

# Book Reviews

*The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World.* By William A. Dembski. Nashville: B&H, 2009, xviii + 238 pp., \$22.99.

I heard of a man that spanked his children soundly every Sunday evening without regard to anything that they had done during the day. His explanation was that he knew they would do things worthy of punishment during the week and he just wanted to go ahead and get it over with and let them know the cost of disobedience. William Dembski has presented an elaborate defense of such parental anticipation by defending his theory of God's creation of the world in a fallen state, the punishment for sin at a cosmological level being instituted retroactively. "I will argue," the author states, "that we should understand the corrupting effects of the Fall *retroactively* (in other words, the consequences of the Fall can also act backward into the past)" (50). Dembski adds later, "An omniscient and omnipotent God, by anticipating human actions, can respond in advance to humanity's Fall" (138).

He states this same idea differently, and strangely, later by writing, "In focusing on divine anticipation as God's way of controlling the Fall's damage, I have stressed the active role God played in bringing about natural evil prior to the Fall" (175). How the creation of a fallen world

actually serves to control the Fall's damage may seem counterintuitive, but he points to a human immune system able to cope, to some degree, with pathogenic microbes (175f.) as an evidence of gracious "divine anticipation." It must be noted, however, that a gracious divine anticipation and the creation of a fallen world are two very different things, one of which rests on firm biblical exposition and the other only asserted.

In the unending challenge presented by naturalism and materialism to the Christian view that the world was created by an infinite, and thus infinitely intelligent, deity, the arguments presented by the proponents of intelligent design (ID) have been immensely helpful. Their reasoning from several different disciplines (e.g., mathematics, biochemistry, and paleontology) has succeeded in showing the much more likely probability that the world in all its teleologically related parts, as a conglomerate and as individuals, came into being as a result of a plan rather than chance. William Dembski has been no small part of this movement and is to be appreciated for his relentless pursuit of putting an intelligent designer (God!) in the middle of some very sophisticated scientific discussions.

The ID method of operation has been to elicit conclusions by drawing inferences only from scientific data. Supposedly, religious presuppositions

are kept at bay while proponents of the view argue that the body of scientific facts points to design and mindful purpose, or, as Dembski states, “an intelligence that structures and directs the world” (74). Other conclusions that may follow this singular conclusion are left, or should be left, to the various theologians and apologists of the respective theistic religions. Thus a Christian, if so inclined to incorporate such data, may use the prolegomena of intelligent design to argue that this designer is also a creating, revealing, and redeeming God. He may argue that the Bible is the place where we find the body of revelation that this God has given.

Because it is a revelation from God, the Christian apologist argues that the Bible is without error; its perspicuity means that we interpret other sources of revelation, such as general revelation in conscience and nature, in a manner consistent with the Bible. We recognize the possibility of error in our interpretation of Scripture, and we remain, therefore, in constant dialogue with the whole corpus of special revelation as well as with other interpreters so as to minimize our propensity to myopic and misleading readings of the text. We also recognize the possibility of errors in our interpretation of natural phenomena, an inferior source of knowledge of God, and thus do not canonize present scientific theories as equal to, or more compelling than, clear biblical exegesis.

In this book, William Dembski has become a theologian intent particularly on framing a theological argument that has powerful implications for apologetics and theodicy. In pursuit of this goal, moreover, Dembski has subdued the gown of theology to the lab robe of the scientist. He has given to natural revelation the task of tutor to special revelation. The result is an attempt to explain the problem of evil in light of some assumptions that Dembski considers a part of “scientific orthodoxy” derived from the “book of nature” (chapters 8 and 9).

He uses the term “orthodoxy” because he believes that these scientific assertions are so sure, so explicitly a part of the undeniable data, that any

biblical idea or theological construction must take them into account and be shaped so as to accommodate them. This “orthodoxy” he derived from the disciplines of geological science and astrophysics. “In our current mental environment,” Dembski writes, “informed as it is by modern astrophysics and geology, the scientific community as a whole regards young-earth creationism as untenable” (55). One undeniable conclusion that provides an infallible scientific framework for theological discussion is that the universe is 13 billion years old and the earth around 4.5 billion (49). A second scientifically orthodox parameter is that suffering, death, disease, parasitism, corruption, destruction, and catastrophe preceded the appearance of man on earth.

Dembski also is concerned about “theological orthodoxy.” Along the way he rejects process theology and open theism, engages Trinitarian orthodoxy positively, criticizes some old-earth creationists for dealing inadequately with the problem of evil (78-81), and affirms the necessity of an exegetical foundation for theological formulations. Although he gives a fair amount of space to the cross and has some hints at penal substitution (18, 24), his interest seems more to be on divine suffering (18, 20) as a means of participating in the human condition, increasing our confidence in God’s genuine sympathy for us, and restoring us to a relationship of love with him. His overall explanation of the cross has elements of A. H. Strong’s immanentism and seems more attuned to moral influence and moral government than to propitiatory sacrifice. As a matter of biblical fidelity, he is particularly concerned to locate the origin of evil in this present world as the result of human sin. To that particular aspect of Christian theodicy he points his readers, and on that issue he believes he has made some original contribution. His perception of what he is about is stated in one paragraph:

Much of my past work has been on intelligent design and the controversy over evolution. Nothing in this book, however, takes sides in that debate. In arguing that the Fall marks the entry of all evil into the world (both personal and natural evil), I make no assumptions about the age of the Earth, the extent of evolution, or the prevalence of design. The theodicy I develop here looks not to science but to the metaphysics of divine action and purpose. At the heart of this theodicy is the idea that the effects of the Fall can be retroactive as well as proactive (much as the saving effects of the Cross stretch not only forward in time but also backward, saving, for instance, the Old Testament saints) (9, 10).

While it is true that Dembski argues that an evolutionist, supposedly a theistic one, can receive his theodicy (146, 154f., chapter 21) (in my opinion a point not favorable to the credibility of his construction), I fail to see the benefit that derives from his supposed lack of assumptions about the age of the earth. He certainly maintains an extended criticism of young-earth advocates throughout the book, but, of course, not by his *assuming* it but because science has so incontestably proven it! The claim, therefore, that he does not look to science for support in his argument also rings hollow. Unless I am completely oblivious to his dominant argument, the age of the earth as supposedly demonstrated by the sciences of geology and astrophysics has everything to do with—is the very *raison d'être* of—this book.

Dembski insists that the facts of scientific orthodoxy must somehow be made consistent with the point of theological orthodoxy that human sin is the immediate cause of all moral and natural evil. He cites Rom 5:12 as determinative of human sin as the immediate cause of natural and personal suffering and rightly criticizes viewpoints that dismiss this connection (27-31). The difficulty that drives the entire book is making millions of years of creature suffering the direct result of human sin prior even to the appearance

of humanity. “For hundreds of millions of years,” in fact, “multicelled animals have been emerging, competing, fighting, killing, parasitizing, torturing, suffering, and going extinct,” all prior to human sin (49).

So sure is Dembski of his leading features of scientific orthodoxy that he contends that the virtually universal Christian understanding of Genesis 1-3 may be dismissed in light of the demands of science. “Indeed, the history of biblical interpretation until the rise of modern science in the seventeenth century overwhelmingly supports a young earth view,” but science, in light of its discovery of “momentous new truths”—that is, data that require an old earth—“trumps the most natural reading of Genesis and the overwhelming consensus of theologians up through the Reformation” (52, 54). Compare this with Dembski’s assertion on page 35 where a straightforward reading of Genesis 1-3 gives way to the caveat, “Today this traditional reading of Genesis seems less reasonable.” Not only is it less reasonable, it is impossible if one is committed to the scientific orthodoxy of an old earth. That curse followed fall is not at all necessary chronologically, according to Dembski, if one sees creation as incorporating judgment from the beginning.

Surely one must concede some difficulty in Dembski’s view that “God wills the disordering of creation, *making it defective on purpose*” (his italics, 145). He believes that such action is justified on the basis of “humanity’s covenant headship in creation.” On the other hand, he takes great care to describe how the first fully God-conscious humans must not experience the “effects of the Fall while they were still, literally, innocent” (155). Why it is more justifiable for the creation to experience the curse with all its horrendous suffering described so aptly by Dembski when its covenant head still is innocent and uncursed is a mystery. He works to make it seem philosophically plausible and psychologically satisfying, but there is no positive exegetical foundation for such an arrangement. Dembski is driven solely

by his commitment to old-earth scientific orthodoxy. Among the many places where this scientific orthodoxy drives the entire discussion is in his opening paragraph on “The Trinitarian Mode of Creation.”

Contemporary science holds that the Earth and universe are not thousands but billions of years old, that humans have been around only a miniscule portion of that time, and that prior to their arrival natural evils abounded. To see how natural evil could precede the first human sin and yet be a consequence of it, we need to explore what it means for God to create and then act within creation (84).

The default assumption is that what science presently holds on the age of the earth must be accepted and theology must be fit into that assumption. When Dembski’s resistance to the naturalistic assumptions of biological evolution is so high, it seems incongruous that he unquestioningly accepts those of geology and astrophysics on the earth’s age (chapter 7), and hardly stops short of ridicule, and misrepresentation, of the work of young-earth creationists on these issues (chapters 6 and 7). To Henry Morris’s interpretation of the relation of created light to the light observed in stars, Dembski responds, “It is difficult, in my view, to reconcile such a God with a God of truth” (67). That would be a very appropriate response to his interpretation of Genesis 1-3, to be mentioned below.

While it is true that God acts redemptively in history prior to actual fulfillment of redemption in the historic work of Christ, one comes to this conclusion on the basis of clear revelation with an explanation of how God could be just in doing so (see especially Rom 3:21-26; Eph 3:4-13; Heb 1:1-4, 11:39-40). No such exegetical foundation exists for God’s making the curse imposed for sin retroactive. The theological life of Dembski’s proposal hangs by a slender exegetical thread. All of it depends on Dembski’s success in reinterpreting Genesis 1-3. He prepares the way for this by dis-

cussing theories of communication, the transcendent and independent character of information, and applying concepts of two types of time and two types of logic.

According to Dembski, time is seen in terms of *chronos* and *kairos*. Logic is described as causal-temporal and intentional-semantic. *Chronos*, which speaks of the sequence of events in history, is aligned with causal-temporal logic. *Kairos*, which deals with particularly meaningful events in the purpose of God, is tied to intentional-semantic logic. In this way Dembski is able to disrupt chronology, or the appearance of it, in biblical narrative by shifting some passages into the category of *kairos* to be understood in terms of intentional-semantic logic. Genesis 1 is not to be interpreted as “ordinary chronological time (*chronos*) but rather as time from the vantage of God’s purposes (*kairos*)” (142). Genesis 1 becomes a narrative of how God sees the world ideally, but has never yet actualized (144f.). His saying, his seeing, his making, and his pronouncing of it as “good,” all recorded in Genesis 1, never actually took place. The originally intended world (the first creation) as described in Genesis 1 was never made, but God settled for an imperfect world (the second creation) due to his anticipation of human sin. Genesis 1 employs intentional-semantic logic and thus sees the days, not as chronology or even as having any palpable existence, but as a statement of the basic spiritual order of importance and fitness in the relation of created things to each other. Dembski writes, “Genesis 1 summarizes the order of creation viewed kairologically” (144).

Dembski seeks to justify this odd reading by saying that he is following “the common scriptural practice of employing physical realities to illuminate spiritual truths” (142). If there is no creation such as Genesis 1 described, to what physical reality does it refer? Is it like real bread symbolizing the real broken body of Christ or real wine symbolizing the real flowing blood of Christ? In one case the symbols are both familiar and palpable, but in Dembski’s attempt at spiri-

tualizing, such a “physical reality” intended to evoke a spiritual correspondent never existed. What spiritual truth does this non-existent physical reality teach us? An ideal future state? Plenty of Scripture addresses that issue directly without being clouded with this picture of an original creation that never existed.

For Dembski the “spiritual reality” is an original intention that was set aside in light of the anticipation of human sin. That which the Bible represents God as calling “good” has never, in fact, existed; God never created it. God never brought the animals to Adam to name, for they already were wild and vicious, predatory, and blood-thirsty. Contrary to Dembski, Adam understood the curse God pronounced on the ground to be immediately related to his sin, as did subsequent generations. When Lamech, the father of Noah, was 126 years old, Adam died. Fifty-six years after Adam died, when Lamech fathered Noah, Lamech said, “Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands” (Gen 5:29). Adam had told every generation of the descendants of Seth, who lived fifty-six years beyond the birth of Noah, of the curse on the ground. He believed that even that ground out of Eden into which Lamech had poured so much sweat and pain had not always been cursed but had become so as a result of, and subsequent to, his sin. Now with the death of Adam, perhaps Lamech reasoned, a generation was arising in which the curse no longer would be operative. Both Adam and Lamech would be surprised at the reasoning of Dembski.

To be sure, in the intentional-semantic logic by which God creates and organizes the world—not chronologically but kairologically—evil is always logically downstream. In that logic God creates a good world, it becomes even better once humans are created, and then it goes haywire once humans sin. Seen chronologically, however, the world has always been haywire—hence the need for a new heaven and a new earth (172).

Dembski purposely borrowed the *kairos/chronos* distinction from Paul Tillich (125). For the sake of his own theological purposes, Tillich exaggerated the distinction. In fact, such a clear distinction simply does not hold true. The words are often used interchangeably in Scripture. For example such an important event as the incarnation is spoken of as *chronos* in Galatians: “When the fullness of *time* was come” (4:4). This same word is used to denominate the time of the birth of Jesus in Luke 1:57, while *kairos* is used concerning the birth of Moses in Acts 7:20. One of the most striking uses of *kairos* as synonymous with *chronos* occurs in Luke 18:29, 30 when Jesus refers to this present age, emphasizing its temporary character, as *kairos*: “There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in *this time*, and in the age to come eternal life.” In short an investigation of the actual occurrences in the New Testament indicates very little difference in the use of *kairos* and *chronos* in the New Testament, while Paul Tillich’s exaggeration of the difference arose only as an apologetic for his radical ontological existentialism and treatment of biblical categories as symbols of self-actualization. In that way, it seems entirely appropriate that Dembski employ the Tillichian distinction, for he indicates no more assent to the historical nature of the creation narrative than Tillich does of the particular, personal, and unique character of the incarnation.

In fact, the biblical history always embeds God’s purposive action in the real chronology of the world. Everything in Scripture is a picture of how God is in every event, controlling each for his own purposes. The Bible has no *kairos* that is distinct from its *chronos*, but every critical action of God in pursuit of his eternally ordained purpose becomes manifest as the irresistible flow of events in real time and space. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:12). “He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). “In the days of Jesus’ life on earth he offered

up prayers.... He learned obedience.... And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:7-9). These events of such powerful and infinite redemptive importance occurred in chronological time and within finite space. The words and the narrative, even if called intentional-semantic logic of *kairological* importance, nevertheless occurred as narrated in the biblical record and would have no meaning if not real historical events. So stands the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and curse and its subsequent importance in the redemptive history.

Dembski’s exegetical difficulties extend far beyond Genesis 1-3. He describes virtually every event of Genesis 4-11 under the phrase “highly dubious claims” (170). This comes from his capitulation to “the current mental environment” that makes a “face-value reading of Genesis 4-11 and the chronology presented there difficult.” He is quite a bit happier with Genesis 12-50 for it “can be confirmed through independent archeological and anthropological evidence” (170). As a result of his intellectual discomfort in the absence of a present day science to confirm what appears to be written with meticulous clarity and purpose, he cannot accept the biblical dating of the flood, the adequacy of the ark to provide all that it was intended to provide, or that Noah and his wife and children populated the world, though the text says with utter clarity, “These were the sons of Noah and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed” (Gen 9:19). He finds it difficult to believe that Abraham arose a mere 200 years subsequent to the Tower of Babel. In addition he states, “Noah’s flood, though presented as a global event, is probably best understood as historically rooted in a local event” (170). This he prefers to the Mosaic testimony that the waters prevailed more than twenty-two feet above the tops of the mountains and that God “blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in

the ark” (Gen 7:23f.). He also prefers his consent to the “current mental judgment” to the testimony of Peter that “the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished” (2 Pet 3:6).

In short, Dembski has demonstrated anew that Genesis remains the battleground of Christian thinking. Science has challenged Christian thinkers to develop a variety of circumlocutions in treating Genesis 1-11. So it was with the C. H. Toy controversy, the evolution controversy of the 1920s, the controversy over Ralph Elliott’s *The Message of Genesis* in the early 1960s, and the Broadman Commentary controversy in the early 1970s. Dembski now has developed his own way of handling the apparent historical narrative of creation, Fall, pre-flood development, and Flood. The old earth demanded by the naturalistic assumptions of contemporary astrophysics and geology must be honored and the ancient text must give way. Even if hidden in the verbal haze of intentional-semantic logic, Genesis 1 simply did not happen; even though the Bible presents it as having happened, Dembski says that it did not. His theodicy is necessary only because he has created a massive theological and exegetical difficulty by denying that the creation was ever “very good” (Gen 1:31) in chronological time and squeezing millions, if not billions, of years of suffering and death into the world prior to the curse pronounced in Genesis 3. Whereas Paul sees the creation “subjected to futility” and concurrent with human bondage until the redemption of the body (Rom 8:20-23), Dembski sees the subjection to futility as an act of creation.

– Tom J. Nettles

Professor of Historical Theology

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Dying to Preach: Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit.* By Steven W. Smith. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009, 175 pp., \$14.99 paper.

Steven W. Smith's *Dying to Preach* focuses on the heart of Christian ministry in general, and Christian preaching in particular. Smith calls the pastor to live out Paul's model of dying that others may live (2 Cor 4:12). While other books rightly champion the need to preach the cross, Smith provides a wonderful contribution to the field by urging the preacher to take up the cross personally, as well. In Smith's words, "The principle metaphor for the act of preaching the Gospel is the Gospel" (13).

Therefore, while this is not a practical "how to prepare sermons" book primarily, it is a book on how one "prepares himself" to preach expositional sermons. Smith urges the preacher to prepare himself by dying to himself and purposing to preach not for the praise of man, but for the glory of the crucified and risen Redeemer. Due to the importance of his selected subject, I would recommend this book to students and pastors for at least five reasons.

First, Smith's work is thoroughly biblical, which makes it trustworthy. Smith's primary focus of source material is Paul's words to the Corinthians, along with other key biblical texts. In chapter 1, Smith provides an excellent summary table of how the cross of Christ informed Paul's view of ministry. Smith records, "No less than twenty times in his two extant letters to Corinth, he [Paul] alludes to this idea of suffering for others" (28). In chapter 2, Smith expounds 1 Corinthians 2 clearly, and draws out implications for preaching. Chapters 3-6 make up part 2 of the book, which deals with how the cross impacts preaching more practically. Chapter 3 is an exposition of 2 Corinthians 4; chapter 4, an exposition of Colossians 1:24; chapter 5, an exposition of Heb 13:11-14; and in chapter 6, Smith focuses on Phil 2:5-7. Each of these chapters actually models faithful exposition, as the author develops his Christocentric thesis.

Second, Smith writes with pastoral vulnerability, which makes the book encouraging. In other words, he is aware of the inner struggles of the pastor. For example, he identifies with the discouraged pastor when he writes, "We lay our guts out in the pulpit, and in response see stone-cold faces with no ambition toward godliness or motivation to change" (24). What pastor cannot identify with this struggle? Smith offers needed encouragement in light of these types of realities.

Third, Smith reminds us of the theological underpinnings of preaching, which makes the book timeless. For example, he reminds us that we should preach with a "healthy fear of God's judgment" instead of succumbing to the pressure to perform and entertain (47).

Fourth, Smith includes some helpful reminders from the history of preaching (mainly from Francois Fenelon's *Dialogues on Eloquence*), which makes the book informative and inspiring. I always appreciate references to homileticians from years past. One of the reasons for various contemporary pitfalls in preaching seems to be the lack of reflection on preaching history.

Fifth, Smith reminds us of the true essence of expository preaching—that is, being surrendered to the text of Scripture (chapters 7-9—the final three chapters), which makes the book useful for personal reflection and instruction.

I found myself throughout the book saying "Amen" to particular points, examining my heart at other places, and praying for the outworking of his thesis in my own life throughout the book. Seasoned pastors, young pastors, and others who handle God's Word would benefit from hearing this call to bear the cross in the pulpit.

—Tony Merida  
Teaching Pastor  
Temple Baptist Church  
Hattiesburg, Mississippi  
Assistant Professor of Preaching  
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

*ESV German / English Parallel Bible*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Wheaton: Crossway, 2009, 2432 pp., \$79.99.

*English Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 1446 pp., \$25.00.

In 2008 the much anticipated *ESV Study Bible* was released, and it did not disappoint. When the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association awarded it top honors at the 2009 Christian Book Awards, it marked the first time that a Bible had won not only best Bible but also Christian Book of the Year. Given how well the English Standard Version (ESV) has been received as a translation by many evangelicals, it is not surprising that various editions continue to be produced. Two recent ESV editions—that have perhaps been overshadowed by the *ESV Study Bible*—are well worth mentioning.

The *ESV German / English Parallel Bible* combines the ESV and the 1984 German Luther Bible. As the KJV influenced the English language, so Martin Luther's translation had a significant impact on the German language. The 1984 update to Luther's classic translation, first printed in 1534, is widely used by German (Protestant) readers today. According to historian Philip Schaff: "Luther's version of the Bible is a wonderful monument of genius, learning, and piety, and may be regarded in a secondary sense as inspired. It was, from beginning to end, a labor of love and enthusiasm. While publishers and printers made fortunes, Luther never received or asked a copper for this greatest work of his life" (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 [1888; repr., Hendrickson, 1996], 354).

The German and English translations appear in parallel columns on each page, allowing for easy verse-by-verse comparison. Textual notes for both translations are included in the back. Given the amount of text, it is quite thick (2 in.), but the other dimensions (8.5 x 5.5 in.) make it a manageable size. The *Parallel Bible* is hardcover

and includes a ribbon page marker.

This Bible can be a helpful tool for those who want to improve their German, especially students learning German for theological research. As with learning any language, vocabulary must be mastered. However, for those who have studied some German, reading through the *ESV German / English Parallel Bible* enables one to acquire German biblical vocabulary in context—a much more effective and preferable method than rote memorization of word lists.

The other recent edition of the ESV is the *English Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha*, which includes the ESV translation with the Apocrypha in the back. The translation of the Apocrypha is based on the 1971 Revised Standard Version (RSV) Apocrypha (the ESV also used the 1971 RSV as its starting point) and was updated by a translation committee consisting of David A. deSilva (Ashland Theological Seminary), Dan McCartney (Westminster Theological Seminary), and Bernard A. Taylor (Loma Linda University). Besides the books customarily included in the Apocrypha, this edition also includes the books of 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151, which were added to the RSV Apocrypha in 1977.

Though the entire text was compared to the original languages, the "main points of interaction," according to the translation committee, included "updating archaic language, clarifying obscure words, removing inaccuracies, and bringing punctuation up to current American English standards" (1177). The textual basis is the Göttingen Septuagint, except for 4 Maccabees (translated from Rahlfs' Septuagint) and 2 Esdras (translated from the 1983 Vulgate published by the German Bible Society). The *English Standard Version with Apocrypha* is hardcover and relatively slim in spite of the added content.

In contrast to Roman Catholics, evangelicals do not, of course, recognize the Apocrypha as inspired or canonical. Unfortunately, for many evangelicals, non-canonical translates as unimportant or something to be avoided. However, this

was not the response of early Protestants. Martin Luther rejected the canonicity of the books of the Apocrypha, but he and other Reformers affirmed their value and encouraged Christians to read them. Sixteenth century translations of the Bible, like Luther's German Bible and Coverdale's English Bible, included the Apocrypha (along with a caveat that its contents were not equal in authority to the Scriptures). Even the venerable King James Version (1611) included it.

The Apocrypha is a significant part of the Jewish literary and theological context out of which Christianity and the New Testament arose. Not only do we gain from it important knowledge of the history, culture, and piety of Second Temple Judaism, but we can also trace the articulation of theological views and the use of relevant words that are crucial to questions of biblical interpretation. For the serious exegete of the Scriptures, the Apocrypha is not to be ignored. I am glad to see this updated translation coupled with the ESV.

—Christopher W. Cowan  
Associate Editor

*The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*

*Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*. Edited by Gary T. Meadors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 369 pp., \$19.99 paper.

How do we get from the Bible to theology and practical application? Such a concern is not new, but the issue has become more intense among evangelicals, particularly with the publication of William Webb's *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (InterVarsity, 2001). The issue of how to get from the Bible to theology is packaged in this book in a familiar format. Four different views are presented. Walter Kaiser defends the notion that we must derive principles from the Bible to apply it to everyday life. Daniel Doriani advocates a redemptive historical approach where the

epochal character of Scripture plays a central role. Kevin Vanhoozer presents a drama of redemption model where believers are called upon to improvise the script of the theodrama in accord with the overarching story of the scriptures. William Webb continues to outline his redemptive movement model, illustrating it by considering slavery and corporal punishment texts. After each author presents his viewpoint, the other three contributors interact and respond to the view presented. The volume is rounded out by three reflection essays by Mark Strauss, Al Wolters, and Christopher Wright. These three authors respond to the four contributions and ruminate on the hermeneutical task facing believers today.

I can hardly survey the contribution of seven different scholars, and hence it seems most helpful to consider the impact of the work as a whole. Virtually all the contributors agree that Kaiser's principalizing approach is reductionistic, especially since it does not consider the role of narrative. And yet all the contributors end up principalizing as well, even if they emphasize other features of the biblical text. It is somewhat surprising that Kaiser, an OT scholar, does not present a more prominent role for redemptive history. And yet Mark Strauss's six criteria at the conclusion of his essay are not remarkably different from Kaiser's use of principles to derive the message of Scripture. Doriani and Vanhoozer rightly emphasize the importance of narratives and story in forming theology. Vanhoozer illustrates his method by considering the theology of Mary and what we should think about sex-change operations. What is unclear, however, is how Vanhoozer's model actually relates to the two issues he considers. Certainly Vanhoozer's essay is full of wit and wisdom, but it is also rather vague in terms of practical application. Vanhoozer emphasizes living out the story of the scriptures, but some might wonder after reading his essay how we do this as believers. I am probably most sympathetic to Doriani's redemptive historical reading. What was quite surprising was the limited

extent to which his essay actually addresses the nature of redemptive history. Many fine insights dot his essay, but it seems (at least to this reader) that he did not explain with sufficient depth what it means to read the scriptures in redemptive historical terms.

One of the problems with four and three views books surfaces in this volume. Are the views presented here mutually exclusive? The models of Doriani and Vanhoozer are quite close to one another. Even if they presented exactly the same model, they would have surely found some places where they disagreed with one another. I have already mentioned that all of the contributors derive principles from Scripture, and hence the differences among the contributors could be overestimated. Perhaps it would have helped if each of the contributors addressed the same issue in terms of practical application, so that readers could discern where they truly differed. More likely, the presentation of four different views is a bit distorting since the strengths of each of the models can be integrated into a larger perspective. I am not suggesting some kind of Hegelian synthesis here! There are disagreements among the authors, but the book suffers a bit (especially when the reflection essays are included) from diffuse discussions on the issues. For instance, it is helpful in one sense to include the reflection of Christopher Wright, especially in terms of his missiological concerns. But how does Wright's essay relate to the four major views presented? We can be thankful for his insight and wise counsel, but in some ways the book takes on the feel of "More Reflections on Hermeneutics." Since the views of the various authors overlap at many points, is this really a four views book? In any case, readers will profit by considering the dimensions of the hermeneutical task.

The most controversial contributor is William Webb, and yet even in his case there is overlap at certain junctures with the other authors. Remarkably, Webb still does not show clear evidence that he understands the redemptive historical charac-

ter of biblical revelation. His discussion on corporal punishment, though it has some helpful insights, is on the whole methodologically confusing. He jumbles together all kinds of texts in presenting his view on the matter, so that texts about disciplining slaves are lumped together with texts about disciplining children. The manner in which the biblical material is presented does not inspire confidence that Webb has done careful exegesis.

This is not to say that readers cannot learn from Webb. Certainly it would be a mistake to think that we can or must replicate the cultural world of the Bible in the modern world. All of the contributors help us to see this to some extent. Even after reading the book, more clarity would be helpful in defining what it means to go *beyond* the Bible. Obviously we all go beyond the Bible in one sense since the biblical world differs dramatically from ours. Insofar as the contributors assist us to think more carefully about the whole matter they are to be thanked.

I found Al Wolters's reflection on the book to be the most penetrating and trenchant. At point after point he identifies some of the strengths and weaknesses of the various positions, though I am not necessarily endorsing his own emphasis on general revelation. Wolters, in particular, points out the weaknesses in Webb's paradigm. Whether Webb addresses slavery, corporal punishment, or the role of women, it seems that his ultimate ethic is too often sundered from the biblical text, so that reigning cultural norms represent how God intends for us to live today. In part Webb goes astray because of his exegesis, but space is lacking to pursue that matter here. Wolters rightly cautions that we must beware of our own cultural blinders. Those of us in the West are typically quite proud of our enlightened stances over against our predecessors, and we deem ourselves to be much kinder and gentler than our ancestors. And it is probably true that we have remedied some blind spots of those who went before us. Still, the danger is that the ultimate ethic proposed by Webb actually contravenes

what Scripture teaches. Surely that is not Webb's conscious intention, but good intentions must not be equated with satisfying results.

—Thomas R. Schreiner  
James Buchanan Harrison Professor of  
New Testament Interpretation  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*God and Race in American Politics: A Short History.*  
By Mark A. Noll. Princeton: Princeton University  
Press, 2008, xiv + 209 pp., \$22.95.

In *God and Race in American Politics*, University of Notre Dame historian Mark Noll gives readers a complex yet coherent analysis of the political movement of America from the 1820s to the twenty-first century. In this interpretation of America's history, race and religion have been intersecting forces serving as more than the lead actors in the play of the nation's "deepest and most enduring moral problem." They have combined in unique ways to act as America's "broadest and most enduring political influence" (1).

The book's period of discussion—"from Nat Turner to George Bush"—is organized largely around "three of the four great transformations in American history": the antebellum period (1830-1860) when slavery was the most significant political issue in the country; the post-bellum period (1865-1900) when there was no movement on equal rights in the country; and the 1950s to the early twenty-first century of the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights era (10). Through these periods, the author reveals that national debates over states' rights and big government clouded the debate on race as the strides for racial progress were viewed by whites as one of many efforts of the government to intrude into the private lives of its citizens. By "refocusing historical analysis to controversies about central government authority," Noll intends to help the reader avoid seeing slavery and civil rights as regional questions that

were mostly important for the South. Instead, he writes with an even-handedness that "makes it easier to grasp the national influence of race in American political history" (24).

In order to accomplish his task, the author argues that American public religion, in its non-Catholic form, largely has functioned in Calvinistic clothing, in which the Scriptures are employed for the sake of public moral persuasion. Noll shows that this philosophy was—and is—a two-edged sword, giving intensity to both sides of national moral debates on race, even as Scripture was used to justify both the existence and abolition of slavery. Religious beliefs and practices "were not the *causes* of the war in the way that dispute over the right of states with respect to slavery was a cause," Noll contends (44). Yet the Civil War was as religious as the Crusades—if only an American version—as the cross again became the mask disguising the face of desires for power and dominion.

As Noll explains, the unfortunate results of both whites and African-Americans co-opting post-Puritan rhetoric for their causes is evident in the African-American and white interpretations of the Civil War. For African-Americans, that is, God providentially provided the war, responding to his needy people. For whites, however, most significantly and enduringly for our national history, a "disjunction between consideration of slavery and consideration of black people" became a great result of the war. For Noll, because neither side stopped and asked the question, "What does the Bible say about 'race'?" before asking, "What does the Bible say about 'slavery'?", the church could not offer the nation unified guidance out of the moral sinkhole left by the Civil War.

Even emancipation in America became atypical of post-slavery patterns in ancient history because of the role of race in American slavery. Noll writes, "Because solutions to economic and political problems of slavery differed from solutions to the social problems of race, repeated efforts by both whites and blacks to differen-

tiate issues of slavery from issues of race exercised almost no influence” (40). Jim Crow laws, southern “Redemption,” the nation’s retreat from Reconstruction, and almost every major social issue after the Civil War was affected by the religious community’s response to the unseen, erroneous tie of African-American rights to the role of the government. Yet, as Noll notes, glimmers of hope would shine through for African-Americans, as “the creation of an independent black religious life proved to be a momentous and irresistible consequence of emancipation” (51).

The author is self-critical of evangelicals. “Support for black causes,” from the likes of Williams Jennings Bryan, “could not be too aggressive ... since he needed the electoral votes of the Democratic Solid South” that was experiencing the completion of “black disenfranchisement” that began after the Civil War. Returning to themes from his earlier writings, Noll also stabs at the individual pietistic strands of evangelical Christianity, speaking of them as insufficient to solve the problem of race apart from voices of corporate intellectual rigor and social responsibility in the public square.

In small criticism of an otherwise exceptional work, some items are addressed almost in passing, and are overlooked for more development in a later chapter, i.e.:

The retreat from Reconstruction, the unleashing of lynch-law terrorism, the general concern for black civil rights in the North, and the imposition in the South of Jim Crow laws to quash black political participation seemed to neuter the nation’s African-American population. (58)

In similar minor criticism, the small work does not discuss the roles that the Nation of Islam and Moral Majority played in the race/religion/politics complex. This might be because these movements centered on such influential individual figures as Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, and Jerry Falwell—each of whom

greatly influenced the relationship of religion and race in the American political landscape—and this work does not give great attention to individual figures. Or the absence could be because Noll’s discussions about the mid- to late-twentieth century were not the major focus of this study.

Noll marshals a wealth of scholarship to his cause and has distilled it carefully into “a short history.” The reader will appreciate the author’s humility, and willingness to consider broader issues that could provide a different set of perspectives and conclusions, for his own efforts in this volume are not “an iron-clad demonstration of historical certainty” (137). One also might appreciate that Noll is low on making judgments of personal opinion until the last chapter, “Theological Conclusions.” Tellingly for the author’s thoughts on race relations in the nation, in contrast, the one exception of opinion comes in a paragraph before the concluding chapter: “The United States pays a heavy price, and it pays it daily, for its history of injustice to African-American citizens. African Americans who wait for redress, who do not take into their own hands the challenge of shaping the future, compound the larger difficulty” (175).

Highly regarded by the present reviewer, this book should be read to awaken the church to the complexities of race in American society, racial reconciliation, and the political divide existing among African-American and white evangelicals. Noll writes to alert the reader that an effective religious answer to the race problem in America will come only when religious rhetoric and action rises above politics with a solution that unites people of all races without being motivated by—or repelling against—Caesar.

—Eric C. Redmond  
Assistant Professor of Bible and Theology  
Washington Bible College

*Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue.* By Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009, 175 pp., \$17.99 paper.

Todd E. Johnson is Associate Professor of Worship, Theology and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Dale Savidge is executive director of Christians in Theatre Arts and chair of the theater department at North Greenville University. Their book is based on the premise that theater has theological content, that it uniquely “embodies three central theological categories that define the nature of human and divine interaction: incarnation, community, and presence.”

In this scholarly and thoughtful study, the authors examine past and current dramatic theory and theologies of drama and its relationships to ritual, to culture, and to the Christian gospel and worldview. They give informative accounts of the viewpoints of Peter Senkbeil, Peter Brooks, French theorist Antonin Artaud, Stanislavsky, anthropologist Victor Turner, and others. Beginning with a thoughtful discussion of the patristic writers and medieval mystery plays, they bring their survey of theater and dramatic theory into the twentieth century, with the plays of T. S. Eliot and megachurch pageants. The latter phenomenon, which marks the high point of live drama in North American churches in recent decades, has been followed by a decline of live theater, especially in evangelical worship, in favor of video and film. What has been lost in the shift?

The great distinctive of live theater is that both actors and audience must be present in the body for theater to happen. In its enfleshment of narrative, the authors argue, theater of all the arts most closely approaches Christian worship or sacrament. After all, it is its dramatic narrative that sets theater apart from instrumental performance or from a sporting event. And it is the incarnation of script and story experienced by actors and audience together that unites them in a powerful—if temporary—community, a time of unrepeatable encounter and connection. (Interestingly, histo-

rian Sandra Sizer made very similar claims about the emotional effects of Sankey’s gospel hymnody in D. L. Moody’s mass urban revivalism of the late nineteenth century.) The authors are careful not to claim too much similarity between theater and liturgy. Most engaging to me was their synthesis of culture analysis by McLuhan, Postman, and others with dramatic theory and ritual study across cultures, a discussion that will be useful to students of world cultures and cross-cultural ministry.

Practitioners of the theater will value the solid biblical advice in the closing chapters on developing discernment and the pursuit of excellence in plying one’s craft. On the concept of “art for art’s sake,” which the authors describe as “an unhealthy extreme of serving the art,” they note, “Honoring the art isn’t the goal, honoring God in the art is.” Many principles apply to church music and other ministries as well: “‘God gave me this play’ ... can be a mask for shoddy craftsmanship. God’s leading is never apart from God’s attributes of beauty and excellence.” I recommend this book as a valuable read for ministers, drama scholars, Christian artists, and believers who wish to experience and understand the arts more fully and more biblically, and trace God’s presence in them.

—Esther R. Crookshank  
Ollie Hale Chiles Professor of Church Music  
Director of the Academy of Sacred Music  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views.* Edited by Bruce A. Ware. Nashville: B&H, 2008, 273 pp., \$24.99 paper.

The title of this volume is, at first glance, a bit confusing. A multi-view book on God could mean any number of things. Is it a discussion on the existence of God between a theist, an agnostic, and an atheist? Is it an interfaith dialogue on the nature of God between a Christian, a Hindu, and

a Muslim? Or is it something else entirely?

The idea of “multiple views” on God is, of course, as old as Eden itself. Beyond that, even among orthodox Christians, questions about God’s nature and involvement with the world have provoked some of the fieriest debates in the history of the church. If the number of professional society papers, monographs, and scholarly articles can serve as a measuring stick, then American evangelicals particularly have demonstrated a resurgent interest in the doctrine of God over the last twenty or so years.

Recognizing this renewed focus, Bruce Ware assembled a reputable cadre of scholars to debate theology proper in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*. Since the book deals mostly with the foreknowledge of God and the freedom of humanity, it seems as if the book would have been more accurately titled *Perspectives on the Providence of God* (cf. 54).

Defending the “Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God,” Paul Helm argues for a Calvinist view of God’s foreknowledge and a determinist understanding of human freedom. Arguing for a “Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God,” Bruce Ware articulates a Molinist view of God’s foreknowledge combined with a compatibilist view of human freedom. Supporting the “Classic Free Will Theist Model of God,” Roger Olson couples God’s simple foreknowledge with libertarian human freedom. Finally, describing “Divine Providence and the Openness of God,” John Sanders contends for a dynamic omniscience understanding of God’s foreknowledge tethered with libertarian human freedom.

Since the contributors have developed their views more extensively elsewhere, the primary benefit of the book is not just in the quality of their insights but also in the interchange of their views. While other multi-view books limit responses to 3-5 pages, this work facilitates interaction by allowing longer rejoinders. This exchange of ideas signals the future direction of the contemporary evangelical debate on the doctrine of God. There-

fore, the duration of this review will focus on several trajectories from the book that will shape future discussion of theology proper.

First, the book confirms why open theism is not a viable option for evangelical theology. Specifically, Ware identifies an irony in the open theist view of God’s foreknowledge (255). When the issue is whether we can trust the God of open theism with the future, open theists praise his extensive foreknowledge. Yet, when the issue is how to explain evil in the past, they appeal to his ignorance and risk taking. As inconsistencies such as this are exposed in the open theist argument, its appeal to evangelicals will continue to wane.

Second, the book raises concerns about the ongoing interrelationship of free will theism and open theism. In fact, Roger Olson goes so far as to say that he cannot see how open theism’s view of God’s foreknowledge “undermines any Christian doctrine” (248). Yet, is it actually possible that such a drastic change in someone’s view of God would not negatively affect other doctrines? If free will theists embrace Olson’s opinion, it will likely enable open theism to remain an appealing option in the future for those who embrace libertarian free will.

Third, the book signals the need for continued conversation about the legitimacy of Molinism for those who hold to compatibilist freedom. In particular, is it possible for Molinism to be a viable viewpoint if its original connection to libertarian free will is jettisoned for compatibilism? Are there alternative ways for compatibilists to account for counterfactuals apart from a Molinist view of middle knowledge (126-29)? The dialogue in this book reveals the need for further discussion on these issues.

Fourth, the book raises the question of whether constructive dialogue between the varying camps can occur in the future. Tension is evident throughout the work. Helm equates the Calvinist view of God with the Christian view of God, which irks the free will theists (53). Ware points out that Olson claims that the God of Calvinism is

“virtually indistinguishable from the devil” (195). This type of discussion leaves the reader wondering if Sanders is correct when he asserts that profitable discussion can occur within Calvinist and Arminian camps but not between them (201). For further developments to occur in the three areas of discussion described above, a more charitable conversation must prevail.

At the onset of this decade, Bruce Ware served as a key figure in the evangelical refutation of open theism. Now, with the publication of his edited work, *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, Ware is further defined as one who will frame the future of the broader discussion on theology proper. This book provides not only a helpful debate between various views on the providence of God but also a clear window into future dialogue on the doctrine of God.

—Phillip R. Bethancourt  
Director of Academic Advising and Research  
Doctoral Studies  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography.* By Bruce Chilton. New York: Doubleday, 2004, xvi + 335 pp., \$24.95.

Bruce Chilton has followed up his biography of Jesus (*Rabbi Jesus*) with a biography of Paul. The story commences with Paul’s early days in Tarsus, sketching in the nature of life in that city, and concludes with Paul’s execution in A.D. 64 in Rome when Nero was emperor. In addition to the eleven chapters that form the heart of the book, Chilton also includes a preface, a brief chronology of Paul, footnotes, sources, and acknowledgements. The section on sources is more than a bibliography since Chilton comments on the various sources.

We only have space to sketch in some of the highlights of the book. It should be noted at the outset that the style of the book makes it a good read, and Chilton does not get bogged down in assessing various scholarly debates, which is

fitting in a biography. Even though the book is engagingly written, one is not carried along by the story to the extent that the book is difficult to put down. Another strength of the book is the grounding of the story in the historical context of Paul’s day, whether it is Paul’s early days in Tarsus, the Pharisaic sect, or the various cities of Paul’s mission.

Any biography, of course, depends on the critical stance of the author, and the assessment of the historical reliability of Acts plays a central role in any Pauline biography. Sometimes Chilton accepts Acts as historical and sometimes he does not. Given the nature of the book, it was difficult to perceive on what basis he made his decisions, and hence at times Chilton’s categorical statements were frustrating since evidence was often not adduced to support the claims made.

A number of the critical judgments that inform the biography should prove to be of interest to readers. Chilton rejects the idea that Paul personally studied with Gamaliel; argues that Paul was significantly influenced by Stoicism; claims that the empty tomb was irrelevant to the Pauline view of the resurrection; maintains that Paul’s eye affliction was herpes zoster; claims Paul never married; maintains that Barnabas abandoned Paul in Derbe and did not return with him as Acts claims; uses very late sources in painting a portrait of James; accepts the view that Paul circumcised Timothy (which is often rejected, of course, by those who doubt the reliability of Acts); questions the reliability of the account that relays the conversion of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16); says that Silas also abandoned Paul; insists (contra Acts) that Paul did not accept the decree in Acts 15; accepts the standard critical view that Paul and the Antiochene church parted ways; argues that Galatians fails as a letter since it is filled with venom and theatrical devices; asserts that Paul had a negative view of marriage; defends the view that 2 Corinthians represents a patchwork of several Pauline letters; and maintains that Timothy wrote Colossians and probably Ephesians and that

the Pastoral Letters come from an even later hand.

Chilton's judgments are a mixed bag. The theory that Paul had herpes zoster is fascinating (though difficult to establish), and many, probably most, would agree that Paul never married. On the other hand, many of his decisions are dubious. For example, his view that Galatians was a failure seems questionable, for the preservation of the letter by the Galatians suggests otherwise. Perhaps Chilton's view that the letter is abusive and off-center reflects his own estimate of the letter from his own social location rather than the response of the Galatians themselves. Chilton claims that by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he had learned to desist from calling his readers stupid, but in 1 Cor 15:36 some of the readers are identified as fools, and Paul is rather sarcastic in 1 Cor 4:8-10, and so it seems that Chilton exaggerates the differences between the two letters.

Chilton is quite dogmatic about the resurrection and implies that only fundamentalists think that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. Such a judgment flies in the face of massive evidence to the contrary, including now the impressive and convincing work by N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. As noted earlier, many of Chilton's conclusions stem from his view of the historical reliability of Acts. Those who think that Acts portrays genuine history, like the present reviewer, will depart from Chilton at a number of points.

The author of *Acts of Paul and Thecla* said that he wrote out of love for Paul. It seems that Chilton writes with some admiration for Paul, but he also freely criticizes Paul throughout the book, and does not convey adequately the depth of Pauline theology. Chilton's book represents mainstream critical scholarship, and reflects the Enlightenment convictions and the philosophical view that reigns in most of our universities. Even those of us who stand at a very different place will profit from Chilton's locating Paul in the historical context of his day.

—Thomas R. Schreiner  
James Buchanan Harrison Professor of  
New Testament Interpretation  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett.*  
By Keith E. Durso. Macon: Mercer University  
Press, 2009, x + 240 pp., \$35.00.

Polite, dignified, and circumspect, George Washington Truett, though a native of western North Carolina, followed his family to the Texas frontier in 1889. By 1897, he had assumed the role of pastor at the First Baptist Church of Dallas. Seven years later, J. B. Cranfill and S. A. Hayden, both well-known Baptists and editors of competing Texas journals, boarded the same train heading for Nashville. Not surprisingly, an argument ensued and both Cranfill and Hayden drew revolvers and exchanged several shots. The fact that no one's shots connected to the target (if not intentional) was a greater embarrassment to Cranfill, a veteran cowboy of Old Chisholm Trail fame, who, under normal conditions, would not have missed twice.

Welcome to Texas Baptist life, Pastor Truett. Perhaps the restraint and regal posture of the new Dallas pastor was precisely what the Texas frontier required. Keith E. Durso suggests as much in *Thy Will Be Done*, his memorable biography of Truett. Scholarly biographies should be perceptive assessments, free from both hagiography and bitter recrimination. Upon completion of his perusal, the reader should sense that he knows the biographer's subject exactly as he was—both in character and contribution. If that is the essence of a good biography, Durso has succeeded splendidly. This tome is readable, accurate, just, and largely free of the intrusion of the author's unsupported perspectives. Further, the importance of the volume for an understanding of Texas Baptist history, and even the historical record of the Southern Baptist Convention and of the Baptist

World Alliance, can scarcely be overstated.

Truett's birth, conversion, baptism, and early years in North Carolina, north Georgia, and eventually Texas, are chronicled by Durso in the first chapter. His call to ministry, his rather incredible and successful efforts to save Baylor University, his assistance in the building of a cowboy camp in Paisano in West Texas, and his unlikely call to First Baptist, Dallas, are the subjects of chapter 2. Chapters 3–7 sketch the ministry of Truett in Dallas and its rapid extension to a worldwide impact prior to the advent of television or the availability of travel by air. A final chapter provides a brief summary and evaluation. Documentation is extensive and helpful, though this reviewer prefers footnotes rather than the endnotes provided here. Within this 377-page biography, 102 pages are devoted to endnotes. The index is thorough and helpful, and the first 24 pages consist of a perceptively selected gallery of photographs that are actually valuable in viewing the historical development of the era.

Durso's sketch of Truett reveals a complex character of considerable ambition, tempered by apparently genuine humility. Recognizing early the value of education, Truett availed himself of every opportunity. As a part of that pursuit of knowledge, Truett mastered the art of debate. In light of his ministry, which was characterized by a generally non-combative approach, this early love for debate seems to have been abandoned during Truett's ministry years. Durso's acknowledgment of the impact of Truett's mother on the pastor's development is refreshing in a day when motherhood is frequently under-appreciated. Citing Truett in *A Quest For Souls*, Durso notes,

She was down on her face before God. I can remember until yet the surpassing pathos of her prayers. She said: "Lord, Jesus, I never can rear this houseful of boys like they ought to be reared, without thy help. I will make shipwreck with them, without thy help. I cannot guide them, I cannot counsel them, I cannot be the mother that

a woman ought to be to her children, without God's help. I will cleave to thee. Teach me and help me, every hour." I heard her like that, and then she came back singing every morning (6).

Jerry Falwell, move over! Other than having their respective genesis in the same part of the country, Truett and Falwell may not have had much in common. But when the subject is fundraising, these two preachers were cut from the same cloth. While I knew that Truett raised a mountain of *dinero*, Durso's biography surprised me in the revelation of just how effective Truett's fundraising activities had been. Durso not only enumerates the extensive causes for which Truett sought support, together with the amounts secured, but he also provides in parentheses what these figures would look like in the contemporary economy. When the amounts raised by the entrepreneurial preacher are viewed in the perspective of 2007 purchasing power, added to the plethora of projects for which he sought such funding, Truett has to be considered one of the greatest development strategists in American history. Further, the pastor accomplished this task with no media support and only a modicum of what, by some analysis, might be reckoned "direct mail" solicitation. In stark contrast to many contemporary preacher/fundraisers, Truett's success seems actually to have enhanced the public's confidence in his integrity. A portion of this was due to Truett's personal generosity and the fact that only much later in his life did he allow himself significant remuneration.

The dissenter from the Truett chorus of praise was bombastic John Franklyn Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth. The antics of Norris were so sufficiently despicable that even when right on an issue, he commands little affection or sympathy. Durso clearly elucidates the unrelenting pressure generated by both public and private sniping administered by Norris. Truett refused to respond in kind or even, for the most part, to acknowledge the allegations of the

pesky but indefatigable Norris. The imprecations of Norris surface throughout the biography like the dark threads of an otherwise colorful fabric. Doubtless, Norris had no intention of elevating the public image of the illustrious pastor, but the “dark threads” in the end only provided stark contrast for the nobility and decidedly Christian responses of Truett.

There is little to criticize in this biography. A chapter on Truett’s theology would have been helpful. Of course, Truett was a pastor with only a college degree, and Durso does discuss Truett’s doctrinal commitments in the development of various chapters. However, the current practice of using names like Carroll and Truett as names for institutions that do not represent the perspectives of those whose names are thus invoked probably make the issue of Truett’s theology require greater attention.

To be fair, however, Durso does not misrepresent Truett’s theology. He introduces the eschatological optimism of Truett with his post-millennialism, which was renewed by his hope that no war of the magnitude of World War I would ever again occur. Durso notes that while the Dallas pastor maintained amicable and even close relationships with ministers in other denominations, he was no ecumenist. Rather he vigorously endorsed Baptist beliefs and openly opposed Catholicism (185). Acknowledging Truett’s fierce devotion to religious liberty and his own efforts to bridge the racial divide, Durso nonetheless finds Truett’s own language about African Americans to be typical of the times and, therefore, demeaning. Naturally and appropriately, he is critical of Truett’s claim that Baptists have always been champions of civil liberties when the very birth of the denomination was on the wrong side of the slavery issue (186).

The author correctly notes Truett’s opposition to Darwinism but spots the inconsistency in Truett’s emotional defense of Baylor when J. Frank Norris made allegations concerning the science professors in the university. Durso presents

Truett as fully orthodox, defined in both general evangelical terms and specifically from Baptist perspectives. This includes full confidence in both the unquestioned authority and full reliability of the biblical text. He even notes the financial savior of Baylor as lamenting “the ‘ominous trend’ in the United States to divorce religious denominations from their colleges and universities.” Durso notes, however, his confidence that “Baylor will remain true to the ideals of the fathers” and “not be ashamed of the noble denomination that founded and fostered her” (97).

The irony involved in the fact that not only Mercer, Stetson, University of Richmond, Wake Forest, and finally even Baylor, to name just a few, did exactly what Truett vowed would be unthinkable actually leads to an understanding of another of Durso’s critiques of Truett. Durso remarks that, “During the evolutionary controversy, Truett, as was his custom, remained in the background. Such aloofness, however, unsettled many Baptists” (189). He cites another Dallas pastor who spoke of Truett’s “lack of backbone” (190).

The author also features Truett not only as president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), but also as its principal promoter among Southern Baptists. Here, too, the seeds of compromise that would take that body on a course far removed from the commitments of Truett and its other founders were already growing. Durso cites Erich Geldbach, possibly the most liberal of contemporary German Baptist theologians, admitting that Truett, the German Baptists, and the BWA in general found that their newfound freedom under the Nazi state was an illusion and that they “had been the victims of massive self-deception” (216).

Was Truett a victim of deception? Did he have difficulty admitting problems in people and institutions that he cherished? Was he simply attempting to work out the implications of practical Christianity in his hesitancy to address contested issues in Baptist life? Durso seems to suspect that the great preacher simply despised controversy.

The answer to this question requires the adju-

dication of motives, which mortals can never make. Such judgments must be left to God, who alone deciphers men's motives. What can be said is that Durso's biography illustrates what happens when top leaders, for whatever reason, fail to answer the bell when a conflict begins. Non-retaliation toward J. Frank Norris and his obnoxious and often untruthful attacks certainly exhibit a brand of Christianity rare in any era. On the other hand, even if unintentionally, the failure of Truett to roar like a lion in theological controversy paved the way for Baylor and the BWA to move inexorably to the left theologically. In the end, Durso is correct to consider this as serious flaw in an otherwise great man.

—Paige Patterson  
President  
Professor of Theology  
L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics.*  
Edited by Larry L. McSwain and William Loyd Allen. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008, 354 pp., \$45.00.

The editors of this book set the scene for Baptist social ethics in the twentieth century by picturing for us the 1934 Baptist World Alliance meeting in Berlin. There, they tell us, the official report "praised Adolf Hitler's personal example of abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, while John R. Sampey, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, cautioned against judging Hitler too hastily since he prohibited women from smoking or wearing red lipstick in public."

Against this shortsighted form of uniquely southern-cultural pietism, the editors offer another tradition prominent in the last century's Baptist witness: that of prophetic social activism. This book introduces readers to some of those whom the editors consider the "major prophets"

of twentieth-century Baptist life. Some will be immediately recognizable to all readers, whether Baptist or not: Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter. Others will be recognizable to those familiar with the Southern Baptist Convention leadership structures of the last generations: J. M. Dawson, Foy Valentine, James Dunn. Each chapter includes both a biographical sketch and an outline of the major ideological or activist contributions of the figure analyzed.

The best chapters are those written by those closest to the ethicists described, and thus able to include personal insights into their background and motivations. The chapters on T. B. Maston and Henlee Barnette, ethicists of Southwestern and Southern seminaries respectively, are perhaps the best in the volume because they are written by their respective students with a personal attention to detail that seems rooted in honor and love.

This attempt to honor, a primary strength of the book, also turns out to be a weakness at some points. The analysis lacks nuance when it comes to possible critiques of the ethicists involved. Some ethicists' positions on, for example, abortion rights and the separation of church and state are examined with little reflection on the (often very ugly) anti-Catholic rhetoric that came along with them (not to mention, in the case of abortion rights, the departure from the small "c" catholic witness of the church universal throughout the ages).

The book's other major flaw is in the "shapers" chosen and those ignored. It is appropriate that the book starts with Rauschenbusch because the "progressive" tradition stands virtually alone here, enough to make one wonder if a better title might have been *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Liberal Baptist Social Ethics*. Many of those chosen would, of course, need to be in any treatment of this subject (King, Maston, Barnette, Valentine). The editors tell us in the introduction they cannot deal with every influence on Baptist social ethics in the last century (and that's undoubtedly true). They

then tell us that they are leaving out some (such as Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry), but they leave this almost as though this neglect is a matter of space in the pages.

But can it really be said that Glen Stassen had more to do with “shaping” Baptist social ethics than Carl Henry? Hardly. And who could assert that Billy Graham’s influence on race, Vietnam, the counter-culture, and the relationship between the church and the White House (whether one agrees with how this influence was used or not) is less than that of Jimmy Carter?

Despite these missteps, the book is worth reading by all interested in seeing the intersection between Baptist life and social ethics. A careful reading can remind those of us in the conservative confessional stream of the Baptist tradition of the necessity of judging our social views in light of Scripture as we seek to be in and not of the world around us.

—Russell D. Moore  
Dean, School of Theology  
Senior Vice President for  
Academic Administration  
Professor of Theology and Ethics  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Why Johnny Can’t Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers.* By T. David Gordon. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009, 108 pp., \$9.99 paper.

If you thought you were soon to die and could only write one book, what would it be? T. David Gordon’s answer to that question was his jeremiad *Why Johnny Can’t Preach*. Gordon penned the volume in 2004 while undergoing eleven months of treatment for cancer and facing a twenty-five percent chance of survival (the cancer is presently in remission). He was not sure if he would live through the year and was driven with a sense of urgency to express thoughts on preaching that he

had desired to write for thirty years (10-11).

Gordon presupposes that contemporary preaching is poor and is of the opinion that “less than 30 percent of those who are ordained to the Christian ministry can preach an even mediocre sermon” (11). His critique is focused on conservative evangelical and Reformed churches (his constituency), and while he acknowledges there are great preachers today, his burden is for the average Christian family sitting on the average pew on an average Sunday (14). In 1966, the landmark volume, *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (Rudolf Flesh) was published and was followed in 1990 by *Why Johnny Can’t Write* (Linden and Whimbey). According to Gordon’s argument, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach* is the logical corollary, because if Johnny can’t read and write then it is just a matter of time until he can’t preach.

Gordon cites media studies that demonstrate that the contemporary dominance of image based and electronic media have altered the thinking of American culture, transitioning it away from a typographical based culture. Gordon believes that for preaching, all of the change in this regard has been negative. The volume begins with a chapter that offers an anecdotal argument for the fact that Johnny can’t preach. Chapters 2 and 3 unfold Gordon’s thesis: Johnny can’t preach because he cannot read texts and because he cannot write. In both of these areas he contends that the problem is atrophy.

Fewer people read today than in previous generations; even fewer read literature, and fewer still read verse. Technology has robbed us of much important face-to-face communication and the priority of clear, well composed writing. Inconsequential reading, thoughtless babbling, and text message compositions do not prepare preachers to read the biblical text or to write a sermon for oral proclamation. Gordon perceptively notes that the result of Johnny’s inability to read and write is a failure to distinguish the significant from the insignificant (67). This failure is devastating for the task of preaching which is rooted

in recognizing the weighty, the significant, and the consequential. In the fourth chapter, Gordon calls for the content of preaching to be Christ-centered in the tradition of Dabney, Clowney, and Chapell. Most notable is his contention that the *only* key to a return to Christ-centered preaching is learning to read and write so the preacher can regain a sensibility of the significant, therefore realizing nothing is more significant and central than Christ (92).

Gordon believes the situation is desperate but not hopeless for Johnny as a preacher. He argues Johnny should pursue a degree in English literature instead of religion or Bible in his undergraduate studies and read as much pre-twentieth century poetry as possible. He contends that reading verse and great novels can help turn Johnny away from modern tone deafness and toward consequentiality. Gordon also suggests pastors have an annual review and consistently practice composed communication in order to develop pre-homiletical sensibilities.

This is an important book because it directly and passionately uncovers the problem of much contemporary preaching in *conservative* evangelical pulpits. Much of the banal, self-oriented, cliché-ridden, how-to preaching found in evangelical pulpits is not simply a choice of style but the default hermeneutic for a generation who cannot read texts closely or write well ordered compositions. Therefore, the preacher is inhibited in his ability to think through and communicate the significance of the biblical text. Thus talk of the biblical storyline, organic unity, unifying theme, or interpretation and application mediated through Christ is an unknown tongue to many. It is simply easier for some people, it seems, to profess their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible—but then read every passage as though it is all about them, jumping immediately from every text to their lives apart from the mediation of Jesus.

Though Gordon overstates his case at times and admits he is speaking from a particular perspective and not giving “the full story” (10), the

essential case he is making is true—and yet it is the very thing that has been left largely unsaid in regard to evangelical preaching today. One minor critique is Gordon’s emphasis on English literature and the study of pre-twentieth century poetry for one’s ability to render a faithful, close reading of the biblical text, and consequently an accurate preaching of the text by Gordon’s standards could smack of a form of academic elitism, at least to some. Gordon undervalues the power of knowing and being saturated with the biblical narrative itself. After all, the Scripture is an amazing collection of diverse genres of literature. Church history is replete with Johnnys who, like the apostles, were formally “uneducated, common men” (Acts 4:13), but who were drenched in biblical texts, were steeped in biblical poetry, and became good writers because of their familiarity with the divinely ordered composition of the Bible. Because they were so familiar with the Bible they knew it possessed a metanarrative that centered on Jesus, and they could preach. Anyone who reads Gordon’s book and embraces his central message will be a better preacher as well.

—David E. Prince  
Pastor of Preaching and Vision  
Ashland Avenue Baptist Church,  
Lexington, Kentucky