

Book Reviews

A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity

Vince L. Bantu

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic

2020, 256 pp., paperback, \$35.00

ISBN: 978-0-8308-5107-2

Reviewed by Susangeline Patrick

In *A Multitude of All Peoples*, Vince Bantu argues that early Christianity was a global religion. To counter the narrative of a Eurocentric vision of church history, Bantu reveals an impressive and extensive focus on early development of Christianity in North Africa, the Middle East, and the ancient Silk Road. The book concentrates on the beginning of the third century until the twelfth century.

The book is well structured with four chapters. Chapter one lays out the foundational framework and overarching thesis. Bantu analyzes the formation of how Christianity came to be associated and perceived as a Hellenized/Romanized Western religion. He first identifies early Christianity in Asia and Africa and the Romanization of Christianity. He then traces the theologians and theological formulation of Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and anti-Chalcedonian debates, interactions, developments, and their influences in early Christianity between the fourth century and the early seventh century. He attributes the Chalcedonian schism as being the most significant ecclesiastical divide that established the dominance of the Roman church and marginalized non-Western Christian traditions in Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, Syria, Arabia, and Palestine. Bantu then turns to the seventh century and provides an overview of the Arab Muslim conquest of the eastern Roman provinces and North Africa. He particularly focuses on how the Christian communities in Egypt had understood and interacted

with cultural shifts while living under Islamic rule from the seventh to the tenth century. Bantu reveals western Christendom and its imperial and religious dominance considering the Islamic rivalry between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Chapter two highlights prominent historical figures and theologians, events, and Christian movements in Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, and other parts of North Africa from the New Testament period till Medieval time. Like other historians such as Thomas Oden, Bantu also argues how profoundly early North African Christianity has shaped Christian history and contributed to theology. Chapter three focuses on the significant developments of Christianity in Syria, Lebanon, Arabia, and Armenia. Chapter four emphasizes Syriac Christian figures and their thought in Persia, India, Central Asia, China.

Bantu's historical lenses equip readers to recognize the diverse expressions and rich heritage in early and Medieval Christianity. The book also enables readers to discern what Bantu repeatedly labels as the western cultural captivity and militarization of Christianity.

Reading Bantu's book has also prompted three sets of questions. The first set of questions concerns the perceptions and actions of early Christian communities in western Asia and North Africa. How did Christian communities in western Asia and North Africa perceive and position themselves? Did they view themselves as being marginalized by Roman Christianity? In the process of the Romanization of Christianity, did Christianity also conversely reshape Roman culture? I may add that Celtic Christianity also rejected some elements of the Roman formulation of Christianity and developed their own distinctive theology and indigenized expression of Christianity. The second set of questions regards Christianity's encounters with different religions, including Medieval Islam and Buddhism. Since the crusades ended with the fall of Constantinople and Muslims won the wars, why would the loss of the crusades contribute to later justification of colonialism? The third set of questions centers on attributing Romanization of Christianity as the root cause of later calamities of western colonialism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and various other practices against indigenous peoples in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Australia. Are there other root causes for European colonialism such as economic exploitation and political expansion? Was Christianity misused by Medieval European rulers or did Christian principles warrant or command political and religious dominance? Bantu's book would add some clarification if he could address these three sets of questions for readers to see the connection

between Romanized Christianity and the marginalization of Christianity in the majority world.

Additionally, a few comments may require more clarification. For example, Bantu views Augustine as “the victim of Romanocentric racist attitudes” (114). Christian theology was enriched because of Augustine’s works, in what ways did Augustine suffer racism? Did early Christian communities in Kerala, India defy the hierarchical *jati* (caste) system (187)? Four minor corrections are also needed. The first one is that Portuguese Jesuits arrived in India in the late sixteenth century, not late fifteenth century (189) because the Society of Jesus was not officially formed until 1540. Perhaps Bantu meant that Portuguese Catholics arrived in India in the late fifteenth century. The second one concerns Xinjiang’s technical classification as an autonomous region (*zizhi qu*), not a province (191). The third clarification is that the Dunhuang manuscripts written in Old Uyghur is distinct from the modern Uyghur language, thus not communicable with the modern ethnic Uyghur spoken language (192). If Bantu is referring to the Old Turkic language found in the manuscripts, it is also a linguistic system different from modern Uyghur. The fourth clarification is regarding the second character of the illustrious religion *jingjiao*. *Jiao* means teaching or religion. It is different from *dao*, “way.” These two words are to be distinguished (204).

From the complex and rich resources of the book, Bantu provides readers a better picture of Christianity’s contextual and multi-directional nature in its transmission both geographically and historically. The book contributes to the post-colonial conversations from a historical and intercultural perspective. In interacting with the political identity of Christianity, Bantu moves beyond a resistance-dominance binary vision and calls for healing, reconciliation, and the empowerment of indigenous leadership and contextual theology.



Imagining Theology: Encounters with God in Scripture, Interpretation, and Aesthetics

Garrett Green

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2020, 288 pp., hardcover, \$36.00

ISBN: 978-1-5409-6192-1

Reviewed by Scott Donahue-Martens

Imagining Theology navigates aspects of postmodern skepticism, especially concerning God and theology. Green argues for a return to normative theology rooted in a normative inspired view of scripture. Because such a return should not ignore the gains of modernity and postmodernity, the theological imagination needs to be employed. Since the theological imagination is prone to misuse and misinterpretation, Green argues that a robust orthodox Christology is needed to navigate the hermeneutical task of imagining God from scripture. The theological and hermeneutical implications of this argument are developed in connections with the works of Barth and Frei. *Imagining Theology* is a hopeful theological argument for how to do theology as a person of faith in the 21st century.

Chapter one is an excellent overview of issues surrounding science and religion. It also lays the foundation for the theological imagination referenced throughout the work. Green provides a brief intellectual history of relevant material before unpacking how science and religion each depend on a type of imaginative thinking. Science has largely operated out of an empirical paradigm that focuses on causes and not teleology. Recognition of the limitations of this scientific paradigm should free religion from attempting to prove itself under impossible paradigms. “The task of the scientist is to imagine the natural world, but the task of imagining God is something altogether different” (10). Green’s use of imagination here is a realistic imagination rooted in a normative reading of scripture. While science and religion utilize the realistic imagination toward different ends, each is understood as a hermeneutical enterprise.

Chapter two explores Barth’s concepts of saga and imagination. The proper way of understanding scripture as saga is through scripture’s imagining the world rightly in connection to God. Green maintains that postmodern readers of scripture need to read from a place of trust in the application of the use of scripture. Readers need to recognize that biblical

writers were able to imagine the world rightly. Chapter two takes up the theme of modern suspicion through the work of Feuerbach. Barthian Christology provides a response, and Christology in general is developed further in chapter three to underscore deficiencies in liberal theology. Without this normative orthodox Christology, the theological imagination is in grave danger of mis-imagining God and the world rightly. The fifth chapter outlines a possible way of embracing Ricoeur's concept of the second naïveté with Frei and a postliberal reading of Barth.

Moving beyond the Romantic hermeneutics' choice between the mirror and the lamp, Green argues for imagination as a lens in chapter six, which is employed to resist idolizing understandings of God in chapter seven. Green exposes his perceived limitations of metaphorical theology in chapter eight. He employs this to argue that "[t]he theology of the genderless God is doubly flawed" (125) and argues for "the kenotic masculinity of God" (136). Chapters nine through twelve explore facets of eschatology, especially through Kant and Moltmann. The eschatological imagination provides part of the needed teleological vision for the theological imagination because it is a core part of the grammar of theology. The final few chapters grapple with faith in increasingly pluralistic and secular settings. Green describes the paradigms of pluralism and secularism, as well as how normative Christianity should resist these trajectories.

Imagining Theology is a complex collection of chapters revolving around faithful Christian being and interpretation in light of postmodernity. While some of the chapters were more convincing than others, the work as a whole makes valuable steps toward an imaginative hermeneutical theology from a Barthian perspective. Green's desire to afford scripture the normative voice and role in theology is maintained throughout the entire work. This corrective to theologies that often abandon scripture for other sources of authority will be welcomed by many. It does give the work an apologetic quality for the type of theology Green purposes. While there are connections between chapters and sections, any individual chapter or section could also be read on its own. The work contains unifying themes, as the title suggests, but the individual chapters are predominantly self-contained arguments.

The book is written with an expert audience in mind. In places, Green leaves original languages untranslated and makes highly nuanced arguments across languages that escape translatability. He also presumes a high level of theological and philosophical literacy. To my mind, a

benefit of these choices is the complex development of Green's arguments. It allows him to explore important theological figures and loci deeply. However, it means that the work is best suited for graduate students and those in the academy. Green grapples with philosophical theologians, especially continental philosophers for the sake of theological faithfulness to a normative reading of scripture. This contribution to theology in general, and imaginative theology in particular, makes the work well worth the read for those interested in these subjects.

Reading the Bible Missionally

Edited by Michael W. Goheen

Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans

2016, 343 pp., paper, \$22.36

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7225-8

Reviewed by Reinaldo I. Gracia Figueroa

Reading the Bible Missionally, is an edited volume by Michael W. Goheen and contains fifteen essays authored by scholars such as Richard Bauckham, Christopher J. H. Wright, N. T. Wright, and Darrell L. Guder, among others. This work is a landmark in missional hermeneutics and fills an existing gap in the literature of missiology and biblical studies. The aim of the book is to recover mission as a central category for reading and interpreting the Bible, for preaching and for theological education. The book is divided in five major sections: I. A Missional Hermeneutic, II. A Missional Reading of the Old Testament, III. A Missional Reading of the New Testament, IV. A Missional Reading of Scripture and Preaching, and V. A Missional Reading of Scripture and Theological Education. It is important to highlight that this book is part of the "The Gospel and our Culture Series," a series whose main objective is to cultivate a missional mentality in North American culture.

The heart of the book it is to explain what is a missional hermeneutic and how it can be integrated into other theological disciplines. The volume tries to connect mission and theology. For the discipline of missiology, the concept of *Missio Dei* is central because it emphasizes the missional nature of God and therefore of the entire church. This means that if mission is the "mother of theology," then, there is a need for engaging

missionally with the theological disciplines and theological education. The first section of the book functions as the foundation of the book because it is where missional hermeneutics is explained in depth. Two of these chapters will be briefly discussed here in order to highlight their contribution to the discussion of missional hermeneutics.

In chapter one, "A History and Introduction to a Missional Reading of the Bible," Michael Goheen, explores from a historical perspective the development of missional hermeneutics in biblical and missional scholarship. There are three dimensions that are important to build a missional hermeneutic. The first dimension is that *mission is central to the biblical story*. This means that "missional hermeneutics begins with the triune God and his mission to restore the world and a people from all nations" (15). The second dimension is *reading scripture to understand what mission really is*. Goheen points out, "missional hermeneutics help us to understand what the church's mission in the world really is" (21). The third dimension is *reading scripture to equip the church for missional praxis*. It is the "scriptures that inspire and inform the church for its missionary praxis" (25). This chapter provides three key components of missional hermeneutics.

In chapter five, "Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Shape of Missional Theology," John R. Franke turns the discussion toward intercultural hermeneutics. For Franke, to read the Bible missionally is to read it with others. Franke argues, "the task of reading the Bible with others and developing an intercultural approach to hermeneutics emerges from one of the most basic assumptions of Christian faith: that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people" (87). The chapter suggests that missional theology emerges from the interactions among intercultural hermeneutics, missiology, and postmodern thought. Therefore, missional theology needs to develop three aspects. The first aspect is it needs to be open and committed to others. The second aspect is that a missional theology beyond its foundations seeks to respond positively and appropriately to the situatedness of all humans (98). The third aspect of missional theology is to stand in opposition to claims that any particular theology is universal for all times and places (99). Franke's chapter demonstrates that intercultural hermeneutics and missional theology is pluralistic and committed to all cultures.

The chapters that were highlighted here are a snapshot of what the book offered. It provides a good range of discussion of what is means

to read the Bible missionally. The scholars in this volume engaged with the topic from different perspectives, such as, hermeneutics, the Old and New Testaments, history, theology, and homiletics. At end of the book the authors explain the implications of this discussion for theological education. In other words, the book provides the theoretical and practical applicability of the concept of missional hermeneutics. It does not leave the reader wondering about how to apply this concept to ministry or to theological education. The book makes clear that missional hermeneutics is being explored from different theological disciplines and angles.

Overall, the book is recommended for those who want to be introduced to the discussion of missional hermeneutics from a multidisciplinary perspective. A major strength of the book is the quality of the contributors and their writing. This book provides a serious and profound academical discussion on the topic. A weakness of the book is that the voices of the majority world were not included as contributors of the volume. Despite this, it is a volume that contributes to the missional discussion not only in the North American context, but also, there is applicability to the majority world contexts as well.

Reading Mark's Gospel as a Text from Collective Memory

Sandra Huebenthal

Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans

2020, 656 pp., hardcover, \$74.99

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7540-2

Reviewed by William B. Bowes

Originally published in 2014 as *Das Markusevangelium als kollektives Gedächtnis*, this English translation makes available for a wider audience Sandra Huebenthal's meticulous and intriguing work on the application of cultural-scientific/memory-theoretic studies to biblical studies. Huebenthal holds the position of professor for exegesis and biblical theology at the University of Passau, and has distinguished herself through various publications on both intertextuality and social identity within the New Testament.

Broadly, the book addresses the creation and use of Mark's Gospel through the lens of collective memory (a field which has recently enjoyed

growing scholarly attention), rather than through the lens of history, literature, or theology. Through an investigation of how groups remember events and how this memory is structured and represented, Huebenthal explores the image of Jesus constructed in Mark and what the narrative reveals about communal practice and the formation of identity. In her effort to bridge the gap between otherwise largely independent disciplines, she paints a picture of Mark's Gospel that is highly constructivist, in that she assumes that the events and persons Mark depicts are to be classified as "memories" which are conditioned by social forces and constructed by the narrator and are thus not accessible as accurate depictions or actual lived experiences of the characters. Huebenthal's view of memory is highly influenced by Assmann, Halbwachs, and Kelber, who do not understand memories to be linguistically or semantically fixed, but variable and socially rooted ideas of the past based on the present circumstances of the community of commemoration.

In the first chapter, Huebenthal begins by situating her approach within the broader approaches of Gospel criticism. She characterizes her own views in alignment with those who, for example, view the evangelists more as creative theologians than collectors or redactors, and view texts as created within a community rather than for a community. Her review of the work of earlier scholars like Bultmann and Käsemann in this chapter is helpful for grounding her own framework, which understands the memories in Mark's Gospel to be "fluid and convertible" meaning that "an unbiased look through the text is therefore not possible, neither as regards the events that lie behind it nor as regards the process of its growth" (76). Rather, in her view, Mark's transformation of his material reflects "the efforts of a group to draft a group identity based on that group's memories" (81). This perspective differentiates her approach from that of others like Bauckham or Hengel, who grant historical validity to Mark and a basic coherence between the text and its sources.

Chapter two has an in-depth discussion of the various forms of memory and the ways in which it has been understood, with Huebenthal laboring to show that memories are "always tied to specific sociocultural context, shaped and molded by them" (96). Assuming this, she can assert that the past exists only as a cultural construct, not actually preserved or recalled but rather past episodes are selectively reconstructed "from a perspective according to its assumed relevance within a given social frame" (100). The collective aspect of this idea of memory comes from the idea

that the community needs a shared point of reference in the past that brings meaning to present experience in order to construct a stable identity.

Chapter three begins to apply this perspective directly to Mark, suggesting that Mark's interpretation of the past altered previous material, resulting in socially accepted forms that were determinative for his community's understanding of their present place and future trajectory. She thus rejects the long-held view that there was a linear, evolutionary synoptic growth that began with oral tradition and written collections into a narrative framework. This view, she argues, must be abandoned in favor of the view that the episodes in the Gospels are "socially and culturally shaped constructions" (184) not corresponding to real events they remember. From this perspective, Mark's narrative is "functional and oriented to the needs of the community of commemoration...in the form of an identity-constitutive founding story" (185), likely necessitated, she asserts, by the crisis of the Jewish War and its aftermath.

In chapters four through six, Huebenthal focuses on analyzing the narrative structure of Mark 6:7-8:26, noting first the complex intertextual web presented by this section and then various possible reasons why Mark may have included certain passages. For example, she proposes that many of Jesus's miracles "are semanticized as indicators for the time of salvation that has just begun" (346). Occasionally this leads to some over-interpretation, as in her analysis of Mark 7:34 where she suggests that Jesus's statement "be opened" should be read as a demand for the readers to "be opened for the new reality of the βασιλεία that has arrived" (445). She then argues that Mark should be divided into three parts, first the constitution of the community (1:16-8:30), the organization of the community (8:31-11:10) and the Jerusalem episodes which focus on crisis and how to overcome it (11:11-15:39). In her analysis she refers frequently to the "theory of multiperspectival narration" and "possible worlds theory", ideas which focus on the perspectives of the characters and how these relate to the broader world of the text and interact with the world of the narrator. Finally, she examines individual pericopes, showing how Mark's audience could interact with each as they constructed their identity within their own context. In the final chapter and epilogue, Huebenthal reiterates her findings and engages with some of the critiques that have been made of her approach.

Huebenthal's work is strong in that it is well-written and meticulously researched (there are more than 1,600 footnotes). It also creates

interesting possibilities for future research about the connection between the fields of memory and biblical studies, forming a bridge between them in a manner unattested in much available literature. Her discussion of the intertextual elements in Mark 6:7-8:26 was also exceptional, providing many valuable insights. From a critical perspective, the repeated dismissal of any historical value to Mark's Gospel will surely prove troubling and doubtless unacceptable to many readers. She consistently assumes that writers like Mark were unconcerned with the accurate, historical representation of real events or of the person of Jesus but deliberately created fictions for the sake of the community's needs. This assumption severs the connection between the text and the actual events and renders Mark rather irrelevant to the contemporary reader. While this clearly makes the book controversial, it nonetheless deserves to be read and evaluated by serious students of Mark's Gospel.

2084: Artificial Intelligence, the Future of Humanity, and the God Question

John C. Lennox

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

2020, 208 pp., paper, \$19.99

ISBN: 978-0-310-10956-3

Reviewed by Matthew Haugen

While ethical and legal cases involving modern technology continue to increase, John C. Lennox in *2084* advocates for serious evaluations of the benefits, liabilities, and limitations surrounding data-driven markets and governments as well as artificial intelligence. Despite the title having strong Orwellian allusions, Lennox is broader and slightly more balanced in evaluating AI than the title suggests.

2084 can be organized into two sections explaining two competing worldviews respectively: atheism (i.e., technological-optimism) and Christianity. Lennox attempts to give a fair presentation of each worldview, but ultimately argues for the supremacy of Christ. Lennox's conversation partner in *2084* is Yuval Harari, author of *Homo deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*.

Chapters 1 through 3 map out the atheistic technological-optimist worldview (i.e., origin and *telos*). Chapters 4 through 6 explore the benefits,

drawbacks, and concerns surrounding Artificial *General* Intelligence. Although the benefits of AI tend to be more commonplace today, some drawbacks and concerns that Lennox explores are worth noting: threats of job loss, “surveillance capitalism” contra “surveillance communism”, and transhumanism as a means to achieving *Homo deus*.

Chapter 7 transitions the book to the second section: the Christian worldview. Chapters 8 and 9 develop a theological anthropology using Genesis 1-2 and Genesis 3 respectively. Lennox distinguishes between intelligence and consciousness, in which AI has not achieved the latter. Lennox also connects the Genesis 3 account to ethics and technology. What ethical frameworks should be applied to AI and who are the arbiters of these decisions?

Chapters 10 and 11 explore Christology. The transhumanist pursuit of AI and the *Homo deus* acts as a parody of Christian teaching surrounding the true *Homo deus*, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, not only has Christ overcome the primary problem to be solved in the atheistic technological-optimist worldview (i.e., death), but the promise of a physical resurrection with Christ is extended to all who follow him. Chapters 12 and 13 explore eschatology as it relates to the true *Homo deus*.

There are three primary strengths in *2084*. First, Lennox’s critiques of AI as being *artificial*. The intelligence of AI is often overstated. Second, there are many unexplored sociological, economic, and ethical questions about AI that have dire consequences for society. Third, power is being centralized via data and technology in such a way that companies or governments might become totalitarian.

There are two primary weaknesses of *2084*. First is Lennox’s anthropomorphization of AI in chapter 12 when he describes people’s willingness to “worship” AI systems despite his repeated attempts to argue AI as being truly artificial. Second is Lennox’s deductive treatment of the book of Revelation. For instance, he conflates those who receive the beast’s mark in Revelation 13:11-18 with an implanted chip, Tegmark’s bracelet, or the partial realization of AGI.

2084 contributes to the interdisciplinary study of religion and science, theological anthropology, and Christian apologetics. I recommend this book to those in ministry, academia, data science, and machine learning or those interested in apologetics involving science, technology, and faith.

New Faces of God in Latin America: Emerging Forms of Vernacular Christianity

Virginia Garrard

New York, NY: Oxford University Press

2020, 300 pp., hardcover, \$99.00

ISBN: 9780197529270

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

“Latin America” is an ambiguous, debated term that, like many terms, conceals a massive amount of diversity. A three-hundred-page book by one author cannot hope to be comprehensive when recent religious developments in Latin America are in view. However, while not comprehensive, Virginia Garrard succeeds at representing the detail of that diversity well and carefully. She guides the reader through a series of ethnographic studies which look closely at the history, artefacts, group practices, and individual self-expressions of religious actors in specific regions like the Guatemala or Haiti. Throughout, her storytelling and interpretations of religious phenomena are respectful of the people involved and of their self-interpretations while being sufficiently critical. She continuously returns to the question of what these religious expressions mean to the person who weaves them into her or his life.

The studies in *New Faces* are balanced toward the northern part of Latin America: Central America and the Caribbean. Explorations of Guatemala, Mexico, and Haiti are followed by a foray into the global forms of neopentecostalism arising out of and linked to Brazil. The historical setting of these religious expressions is richly illustrated by stories of local communities. The human details keep the descriptions from becoming abstractions, the cold observations of a detached scholar. In Guatemala, Garrard takes the reader on a tour of a strongly Pentecostal community, Almolonga. At the end of the chapter, Garrard writes a postscript which returns to Almolonga after a tropical storm wreaked havoc on the area. For the reader, the obvious question is how a town that had associated so much of its prosperity with the blessings of God would respond to this disaster. It is the voices of individuals telling of their response to the tragedy that is powerful in this section, and, whether or not the reader shares the worldview of these speakers, they are treated with dignity and given the

chance to describe their situation. The ethnography here is well done in its respect for the human beings in the study.

Personally, I spent some time in Central America during college. I worked for a summer in Tijuana, Mexico and attended a Pentecostal church near the border every Sunday. After that, I studied in Guatemala for a brief time. While there I spent a Sunday in a Ki'che' church and went to the shrine of San Simón (Maximón) that Garrard analyzes. As I read, those memories came alive and were given context that I did not have as a student. She places those religious expressions in a network of relationships that fleshes out the world and the meanings of the people involved. At the time, what I saw was a series of disjointed experiences, but, as I read, I was taken back to those places and shown how they fit in the larger vista of the Latin American landscape.

This is a book that I wish I had read years ago when I was exploring Central America. It is a careful, scholarly book with plenty of illustration and human interest. Although there are many of countries in Latin America where Garrard does not shine the full light of her scholarship, what *New Faces* lacks in comprehensiveness, it more than makes up for in depth and detail. It is a great resource for the student of religion, Latin America, or sociology.

Basics of Latin: A Grammar with Readings and Exercises from the Christian Tradition

Derek Cooper

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic

2020, 432 pp., paper, \$59.99

ISBN: 978-0310538998

Reviewed by William B. Bowes



Although it was the official language of the church for centuries and the *lingua franca* in the imperial era during which early Christianity formed, Latin is typically subordinated to Greek and Hebrew in theological studies. Indeed, the market is saturated with introductory Greek grammars,

and there are few contenders to the “big two” in Latin pedagogy, *Wheelock’s Latin* (Collins, 7th ed., 2011) and Hans Ørberg’s *Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (Focus, 2nd ed., 2011). In this addition to the Zondervan *Language Basics* series, Derek Cooper has introduced a new, unique and thorough grammar of Latin most suitable for Christian college and seminary students. Given its focus on examining and translating exclusively Christian Latin texts, Cooper’s work is likely to become a new standard in the study of this neglected language, particularly in Christian contexts with students preparing for further studies in classics or Church history.

Cooper’s grammar is made up of twenty-seven chapters divided into eight parts, structured in such a way as to cover a two-semester introductory course, and an appendix which includes numerous exercises for each chapter. In terms of chapters and pages, the first part is the longest in the grammar, dealing with initial elements of the language (such as the alphabet and accents) and moving into the various noun declensions. Cooper structures the grammar to be accessible to those who may have little familiarity with grammatical concepts of language study, and takes time to explain features of grammar and syntax in English and how these compare to Latin. Following other grammars in the *Language Basics* series (such as Mounce’s *Basics of Biblical Greek*), each chapter begins with an introductory note dealing with a theological topic (which he calls *opusculum theologicum*) and each chapter ends with a list of vocabulary to memorize. Cooper also includes a section with a Latin prayer at the end of each chapter (which he calls *oratio popularis*).

Although the equative verb “to be” (*sum, esse*) is covered in the first part, Cooper waits until the second part of the grammar to introduce verbs, beginning in chapter eight. In this way he follows the tendency of other grammars in Zondervan’s series, but makes a clean break with other Latin grammars such as *Wheelock’s*, which introduces verbs from the first chapter. Chapter 8 serves as a helpful introduction into the characteristics, structure, and principal parts of verbs, with chapters nine, ten and eleven covering present, imperfect, and future active and passive, respectively. Chapter twelve begins the third part of the grammar, which deals with irregular or “nonconforming” verbs, beginning with a return to the equative and progressing to more complex verbs such as *ferre*, which occurs frequently in ancient texts and often compounds with other words. The third part concludes with an introduction of deponent verbs (that is, those with passive forms and active meanings) and semi-deponent verbs (those

with mostly active and passive forms, but only passive forms in the perfect tense). In a two-semester structure, the completion of this part would likely be a good stopping point for the initial course.

Part four more thoroughly examines pronouns and adjectives, beginning first with personal pronouns and demonstratives and helpfully elaborating grammatical terminology for those not as well-versed in the jargon common to traditional grammars. Cooper then moves through reflexive, possessive and intensive pronouns in chapter fifteen and then into relative, interrogative and indefinite pronouns in chapter sixteen. Although such separations create more chapters, dealing with small groups of these elements at this stage in the learning process is helpful.

Parts five and six are somewhat of a turning point in the grammar, as they begin to introduce more complex aspects of verbs. Chapter seventeen addresses the perfect tense and its place in the grammatical system, and chapter eighteen introduces the pluperfect and future perfect. Chapter nineteen is one of the longest chapters in the grammar, dealing with the subjunctive mood (which frequently trips up and discourages Latin students). Cooper is careful to present the subjunctive in a way that is accessible for readers only familiar with English, which can be rather clumsy and imprecise in its expressions of subjunctive ideas. Cooper then turns in the subsequent chapters to the imperfect, perfect and pluperfect subjunctives, all representing comparatively longer chapters, given the ambiguous and difficult ways that various verbs are rendered with the subjunctive.

Part seven deals with participles, passives and infinitives, following the structure of most other Latin (and Greek) grammars in leaving these elements to the very end. Chapter twenty-two is another quite lengthy chapter on the nature of participles, and may leave some readers wondering whether it should have been split into two chapters. Chapters twenty-three and twenty-four expand to more complex participial expressions, such as those involving future, perfect, and periphrastic formulations. Cooper also returns in more detail to the ablative case here, which is welcome, since at times it felt as though the ablative (which is rather peculiar to Latin, and absent from Biblical Greek) was overlooked. Chapters twenty-five and twenty-six close this part, dealing primarily with infinitives and the complexities of indirect speech.

The eighth and final part has only two chapters. Chapter twenty-seven deals with imperatives, introducing their basic form. Chapter twenty-

eight is an unusually brief conclusion section, which seemed rather unnecessary. This final section presents a point of critique, since it seems as though chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight could have simply been combined with another part, rather than separated into an eighth section. Or, perhaps, given the fact that Cooper spreads the concept of indirect speech over two chapters otherwise dealing with infinitives (twenty-five and twenty-six), part eight could have been expanded and other sections shortened.

Even with this small point of contention, Cooper's grammar is excellent, and serves as a helpful, unthreatening option for those seeking an alternative to the available introductory texts. It is highly recommended for its accessibility and lack of jargon, its relatively short chapters, its detailed and thorough explanations, its manageable length, and its useful and illuminating examples from Christian writers.

Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis

By William J. Webb.

Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001,

301 pp., paper, \$30.00

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Reviewed by Matthew K. Robinson

In this widely and influential study in hermeneutics, William J. Webb sets out to construct a set of criteria for determining whether particular passages from scripture, especially commands, are culturally bound or transcultural. Webb first gives attention to the nature of his task, the shape of scholarship in evangelical circles around hermeneutics generally, and the particular hermeneutical aim of his own study. He then moves on to develop and exemplify this hermeneutic via 18 criteria with which he analyzes key verses in regard to their implications on current issues in the west: the role of women in church and society and homosexuality. Webb ends his study with a chapter entitled "What if I Am Wrong" wherein he discusses the solidity of some arguments made previously in the book and considers what is at stake if he is indeed wrong. Ultimately, Webb concludes that scripture suggests an egalitarian ethic, the logical end of

its “redemptive movement hermeneutic.” However, the condemnation of homosexuality found in both the New and Old Testaments is transcultural and determines that homosexuality is indeed a sin for all time.

Chapter one, entitled “The Christian & Culture” briefly introduces the problem of assessing scripture and ethical issues via the two cultural horizons of any subject: the subject’s culture and the culture in which the text was produced and which the text initially reflects. Our “quest”, writes Webb, “is to determine whether the church should move with our culture or against our culture” on ethical issues, particularly that of the role of women in society and homosexual practice (29). In chapter two, Webb introduces his notion of the “redemptive-movement hermeneutic.” Webb argues that one must “engage the redemptive spirit of the text in a way that moves the contemporary appropriation of the text beyond its original-application framing” (30). That is to say, one must assess the text to determine whether there is an ethical/theological trajectory that brings further implications to bear upon cultures incommensurate with the culture which the text reflects. Webb contrasts this hermeneutic with the static reading- where a text is understood to be universally applicable ‘as is,’ with no regard for cultural particularities suggested in the text- and a radical feminist or reader-response hermeneutic, which negates the texts original and perennial meaning. For Webb, “a static hermeneutic lacks power and relevance, while a secular or radical hermeneutic lacks direction” (51).

At this stage in the book, one must agree with Webb, at least in his primary concerns. Surely some texts reflect ethics and concerns which are so laden with the cultural trappings of the world of its historical origin that one could not abide by those ethics and concerns by fulfilling them in the way prescribed by the biblical texts. One example that Webb addresses later in his book is that of Rom 16:16’s charge “greet one another with a holy kiss.” Although familial love, kindness, and comradery are certainly at the heart of the command, one would surely miss the mark of expressing “familial love, kindness, and comradery” by kissing his/her fellow believers in the 21st century west. Moreover, the radical postmodern readings which see the text as only a receptacle for current cultural norms mutilate the text by refusing to consider the counter-cultural aspects of scripture. This amounts to a form of idolatry.

However, Webb’s argument here is lacking in sophistication and nuance. First, Webb never really unpacks his nomenclature. “Redemptive” is used at every turn in this chapter and shows up often in the rest of

Webb's study. However, we are never given a satisfactory reason for this title. We are only told that there is a "redemptive spirit" within the text which often portends later development. Furthermore, the theological foundation for Webb's hermeneutic is severely lacking in development. He provides a short section wherein he states that "the theological basis for a redemptive-movement hermeneutic is rooted in two crucial considerations: the authority of scripture and the wisdom of God" (56). Yet his explanations of these two bases are unsatisfactory. One would expect that Webb's call for a "redemptive hermeneutic" would attempt to construct some theologically grounded criteria. That is, one would expect Webb to demonstrate an overarching theological truth, character, or metanarrative which would act as a plum line for tracing the progression of the latent ethical/theological power in problematic texts. He provides nothing of the sort.

Another problem at the outset of Webb's book is the lack of nuance in notions like "culture." Webb assumes a western culture as the present receiving end of the text. He thus assesses texts through a lens of contemporary western mores. However, Webb does little to trace the emergence of these present western convictions. Moreover, Webb all-but-ignores the rest of the world and appears to assume the ethical superiority of the present west. This, at times, results in circular arguments. For example, Webb writes that "by initiating some basic improvements to the right-hand column [problematic passages], it would not be difficult to forge a social ethic that far exceeds scripture" (45). However, Webb's argument does little here to lay a foundation of determining "better." Moreover, especially when it comes to egalitarianism, Webb does almost nothing to engage many cultures around the world which are strongly patriarchal and would find nothing problematic about scriptures like 1 Tim 2. This is not to say that the egalitarian view is mistaken, of course. However, to make his argument cogent, Webb must address these gaps in his methodology.

Finally, Webb's theoretical foundations are weakened by his lack of canonical theology at the outset of his book. Webb does little to lay out the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. At one point, for example, Webb reads Jesus' declarations in Matt 5 as an example of good, redemptive hermeneutics (61). However, Webb does not broach the question of Jesus coming to πληρῶσαι the law (Matt. 5:17). May current believers do with the New Testament what Jesus did with the Old Testament? Unfortunately, Webb never asks this question. Yet, the continuity

or discontinuity between the testaments, the matter of Jesus' particular authority to announce the New Covenant, etc. should be central to this discussion.

The bulk of Webb's book is concerned with demonstrating his redemptive-movement hermeneutic through the application of 18 different criteria via two major categories: "intra-scriptural evidence" and "extra-scriptural evidence." In what follows, I will briefly survey these criteria.

The first 16 criteria that Webb offers fall within the "intra-scriptural evidence" category, which is further broken down into three sub-categories organized via persuasiveness regarding the argument of egalitarianism: persuasive criteria, moderately persuasive criteria, and inconclusive criteria. The first criterion is "preliminary movement" which seeks to determine if a text "modifies the original cultural norms in such a way that suggests further movement is possible and even advantageous in a subsequent culture" (73). Next, Webb analyzes "seed ideas" which are instances in scripture wherein a theoretically powerful notion is introduced without immediate application. The third criterion, "breakouts" looks to texts which outright contradict any enduring application of another text. One good example Webb uses is the leadership role of women in the Church (99). However, Webb does use poor examples as well, like 1 Sam 11:1 as a "breakout" which contradicts Paul's charge against men having long hair (1 Cor 11:14).

Criterion 4, "purpose/intent statements" correctly surmises that "a component of a text may be culturally bound, if by practicing the text one no longer fulfills the text's original intent or purpose" (105). "Basis in Fall or Curse" determines whether or not a feature in the text has transcultural relevance in light of its tie to the fall/curse. Likewise, criterion 6 looks to creational intentions to determine the cultural or transcultural value of a text. Criterion 7 looks particularly at primogeniture and limits Webb's discussion to women in society. Here, Webb's logical and hermeneutical missteps are glaring. Webb first connects Paul's affirmation of gender hierarchy via creation in 1 Tim 2:13 to primogeniture. Next, Webb demonstrates that primogeniture is often undermined by other texts in scripture and is usually tied to cultural-specific concerns. He then transfers these factors back to Paul's reading in 1 Tim 2:13. However, nothing explicitly connects 1 Tim 2:13 to primogeniture (Paul's use of the LXX's *ἐπιτάσθη* indicates more about creative order). Moreover, applying everything that may be said of one

societal fixture to a notion that simply parallels that notion in some ways is logically fallacious. Again, this is not to say that the egalitarian view is wrong, but that Webb's argument is untenable on this particular point.

Criterion 8, "Basis in New Creation" seeks to determine how a component in the text aligns or is modified in light of New Creation. Criterion 9, "Competing Options" states that "a component of text is more likely to be transcultural if presented in a time and setting when other competing options existed in the broader cultures" (152). Criterion 10 argues that a text's opposition to its original culture indicates a greater likelihood of transcultural application. Criterion 11 argues that a text may be culturally bound if related issues are culturally bound. Criterion 12 holds that a command may be culturally bound if the punishment for breaking that command is light or not mentioned (104). Criterion 14 compares specific instructions to general principles which may be in tension. Criterion 15 analyzes the context of a text to determine whether or not the command/component functions within a "specialized context" (15). Criterion 16 states that discontinuity with the OT in the NT necessitates transcultural value.

The final two criteria- "Pragmatic Basis Between Two Cultures" and "Scientific and Social-Scientific Evidence"- assess extrabiblical evidence. The former holds that "A component of a biblical imperative may be culturally relative if the pragmatic basis for the instruction cannot be sustained from one culture to another" (209). The latter states that "A component of a text may be culturally confined if it is contrary to present-day scientific evidence" (221).

Webb's study provides many helpful and important points; both his central concern and approach are to be commended. The ethical/theological trajectory within texts must always be considered and Webb has done well to construct 18 criteria for determining this trajectory (or lack thereof) within the biblical texts. However, Webb often lacks nuance and fails to carefully exegete passages, instead bringing assumptions to bear upon the text without explanation. His lack of theological foundations at the outset weakens his study. Yet, despite this, Webb's call for a hermeneutic that is more methodologically attentive to the text is well taken.