

Book Reviews

Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth Through Online Education

Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe
Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
2018, 250 pp., paper, \$25.00
ISBN: 978-0-8308-5205-5

Reviewed by Matthew Haugen

With the increased prevalence of online education, Stephen and Mary Lowe beg the question as to its viability in Christian higher education. Although seminaries are increasingly *capable* of facilitating online mediums of education, *should* they offer education in this medium? Lowe and Lowe utilize sociology, biblical, theological, and educational studies to explore spiritual growth through online education.

Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age is organized into three sections and thirteen chapters. Lowe and Lowe argue that 1) there are overlapping and interacting ecologies, 2) online education is one among many other ecologies, and 3) the online medium facilitates a space for seminarians to grow spiritually with one another through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Section one shows the ecological dimensions found in scripture. In these varying ecosystems are interconnected and interactive ecologies. Lowe and Lowe see these ecologies through the entirety of scripture, but more specifically in Genesis, Jesus' parables, and Paul's theology of the Body of Christ.

Section two extends the conversation of ecologies to online education. Online platforms of all varieties allow for social networks. Social networks entail individuals and groups of people participating in reciprocal interactions. Although education does not necessitate disembodied

learning, I am suspicious of their overly optimistic approach to an online medium of education *and* formation. In short, there was little to no defense on how digital mediums are neutral tools. For instance, Sherry Turkle describes many of the drawbacks of digital social networks on *de-forming people* in subtle but important ways.¹

Lowe and Lowe's defense of digital mediums being *capable* of formation after the likeness of Christ, however, is well defended in section three. Although the learning is not disembodied because it is online, intentionality of students and professors alike allow for environments conducive for mutual spiritual growth between students. They do admit that embodied realities (i.e., local churches) facilitate the most spiritual growth for students while online education facilitates the greatest construction of knowledge.

Lowe and Lowe's unique contribution in *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age* are their concepts of overlapping and interacting ecologies in the fields of education and formation. The primary critique that I have for this work is the overly optimistic portrayal of online mediums. I admit, however, that Lowe and Lowe provide ample examples and counter-examples to provide a more satisfying defense for the *capacity of online mediums for educating seminarians*. This book contributes to the field of online education studies from a Christian perspective. I recommend this book to online Christian educators, Christian higher education administrators, and to those interested in the cross-section of Christian formation and online education.

¹ Sherry Turkle. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015).



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Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation

Winfield Bevins

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

2019, 208 pp., paper, \$16.99

ISBN: 978-0-310-56613-7

Reviewed by Michael Whitcomb-Tavey

In this book, Winfield Bevins argues for the implementation of a more robust liturgical existence within the walls of the Church. Titled *Ever Ancient Ever New*, he argues that the tried and tested measures of established Church liturgical exercises and practices throughout the centuries is more effective at growing the Church both numerically and spiritually than any other means currently practiced. These forms are sometimes referred to as “ancient,” for the majority of them were established many centuries ago, with some of them established millennia ago. This premise essentially stands as an implicit critique on current Church models and practices, which he often refers to as “Church entertainment.” His overall concern is that higher forms and uses of liturgy are of more value to the Christian than neglecting them. Throughout his book, he references three traditions that stand as paragons of ancient worship expression: Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism.

The book is more than argument, however. It is no surprise that there is a growing movement toward older forms of worship amongst younger generations. Many books have been devoted toward analyzing this trend. Those books tend to approach this phenomenon through statistics and objectivity. Winfield stands out in that he approaches this trend from a more subjective perspective, providing multiple case studies and personal examples of people moving toward ancient forms of worship. His book is more reporting than scientific analyzing, in that he cites the reasons many people have personally given him for moving toward a more robust liturgical experience. In fact, he quite often quotes the people he has interviewed. From these interviews, he infers persuasive positions that are both logical and convincing.

His book is separated into three sections. The first section, titled *Foundations*, argues for the use of liturgy within the Church. This section explores the many reasons why younger generations are shifting toward these ancient forms of worship, and how those forms have inherent power,

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by the grace of God, to strengthen the faith and Christian identity of both the individual and the community. Although it may be surprising to some, younger generations are not seeking entertainment, but rather robust liturgy. This section naturally leads into the second section, *Journeys*, where he discusses two essential components that drive younger generations toward these forms of worship, and how they are implemented in new and fresh ways in our modern age. This section also introduces the reader to the many interviews he has conducted with people that explain the allure of liturgy. The first component is the allure of Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism. More specifically, it analyzes the allure of the worship expressions of these three traditions. The second component examines the appeal of community, and how these traditions help foster it. The next two chapters detail how these components are being implemented throughout the spectrum of Christian branches and denominations, including Charismatic congregations. The final section explores liturgy from a more individualistic perspective, and how these forms of ancient worship can also be implemented in one's personal life, as well as for the family home. This section is both insightful and practical. Not only does he argue for the use of liturgy within the home, but also provides examples of how it can be implemented. The book concludes with a short epilogue encouraging the reader to embrace ancient forms of worship.

Winfield's book will provide teachers, students, pastors, non-pastors, and others with a challenging call toward liturgy. This is especially true for Church leaders, where they have the power to make worship changes within their services.

Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour

John Goldingay

Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

2019, 250 pp., paper, \$28.00

ISBN: 978-0-8308-5224-6

Reviewed by Theresa Lieblang

What is ethics? John Goldingay answers this question, based on principles founded upon the Old Testament, in his newly released book, *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour*. He divides ethics of the Old Testament

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into four broad topics for the basis of his discussion which are: what sort of people we are; how we think; what sort of things we do; what sort of things we do not do. Within these four broad topics Goldingay creates five main parts for the discussion of ethics: Qualities, Aspects of Life, Relationships, Texts, and People. These five main parts comprise a total of forty-three short chapters that can be read in any order with no accumulating argument.

Within each chapter Goldingay incorporates biblical text from his own translation that he elaborates for the sake of discussion. Each chapter ends with a few insightful “Reflection and Discussion” questions that is geared for personal or group study. In the conclusion he compels the reader to reread the Old Testament to better understand the ethical lives of the many biblical characters involved and how God revealed himself through each situation. Goldingay ends with a postscript that gives a brief explanation to the ethics behind the Israelites slaughtering the Canaanites. This explanation briefly elaborates on the historical realities and beliefs of these two nations for the reader who may not be familiar with the pagan worship of the Canaanites and the disobedience of the Israelites.

In his introduction, Goldingay illustrates a few references from the New Testament where Jesus or a disciple is questioned regarding certain ethical issues. The answers to these types of questions always refer back to the Torah or the Prophets. One example is when the Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce and he responds with, “What does it say in the Torah?” In order to better understand Old Testament ethics Goldingay uses three guidelines from Jesus: ask how the implications of the Old Testament’s teaching need to be spelled out; ask how its teaching expresses love for God or love for neighbor; ask how far it is laying down creation ideals and how far it is making allowance for our hard-heartedness.

It is within these three guidelines that forty-three succinct chapters are developed to cover the qualities that comprise a community that also entail work ethics and legal issues. He expounds on relationship issues from the broad perspective of nations to the more narrow perspective that addresses the ethics of family members and the household. Goldingay elaborates on the ethical matters found in essential chapters like Genesis 1 and 2, Leviticus 19 and 25, Deuteronomy 15 and 20, Ruth, Psalm 72 and the Song of Songs. He shifts to discuss the lives of some biblical characters to help answer ethical questions which include: Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Joseph, Shiphrah and Puah, Samson, David, Nehemiah, Vashti, Esther, and Mordecai.

This book is an excellent resource to have for a quick guide on any subject of Old Testament ethics.

The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology and the Deluge Debate

Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton

Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic

2018, 192 pp., paper, \$20.00

ISBN: 978-0-8308-5200-0

Reviewed by Brian Shockey

The Lost World of the Flood is the latest in a series of books written by Walton, either alone or in collaboration with other scholars, aimed at reading the Old Testament within its ancient Near Eastern context. In this volume, Walton enlists the help of Tremper Longman III as well as geologist Stephen O. Moshier, who contributes one chapter. This volume, like others in the series, is built around a series of propositions made by the authors, which are intended to guide the reader to a certain conclusion. The book presents itself as an academic resource designed for a more popular audience, and as such, is very accessible. Although Longman and Walton note at the beginning that they plan to introduce the reader to a variety of interpretations, they do so mainly in the service of their own argument. This is likely, in part, an effort to reduce the complexity of the topic for the more casual reader.

The book itself is well written and the argument clearly articulated. While the authors assume some familiarity with previous books in the series (particularly those discussing Genesis 1-3), the footnotes are sufficient to allow the reader to engage the material without having read the other books. After outlining some of their strategies for biblical interpretation, Longman and Walton proceed to argue that modern readers have missed the rhetorical shaping of the flood narrative. They affirm that a historical event lies beneath the account in Genesis but suggest this event has been written as theological history. As such, we should expect the author to employ rhetorical methods to emphasize the key interpretive elements of the story. Longman and Walton suggest that our inability to reconcile modern scientific data with a literal account of the flood should lead us to consider whether we have accurately understood ancient concepts of

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genre and style. They argue that the global flood and description of the ark are hyperbolic in nature, a fact that would have been plain to the original audience. It is the theological interpretation of the flood event and how it relates to the broader context of Genesis that is of chief importance. They further suggest that reading the Genesis account beside the other ancient flood accounts helps to clarify the theological emphasis of the biblical text.

The reader should be aware that Longman and Walton assume a degree of continuity among sources in the ancient Near East (of which the Bible is one), which affects the way they use comparative data. Although they are not interested in arguing for direct literary borrowing from one source to another, they do presuppose that the Bible shares in the broad “cultural river” of the ancient Near East. Little attention is given to the specifics of the relationship between the Bible and the ancient Near Eastern sources and issues of chronology and geography are not discussed. The extent to which one agrees with this presupposition will largely determine how well one receives Longman and Walton’s argument. In either case, the book is thought provoking and an excellent addition to the *Lost World* series.

Displaced Persons: Theological Reflection on Immigration, Refugees, and Marginalization

Matthew W. Charlton and Timothy S. Moore, eds.

Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the United Methodist Church

2018, 210 pp., paperback, \$39.99

ISBN: 978-0-938162-26-1

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

We are in a global situation where it is imperative for people of faith to reflect upon how they are called to respond to immigrants, refugees, and those who are marginalized in our societies. For that reason, I was cheered to see this title in print and hoped that this book would be an addition to the ongoing conversation and an impetus to response for those who read it. At times, *Displaced Persons* rises toward the occasion, but, on the whole, it takes on too many issues at once and ends up being an erratic collection of essays.

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Probably the most frustrating and misleading part of this collection is its subtitle. That may seem like an odd complaint, but simply *Displaced Persons* without *Theological Reflection on Immigration, Refugees, and Marginalization* would have been closer to the mark. The subtitle, within our current milieu, quickly brings to mind the images that are flooding the news of scenes at the US-Mexican border, forced migration from Syria, and boats of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. That is an important topic that should be met with theological reflection and action. However, that is not the thread that binds all of these papers together. There are some papers that do reflect on that topic, but, if you are looking for a focused collection of essays on current human migration, this is not that.

So, skip the subtitle and note that this is a United Methodist (UM) book, and the discussions inside come from people involved in UM student ministry on college and university campuses. Already, one can tell that this is a highly contextualized discussion. That, in itself, of course, is not a mark against it. The topics, though, are free-ranging enough that the best replacement subtitle I could think of was *Marginalized People and the United Methodist Church*, but you still almost have to say something about college and university ministers. There are essays on being an American missionary-pastor-immigrant in Germany, perspectives of emerging adults, hospitality to marginalized people on campus, Native American young people's sense of belonging in the UM, homosexuality and the *UM Book of Discipline*, as well as essays on current human migration issues. It is very difficult to pull all of these essays together under one title.

There are times that, from the perspective of someone who is not a United Methodist, the conversations seem like shots fired in an internecine struggle. A case in point is the essay on homosexuality, "Out of Joint: The Dislocation of Our Bodies from the Church's Sexual Ethic" by Timothy S. Moore (119-142). The starting point of this essay is the language *UM Book of Discipline* and the anthropology implied in that language. Moore then strenuously argues philosophically and theologically against that anthropology, but, for someone outside the denominational struggles, this seems like a rather narrowly focused, intramural debate.

So, in the selection of the essays that appear, the collection feels overly broad. At the same time, the UM specificity of many of the essays seems overly narrow for a wider audience. Perhaps all of this could be forgiven if some of the essays stood out as important pieces, but critical quality is generally lacking. There are interesting essays, well-written

essays, but nothing really rises to the level of opening new paths for scholarship or advancing the conversation around immigration, refugees, and marginalization.

Fearfully and Wonderfully, the Marvel of Bearing God's Image

Paul Brand and Philip Yancey

Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

2019, 272 pp., paper, \$25.00

ISBN: 978-0-8308-4570-5

Reviewed by Michael Whitcomb-Tavey

In *Fearfully and Wonderfully, The Marvel of Bearing God's Image*, Philip Yancey and the children of Dr. Paul Brand have updated this edition for those who live in the context of our modern age. Dr. Brand was a renowned medical orthopedic doctor who served leprosy patients in India from 1946 to 1966, and as the Chief of Rehabilitation at the National Hansen's Disease Center in Carville, Louisiana until 1986. Afterward, he taught at the University of Washington as emeritus professor of orthopedics. He is best known for discovering that leprosy was not a disease of the tissue, but a disease of the nervous system, whereby nerves lose the ability to communicate sensations to the brain. He was a pioneer in surgical techniques of the tendons, and specialized in repairing broken and damaged tendons and nerves in the hands of leprosy patients. He also performed many other surgical procedures, including brain surgery.

Over his many years of service in India, he journaled about his experiences. In addition he wrote about his perspectives concerning leprosy and how it relates to the Church. Much of his insights are analogous. He relates how the body of the Church ought to function according to how an ideal human biologically functions. Those insights eventually were compiled together, and with the help of Philip Yancey, he published several books. Two of his most renowned works of publication are *The Gift of Pain*, and *Fearfully and Wonderfully*. Sadly, Dr. Brand passed away in 2003. As a result, this updated version was produced by Yancey and Dr. Brands' children.

In this book, Dr. Brand discusses how the Church can gain insight into how the Church ought to function by viewing how the human body

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functions. He explains the ways in which the body functions correctly, and then uses those insights to inspire the Church to function correctly. He also explains the dangers the body experiences, as well as the potential threats it faces. Using that knowledge, he instructs the Church of the dangers and threats that the Body of Christ will encounter.

His book is separated into six sections. The first and second sections discuss how each individual within the body of Christ functions like individual cells within the body. When working together in harmony, the Church can accomplish amazingly redemptive tasks. Such knowledge also forces the Church into a place of acceptance and love for all people. The third section explores Skin and Bone. The sense that garners the most sensation is touch, which is communicated through the skin. In relation to the Church, Dr. Brand explains the need for the Body of Christ to expand their care for other people, from a place of mere financial support to a more meaningful and intimate form of caring, whereby the people of God suffer with those in need and actively engage with such people in both relationship and fellowship. In this way, those in need experience the sensation of “Divine touch.” Moreover, just like the skin protects vital and fragile organs, the Church has a duty to protect the most vulnerable, which includes the newly converted. In reference to bone, the human skeleton is both extremely durable and flexible. Based on this knowledge, Dr. Brand exhorts Christians to be both strong in Christian conviction, passion, and commandment, and also flexible enough to adapt and change according to the times in which they live. In doing so, the Church will avoid both legalism (a rigidity that can never adapt to changing times) and licentious progressivism (lacking in structure resulting in an inability to stay grounded during times of change).

Section four explains how blood and oxygen work together, and how they are essential to life. Dr. Brand reveals that the Church also needs vital components for its continued sustenance and life. According to him, this sustenance is found in the blood of Christ, which is communicated to the Church in a mysterious way through communion, and also the life of Christian liturgical practice, which is the “oxygen” of the Church. Section four also details the muscular system, and how it works properly within the human body. As an analogy, the Church grows its muscles when we stretch beyond ourselves to help other people.

The last two sections explore the nervous system and the brain. As has been noted, Dr. Brand discovered that leprosy is the disease of the

nervous system. This means that nerves become apathetic toward pain, which can result in bodily harm. It may even result in death. This becomes metaphorical for the Church. One of the greatest dangers to the Church is the threat of apathy, and how it causes inaction. The Church functions best when it both listens to the needs of others and is willing to experience the pain of other people. Finally, in relation to the brain, the reader is taught how the brain commands the body, and how it delegates the different functions of the body. In a similar fashion, Jesus Christ is the Church's head. He commands and delegates its functionality. When the Church listens to and obeys Christ, it functions properly.

In conclusion, this book is deeply insightful. The depth of Dr. Brand's wisdom on these matters is both profound and impressive. *Fearfully and Wonderfully* will provide teachers, students, pastors, non-pastors, and others with a challenging reflection on the status of the Church, and how it should properly function as the Body of Christ. This, then, will affect how each one of its members operates individually in relation to the whole of the body, and also how the whole body grows into an incarnational redemptive force within the world.

Cosmology in Theological Perspective: Understanding Our Place in the Universe

Olli-Pekka Vainio

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2018, 224pp., paperback, \$24.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-9943-4

Reviewed by Logan Patriquin

Suppose we—the human race and all other potential embodied conscious agents (ECAs)—inhabit an inflationary universe. That is, a universe that perpetually expands and then, theoretically, collapses and then produces new universes. Think Big Bang → Big Crunch → Big Bang, *ad infinitum*. Of all multiverse theories this option has the most empirical grounding to date. Suppose then our current universe's iteration isn't the first or the last. What implications might this have on Christian doctrines like: incarnation, human uniqueness, and creation itself? While each chapter title is a science fiction reference, Dr. Vainio sets out in

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Cosmology in Theological Perspective to add his seasoned voice to some contemporary theological debates for which the label “science fiction” is markedly less tenable nowadays.

The reader of, *Cosmology in Theological Perspective*, will observe an informal, two-part structure. The first three chapters serves as a judicious, interdisciplinary introduction to the material, sweeping through ancient - though not solely Christian - cosmological conceptions, enough Patristic philosophical engagement to provide a historical tie to the discussion, and then a quick review of major, broadly cosmological challenges that historic Christian orthodox has already endured. The second section, then, consists of chapters that individually tackle material from budding discussions in contemporary scientific and cosmological circles.

Take this question for example: does the sheer enormity of the cosmos warrant a theological crisis for Christianity? Not according to Vainio. The text’s fruitful theological engagement with multiverse theory, cosmological peripheral locality, and the vastness of space is tethered together by two theological/philosophical premises:

- (a) “Humans were made for the cosmos” (41).
- (b) “As the greatest conceivable being, who is good and loves things that are good, God is more likely than not to create good things in abundance” (82).

Premise (a) may sound fairly tame at first but frame it against the popular conception that “the cosmos was created for humans” (x), and a deeper discussion emerges. Vainio does not pit these claims against one another. Rather, he suggests affirming (a) to get to (x), not *vice versa*, in order to have a richer discussion on human uniqueness and value despite our lack of cosmic centrality (41). Premise (b), labeled the *Theistic Principle of Plenitude (TPP)* by the author, deals more with the material end of the discussion. He wagers that Christians shouldn’t be surprised or threatened by a great universe, nor the potential of other ECAs. For, it ought not be shocking that a God with infinite resources would create in plenty. Embracing both (a) and (b) gets us to an intellectocentric cosmology rather than an anthropocentric one (69).

Let us see how accepting Vainio’s cosmological presuppositions may help Christians dispense with a commonly articulated objection to stereotypical, populist Christian cosmology by atheists:

1. If God exists, he would create a human-sized universe.
2. Our universe is not human-sized.
3. Therefore, God does not exist (112).

What is at stake, biblically, theologically, philosophically, or from a scientific perspective that Christians would need to commit to premise 1? The author is quick to wield (a) to challenge the conception that cosmic centrality is necessary to ascribe value to human beings, thus also dismantling, in turn, the connected claim that our peripheral locality, cosmologically speaking, denotes insignificance for our species and planet. He opts instead to affirm that human value is not rooting in axiological categories like spatial location, size, or distance (115-119). Human value and uniqueness rest instead in the fact that out of the void of space, God chooses to call and pursue us. Human value, therefore, is fixed in God's saving action not cosmological conventions. As such, very few scientific theories about the vastness or multiplicity of our universe offer genuine theological challenge on this particular front.

Additionally, *TPP* (b) is also an excellent counter to premise 1. Why ought Christians believe that an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God would even desire to create a "human-sized" universe? Instead, one ought to expect a universe potentially teeming with beings capable of comprehending it (99). To say that humans bear the image of God doesn't not necessarily entail that nothing else does (102). Jettisoning premise 1 with (a) and (b) undermines the entire argument.

One area where committing to (a) and (b) gets tricky for Vainio is in his discussion on incarnation. *TPP* most naturally lends itself to the conclusion that, "We are not alone; one or more extraterrestrial races [of embodied conscious agents] exist" (158). The author outlines a number of soteriological possibilities for these speculated ECAs but seems to gravitate to his option d—"Ets are fallen, but their nature is assumed by God in an act of incarnation on their worlds" (159 & 161). In short, a commitment to (a) and (b) seems lead one to embrace, at least the possibility, of multiple incarnations.

Classic, Trinitarian, Christian orthodoxy, as expressed in the great creeds, professes belief in the bodily ascension of Jesus Christ, and consequently the assumption of human nature into the Godhead via the hypostatic union of Christ. Vainio appears to believe that the possibility of adding additional wills to the nature of the Son of God, for every presumable

race of ETAs, ought not be a notion too quickly dismissed (162). While he spends about a page and a half trying to present Thomas Aquinas as a theological ally in this endeavor, even the author admits that much more constructive work would need to be done on this point (165). I, for one, concur.

Baker Academic's, *Cosmology in Theological Perspective*, is a dense but worthwhile read. In Lewisian fashion, Dr. Olli-Pekka Vainio implores us to engage our imagination in some of these speculative discussions about the nature of the cosmos and humanity's unique, or not so unique, relation to it. He argues in his conclusion, along with Lewis, that:

It would be foolish, and obviously false, to think that Christian faith has sailed smoothly through history without ever encountering serious objections and challenges. However, it is equally foolish to think that science and new discoveries somehow necessarily, like a tide, force the Sea of Faith to withdraw from these shores. (180)

Readers will be hard-pressed to disagree.

The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity

Second Edition

Roger E. Olson

Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic

2016, 396 pp., paper, \$37.99

ISBN: 978-0-8308-5125-6

Reviewed by J. Russell Frazier- Nairobi, Kenya

Roger Olson (Ph.D., Rice University) is Foy Valentine Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University. He has served as the president of the American Theological Society (Midwest Division) and co-chair of the Evangelical Theology Group of the American Academy of Religion. He is a prolific writer, having authored or co-authored over 20 books and numerous journal articles and other publications. He is well qualified to write a book of this nature. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity*

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and Diversity was first published in 2002; the work under review is the second edition of this work. The author describes the word “mosaic” as “a metaphor for this mediating approach that seeks to emphasize both Christian unity and Christian diversity in terms of belief” (12).

Olson sets out the aim for this work in the introduction entitled “The Need for a ‘Both-And’ Theology.” His work is characterized by mediating theology, which attempts to reflect the consensual tradition as reflected in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant branches of the Church. His goal is stated as follows: “to explain to uninitiated readers what that common tradition includes in terms of unity, what it allows in terms of diversity and what it excludes in terms of heresies...” (12). Another characteristic is that Olson’s project is intended to express “the best of evangelical Christianity” (13) and by this, he means a gospel which is centered upon the grace of God. His project makes an attempt to be “irenic in spirit and tone” (14). Olson identifies his work as non-speculative; he purposes not to speculate about controversial doctrinal matters but keep the focus on “the rough unity and colorful diversity of Christian belief” (16). The last characteristic is that of simplicity for the novice (17). With these characteristics, Olson attempts to counter the folk theology and to provide a balance between believing and experiencing within a post-modern culture that has leaned to a subjective spirituality. Olson’s antidote is to develop a “both-and” theology, which avoids the errors of the pendulum swing effect rather than an “either-or” theology (23). Olson admits of several influences. He is a Baptist in the “broader evangelical free-church tradition” but has been “spiritually and theologically nurtured” by Pentecostals and Pietists (27). Yet, he learned to value “the wider catholic tradition” of the early church fathers and self-identifies as a progressive evangelical and ecumenicist that respects “his own tradition’s distinctives” (28).

Chapter one of Olson’s work is entitled “Christian Belief: Unity and Diversity” in which he further reveals the agenda for his project. Against the meaninglessness of an indefinite definition, Olson proposes the identification of “the core of essential Christian beliefs that all mature, capable Christians must affirm in order to be considered truly Christian” (30). Yet, Olson wants to avoid an intolerant dogmatism. The criterion for discerning this core of Christian beliefs is expressed in the Vincentian Canon: “What has been believed by everyone (Christians) everywhere at all times” (34). Olson further clarifies that the Great Tradition entails the agreed upon beliefs of the early church fathers as well as the sixteenth-century

Reformers (36). Though recognized as a secondary, relative authority, the Great Tradition “deserves great respect and should be ignored only with fear and trembling” (44). Olson differentiates between the following three categories: 1) dogmas that he considers essential to the Christian faith; 2) doctrines that are distinctive of a particular faith community; and, 3) opinions that tend to be the reflections of Christians about which there is no consensus (45). Having set out his agenda, Olson proceeds in the remaining chapters of the book to articulate the various theological categories of the Christian faith.

In the remaining chapters of the book, Olson presents a polarity in each chapter. The chapter titles reveal the polarity. Chapter 2 is entitled “Sources and Norms of Christian Belief: *One and Many*.” He identifies scripture as “the major source and norm” of authority for the Christian faith (51); the many sources include tradition, reason and experience. Chapter Three is entitled “Divine Revelation: *Universal and Particular*.” Olson attempts to achieve a balanced view between the two polarities; however, he may be too Barthian for some readers. “Christian Scripture: *Divine Word and Human Words*” is the title of the fourth chapter. Olson attempts to maintain a balance between the polarities of divine word and human words. Along the way, he discusses themes of inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration. In the fifth chapter, Olson argues for a balanced view between the transcendence and immanence of God. The chapter is entitled: “God: *Great and Good*.” Chapter six is entitled: “God: *One and Three*.” Therein, Olson argues with classic Christianity as the subtitle suggests that God is one substance and three persons.

Olson in his chapter on “Creation: *Good and Fallen*” endeavors to avoid certain issues within the theological currents of the day: “...our theme [in this chapter] will be that Christian belief about creation has little to do with specific scientific theories about the age of the earth and the natural processes that led to the emergence of life” (158-159). The fallenness of creation is emphasized, while one side of the polarity is not given equal treatment in this chapter. In chapter 8, Oden discusses the doctrine of providence and his polarities are “*Limited and Detailed*.” He affirms that God is in charge of nature and history, but raises questions about the extent of the providence, particularly in the light of evil. In the section on the diverse Christian visions of God’s providence, he discusses meticulous providence, limited providence, and open theism (193-199). He doesn’t consider open theism heterodox as many theologians have (199), but holds

that some view of limited providence holds the most promise for the unity of the Christian faith.

Chapter 9 is entitled “Humanity: *Essentially Good and Existentially Estranged*.” Olson attempts in this chapter to balance the Christian idea of the value and dignity of human beings with the fallen nature of humanity. The author attempts to provide a unifying Christian perspective and finds hope in Emil Brunner’s distinction between the “formal image” and the “material image;” the former defines the image of God within terms of “responsible freedom,” and the latter is humanity’s righteousness before God (224-5). The polarities of Christian belief about Jesus Christ are the subject of the next chapter. Olson articulates the Chalcedon faith, that is the union of the two distinct natures – human and divine – in one eternal, hypostatic union.

“The Holy Spirit: *Divine Person and Power*” is the title of chapter 11. The crucial issue here is that most Christians in their practice emphasize either that the Holy Spirit is a divine person or a divine power (251). The disagreements about the doctrine of the Spirit center around either the status of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, or the operations of the Spirit within the Church today. Olson appeals for the Church to maintain “and even strengthen” its belief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the equality of the Holy Spirit with the other two persons of the Trinity (271). He also calls for greater stress upon the activity of the Holy Spirit without falling into fanaticism. The next two chapters, twelve and thirteen, both deal with the doctrine of salvation. Chapter 12 focuses on the objective and subjective aspects of the atoning work of Christ. Olson expresses concerns for views of the atonement that overstress the polarities and asserts, “*No one explanation does justice to all that happened on the cross*” (emphasis of the original retained, 292). The next chapter discusses salvation as gift and task. Olson argues that salvation is both a gift of divine grace and, at the same time, entails human agency.

The Church is the subject of Olson’s chapter 14, which is both visible and invisible. Olson employs the four universal marks of the Church as the unifying consensus on the doctrine of the Church; he discusses in this chapter the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. The fifteenth chapter is entitled “Life Beyond Death: *Continuity and Discontinuity*.” Olson points the direction in the balance between continuity and discontinuity with the present life and the life to come; however, he acknowledges much work to be done on this doctrine to reaching a consensus (360-1). The last chapter

addresses an eschatological theme: “The Kingdom of God: *Already and Not Yet.*” Here Olson attempts to navigate between the extremes of radical realized eschatology and of adventism.

Olson’s work represents a solid introduction to consensual theology or a paleo-orthodox theology that places great emphasis on the theology of the first five centuries of the early Church. His work of course differs from paleo-orthodoxy in that he holds in high regard the magisterial Reformers of the Church. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* provides a good, solid introduction to Christian theology and would serve well as a textbook for a course in the field. Olson doesn’t allow his focus on the consensus to cause him to have myopic vision; he recognizes the on-going tensions and disagreements among theologians in the Church. However, he attempts to point the way forward to consensual thought when possible. The issue with developing a consensual theology is that the author has the responsibility of choosing the polarities. When the polarities are ill chosen, the attempt to balance the polarities is ill conceived. However, Olson has done the Church a service in developing a consensual theology that is well balanced. However, one wonders if the consensus would satisfy those of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.



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Books Received

The following books were received by the editor's office since the last issue of *The Asbury Journal*. The editor is seeking people interested in writing book reviews on these or other relevant books for publication in future issues of *The Asbury Journal*. Please contact the editor (Robert.danielson@asburyseminary.edu) if you are interested in reviewing a particular title. Reviews will be assigned on a first come basis.

Ashford, Bruce Riley and Heath A. Thomas

2019 *The Gospel of Our King: Bible, Worldview, and The Mission of Every Christian*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-4903-3. Price: \$22.99

Bevans, Winfield

2019 *Marks of a Movement*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective. ISBN: 978-0-310-09835-5. Price: \$17.99.

Bouma-Prediger, Steven

2019 *Earthkeeping and Character: Exploring a Christian Ecological Virtue Ethic*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9884-0. Price: \$24.99.

Brown, Sherri and Francis J. Moloney, SDB

2019 *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7519-8. Price: \$25.00.

Campbell, Douglas A.

2020 *Pauline Dogmatics: The Triumph of God's Love*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7564-8. Price: \$64.99.

Chatraw, Joshua D. and Karen Swallow Prior

2019 *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-53457-0. Price: \$29.99.

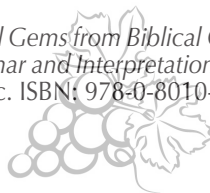
Chilcote, Paul W.

2019 *Active Faith: Resisting Four Dangerous Ideologies with the Wesleyan Way*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. ISBN: 978-1-7910-0172-8. Price: \$13.99.

- Colyer, Elmer M.
2019 *The Trinitarian Dimension of John Wesley's Theology*. Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church. ISBN: 978-1-9459-3544-2. Price: \$44.99.
- Duvall, J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays
2019 *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-4959-0. Price: \$34.99.
- Ensminger, Charles D.
2019 *Crafting the Sermon: A Beginner's Guide to Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books. ISBN: 978-1-9459-3560-2. Price: \$16.99.
- Gehring, Michael J., Andrew D. Kinsey, and Vaughn W. Baker, eds.
2019 *The Logic of Evangelism Revisited*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications. ISBN: 978-1-5326-0456-0. Price: \$23.00.
- Georges, Jayson
2019 *Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missional Implications*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5247-5. Price: \$22.00.
- Gorman, Michael J.
2019 *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul's Theology and Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6036-8. Price: \$30.00.
- Gupta, Nijay K.
2019 *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Zondervan Critical Introductions to the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-51871-6. Price: \$44.99.
- Gupta, Nijay K.
2020 *Paul and the Language of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7343-9. Price: \$34.99.
- Hardy, H. H., II
2019 *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9876-5. Price: \$19.99.
- Heetland, David L.
2019 *Happy Surprises: Helping Others Discover the Joy of Giving*. Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books. ISBN: 978-1-9459-3557-2. Price: \$18.99.

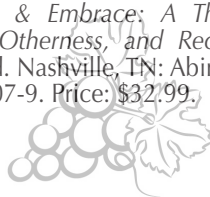

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- Holtzen, Wm. Curtis
2019 *The God Who Trusts: A Relational Theology of Divine Faith, Hope, and Love.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5255-0. Price: \$28.00.
- Johnson, Adam J. and Stanley N. Gundry, eds.
2019 *Five Views on the Extent of the Atonement.* Counterpoints in Bible and Theology Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-52771-8. Price: \$22.99.
- Keener, Craig
2019 *Christobiography: Memories, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7675-1. Price: \$54.99.
- King, Roberta R.
2019 *Global Arts and Christian Witness.* Mission in Global Community Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9885-7. Price: \$26.99.
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2019 *Outside Looking In: Early Methodism as Viewed by its Critics.* Nashville, TN: New Room Books. ISBN: 978-1-9459-3543-5. Price: \$49.99.
- Kreider, Glenn R. and Michael J. Svelg
2019 *A Practical Primer on Theological Method: Table Manners for Discussing God, his Works, and his Ways.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-58880-1. Price: \$16.99.
- Long, D. Stephen
2019 *Truth Telling in a Post-Truth World.* Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books. ISBN: 978-1-9459-3550-3. Price: \$28.99.
- McNall, Joshua M.
2019 *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-09764-8. Price: \$34.99.
- Merkle, Benjamin J.
2019 *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9877-2. Price: \$19.99.



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- Ott, Craig
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- Ovey, Michael J.
2019 *The Feasts of Repentance: From Luke-Acts to Systematic and Pastoral Theology*. New Studies in Biblical Theology Series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2662-9. Price: \$16.84.
- Parker, Margaret Adams and Katherine Sonderegger
2019 *Praying the Stations of the Cross: Finding Hope in a Weary Land*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7664-5. Price: \$21.99.
- Rhodes, Ben and Martin Westerholm, eds.
2019 *Freedom Under the Word: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9881-9. Price: \$45.00.
- Robert, Dana L.
2019 *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-2571-1. Price: \$19.00.
- Sider, Ronald J.
2019 *If Jesus is Lord: Loving Our Enemies in an Age of Violence*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-3628-6. Price: \$24.99.
- Treier, Daniel J.
2019 *Introducing Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9769-0. Price: \$29.99.
- Tyson, John R.
2019 *Praying with the Wesleys: Foundations of Methodist Spirituality*. Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books. ISBN: 978-1-9459-3554-1. Price: \$18.99.
- Volf, Miroslav
2019 *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Revised and Expanded. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. ISBN: 978-1-5018-6107-9. Price: \$32.99.



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- W., Jackson (pseudonym)
 2018 *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5223-9. Price: \$20.00.
- Walker, Andrew G.
 2015 *Notes from a Wayward Son: A Miscellany.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. ISBN: 978-1-62564-161-8. Price: \$41.20.
- Waltke, Bruce K. and James M. Houston
 2019 *The Psalms as Christian Praise: A Historical Commentary.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7702-4. Price: \$36.00.
- Wray Beal, Lissa M.
 2019 *Joshua.* The Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-49083-8. Price: \$49.99.
- Wright, N.T. and Michael F. Bird
 2019 *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. ISBN: 978-0-310-49930-5. Price: \$59.99.



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