However, its target audience affects the nature of the commentary: “As we wrote *Song of Songs for Singles*, we imagined what we would approve of our young teenage son reading. Writing from this perspective has obvious disadvantages. For example, we will not answer some questions because to do so could unintentionally awaken the sleeping desires of the innocent. Those desires need to sleep (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)” (11). In general, the Littles succeeded in addressing their target audience, though the discussion of Song 4, while guarded, may be too much for a high schooler and more appropriate for someone approaching marriage. Likewise, the discussion of Song 5 also seemed more suited to older singles—those preparing for marriage—than for the high school audience.

The Littles hold that just as Proverbs is directed primarily at the son, the Song is directed primarily at daughters. Of course, both books are applicable to people of both sexes and all ages. They reject the allegorical and dramatic readings of the Song. Though Solomon is the author of the book, the primary man in the book is neither Solomon nor a historical man. Instead, he (as is the woman) is constructed by Solomon the poet to instruct the readers in wisdom about marriage. Solomon writes himself into the book as an example of what not to be (see especially 8:11–12).

This book evidences wide and deep reading in the scholarly literature, and it exhibits swift movement from the biblical text to application. For instance, chapter 2 draws on the work of Shalom Paul to argue that the latter part of 1:4 is a continuation of the woman’s speech, not a speech of the virgin daughters (as in the NKJV, ESV, CSB). The same chapter also applies 1:2 to singles by arguing that they do not need to know about lovemaking in general. They should wait to learn what pleases their spouse when/if they marry.

Some chapters are less a commentary than an essay on a topic raised by the passage under consideration. Chapter 3 takes Song 1:5–11 as an opportunity to launch a discussion on the topic of beauty. The discussion is well done. It argues that beauty is objective. It draws on the Bible and on general revelation to sketch out some universals regarding beauty. It distinguishes between objective beauty and subjective tastes, and it cautions readers about becoming locked into a specific culture’s tastes regarding beauty. The Littles rightly acknowledge the reality of blemishes, and they observe that some people are more beautiful than others. They note that the woman in the Song acknowledges her blemishes while the man rejoices in her beauty. They encourage the husband to delight in his wife’s beauty. They observe that flaws that are the result of the Fall may be fixed, while warning against seeking to “correct” things that are not a result of the Fall. They warn against making too much of beauty, but they note that beauty is not insignificant and that adornment can be biblical.

In the chapter that discusses the adjuration refrain (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), the Littles define love. They distinguish between family love, neighbor love, and the “permanent, exclusive, jealous unquenchable kind of love” that the Song is concerned with (84). They argue that love has both an intellectual and affective component. The adjuration refrain urges the readers, with a particular focus on the virgin daughters, not to awaken love until it pleases, which the Littles take to mean “until you can take pleasure in it.” They observe that the question many young people ask is, “How far can we go?” The biblical question is, “Does this awaken love?” This question is then applied to the topics of kissing and dancing. While they note that there are different kinds of kissing and dancing (e.g., kissing as a greeting in some cultures or dancing in celebration of a military victory), the question at hand is romantic kissing and the dancing of a couple. In both cases, the Littles argue against the conclusion that these are permitted because there is no Bible verse forbidding them. These actions awaken love.

Song of Songs 3 is a challenging passage to interpret. The Littles understand 3:1–5 to indicate that the wife pursues her husband sexually. She is not merely passive. She especially pursues him when he is in a dangerous situation: in the streets at night (the lurking place of *dame folly*). She brings him back to the chamber of love. The authors take the remainder of chapter 3 to refer to Solomon’s wedding, but they do not identify Solomon and his bride with the couple who is the focus of the Song. I believe this is the correct interpretation, but I would have benefited from some additional reflection about why a Solomonic wedding is included here.

Many of the applications proposed should be readily accepted by Bible-believing Christians. In their discussion of 1:12–2:7 the Littles discuss the power of words and the need to restrict flirting to marriage. They also affirm the appropriateness of flirting within marriage. Their treatment of 2:8–17 deals with the ideas that marriage leads to a “happily ever after” and that sexual temptation disappears after marriage. They claim that these verses envision a separation between the partners, which provides the occasion for sexual temptation (though, it must be observed, that sexual temptation is not explicitly present in the text). They also focus on the statement concerning the little jackals that spoil the vineyard—connecting these with little sins of selfishness or even larger sexual sins against a spouse.

Other interpretations will cause readers to stop and think. The Littles understand Song 5 to be about the wife’s selfish rejection of her husband’s sexual advances. While she is understood to be wrong, the husband rightly accepts her refusal. His departure actually arouses her desire, which is then expressed in the beginning of chapter 6. The Littles then take the rest of chapter 6 to refer to the couple’s working through the resulting difficulties that arise from chapter 5. I am open to this interpretation of chapter 6 but not entirely persuaded.

The Littles argue that Song 7:11–8:4, as well as other parts of the Song, present the wife as the primary initiator of sexual intimacy. They do not deny that the husband may initiate (Song 2:8; 4:3; 5:2ff.), but they think the creational pattern is for the wife to initiate. Further, they lay on the wife the responsibility to initiate (and suggest she do so several times a week). Part of their concern has to do with husbands whose desires have been distorted by pornography combined with a widespread belief in Christian circles that wives are to submit passively to their husband’s desires. They are correct that this combination is likely to lead to marital problems, and their solution could be practically helpful

in certain marriages. But it seems to over-read the text to conclude that the wife should be the primary initiator of intimacy while the husband remains somewhat passive.

While there were appropriate warnings about not being married for selfish reasons and while the final chapter appropriately stressed the importance of pursuing marriage, there was perhaps insufficient acknowledgment that God may not open the way for every individual to be married. The Littles do briefly engage with 1 Corinthians 7, but they take the “present distress” (7:26) to refer to a localized time of trial. However, it seems that Paul explains his meaning in verses 29 and 31: “This is what I mean, brothers, the appointed time has grown very short. . . . For the present form of this world is passing away” (ESV). In other words, Paul advocates singleness for the sake of promoting the Lord’s interests in the world in these last days while also recognizing that many will marry (and encouraging the married to also give primary to the Lord’s interests within their marriage).

These critiques should not detract from the overall accomplishment of *Song of Songs for Singles*. Song of Songs is a difficult book to interpret, and issues surrounding marriage and sex are often controversial. *Song of Songs for Singles* rightly recognizes that the message of the Song is essential for equipping young people with a biblical view of these important topics, and it effectively challenges unbiblical ideas while attractively presenting the Bible’s better way.

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Shenvi, Neil, and Pat Sawyer. *Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology—Implications for the Church and Society*. Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2023. 486pp. + 15pp. (back matter).

In the contemporary socio-political landscape, some Christians have become worried about the rise of critical theories, social justice ideologies, “wokeness,” and the like. *Critical Dilemma*, by Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, aims to clarify what all these words mean, how they appeared in our society, and how they relate to traditional Christian faith. Does it succeed?

It is hard to say. Shenvi and Sawyer assume that most of their readers are going to already agree with them about major points of doctrine, ethics, and political vision. Though a certain level of education and familiarity with scholarly discourse will make reading *Critical Dilemma* easier, the book is not addressed *to critical theorists*. Shenvi and Sawyer occasionally address non-Christian readers, and they include an entire chapter on the basics of evangelical theology, but it is hard to imagine that they expect the book to be widely read outside evangelical circles. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the book is supposed to explain critical theory to the church or to supply an encyclopedia of resources for debating it. As an explainer, it is too repetitive and, at times, both a little too polemical and a little too scholarly. But as an encyclopedia, it is missing some key elements to make it useful as a reference work. There are some good features of the book, but overall, it is hard to know who would actually benefit from reading it. In this case, the whole is somewhat less than the sum of the parts.

When someone criticizes a scholar, and especially a *popular* scholar, an all-too-common rejoinder is that the critic has not “done the reading.” Shenvi and Sawyer have done the reading. At times their pains to show their work become tedious and contribute to the book’s overall defensive tone. Nevertheless, scanning through the footnotes (and often also the main text) will give the reader an adequate introduction to the core of contemporary critical theory. Specialists in these fields might quibble with the interpretations of various figures’ work, but it is hard to fault the book for trying to articulate something like a consensus view.

Moreover, Shenvi and Sawyer often acknowledge where the critical theorists have a legitimate point. Critical theories often insightfully identify specific problems, including ways in which past generational sins continue to have effects today. They are frequently about genuine issues, even if the treatments of those issues are unpersuasive.

Not everything is great about the book, though. First, it suffers from being neither scholarly nor merely popular. Though there are many footnotes, there is no bibliography and only a minimal topical index. (There is a complete Scripture index.)¹ These criticisms are not complaints about the authors’ work *per se*; this is an editorial problem, but a noteworthy one.

¹ For example, the term *critical social theory* is treated in some detail in pages 61–68. These pages are mentioned in the index. But in chapter 7, entire sections are headed with labels that include *critical social theory*, and the discussion is an important addition to the treatment in the earlier chapter, yet none of these pages appear in the index. Similarly, some thinkers are called “postmodernist” (e.g., Foucault, *Critical Dilemma*, 82), but this term is not defined, and does not appear in the index.

Second, the limited reference tools within the book encourage reading it straight through (even though it is fairly long). However, reading straight through reveals several repetitive parts and several digressions (including two entire chapters labeled “an excursus”). Some sections are borrowed from other works. Again, a stronger editorial hand would help.

There are more substantive issues as well. Treatments of critical theory perennially struggle to define the view. Shenvi and Sawyer make a fair attempt. Their arguments work better if academic critical theory and “popular” critical theory are closely related. But it is possible, perhaps even likely, that academic critical theory and its popular versions are not actually consistent. Critical theory is not just one thing, which the authors acknowledge at times. Thus, it is not always clear where the ideological problems are.

For example, in chapter 13 Shenvi and Sawyer argue that ideas from critical theory will devastate the church. But *which* ideas are problematic? The ones specifically mentioned are the popular ones. Let us grant the warning about them. (As many people are finding, half-baked social theories are devastating to *any* organization.) Yet churches risk pushing away legitimate, faithful scholars simply because they are not strongly opposed to something called “critical theory.” A book like Christopher Watkin’s *Biblical Critical Theory* might receive less engagement than it warrants simply because of the last two words in the title.²

As another example, in chapter 12 Shenvi and Sawyer try to establish a link between gender theory and egalitarianism (as a view about the role of women in the church and home).³ But what is the actual link? Egalitarians and gender theorists sometimes cite the same scholars, and there is a historical coincidence between the two movements (depending on how you look at them). Yet one can be skeptical about traditional roles without doubting the gender binary. Contemporary gender theory is much worse than biblical wisdom, for sure, but not everything that American Christians assert is actually biblical wisdom. It is incorrect to make a one-step inference from someone’s use of terms associated with critical theory to a conclusion about their theological convictions or biblical faithfulness.

Finally, Shenvi and Sawyer’s historical and social analysis is one-dimensional. It is true that ideas have consequences, but so do more prosaic material concerns. Moreover, *popular* ideas—those held by ordinary folk and well-known public figures, rather than by scholars—often exert more influence than academic theories, and their sources are even less intelligible.⁴

Nevertheless, two legitimate and interesting questions seem important: (1) Why does it seem like everyone is “woke” now? (2) Why doesn’t the traditional Christian view have more influence?

² Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022).

³ “Some Christian readers will likely reject a traditional view of gender and sexuality. . . . [They] argue that the Bible does not require a distinction between the roles of men and women either in the family or in the church. This position is known as egalitarianism” (*Critical Dilemma*, 376). Note the opposition between egalitarianism and “traditional” views.

⁴ See Hunter for a critique of the “idealist” view, according to which the ideas a culture holds are the most important factors for determining its character. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Everyone is woke now because they think it is in their interest to be so. Many professional spaces are explicitly left wing and privilege those who are willing to adopt its language. Consider academia. For a scholar who is not yet firmly established in professional life—in academia, this is almost everyone, or so they think—refusing to go along with the ideological culture could jeopardize an entire career. It is far easier to just play along, and it is often advantageous to be the most forceful proponent of the dominant ideas.

A related phenomenon occurs in the broader culture, where a natural explanation for the rapid growth of critical theory is social media, abetted by smartphones. Shenvi and Sawyer barely acknowledge these circumstances. They trace the “Great Awakening” to 2012, when the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was created in the aftermath of the killing of Trayvon Martin. The technology itself is noteworthy. In the year before and after this event, both Facebook and Twitter had experienced enormous growth, driven primarily by smartphone usage. A few months earlier Twitter had added a feature showing public engagement with each post, and Facebook added hashtag functionality a few months later. This confluence of technologies makes social media function like the academic world, where participating according to dominant ideological norms is a key step to higher status.

The decline of religious practice matters too. In contemporary society, wokeness partially fills the cultural void left by the decline of historic Christianity. Public righteousness remains essential, but reconciliation is elusive. The new purity culture is just the old purity culture, but with different taboos. The woke religion has all the same Pharisaical impulses⁵—these are default reactions among sinners—but with new names for its sins and no place for forgiveness and absolution.⁶

But if wokeness is a substitute religion, why doesn't traditional Christian social thought have more influence? First, at least in the American evangelical world, pietist impulses are strong and tend to limit careful, systematic thinking about secular human affairs. Second, the decline of merely traditional, cultural Christianity isn't all bad. It is easier to see the difference between mere tradition and the religion of the NT. Those who find contemporary culture distasteful and oppressive may find that of all the masters one might have, Jesus is the easiest.

Third, and sadly important, is (inadvertently) illustrated by Shenvi and Sawyer's book. Critical theory is most visible in discussions about race and gender. But why these two fields? Here we need to review an argument from a generation ago: Christians were wrong about interracial marriage; now they are wrong about homosexual marriage. As a bit of logic, this argument is clearly invalid. But as a point of rhetoric, it is devastating. In the middle of the twentieth century, traditional sexual ethics were often bound up with a racist ideology and cloaked in the language of Scripture. Now, when gender theorists reject creational norms, they say Christians misused the Bible to defend racism, and now they are misusing it to defend heteronormativity. Again, the point is not that this is a good argument—it isn't—but that it is a socially and rhetorically effective way of excluding Christian witness.

⁵ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012; reprint, New York: Vintage, 2013.)

⁶ See Marilynne Robinson, “Puritans and Prigs: An Anatomy of Zealotry,” *Salmagundi* 101/102 (1994): 36–54.

Often what is needed is a thorough, patient, and honest statement of what Christians actually believe the Bible says. Shenvi and Sawyer model this discipline well in *Critical Dilemma*. American Christians would do well to become better at saying what they believe on various social matters without simply resorting to biblical proof texts or parroting a political party platform.

Sometimes ideological movements collapse under their own self-contradictions. Sometimes they are dismantled and resisted by effective argument. Often it is a mix of both. But choosing a strategy is hard: should we just leave the error alone to collapse of its own accord, or should we actively resist (Prov 26:4–5)? If the latter, we risk spending time and energy on something that might not really be worth it. But if we are wrong about the former option, then we will have simply yielded to a destructive ideology.

Shenvi and Sawyer’s book seems caught in this dilemma. There is evidence from the broader society that the cartoon versions of wokeness have outlived their usefulness.⁷ Yet while the tides of intellectual fashion rise and fall, sometimes even a temporary bulkhead against a dangerous error is necessary. Thus, even though this review has emphasized some limitations of *Critical Dilemma*, the book itself contains plenty of wisdom and insight, along with tools to resist the pull of either the woke or the anti-woke. Though contemporary critical theory is not Christianity, neither are many of the cultural alternatives to it. Discerning the truth remains critical.

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⁷ E.g., Rachel Poser, “Ibram X. Kendi Faces a Reckoning of His Own,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 4, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/04/magazine/ibram-kendi-center-for-antiracist-research.html>.

Marsh, Cory M., and James I. Fazio, eds. *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century*. El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023. 372pp. + 10pp. (front matter) + 13pp. (back matter).

Unlike many recent works that caricature dispensationalism, *Discovering Dispensationalism* assembles twelve scholars from eleven academic institutions to present a sympathetic, researched, and well-documented study outlining the threads of dispensational thought that appear through church history. Each chapter employs a subject-area expert to examine the characteristic traits of dispensationalism. In so doing, the authors dismantle specious and libelous charges made by dispensationalism's opponents, while leaving intact the reality that Christians tend to choose theological and hermeneutical systems based on a complex set of factors including personal background, church tradition, preferred logical approach (inductive/deductive), and personally resonating biblical themes (redemption/glory of God). In other words, the book does not present an attack on covenant theology but a refutation of inaccurate claims against dispensationalism. An extensive bibliography follows each chapter so that the reader can see at once the primary sources that each contributor utilized.

In chapter 1, Cory Marsh cites some of the oft-repeated falsehoods leveled against dispensationalism. These include the following:

- (1) it is an entirely recent innovation (the historical argument of the book refutes this charge);
- (2) it is anti-intellectual (the academic caliber of the scholars involved refutes this charge; moreover, intensive inductive study of Scripture is hardly anti-intellectual);
- (3) it is antinomian (this charge is impossible to sustain when nearly all early dispensationalists were Calvinists);
- (4) it is a prosperity gospel (this charge is libelous and a straw-man argument); and
- (5) it encourages societal neglect (this charge is ironic since it contradicts the fourth charge above and is provably false given the missional emphasis of dispensationalism that dwarfs the outreach of its theological counterparts).

Marsh identifies the purpose of the book: “to demonstrate the historical fact that so-called ‘dispensational’ ideas are not novel and they were not invented by the gentry class of western thinkers in the nineteenth century” (9). Along with his co-authors, he argues that “hermeneutics is the perennial issue at play,” while simultaneously contending that dispensationalism is more than a hermeneutic; it is a biblical theology (11, cf. 355). Marsh concludes the first chapter by surveying the contributions of the other authors.

In chapter 2, James Fazio addresses the precursors to dispensationalism that appear in the NT era. He analyzes the meaning of the NT word for *stewardship* (οὐκονομία) from which the concept of dispensation arises. The point of this exercise is to demonstrate that the later use of the word *dispensation* by dispensationalists is consistent with apostolic usage. Darby, for example, focused on human stewardship of divinely delegated administrations (41). Fazio concludes the chapter with a summary of what he considers to be the six defining features of a properly constituted dispensation.

In chapter 3, Paul Hartog deploys his considerable knowledge of patristics to compare and contrast Larry Crutchfield's and Charles Hill's perspectives on the presence and absence of dispensational features among the ante-Nicene fathers. Hartog displays an irenic tone and unrelenting logic that readers of his previous works have come to recognize. He proves conclusively that premillennialism (chiliasm) was the earliest doctrine of the church regarding eschatology. Specifically, all the extant witnesses of the apostolic church were premillennial. Hartog shows that Hill has failed to demonstrate his primary claim—that there is a necessary connection between millennialism and an intermediate state of the righteous in Hades—and that Hill tends to twist the available evidence to suit his agenda (Hartog identifies Hill's primary fallacy as begging the question, 78–79, 82). For example, Hill frequently levels the libel at early chiliasts that they acquired their premillennialism from Judaistic and pagan sources although those same early chiliasts claim they received this teaching from the apostle John himself. Basically, Hill urges his reader not to believe eyewitness testimony but his own theological agenda nearly 2,000 years later. Hill repeats Augustine's error in which he blended Manicheanist dualism into Christianity, then accused literal interpreters of being Judaistic. Finally, Hartog concludes that while it is impossible to identify dispensationalism as a fully developed system in the early church, several key traits (consistent with dispensationalism and inconsistent with the theological alternatives) were present (e.g., consistent interpretation).

In chapter 4, Jeremiah Mutie contends that dispensational precursors are evident in the Nicene era. His argument is particularly important because allegorical interpretation of prophecy had superseded literal interpretation in this era, but many church fathers insisted that literal interpretation and premillennialism were correct in the face of growing pressure to conform to an allegorical method. Mutie, like the other contributors to the volume, does not assert that dispensationalism existed in any developed form but that the traits and characteristics that constitute dispensationalism were present. It can hardly be reasonably asserted that Darby invented dispensationalism *de novo* in the 1800s if the parts and pieces that make up dispensationalism existed throughout church history. One of the most telling evidences in the Nicene era comes from the reaction of Dionysius of Alexandria. Dionysius admitted that the Book of Revelation teaches chiliasm (in his critique of Nepos); so he attacked the authenticity of Revelation. That is, some allegorists of the Nicene era recognized Revelation is properly premillennial (93). To such church fathers, the only way to institute amillennialism was to dispense with Revelation altogether by rejecting its canonicity. By the end of the chapter, Mutie has collected a list of chiliasts including Cyprian, Nepos, Lactantius, Methodius, Hilary, Hesychius, and Sulpicius Severus, with some additional traits later recognized in dispensationalism that appear in Jerome and Augustine.

William Watson carries the argument forward in chapter 5—demonstrating that core traits of dispensationalism were preserved even in the medieval era by some of the church fathers whose literal interpretation of Scripture would later lead to the Reformation. The organized Roman Catholic Church of the medieval era suppressed inductive study and literal interpretation of Scripture. Both are perilous to magisterial authorities, who brook no rivals. Watson shows that individuals such as Andrew of Caesarea, Aspringius, Cyril of Alexandria, Isidore of Seville, Theodoret, and others held certain

biblical truths on the basis of a natural hermeneutic. Once that hermeneutic revived in the church, the Reformation was inevitable.

Ron Bigalke points in chapter 6 to the reemergence of a more widely used literal hermeneutic as a key factor in the Reformation. While the Reformers adopted a literal interpretation of wide swaths of Scripture, they retained a Roman Catholic hermeneutic in regard to prophecy with a resultant Roman Catholic eschatology. Thus, Bigalke observes, “A consistent application of the Reformation’s hermeneutical principle would be the catalyst for what would later become known as dispensationalism” (158). If the same hermeneutic that led to the Reformation were applied consistently by the Reformers and their followers, the outcome in their eschatology would be widely different.

Mark Snoeberger argues in chapter 7 that “the distinction between Israel and the church is the watershed between dispensationalism and non-dispensationalism” (188). Snoeberger then shows how Calvin interpreted Romans 11:16 in an entirely novel fashion in order to subvert what Paul transparently says, namely, that there will be “a restoration of the Jewish people in the eschaton” (189). Bucer and Beza disagreed, and “John Owen sharply disavowed Calvin’s (Augustinian) interpretation of Romans 11:26,” as well observing that if Calvin is correct, then Paul is incoherent (192). The remainder of Snoeberger’s chapter shows how a distinct hope for Jewish restoration persisted in the Puritan and other Reformed communities, and this hope is more consistent with dispensationalism than with its theological alternatives.

Max Weremchuk presents the lengthy chapter 8 on John Nelson Darby. He collects crucial background information that shows Darby’s “novelty” does not lie in the invention of new doctrines (as asserted by some critics) but in an insistent return to inductive study of Scripture as the foundation for theology (213). Darby restructured long-held biblical doctrines into a particular coherent form.

A series of chapters brings the book into the present. In chapter 9, Larry Pettegrew traces the movement of dispensationalism to America and shows its revivalist and missionary tendencies. Phillip Long addresses the Mid-Acts movement in chapter 10. This subset of dispensational thought lies between the ultra-dispensationalism of Bullinger and the traditional or moderate dispensationalism of Dallas Theological Seminary. Thomas Ice provides chapter 11 as a survey of the ascendance of dispensationalism in the twentieth century. He demonstrates that virtually all early dispensationalists were Calvinists (surely a shock to the many Arminian dispensationalists today). Ice also shows that wherever a literal hermeneutic is adopted, premillennialism results, but established theological traditions serve as one of the greatest obstacles to the adoption of a literal hermeneutic (321). Darrell Bock contributes chapter 12 as an explanation of progressive dispensationalism. Bock also offers several cautions regarding the sensationalism that some popular teachers have resorted to in teaching about the future. Such sensationalism allows those who object to dispensationalism to make a false equation between the system as a whole and the unbridled pronouncements of a few. Marsh and Fazio collaborated on a final, summary chapter that emphasizes the biblical-theological nature of dispensationalism (in specific contrast to systematic or historical theology). The editors insist that dispensationalism is not identical with a consistent hermeneutic but that a consistent hermeneutic leads to something approximating dispensationalism. The one is the cause; the other, the effect.

This reviewer found only a few items of critique in regard to the book. First, one might wish to see a more thoroughly edited text. The number of misspelled, omitted, or repeated words surpasses what the reader might be accustomed to in an era of spell checks and grammar checks. Other readers will find the case inconclusive. Though the authors and editors admit they cannot demonstrate a developed form of dispensationalism earlier in church history, one could always hold out hope that an alternative system might have developed from premillennialism, consistent interpretation, a distinction between Israel and the church, and inductive reasoning. The book, then, does not prove that these four traits *must* lead to dispensationalism but that some of the features of dispensationalism also appear in the earlier centuries of the church. Yet since this critique lies outside the scope of the authors' stated intent, the reader should be content to let them demonstrate their own chosen point.

Discovering Dispensationalism ought to have its place among studied theological texts precisely because it helps dispensational theologians understand the heritage of their theology, and it helps covenant theologians avoid unnecessary missteps in their assertions about the origins and nature of a competing description of God's work in this world. The reader must recognize the intended purpose of the work to profit best from it. He will not find a comprehensive explanation of dispensationalism or developments within the dispensational community. He will find evidence that dispensationalism is not a fringe, novel, or unfounded system but a fruition of sound hermeneutics, emphasis on Scripture, and inductive reasoning based on the evidence that God has chosen to reveal and then preserve in his Word.

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Naselli, Andrew David. *How to Read a Book: Advice for Christian Readers*. Moscow, ID: Canon, 2024. 160pp. + 16pp. (front matter) + 46pp. (back matter).

From his introduction onward, Naselli confronts the fact that readers may view his book with skepticism. Those who already enjoy reading surely do not need further motivation (or do they?), and those who do not like to read . . . well, will they really be persuaded by reading a book *about* reading? Heavier and more comprehensive tomes on the topic exist (for example, Mortimer J. Adler’s classic 400-plus page, *How to Read a Book*), but Naselli captures the essential *why, how, what, and when* of reading in a succinct 160 pages. He writes from an explicitly Christian perspective, and he defends reading as more crucial for believers than for unbelievers due to the supremely valuable Word that Christians possess and the supremely valuable Person that Christians seek to glorify.

Naselli’s writing style is lucid, engaging, succinct, and highly structured. Because he favors structured lists, some readers might find the itemization of key ideas in each chapter distracting. However, those who intend to use the book formatively—either to enhance their own reading practice or to guide students in the process of reading well—will find the structure in this book both memorable and pedagogically valuable.

Naselli addresses logic, sentence constructions, best resources, and worldview at key points in his argument. He also punctuates his theme with interesting, supportive details. For instance, he notes that John Milton may well have been the last person who read every existing book in English, and if a person reads twenty-five books a year for fifty years, he will have browsed only 0.0007 percent of existing books (2).

I expected to walk away with a greater sense of guilt (for failing to read adequately) and a lesser motivation (to read wisely and well), but Naselli avoids painting a world in which reading is the only thing Christians ought to do and depicts instead a world in which thoughtful, intentional, exceptional reading becomes more achievable to his own readers. It is not that our present culture is illiterate but that it is indifferently or carelessly literate; and ignorance, sciolism, and weak character thrive in that indifference.

How to Read a Book consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, “Why Should You Read?” points to life, growth, and joy as three compelling motives behind sound reading. The concept of reading for life highlights the Scriptures, which bring light and life (Ps 119:130). Reading for growth involves the expansion of the mind, experience, and discernment—all of which make the Christian reader a more effective servant of God. Reading for joy dispenses with status seeking and reaches for the principled intentionality of enjoying God and his work (20–21).

Chapter 2, “How Should You Read?” offers insights that promote sound interpretation so that the reader arrives at a real understanding of the author’s intent in communication. This is a special concern of Christians, who believe that integrity is a virtue, and who want to represent an author’s beliefs and argument accurately. Two subsections—on the nature of uncertain arguments (ones that are “unclear, false, or invalid”) and the types of propositions and their relationships—are worth the price of the book. (Second-year Greek students will note strong similarities between the relationship of propositions and the uses of the Greek participle.) The chapter then transitions to an explanation of

three levels of reading (survey, macro-, and micro-reading) and explains how the reader utilizes variable levels of attention and intensity to accomplish different purposes in his reading.

Chapter 3, “What Should You Read?” helps the overwhelmed reader face the 170 million existing books and select ones that are worthwhile. These include (in order of priority), the Scriptures, books that strengthen character and doctrine, books that make a person excel in his calling, books that give a true grasp of reality, books that the reader enjoys, books that model good writing, and books recommended by trusted friends and advisors. Naselli’s advice spans fiction, non-fiction, theology, fantasy, and vocational reading. He directly confronts and rebuts the claim that fiction is trivial and a waste of the Christian’s time (117–19), and he consciously draws heavily from C. S. Lewis’s views on the nature and value of fantasy reading and novels as windows into humanity.

Chapter 4, “When Should You Read?” guides the reader to choose the best times for reading by addressing common excuses for the inability to read (no time, no desire), by suggesting different times that may prove ideal to a specific reader, and by offering alternative suggestions (audio books).

The book concludes with four appendices (“Forty of my favorite books,” “Twenty-two tips for cultivating a culture of reading for your children,” “Why and how I use social media,” and “Why and how I organize my personal library”). Readers will find much practical advice up to the very end of this book. At the very least, those who believe that they are called to ministries involving substantial research will want to consider the library organization tips of Appendix D. Apart from some system of organization, the researcher will find himself unable to recollect the source of crucial information later.

Not all readers will be comfortable with Naselli’s repeated reference to and praise of the Harry Potter series, but he explains his reasons for his recommendation and recognizes the differences of opinion that other believers may have regarding this series without simply dismissing their concerns as unfounded (68–70). The fairly strong sampling of Douglas Wilson’s books (106–7, 119–21, 130) in a chapter on *what* a Christian should read feels, perhaps, imbalanced given the sheer breadth of available resources and Christian authors. It is true that Naselli’s work does not represent itself to be a list of books that Christians *ought* to read; however, readers are likely to assume that the cited works are among the best that could be read, and this assumption is doubtful. Perhaps a wider referencing of “best resources” would make up for this deficit.

I do not consider Appendix A to have provided this wish-list of best resources precisely because of its heavy reliance on C. S. Lewis (9/40 books) and J. K. Rowling (7/40 books) and its limited scope. However (and this is a major caveat), Naselli *explicitly engages* the fact that he does not include a more comprehensive reading list (161–65). He *knows* that some readers will register this complaint and has consciously chosen a shorter, more reader-friendly format instead of supplying a lengthy reading list (for exactly the reasons he states). Therefore, it is helpful for the reviewer to protest that he desires a longer list, and it is just as helpful to recognize the author’s own stated intent and not hold him to a standard that exceeds his purpose.

Apart from these quibbles, *How to Read a Book* compels the distracted, overly busy Christian who is not inclined to read well or often to confront the question: what really matters in the deployment of my time? Naselli contends that one answer is thoughtful, effective reading of the right kind of books.

He does not wish his own readers to pass up the vital opportunity for personal enrichment and enjoyment as well as the exercise of stewardship entrusted to them by God.

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Childers, Alisa, and Tim Barnett. *The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It's Destructive, and How to Respond*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2023. 277pp.

Paul, Luke, and Demas labored side-by-side in the early-church era. When the apostle penned his epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, he sent greetings from his fellow laborers (Col 4:14, Phlm 1:24). Sadly, only Luke remained with Paul to the end of his ministry, “for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim 4:10–11).

Jesus predicted that this kind of thing would happen time and again. In the parable of the soils, he described a sower who cast his seed indiscriminately on the surrounding land. Some seed “fell into good ground, and brought forth [lasting] fruit” (Matt 13:8). Other seed fell on stony ground, and “immediately it sprang up,” but when the sun came out the plant withered away because it had no moisture or depth of earth (Mark 4:5). Christ explained that the latter soil typified apostates who seem to embrace the gospel gladly at first but fall away when temptation comes (Luke 8:13).

In *The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Alisa Childers and Tim Barnett demonstrate that apostasy continues unabated in the twenty-first century. Nowadays it goes by a different name, *deconstructionism*, which the authors define as “a postmodern process of rethinking your faith without regarding Scripture as a standard” (26). As the definition implies, deconstructionism deifies internal feelings (my truth, my comfort, my sincerity, my self-constructed identity) and defies external authority (God, his Word, parents, pastors). Every man therefore gets to do that which is right in his own eyes (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Anyone who says otherwise is considered oppressive, toxic, abusive, and power hungry.

Childers and Barnett note that deconstructionism originated with Satan in the Garden of Eden. He tempted Eve first by saying, “Hath God said, ‘Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). Then the serpent patently denied God’s words: “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as [God], knowing good and evil” (vv. 4–5). Satan wanted Eve to disbelieve that God was loving, truthful, and sufficient (46).

This is a part of the process all deconstructionists go through when they begin to apostatize. Often, the process will begin with a crisis or a series of difficulties—possibly “unanswered prayer, unexpected suffering, and unwanted hardship” (84). Sometimes would-be apostates see real or imagined sin (adultery, racism, sexism, embezzlement) within professing Christianity and use it as an excuse to question the faith. Ultimately, they abandon Scripture’s teaching on inerrancy, complementarianism (i.e., men and women have equal value but different roles), sexual morality (particularly homosexuality and abortion), Christ’s vicarious atonement, and the final judgment of the wicked.

According to deconstructionist coaches, it does not matter where these exvangelicals end up spiritually as “belief-building should be ‘self-determined’” (112).¹ As Jo Leuhmann has said, “Everyone lands wherever they land. There is no right place to land with deconstruction. Some people land away from faith. Some people land in a different type of faith. Some people become agnostic. Some people

¹ Citing Katie Blake, “What Is a Belief Artisan? Learning to Be Creative with Your Beliefs,” accessed January 12, 2023, <https://drkatieblake.com/blog/2022/8/4/what-it-means-to-be-a-belief-artisan>.

become a different type of Christian. Some people become atheists. And all of those routes in deconstruction are valid and to be respected” (111).²

Interestingly, Childers and Barnett see doubt as a virtue, as long as it does not end in total apostasy. They believe doubt “is sometimes a necessary path to spiritual maturity” (169). Therefore, they wish “to teach Christians to doubt well” (222). The authors, however, fail to recognize that doubting God is a sin. While many saints in the Old and New Testaments distrusted God at times, they were never commended for this action. Rather, they were rebuked for having “little faith” (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). James also exhorted his readers: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . but let him ask in faith nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (1:5–8). Scripture is clear that doubters of God ought not to be commended, but rather admonished to cry out, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

Apart from this weakness, the authors do an excellent job analyzing deconstructionism and cautioning Christians not to baptize the term as a synonym for biblical reformation (19).³ They also do good work critiquing scholars in the “evangelical deconstruction project,”⁴ who “tend to appeal primarily to sociology and history rather than Scripture” to determine what is right or wrong (144–152). Some readers may wish Childers and Barnett had included further discussion on those who supposedly do not deconstruct yet claim to de-church, decenter, decolonize, and/or disentangle their faith. Are such individuals truly reforming in accordance with Scripture, or are they moving towards primitivism, antinomianism, and postmodernism? Also, what should Christians make of the seemingly high number of exvangelicals formerly from Charismatic or CCM? Toward the end of the book Childers, a former singer with ZOEgirl, acknowledges that “if you combine depression, the tension of celebrity, the shallowness of so much of the commercial Christian world, the full realization of your own brokenness, and some bad church experiences, you are ripe for deconstructionism” (246). Many would add emotionalism to her list.

Mature believers reading this book may be convicted of the need to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15). They likewise may feel compelled to pray more earnestly for those under their care, that Satan would not sift them like wheat (Luke 22:31–32). Pastors especially may be encouraged to preach a more robust theology and practice among their flocks, and to call them to “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ

² “Our Journey of Faith Deconstruction,” accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+VI8b3YeePZA> (quotation starts at 3:53).

³ “There are a number of reasons why the word *deconstruction* should not be baptized, redeemed, or Christianized to mean something healthy or positive. First, what pastors call ‘good deconstruction’ (i.e., using the Scriptures to challenge the ideas you hold) doesn’t match the common use of the word in the culture, which usually calls for the rejection of Scripture as a standard. . . . Second, when people redefine words, the first casualty is clarity, and communication is compromised” (19, 21).

⁴ Particularly Kristen Kobes Du Mez (author of *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*), Jacob Alan Cook (author of *Worldview Theory, Whiteness, and the Future of Evangelical Faith*), and Beth Allison Barr (author of *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*).

is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust ye shall know that we are not reprobates” (2 Cor 13:5–6, cf. Heb 10:38–39).⁵

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⁵ Readers may also wish to further their studies on this topic by reading John Owen’s classic, abridged and made easy to read by R. J. K. Law: *The Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel*, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2021).

Atherstone, Andrew, and David Ceri Jones, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Fundamentalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 715pp. + 20pp. (back matter).

Since the publication of Ernest Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism* in 1970, there has been a renaissance in historical studies of American fundamentalism. This hefty volume is the culmination of over fifty years of scrutiny of the movement. It is not a perfect work, but it provides a summary of relevant scholarship and makes a significant contribution to the literature.

In writing about fundamentalism, the handbook wrestles with a problem that plagues every scholar dealing with this subject—definition. Exactly what is fundamentalism, and who deserves the label *fundamentalist*? Many writers within the fundamentalist movement define fundamentalism in terms of their own practice and that of their constituency, which is limiting. One could limit a study to “card-carrying” fundamentalists, those who openly identify with the movement, but does such a delimitation do full justice to the movement? Brian Stanley puts the matter succinctly: “Defining fundamentalism, and distinguishing it from other styles of conservative Protestantism, is no straightforward task, as this Handbook well illustrates” (495).

The editors survey the definitions that have appeared in the scholarly literature (3–18), but they do not decide on a single option, instead allowing each author discretion. One result of this editorial decision, however, is that the contributors to this volume are rather diverse in their approaches. Paul Emory Putz blends common theological and sociological approaches as he identifies “common patterns” of fundamentalists (which he agrees are not universal), including “a predominantly white racial identity, a belief in dispensationalism, a commitment to Keswick spirituality, and an outsider perspective—a sense of cultural marginalization—influenced by adherence to strict behavioral standards” (419). Robert Glenn Howard and Megan Zahay are more theological as they note four “traits” of fundamentalists: “biblical literalism, spiritual rebirth, the need to evangelize, and the ‘end times’ interpretation of biblical prophecy” (652). Sometimes the interpretations clash. D. G. Hart gives a nuanced argument for why Presbyterian confessionalists such as J. Gresham Machen are not really “fundamentalists” (92–107), while John Maiden anachronistically identifies B. B. Warfield as a fundamentalist (167).

Mark Hutchinson deals adroitly with the challenge of definition. He notes that the term *fundamentalism* can be useful “on a local level” but “imposed across the board as a form of multipurpose ‘swiss army knife’ term, it can be misleading” (688). He identifies three categories of definition: “self-identifying” (those who actually label themselves as fundamentalist), “criteria identified” (those classified as fundamentalist, often by outsiders, by adherence to similar doctrines and ideas), and “other identified” (a term from outside the ideology, such as academics and journalists, to describe fundamentalists as “other” than the observer, those “not on our side”) (691–95).

A particular problem faced by the authors is what to do with movements that are similar yet distinct, those sharing some characteristics and even sources with historic fundamentalism but rarely defining themselves in this way. Gerald King, for instance, sees fundamentalism, the Holiness movement, and Pentecostalism as sharing common roots in Pietism (133). Yet how far does such a

common source allow these movements to be treated together? Do we lose precision by generalizing too much?

The book has many strengths. Part I, “Historical Developments,” may be the best section, with first-rate studies that include considerations of *The Fundamentals* (by Geoffrey R. Treloar), big-tent revivalism (Josh McMullen, summarizing his longer monograph¹), Spurgeon and the Downgrade Controversy (Thomas Breimaier), the Scopes trial (Constance Areson Clark), Princeton and fundamentalism (D. G. Hart), and fundamentalism in Northern Ireland (Andrew R. Holmes). Each of these articles provides full accounts of the chosen topic with relevant and perceptive observations. Furthermore, the bibliographies in nearly every article are unmatched and a rich resource for anyone wanting to read more about fundamentalism.

Considering how often studies of fundamentalism focus on political or socio-economic interpretations, the handbook provides a commendable emphasis on theology (219–342), although it concentrates on topics seen as peculiar to fundamentalism, such as inerrancy, creationism, conversion, ecumenism/separatism, and premillennialism. The inclusion of conversion is notable, showing how fundamentalism draws from the broader evangelical heritage. An approach that would further enrich study of the topic would be to discuss the points that fundamentalists themselves identified as their “fundamentals” and what they taught about them. Doing so would give fair place to the role of theology in the movement.

Other topics may be useful to the reader, depending on his or her interests. Readers can delve into essays on education (home school, higher education), cultural practices (alcohol, popular music, sports), current issues (abortion, the environment), as well as standard academic categories (gender, sexuality, class, race). The drawback with some of these topics goes back to the challenge of definition. Not all of the individuals and groups discussed under these headings would identify themselves specifically as fundamentalists (Pentecostals, conservative Anglicans, CCM artists, etc.). The reader will have to discern.

Because the volume addresses such a wide range, conservative Christian readers will find some ideas that challenge them and others that they challenge. Yet there are certainly insights to be gained. Emily Suzanne Johnson, for example, notes how fundamentalists (and other conservatives) shifted from a traditional hierarchical view of gender roles to a more nuanced complementarian approach (450). She credits this development to the fact that women influenced the movement by filling the leadership roles allowed them in the fundamentalist subculture. But one might also suggest the change displays the tendency of Christians to respond to cultural challenges by closer attention to the testimony of Scripture. One of the values of history is helping Christians discern which ideas they hold are merely cultural and which are actually based on Scripture.

Of course, there are problems with the volume. Often the authors judge fundamentalism not on its own terms but according to the authors’ viewpoint. There are specific critiques as well. Paul Gutjahr repeats Stewart Cole’s mistake from *History of Fundamentalism* (1931) that the Niagara Bible

¹ Josh McMullen, *Under the Big Top: Big Tent Revivalism and American Culture, 1885–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Conference put forth a five-point summary of essentials (226), when the “five points of fundamentalism” are a later development. Also, although C. I. Scofield attended the Niagara Bible Conference and addressed it, he did not lead it (227).² However, almost none of the contributions in this book are without some value. It provides an important resource in studying the history and nature of fundamentalism.

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² To give Guthjar credit, however, he has a brief, clear discussion of the Common Sense Realism school of philosophy—the idea that “all people enjoyed a ‘common sense’ that enabled thoughtful observers to recognize truth when they saw it” and that in addition to the normal human senses all people shared “a common moral sense . . . that intuitively moved them to act on truth when they encountered it” (220). Those who encounter discussions of Common Sense Realism in their study of American Christianity will appreciate his description.

Hummel, Daniel G. *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. 360pp. + 40pp. (back matter).

Histories of dispensationalism vary in tone, often depending on whether they originate from within the movement or without. Charles Ryrie's *Dispensationalism Today* (1965, later revised in 1995 as simply *Dispensationalism*) is a classic statement from within, defining and defending the movement and providing some historical context. *Progressive Dispensationalism* (2000) by Craig Blasing and Darrell Bock maintains a respectful tone even as it seeks to revise older versions of dispensationalism. On the other side is C. Norman Kraus's *Dispensationalism in America* (1958), which is, to put it mildly, unsympathetic. This work by Daniel Hummel leans in the direction of Kraus and is certainly not history from within, but Hummel has written one of the fullest histories of dispensationalism.

Foremost among its strengths is the book's comprehensiveness. Hummel helpfully lays out the origins and development of the dispensationalist system, doing a fine job of describing the development of both scholarly and popular dispensationalism. He explores thoroughly the views of John Nelson Darby, one of the chief fountainheads of the movement, showing his influence but also how later interpreters modified his system, selecting and rejecting points according to their needs. For example, he points out how Darby emphasized reliance on spiritual illumination in understanding the Scripture as opposed to the devotion of later dispensationalists to a plain reading of the Bible (46). Likewise, Hummel observes that later dispensationalists did not generally adhere to Darby's idea of the ruin of the church, that is, that the modern institutional church is irredeemably corrupt, necessitating that believers follow a highly decentralized pattern of church order like that practiced by the Plymouth Brethren. An interesting fact Hummel notes is that the term *dispensationalism* itself dates only from 1927 in the writings of Philip Mauro, an acerbic critic of the movement. Hummel in fact prefers the label "new premillennialism" (as opposed to the older historicist premillennialism) as a descriptor prior to 1927.

The work offers numerous other helpful particulars. Hummel notes that along with the increasingly systematized dispensationalists, such as the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary, there were also what one might call "sort-of dispensationalists," such as John R. Rice and Bob Jones Sr., who favored pretribulationism and end-times declension but were otherwise not system dispensationalists. They were an important if underappreciated factor in American dispensationalism.

Hummel also describes—and indicts—popular, or "pop," dispensationalism (or as one of my former colleagues labeled it, "Christian science fiction"). He describes particularly Hal Lindsey (*Late Great Planet Earth*) and the writing team of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins of the *Left Behind* series. He points out Tim LaHaye's influence in both religious and popular culture, such as how LaHaye extrapolates principles of dispensationalism for current application. For example, LaHaye taught a "pretribulation tribulation," an oppressive "humanist tribulation" against Christians just before the rapture (272). LaHaye's idea highlights a problem with popular dispensationalism. Despite the argument of dispensationalists that there are no prophetic signs prior to the rapture of the church, many still presume to find signs and insist that the event must come soon. Hummel quotes an apt observation from Carl Henry: "Fundamentalism was not wrong in assuming a final consummation of

history, but rather in assuming this is it” (229). Christ’s imminent return means that one should be ready for the coming of Christ but that one must also be ready to wait.

Hummel’s work, however, has flaws along with its virtues. Some are simple mistakes of fact. Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III) was the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, not his cousin. Bob Jones Sr. never became “an independent Baptist.” The famous filmmaker is Orson *Welles*, not “Wells.” J. Frank Norris had nothing to do with the founding of the John Birch Society, dying six years before it was founded. Baptist John Piper is not a member of the PCA. Likewise, it is odd to refer to “centuries” of postmillennial consensus on the Bible in the 1800s when the postmillennial system was not that old (53). One might also debate some of the terminology. Hummel refers to academic dispensationalism as “scholastic” instead of “scholarly.” The connotation of “scholastic” recalls the common perception of medieval Catholic theology or Protestant orthodoxy of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as arid and narrowly punctilious, a label that could slant perceptions.

One can identify some problems even in the author’s title. The book might better be called the “rise and *decline*” of dispensationalism rather than its “rise and *fall*.” Even Hummel admits that although dispensationalism has passed its height of influence (perhaps in the middle of the twentieth century), there are still advocates of dispensationalism in some schools, churches, publications, and other organizations.

In reckoning with the theological impact of dispensationalism, Hummel simplifies a complicated narrative in tracing what we would call “easy-believism” primarily to the “free-grace” teachings associated with many dispensationalists. The roots of easy-believism are broader, found more in the democratization of American theology associated with the nineteenth century and particularly Charles Finney’s version of the New England Theology, which Hummel himself acknowledges as part of “the American revivalist tradition” (11). That the free-grace teaching contributed to the concept of easy-believism is highly likely, but there are other factors to consider. Also to be noted is that nearly all of the early dispensationalists, including J. N. Darby, sound rather Calvinistic on soteriology (as Hummel himself notes).

This discussion of free-grace teaching suggests a problem with the work, a tendency to stress too greatly the larger impact of dispensationalism. To justify the subtitle of the book, “How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation,” the author suggests effects of dispensationalism on American culture greater perhaps than the evidence will bear. For example, he claims that dispensationalists played a significant role in fostering the sentiment for national reunion between North and South after the Civil War in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a sentiment that ignored the civil rights of African Americans. He cites James L. Brookes and D. L. Moody as particular examples. Undoubtedly some (perhaps many) of these premillennial leaders felt that way, but was such a concept really key to their theological agenda? And were they markedly influential in promoting that sentiment? It is too much to say that sectional reconciliation was a “project by white northern evangelicals” (348) as though it were their creation, and they were its mainstay. The tendency in American society was strong and far from dependent on certain religious leaders. Christian leaders undoubtedly shared a range of ideas common (and sometimes bad) in their era, but that is a very different matter from viewing them as a source. Yet in defense of the author, it does appear that some

ideas derived from dispensationalism such as the rapture and the idea of an end-times individual leader known as the Antichrist do seem to have permeated American culture to a great extent. How wide their influence is may be debated.

Despite these criticisms, one must recognize the value in how the author pulls together so much history into one coherent narrative. I would add this book to the reading list for students of the history of dispensationalism, perhaps in connection with other histories.

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Porter, Stanley E., and Alan E. Kurschner, eds. *The Future Restoration of Israel: A Response to Supersessionism*. McMaster Biblical Studies Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023. 396pp. + 20pp. (front matter) + 32pp. (back matter).

Volume 10 in the McMaster Biblical Studies Series is a collection of twenty-one essays from a rather eclectic assortment of scholars who, despite whatever other differences may divide them, agree on the title issue. The contributors are by no means uniformly dispensational. The list of authors includes the more predictable (Bock, Chisholm, Glaser, Hultberg, Kaiser, Saucy, Vanlaningham) along with an intriguing range of other specialists. Most of the essays are categorized under four headings: The Covenants and Israel's Future, The Nations and Israel's Future, Paul and Israel's Future, and Jesus and Israel's Future. These are capped off by a brace of essays on the historical and evangelistic impact of supersessionism.

Porter and Kurschner explain in their introductory essay that although the English term *supersessionism* is only a couple of centuries old, the concept dates to the second century and finds its “definitive statement” in Augustine. The concept has historically been fueled by varying motivations, from a desire to see Israel judged for its rejection of Messiah (*punitive* supersessionism) to a belief that Christ entirely fulfilled Jewish prophecy and law (*economic* supersessionism). This volume aims to rebut any “view that denies any future divine promise and blessing to national Israel”—including the position that admits a future revival of individual Jews but rejects any restoration of Israel as a national entity (5). The editors present a concise history of supersessionist theology, from its punitive expressions among the church fathers, to the Reformation's inheritance of its Augustinian expression, to its “ugly theological turn . . . in the early nineteenth century” (8). The introduction concludes with a helpfully succinct, one-paragraph summary of each of the remaining twenty essays. It is impossible in the allotted space to overview every essay, so this review will necessarily be selective.

Walter Kaiser (“The Christian Church: Built on the Foundation of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants”) expresses amazement that within the span of a mere century, the early church could have “changed so dramatically from what the Jewish Apostle Paul had taught” in Romans 11 about the partiality and temporality of the Jews' fall from grace and the irrevocability of God's promises to the fathers, to the confident assertions of Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and others that God had altogether abandoned the Jews and redirected all their promises to the mostly Gentile Christian church (38–39). Kaiser traces this early error “to an incorrect conclusion about the subjects, contents, and duration of the Abrahamic covenant” (41), and he emphasizes the implication of Genesis 15:17 regarding the absolute “unconditional, unilateral” eternality of that covenant including the land promises that are reiterated throughout Scripture (43)—while effectively countering the misreadings of Gary Burge, Chris Wright (42–43), and N. T. Wright (46). Israel's restoration to the land has nothing to do with Israel's deservedness and everything to do with the integrity and glory of the God who promised (50).

Michael Vanlaningham (“A Response to Progressive Covenantalists' [and Others'] View of the Land Promises for Israel”) rebuts a series of five key assertions from Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum that undergird the progressive-covenantal perspective. For Vanlaningham, the bottom line is that this

view relies on “overly-subtle, perhaps even surreptitious caveats” folded into God’s land promises that would seem to imply that “God lacks integrity in keeping his promises” (83).¹

Darrell Bock (“Israel’s Future as a Nation and Reconciliation”) surveys a series of prophetic passages (both OT and NT) that particularly highlight Israel’s central role of international blessing and reconciliation. Like Vanlaningham, Bock argues that at stake in this debate is “the character of God and his revelation. . . . The veracity of God and the clarity of his communication are both in play,” for “he stakes his reputation upon completing this promise” of Israel’s future restoration as a nation (102–3). This does not imply, of course, that non-restorationists reject or devalue God’s veracity; but it does imply that such a view undermines the clarity of God’s communication, resulting in a redefinition of God’s veracity.²

Mark Saucy posits the intriguing assertion that having a national identity “is an intrinsic dimension of what it means to be human according to the image of God.” Consequently, “without a re-born nation [of Israel] and the global, culture-level restoration it represents *for this earth*, messianic soteriology does not claim the fullness of human life that Jesus intended when he stated, ‘salvation is of the Jews’” (126, emphasis original). Saucy explores the theocratic role of Israel both against the backdrop of the concept of national identity established in Genesis, and in the light of the NT’s eschatological “soteriological narrative” of the “salvation of our nationed humanity in Christ” (ibid.). From the historically programmatic Psalm 2 with its portrayal of the *nations* raging against Yahweh until his Anointed inherits the *nations* and rules over them, to Daniel’s depiction of Messiah’s eternal dominion over “every people, *nation*, and language,” to Jesus’ call to disciple the *nations*, to “John’s Apocalypse . . . with its narrative-controlling place at the end of Scripture’s story and deep roots in the Old Testament” (137), which declares Christ as “the ruler of the *kings* of the earth” (1:5) who comes to “strike the *nations*” (19:15–16) and in whose light the *nations* (not merely a mass of regenerated individuals) will walk (21:23–24) and experience healing as *nations* (22:2)—the soteriological metanarrative of Scripture never devolves into individualism but maintains its focus on humans as *nations*. In that regard, the *national* restoration of a regenerated Israel under the New Covenant is essential; “in its future role on the world’s stage, national Israel will lead the way . . . as the exemplar of the greatness of God’s name in salvation” (139).

Alan Kurschner (“Should the 144,000 in Revelation 7:3–8 Be Identified as the Great Multitude in 7:9–17: A Response to Gregory K. Beale”) offers a thorough, multi-faceted, and exegetically grounded defense of the 144,000 as consisting specifically of ethnic Jews. His core argument is that “the narrative logic depicts . . . the appearance of the great multitude in 7:9–17” as “*concurrent*” with “the sealing in 7:3–8”—rather than a “*recapitulation*”—indicating that these are “two distinct groups

¹ For a thorough treatment of this subject see Wade Loring Kuhlewind Jr., “‘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., Bob Jones University, 2018).

² If even this language sounds unfair or extreme, consider P. E. Satterthwaite: In view of the OT’s linkage between resurrection and national restoration (e.g., Ezek 37; Dan 12), the fact that Jesus’ resurrection did not trigger Israel’s national restoration was “a startling development which entailed a *radically revised understanding of God’s faithfulness to His promises*, particularly in respect to the nation of Israel.” “Biblical History,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 49 (emphasis added).

and not two different perspectives of the same [international] group” (143–44, emphasis original). His rebuttal of Beale addresses the latter’s illegitimate-totality-transfer fallacy in his understanding of *doulos* in 7:3, clarifies the purpose of the sealing, distinguishes between the wrath of the beast and the wrath of God, explores the import of *meta touto* in 7:1, and refutes Beale’s conflation of the “four winds” in 7:1 with the four horsemen in 6:1–8.

Stanley Porter (“Romans 9–11 and Especially Romans 11:26 in the Context of Paul’s Argument in Romans”) summarizes four major views regarding Romans 11:26 (“and so/thus all Israel shall be saved”). (1) The Ecclesiastical View—the standard, historical supersessionist view held by Calvin, Harnack, Barth, N. T. Wright, Richard Hays, *et al.*—interprets the phrase as a reference to the international church, which has replaced Israel itself as the people of God. (2) The Eschatological View (Bruce, Cranfield, Dunn, Stuhlmacher, Moo, Schreiner, *et al.*) sees the phrase as an expressly “ethnic designation” denoting “a mass-conversion of Jews at or just prior to the Parousia” (220). (3) The Remnant View (“relatively unpopular”) also sees “Israel” as an ethnic designation but interprets it as the salvation of the Jewish remnant throughout time. (4) The Two-Covenants View (followed by adherents of the “Radical New Perspective”) implies two covenantal means of security or salvation (a curious feature, given the long-lived demonizations of old-line dispensationalism for that very accusation). Having suggested both strengths and (especially) weaknesses in each of these views, Porter then propounds his own argument for seeing “all Israel” in 11:26 as referring to “the new Israel as an extension and reconstituted ethnic Israel based upon ethnic Israel as its root or base and including Gentiles, all of whom have attained salvation by the same means” (228)—by virtue of Paul’s all-important olive tree analogy, which organically connects both Jews and Gentiles to the patriarchal root. Porter differentiates this view from replacement theology and from the purely technically ethnic view. There are some explanatory quirks: in 11:1 *mē genoito* means “Indeed not,” but in 11:11 the same expression means “Indeed *or probably* not” (225, emphasis added); in 11:26 “Paul says, there is an expectation that ‘all Israel’ *can* be saved” (227, emphasis added). Porter also resorts to what seems an astonishing example of question-begging: “Paul by referring to the ‘new Israel’ makes clear that this is an Israel newly reconstituted” (228). Perhaps it is the implication of the quotation marks that makes the statement seem more egregious than intended, but Paul does not, in fact, refer to a “new Israel” at all, but to “all Israel.” While the essay does counter supersessionism, it makes no definitive contribution to titular focus of the book (*The Future Restoration of Israel*).

Michael Brown (“The ‘Seed’ as Christ in Galatians 3:16 and the Wrong Deductions of Replacement Theology”) focuses his attention on a specific interpretation of a specific text by a specific (and more recent) species of supersessionism. The specific species of supersessionism is known variously as *fulfillment theology*, *inclusion theology*, or *transference theology*—though adherents (Brown identifies, e.g., Storms, Lehrer, Gordon, Burge, Blume, N. T. Wright) often expressly disavow any connection to replacement theology (278–79). The specific text is, of course, Galatians 3:16. And the specific interpretation claims (a) that Christ (as the new and consummate Israel) is the true recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant land promise *instead of* the biological descendants of Abraham so that the original terms and recipients of the covenant become obsolete and irrelevant; or (b) that Christ himself *is* the land (with the same results); or (c) both! While other passages are marshaled for additional

support (e.g., John 15), “the locus classicus” for this view is Galatians 3:16 (280). Brown notes that such an interpretation contradicts not merely the Abrahamic Covenant passages but a whole swath of OT Scriptures that perpetuate the land promises, as well as Paul’s express argument in Romans 11:28–29. (I would suggest that, even more significantly, it also contradicts the express reiteration of the land promises within the very context of the New Covenant itself—Jer 32:37, 41; Ezek 36:33; 37:25; 38:28; Isa 60:21.)

What was missing, however, from Brown’s arguments (indeed, from most arguments surrounding Gal 3:16) is the astonishing specificity of Paul’s citation. The apostle does not argue for the phrase “to thy seed” but “*and* to thy seed.” The “and” is odd, unnecessary, and superfluous . . . unless Paul has a particular point and passage (or passages) from the LXX in mind. The specific phrase that he cites (*kai tō spermati sou*) appears in only four Abrahamic Covenant passages (Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7; 48:4), and in every case, the phrase explicitly has the eternal land-promise component of the covenant in view. That Paul has the land promise in view is obvious when he refers to “the inheritance” in 3:17–18. For fulfillment-inclusion-transference theologians to conclude from Galatians 3:16 that Christ *himself* is the land is exegetically and theologically bizarre; likewise (as Brown rightly asserts), their claim that Christ becomes the *sole inheritor* of the land promise to the exclusion of all the rest of Abraham’s seed bristles with complications as well. Their view that Christ, as both biologically the Seed of Abraham and theologically the Son of God, is the *consummate* Heir of the Abrahamic land promise is, indeed, a thorny problem, but it is a problem for fulfillment theologians themselves. They have claimed much more than they realize. One could hardly posit a more potent guarantee of a coming earthly kingdom where Christ will rule over a restored Israel than to argue that Christ will *personally* inherit the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant—and then, as Son of Man, share that inheritance and reign with “the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7).

This review has only scratched the surface selectively, but it has attempted to scratch a bit deeper here and there. Thanks to the scope of its essays, the depth of their arguments, and the theological breadth of its contributors, *The Future Restoration of Israel* repays an attentive reading.

Layton Talbert

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Echevarría, Miguel G., and Benjamin P. Laird. *40 Questions about the Apostle Paul*. 40 Questions Series. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2023. 306pp. + 13pp. (back matter).

Miguel G. Echevarría is an associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has written books on the Pauline and Johannine Epistles. He holds a PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary. Benjamin P. Laird is an associate professor of biblical studies at the John Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University. He holds a PhD from the University of Aberdeen and a ThM and MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has written several books on the NT canon.

Unlike other books in this series (such as *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*), the articles are not attributed directly to one of the co-authors; therefore, it is impossible to determine what each author would affirm. The questions are grouped into three sections.

The first section contains eleven questions concerning the apostle Paul's pre-Christian and Christian life. Questions in this section address where Paul was born and raised, what we know about his family, his education, his motivation to destroy the church, his early years of ministry, his first missionary journey, his second and third missionary journeys, his final years of life, his death, his missionary strategy, and his primary opponents.

The second section consists of twelve questions about the writing and authority of Paul's letters. Questions address when and where Paul wrote his letters, whether Paul's companions assisted in the writing and distribution of his letters, whether Paul's letters resembled the style and structure of contemporary letters, when and how Paul's writings were first collected and published, whether Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews, what happened to Paul's lost letters, why some scholars question the authenticity of certain Pauline canonical letters, what the basis is for affirming the authenticity of disputed Pauline letters, whether Paul thought his letters were Scripture, why Peter said some of Paul's writings were "hard to understand," what sources Paul used, and how Paul used the OT.

The third section consists of seventeen questions about Paul's theology. The first question in this section addresses whether there is a center to Paul's theology. Others address his Christology, his view of atonement, conversion, baptism, the Lord's Supper, his understanding of the relationship between the law and the gospel, the role of faith and works in salvation, his eschatology, the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), the strengths and weaknesses of the NPP, whether *pistis Christou* should be translated as "faith in Christ" or "faithfulness of Christ," Paul's view regarding marriage, singleness and divorce, his teaching regarding the role of women in the home and church, whether Paul taught that some spiritual gifts would cease, his teachings about slavery and racial divisions, and whether Paul believed that the church replaced Israel.

Several chapters in this book are very helpful. The chapters on Paul's books and background are excellent resources that could be easily integrated into a NT survey course. The reflection questions for each chapter are helpful as well. The first three questions about where Paul was born and raised, what we know about Paul's family, and what we know about Paul's education are particularly valuable.

The book's best chapters are the two chapters about the New Perspective on Paul and the meaning of *pistis Christou*. In particular, the chapter on the strengths and weaknesses of the New Perspective on Paul articulates these clearly. The strengths of the NPP include its emphasis on Second Temple literature, a positive portrayal of Judaism, and the interpretation of Paul within his Jewish context. The weaknesses of the NPP include its strict assumptions about Jewish soteriology, its overemphasis on the role of covenant in Pauline thought, and its mishandling of the works of the law. The chapter on *pistis Christou* does an excellent job of contrasting the arguments for the objective (faith in Christ) and subjective genitives (faithfulness of Christ). The authors helpfully show that the arguments are not definitive and that good conservative scholars are on both sides of the issue.

The only major problem with the book was the last chapter about whether the church has replaced Israel. The authors do not believe that the church has replaced Israel (302) but argue for an over-realized continuity between the church and Israel (302–4). The chapter draws a firm conclusion without providing adequate evidence. The authors' strongest argument is the idea of the nations' being blessed through the promises of Abraham (Gen 12:3; 15:6; Rom 4:11–12; Gal 3:7–9). The authors evaluate the meaning of the phrase “and . . . the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 and argue that the best sense of *καί* would be “that is” rather than a connective “and” (304–5), but this is the *least* grammatically likely of the available options. The authors claim that since there is no distinction in the body of Christ elsewhere in Galatians, there can be none here. In the opinion of this reviewer, their conclusion does not entail from the evidence. Many people who accept a distinction between the church and Israel, such as dispensationalists, acknowledge that there is no distinction in the church. The authors provide a footnote to Craig Keener's Galatians commentary for further options, but they draw definitive conclusions that are inadequately warranted. Regardless of the theological position of this reader, he will want to see a more adequate explanation of this issue.

The book's wealth of information and insightful analysis make it a worthwhile addition to any library—accessible to readers at all levels of study.

Joel Thomas

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Jobs, Karen H. *1 Peter*. 2nd ed. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 335pp. + 13pp. (back matter).

Karen Jobs was the professor of New Testament Greek and Greek exegesis at Wheaton College from 2005 until her retirement in 2015. She received her PhD in biblical hermeneutics from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1995. Her research interests are biblical hermeneutics, the Septuagint, Hebrews, the general epistles, and Esther. This volume is a revised edition of Karen Jobs's *1 Peter* commentary in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. The volume is a fine example of the series. It does an excellent job of fulfilling the series' goals by packaging excellent scholarship in a form accessible to scholars, pastors, and even the educated layperson. The commentary's first edition (2005) was already one of the better commentaries on 1 Peter but was due for revision. The overall structure of the commentary is unchanged, consisting of three sections.

The first section is a sixty-one-page introduction. Topics discussed in the introduction include the significance of the letter, date/authorship (apostolic, pseudonymous, or both), challenges to Petrine authorship (the Greek of 1 Peter, the *Sitz im Leben* of 1 Peter, 1 Peter's dependence on Paul, and the spread of Christianity), evidence for Petrine authorship, destination, recipients, the origin of 1 Peter, the purpose of the letter, the use of the OT in 1 Peter, major themes/theology, literary unity/genre, and an outline of the book. This introduction does an excellent job of giving an overview of the significant issues confronting students of 1 Peter.

The second section is the commentary, which is 260 pages long and divided into five sections. The first segment is 1:1–2, the greeting. The second segment is 1:3–12, the letter's opening, a reassuring message to God's people. The third segment, 2:11–4:11, discusses why and how God's people should live godly lives. The fourth segment, 4:12–5:11, is a message of consolation to the suffering church. The last segment, 5:12–14, is the letter's closing and greetings.

The last section is an excursus of fourteen pages. This excursus is a discussion of the nature of 1 Peter's Greek. The principal section of the excursus is a syntactical study consisting of seventeen criteria. The criteria are applied to 1 Peter, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. The analysis is displayed in a helpful chart on page 333. This analysis in the excursus attempts to demonstrate from the Greek syntax of 1 Peter any evidence of bilingual interference. Jobs concludes that there is definite evidence of a Semitic influence in the Greek of 1 Peter.

Two notable features from the first edition are carried over. One is Jobs's proposal that the recipients of 1 Peter were converted elsewhere besides Asia Minor (most likely Rome). Jobs argues that the converts were living in Asia Minor because Claudius used periodic expulsion of undesirables to colonize different areas of the empire to keep the peace in Rome. Jobs admits that this is a minority position. Still, she thinks it is the best explanation for how Christianity spread to Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia, since most of these regions were not evangelized by any known apostle. The second feature is her in-depth analysis of LXX usage in 1 Peter. She specifically compares the uses in 1 Peter against their original LXX context.

There are five notable additions to the second edition. First, Jobs provides a refreshed translation based on the NA28 Greek text. The author's translation is used in the commentary unless otherwise

noted. Second, the author adds additional text-critical information for some OT quotations. Third, she standardizes references to the Greek OT. Jobes refers to the Pentateuch as the LXX and the rest of the books as the OG (Old Greek). The entire Greek OT is referred to as LXX/OG. Fourth, bibliographic information was revised and supplemented. Lastly, a section on the use of the OT in 1 Peter was added to the introduction.

There are five positive aspects to this commentary. The first positive aspect is accessibility to many different types of readers, as only a basic level of Greek is required. It is helpful for readers of all levels, just like the original 2005 commentary. The second positive aspect is its emphasis on the argument of 1 Peter rather than critical issues. It is undoubtedly essential that any commentary deal with important critical issues. Still, it is more important not to let the evaluation of the critical issues interfere with the explanation of the argument of a book. The third positive aspect is Jobes's discussion concerning the arrival of Christianity in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia. The fourth positive aspect is the in-depth analysis of OT quotations, which directly affects exegesis. This is a complex area in NT exegesis, and Jobes does an excellent job navigating the issues. The last positive aspect is the excursus on the quality of the Greek. The excursus is very helpful in refuting one of the major arguments against Petrine authorship. It provides strong evidence against the prevalent idea that the Greek of 1 Peter was too good for a first-century fisherman to write.

This reviewer sees only one negative aspect in this commentary: There does not seem to be enough extra content to justify the revision. I would recommend that a person who does not have the original 1 Peter commentary buy the more recent edition. Still, I am unsure how valuable this second edition would be for someone who owns the original commentary. The only exception to this caveat would be scholars specializing in the Petrine correspondence, who will want to get this second edition for its updated bibliography.

Joel Thomas

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Croft, Brian, and Ronnie Martin. *The Unhurried Pastor: Redefining Productivity for a More Sustainable Ministry*. N.p.: Good Book, 2024. 169pp. + 4pp. (back matter).

While pulpit committees breathlessly search for the next Charles Spurgeon, pastors are busy scrambling for the exits. The confirming surveys are relentless in their annual tracking of the sobering trend that transcends educational and denominational boundaries.¹ Pastors want out, and while many are only eyeing the doors, increasing percentages of a diminishing number of pastors are passing through them. All of this points to an alarming ministry exodus, one more notable than nearly any since, well, *the* exodus.

Desiring to encourage pastors in their ministries, Brian Croft and Ronnie Martin have collaborated on *The Unhurried Pastor*, a most helpful appeal for pastors to assess themselves spiritually and their philosophy of ministry scripturally. More than a decade ago, Paul Tripp described the ministry as a “dangerous calling.”² He captured how much temptation lurks in a sacred calling when pastors so readily neglect to nurture their own spiritual lives, instead giving into the age-old lure of proving themselves by shaping their lives and schedule around the fool’s gold of men’s approval. The danger is certainly not a new one. We have often been warned. Philip Spener (1635–1705) wrote to a German Lutheran pastoral community in 1765, “How many a Christian minister, when by God’s grace he first enters upon his office, has the experience that many of the things to which he devotes hard work and great pains prove to be useless, that he must begin all over again to reflect on what is more necessary, and that he wishes he had known this before and had been wisely and carefully directed to it.”³

Several decades before Spener, in 1689 after Puritan pastors had been newly restored to their congregations following the Glorious Revolution, John Flavel (1627–1691) wrote “A humble supplication to the *more aged*, and as an Exhortation to *younger* Ministers and Candidates,”⁴ in which he urged his fellow ministers in England concerning their renewed opportunity to exemplify scriptural ministerial priorities: “He will make the best divine that studies on his knees,” “Take care you put not that last, which should be first; and that, again, first, which should be last,” “A head well instructed is much to be desired; but a sanctified heart is absolutely necessary,” and “It is one thing to be learned in the truths of Christ, another to be taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

¹ See “38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year,” Barna Group (2021), accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>; “Pastors Share Top Reasons They’ve Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year,” Barna Group (2022), accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/>; Peter Smith, “US pastors struggle with post-pandemic burnout. Survey shows half considered quitting since 2020,” AP News, January 11, 2024, accessed August 17, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/christian-clergy-burnout-pandemic-survey-24ee46327438ff46b074d234ffe2f58c>; and Darryl Dash, “The Coming Pastoral Shortage,” The Gospel Coalition Canadian Edition, February 15, 2023, <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/straight-paths/the-coming-pastoral-shortage/>.

² *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

³ Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. and ed. Theodore J. Tappert (1964; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 54.

⁴ *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 4:15.

It is fitting that most of the final words Jesus uttered before his ascension were uttered to those who would be church leaders. His words are clear and simple—shepherd my sheep, teach, baptize, preach the gospel. Those who become so busy redefining ministry forget or at least overlook the heart of his counsel every bit as much as the religious leaders of Jesus’ day did. Jesus’ words not only command; they anticipate our propensity to distraction. Martin cautions us that today pastoral life is “hijacked by success driven strategies, edgy entrepreneurs, and leadership seminar gurus who tempt pastors to reinvent the pastoral life into something that can be measured on an Excel spreadsheet” (35).

The blessing of *The Unhurried Pastor* is that a tandem of contemporary ministerial brothers are willing to call attention yet again to the sin that so easily besets pastors and urge them to “keep a close watch” on themselves (1 Tim 4:16). Their call is not to a more lax and leisurely ministry but to a scripturally prioritized and purposeful one. Seminary students, pastors (young and old) and their wives, church leaders, and pastoral search committees all would profit wonderfully from a careful read. Martin and Croft provide a “push against the accepted busy and frantic practice of pastors today, as well as a push against our broader Western mindset, which assumes that to be productive we must always be busy, moving, and hurried” (13). Martin, in the “Preparation” and “Power” sections of the book (chapters 1–3 and 4–6 respectively), diagnoses and opens soul wounds into which he then pours the ointment of the gospel. Croft completes the book with the “Pursuit” section, with briefer chapters (7–11) of iron-sharpening counsel to structure pastoral practice that prioritizes practical biblical prescriptions. “Genuine pastoral productivity—of a kind that brings joy and longevity—is unlocked through the practices reflected in some of the titles of chapters that follow: humanity, humility, self-awareness, prayer, contemplation, silence, rest, friendship” (13). The writers blend candor with sympathy, personal transparency with brotherly love, and truth with grace to goad our remembrance that our privileged calling “lies in *being* more than *doing*” (14, emphasis original). Martin’s concluding “Daily Spiritual Health Plan” (appendix) endeavors to weave the essence of the book into a model worth perusing with care.

My own notes from this little volume fill several typed pages. I have profited from repeated readings, particularly of chapters 1–6, and as I review my notes even now, even after more than thirty years of ministry, I find myself sliding from my chair to my knees to be instructed. Below is a sampling of some of the best contributions of the authors.

1. Humanity (19–32): We must admit and submit to our God-designed limitations. We are inadequate. We are not the Messiah. “Remembering that God is the one who takes you, places you, and keeps you prevents ministry from becoming the pinnacle of your identity. It also helps remove that rather large anvil of performance-driven spirituality that rides so heavily on your back—the kind of spirituality that seeks applause from an audience other than God in order to be affirmed. God has put us where we are. *We work for him*” (24).
2. Humility (33–45): “Your care for your body and soul helps you *become* the person you’re called to *be*, before you spend even an hour doing the work of the *pastor* that people expect you to be” (37, emphasis original).

3. Hopefulness (47–59): “Waiting [on God] is putting a pause on our stirring without pausing our belief that God will not fail to deliver his goodness to us” (51).
4. Self-awareness (63–76): “Theorizing about our limitations does little good if we aren’t daily grasping the reality that God didn’t create us with hands big enough to hold *all things together*” (66, emphasis original).
5. Contemplation (77–87): “Contemplation provides the space for us to differentiate between what is true and what is not so that we develop healthier patterns of working and thinking” (79). “Prayer is the first recourse of wise people” (82).
6. Prayer (89–103): Prayer is “like water in the garden of our soul. It’s doing something beneath the surface of our being that we can’t always see but that we trust is going to produce something lovely—as long as we don’t break our habit of consistent watering” (91). “Prayer is how I experience the peace of God, protect my heart from anxiety, and reposition it to rejoice” (92).
7. Self- (soul-) care (107–21): “I have spent most of my life pretending that strength and weakness do not and cannot coexist. By God’s grace, however, I am continuing to learn that this combination is a key for living courageously and in the freedom of the gospel” (112).
8. Rest (123–28): “In fact, what I now understand to be rest and recreation I saw back then as laziness and lack of productivity” (123).
9. Silence (129–36): “Silence exposes the soul” (129).
10. Emotions (137–43): “A courageous pastor loves deeply and risks feeling deeply for others. Ultimately, it is the deeply feeling pastor who is able to stop, be still, feel with others, be present, connect on that human level, and minister God’s grace” (140).
11. Friendship (145–55): “The unhurried pastor stops and takes the time to consider their need for care and invests in the types of meaningful pastoral friendships where that care is found. Friendship is precious, but every pastor must carve out time from the demands of his schedule to cultivate it” (154–55).

Hurry to read this book . . . but read it unhurriedly. You will appreciate the understanding, empathy, and pastoral sensitivity of Martin and Croft’s timely counsel.

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Piper, John. *Foundations for Lifelong Learning: Education in Serious Joy*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 163pp. + 3pp. (front matter) + 7pp. (back matter).

Conservative Christianity has long navigated tensions regarding the importance of education for individuals, society, and the church. On one hand, where the gospel has flourished, education has followed. Throughout most of its history, the church has established and advanced Christ-centered educational institutions. On the other hand, the church has seen formal education as a barrier to faith and spiritual fervency—appropriately so when formal education prizes intellectualism over faith. *Foundations for Lifelong Learning* does not overtly address these tensions; however, John Piper makes a persuasive case for Christ-centered formal education and lifelong learning.

Piper's thesis is consistent with his other theological writings. We glorify Christ best by enjoying or treasuring him above all. Believers, therefore, should understand education as "the process of growing in our ability to join God in this ultimate purpose to glorify Jesus Christ" (2). Piper asserts "that the great purpose of lifelong learning—education in serious joy—is to magnify Christ by enjoying him above all things and in all things, with the kind of overflowing, Christlike joy, that is willing to suffer as it expands to include others in it" (6).

Piper introduces several foundational principles in the introductory chapter. First, lifelong learning finds its end in serious joy. This phrase appears to be more than another expression of Piper's "Christian hedonism" ("God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."). Piper emphasizes a willingness to suffer in order to bring others along in this great purpose. Thus, he speaks not simply of joy but of serious joy. In this sense, Piper's exposition of serious joy might find wider acceptance than has his Christian hedonism.

A second foundational principle developed in the introductory chapter is that God reveals truth through both his Word and his world. Therefore, both merit study. Piper unequivocally affirms that Scripture and general revelation are not on the same authoritative plane. The Bible is primary and irreplaceable. The Bible is the authority without which we would grope in spiritual darkness. "But the decisive, saving power and authority of God's word," writes Piper, "does not cancel out God's world. The Bible gives the decisive meaning of all things. But the Bible itself sends us over and over again into the world for learning" (10). Piper's brief but compelling demonstration of how the Bible both "commands and assumes that we will know the world, and not just the word" is one of the book's strongest features (11). Christian educators who rightly emphasize biblical authority at times too quickly dismiss what Scripture assumes, illustrates, and even commands about understanding God's material world.

Building on the introduction, the book unfolds six habits of heart and mind for learning that best accomplish the aim to treasure Christ above all else. Piper does not correlate the habits—*observation, understanding, evaluation, feeling, application, and expression*—with success in particular professions or vocational service as is the bent of much education today, secular or Christian. In other words, he does not describe how these habits of learning help one become an eloquent preacher, inspirational teacher, innovative engineer, or a skilled surgeon. But he concludes that the result of practicing these habits "is a kind of maturity that makes a person more fruitful in whatever vocation God assigns" (161). Piper's

conclusion is difficult to refute. More importantly, his conclusion is refreshing in a culture that increasingly views education or learning as mere skill development and measures its value in transactional rather than transformational terms.

Piper's development of each habit in successive chapters is both theological and practical. Scripture abounds in each chapter. Most chapters end with enumerated lists for application. The chapter on *observation* is among the best in the book as Piper explains how our natural senses can serve spiritual purposes. "The created world is not incidental to God's self-revealing purposes, as if once we see him, we can dispense with the material world" (25).¹ In his chapter on *understanding*, Piper rejects the notion that logic is both cold and incompatible with God's purposes. Jesus not only used logic but also expected his hearers to follow his logic. The chapter on *evaluation* systematically establishes the necessity of correct judgments, arguing that observation and understanding are not ends in themselves. Regenerated image-bearers can learn to make correct judgments because God himself is the final, objective standard for all evaluation.

Feeling, as a foundational habit for learning, emphasizes that learning in God's design is more than cognitive and even moral; it is affective as well. Piper argues that an individual is not fully educated until rightly ordered affections accompany true thoughts and moral decisions. The final habits—*application* and *expression*—convey that education is incomplete unless lived out in both deed and word. Again, Piper develops the habit of expression in both theological and practical ways. Those who are truly educated in serious joy live fruitful lives through stewarding well the gift of language. In other words, they speak, and they write. Ironically, it is unusual to find such a strong claim about communication in Christian writings about education.

Throughout the book, the reader will encounter both thoughtfully provocative statements and paradoxes. For example, Piper equates natural abilities and spiritual gifts when discussing God-given aptitudes. "God ordinarily gives us natural abilities because he intends to use them. 'Spiritual gifts' are often natural abilities that have been sanctified and empowered by the Holy Spirit" (133–34). When advocating for creative expression in communication, Piper addresses the paradox of eloquence in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. He contends that Paul directed his criticism at an eloquence "aimed at self-exultation." The whole of Scripture does not condemn eloquence but in fact supports it, for "the Bible is replete with a kind of eloquence that creatively uses language for greater impact" (155).

If there is a substantive limitation to *Foundations for Lifelong Learning*, it is in the scope of its development and application. A companion volume would do well to apply these habits of heart and mind more fully to other disciplines such as the arts and humanities as well as social and natural sciences. Furthermore, Piper does not address implications for curricular and pedagogical choices. How the principles in this book apply more precisely to education is worth developing. Piper's concluding sentences hint at the breadth of what he has written and the absence of precision that Christian educators might seek in a book on this topic. "These are the habits of life, not just the habits of education. These are the foundations of living, not just the foundations of learning" (163). Again,

¹ See Andrew Wilson, *The God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

one is hard-pressed to disagree with Piper's claim even if there lingers a desire for a more precise treatment of education and learning.

In the end, Piper has developed a theology of learning that is biblical, and that is not a simple task.² Proverbs 2 describes the believer's responsibility to seek wisdom diligently and God's promise to give wisdom in such a way that one becomes wise, which is more than merely recognizing or understanding wisdom. Piper's foundational habits for learning outline a clear path toward this end.

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² See D. A. Carson, "A Biblical Theology of Education," *Themelios* 46, no. 2 (August 2021), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/a-biblical-theology-of-education/>.