The Return of the Kingdom: A Biblical Theology of God's Reign. By Stephen G. Dempster. Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2024. Pp. 220. $34.95.

In his latest book, Stephen Dempster, now emeritus professor of religious studies at Crandall University, has sought to provide an essential component on the nature of the Kingdom of God for IVP Academic's 'Essential Studies in Biblical Theology' series. As the series' aim is to provide 'an accessible introduction to core biblical-theological themes of the Bible' (p. x), Dempster assumes the unenviable task of tracing the concept of the Kingdom of God in just over two hundred pages. He pursues this task by focussing on humanity's role as viceregents in God's creation, set apart as 'royal representatives, called as God's image bearers to extend the divine rule in his vast creation, to have dominion over it for the glory of God.' (p. 2)

The book's structure is largely canonical, tracing the theme of humanity's role in the unfolding Kingdom of God throughout the biblical narrative. Given Dempster's core argument, the Genesis account looms large, indeed the first nine chapters cover the Pentateuch alone. The depth of enquiry provides space for interesting observations. For instance, he highlights the kingly role evident in Adam's charge to care for the garden of Eden as indicative of the responsibility of kings, arguing that 'not only were kings to exercise their power by military conquest but also by farming and cultivation near their palaces.' (p. 23) From the Garden of Eden narrative, Dempster sets in motion an almost Augustinian contrast between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Serpent, demonstrating Israel's continual inability to consistently model the Kingdom of God as a nation. The final chapters, including one dedicated solely to Matthew's Gospel, show just how the return of the King ushers in *The Return of the Kingdom*. Dempster makes good use of Scripture in this text, exploring obvious connections while also including more obscure passages. He makes reference to many expected scholars, including Graeme Goldsworthy, Walter Moberly and T. Desmond Alexander, while also including the occasional reference to more popular fare such as a sermon by the late Tim Keller.

To my mind, the book's key strengths are often evident in some of the more peripheral sections, such as his purposeful inclusion of Old Testament women in the Kingdom narrative. These sections sometimes feel like asides, trimmings from a more academic volume, but they serve to deepen and enliven the text. As for potential shortcomings, Dempster—a Hebrew Bible scholar—understandably spends nearly seventy-five per

cent of the text in the Old Testament. It would have been preferable to have seen a bit more engagement with the New Testament. Further, while this text is certainly in the genre of biblical theology, it would have benefitted from some interaction with (or even mention of) broader studies on the Kingdom of God from the wider world of systematic theology or philosophy. Readers unaware of, say, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, or James K. A. Smith will not find reference to their works here, and that seems like a missed opportunity.

In all, however, these are minor quibbles in what is paradoxically an expansive but concise book about an equally expansive but concise subject. Dempster's choice to include study questions at the end of each chapter suggests that the book may be intended for a more lay audience, though I suspect it will find its natural home as an introductory text for undergraduate theology students. In *The Return of the Kingdom* we don't have a ground-breaking, novel approach to the subject, but instead a well-versed introduction to an important subject, and to that end Dempster serves as a helpful guide.

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The Historical Depth of the Tiberian Reading Tradition of Biblical Hebrew. By Aaron D. Hornkohl. Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures 17. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2023. 539pp. £33.95.

Hornkohl teaches ancient and modern Hebrew at the University of Cambridge researching broadly aspects of ancient Hebrew philology and linguistics with a focus on diachronic analysis of ancient Hebrew (e.g., see Hornkohl, *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-century Date of Composition*. Leiden: Brill, 2013). This book is intended for the advanced student as it assumes knowledge of Hebrew and often discusses the earliest versions and translations of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Greek, Aramaic *Targumim*, Syriac, and Latin). Those interested in ancient Hebrew philology and linguistics, Tiberian Hebrew phonology, textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, the Qumran scrolls, Masoretic studies, and manuscript studies of the Hebrew Bible will find much of value.

In this monograph, Hornkohl examines incongruities between the Tiberian written and oral traditions that are not specifically noted as a *kethiv/qere* variant by the Masoretes nor is it discussed in medieval masoretic treaties. The written biblical text often assumes a pronunciation that differs from the oral tradition actually placed over the consonantal text. Hornkohl demonstrates that the differences between the written and reading traditions are each an ancient linguistic relic. The oral tradition

does not spring from the minds of the Masoretes, but usually has a linguistic predecessor in ancient Hebrew though it is only rarely attested. He seeks to illustrate the discrepancy between the written and oral Tiberian tradition as well as the historical depth of each tradition. Both traditions are ancient and composed of multiple linguistic layers (pp. 15-16, 478). The oral tradition represents Hebrew which cannot be later than the Second Temple period and its developments are already reflected in epigraphic Hebrew and Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH). Thus, Hornkohl demonstrates that the differences between the oral and written Tiberian tradition embody a significant linguistic artefact.

Hornkohl divides his material into two parts. The first section deals with conscious, often theologically motivated, replacement of material by those active in the text (e.g., the tradition of reading *ʾădōnāy* "my Lord" or *ʾĕlōhîm* "God" instead of the divine name *yāhwĕh*). While the changes are secondary, he convincingly demonstrates that there is often historical precedence for such a reading. For example, the practice of not reading *yāhwĕh* appears to have a precursor in the Dead Sea Scrolls where *yāhwĕh* is replaced by dots (4Q196 f 18.15 on p. 47). He entertains the possibility that this practice of substituting a lexeme for *yāhwĕh* might even be present in the so-called Elohistic Psalter (Pss 42-83) or the Elohist source of the Pentateuch (p. 52). By implication, a conscious variation in the oral tradition is not necessarily a creation of the medieval scribal mind but has roots in the written and oral textual tradition of other stages of Hebrew. The second part of the volume deals with linguistic developments in phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax within Hebrew which results in different linguistic layers in the biblical text. For example, the 2ms ending *-āk* appears most commonly in the MT while *-kâ* also appears. These are different phonetic realisations instead of both reflecting a pronunciation of *-kɑ̄* . The Tiberian pronunciation implies a vowel final rendering which is significantly attested in the Second Temple period and to a much lesser extent in the First Temple period, while the Masoretic consonantal text probably represents a consonantal final form (pp. 101-144).

The nature of other divergent linguistic aspects in the text is not as easily ascertained. For example, the syntagm *ṭerem* + *yiṭqôl* appears most often in the Hebrew Bible while the syntagm *ṭerem* + *qātal* becomes prominent in the Second Temple period. There are, however, a few cases of *ṭerem* + *qātal* in the Hebrew Bible. Of these cases, 1 Sam 3:7 appears to be secondary as it is contextually probable that an original *ṭerem* + *yiṭqôl* has been reanalysed by scribes in accord with Second Temple syntax to become *ṭerem* + *qātal*. A few cases, however, namely Prov 8:25 and Gen 24:15 (pp. 337-342), appear to use *ṭerem* + *qātal* as a viable, active syntactic

feature of First Temple Hebrew. This is an illustration of the depth of both the written and oral features in the Tiberian Hebrew text.

Throughout this volume, Hornkohl is judicious and examines all sides of the linguistic issue while refraining from unnecessarily bold conclusions. Hornkohl's presentation advances the discussion while challenging Hebraists, text critics, and biblical scholars alike to rethink their previous positions. The main goal of the book is to demonstrate that most elements of dissonance between the consonantal and oral Tiberian tradition in the MT evidence secondary developments in line with Second Temple Hebrew while having linguistic precursors. Hornkohl's volume makes several contributions. First, there are inharmonious elements in the Tiberian tradition beyond *kethiv/qere* (p. 9). Second, he notes that while secondary developments exist in the MT because of scribal updating according to Second Temple Hebrew phonology, morphology, and syntax, the pairing of the consonantal and oral traditions in most cases demonstrates the linguistic antiquity of the MT (pp. 14, 464). Third, while there is diversity and multiple linguistic layers in the MT (p. 478), these layers do not always correspond to previous understandings. For example, it seems possible from the few linguistic elements discussed to understand the Torah as written in a slightly older form of Hebrew than CBH (pp. 418-421, 472-474). Fourth, disharmonious elements are often juxtaposed, for example the relativising *ha-* with *Qal* participle and *Qal qātal* in Gen 46:26-27, which demonstrates that though scribal updating occurred in the MT it was not pervasively exercised. These juxtaposed textual oddities might "reflect some degree of genuine preservation" (p. 370).

Josiah D. Peeler, Mid-Atlantic Christian University

Bijbel met bijdragen over geloof, cultuur en wetenschap. By: K. van Bekkum, G. van den Brink, A.M. Schol-Wetter, A. Zwiep. Nederlands-Vlaams Bijbelgenootschap, Haarlem/Antwerpen, 2022. ISBN 9789089124128. 1667 pp. € 58.

The Preface by two of the editors (Van den Brink & Schol-Wetter) raises thoughtful questions. The bible can be read on its own terms. Yet there are many places where the content is too strange, and we want to resist reducing that strangeness it to its 'primitive' character. Now, is a work of art better for its being explained? Does one need to strike a balance between head and heart when it comes to responding to it? Furthermore, there are common life-questions that the bible raises, not least in the case of sacrificial offerings, where a bit of explanation can help. Not far underneath the instructions for the ancient practices lie questions and themes that are 'everyday' and this primarily hermeneutical in nature. This means one

has sometimes to deal with sensitive questions, but fundamentally the task is to supply information so the reader can decide. Natural science provides a particular challenge, although not all knowledge is natural scientific knowledge. There is not one only Biblical worldview, even if the seemingly generally accepted 'three-storey universe' is strange to us. But that is not the message, it's just the 'husk'. After all, God is often portrayed as accommodating to the times; we need to understand those times and cultures well, just as one places Jesus against Jewish background.

The text (beautifully reproduced) is that of the Dutch NBV21. In addition to this bible translation there are 20 'theme' articles (usually around 3 pages each); 50 topics (usually one page each); and 200 marginal explanations of 'key' bible texts—all offering a good impression of the sort of questions that might arise for modern people in reading the bible—and how to proceed. The normal setting for use would be the weekly bible study, and the questions and 'further reading' at the back of the book encourage this. However, outside church circles there may also be seekers looking for wisdom in the bible. Special thanks is offered to the *Vrije Univetsiteit* and the Templeton Foundation.

When one dives into the first few pages (Genesis), the first theme, perhaps interestingly is not 'natural creation' as such, but specifically 'the Image of God', whether that be defined as valuable, relational (so, Karl Barth) or functional. Connections are made between Gen 1:26 and Gen 9:8 as well as James 3:9: humans have not lost the image, but it is a challenge to act according to our seeing it reflected in others.

The fourth topic 'Transhumanism' is linked to Gen 6:1-4, but there are no more topics after that until we get to end of Genesis (50). There are two themes very early on: *God, mens en scheping* and *Onststaan en basis van de moral*—this seems more forward looking rather than related to early Genesis completely. In the latter 'theme' there is a use of Augustine: God is good so what he wills is good. Interestingly it is here suggested that the belief in the objectivity of moral rightness has made a reappearance in contemporary culture. In the past slavery could be considered 'good' even if system of slavery was not; but that seems unthinkable now. There might be some truth in the idea that we hold moral values, because they are favourable on evolutionary grounds, such that objective morality is and illusion; yet in principle and in practice that which is morally good can often be *opposed* to what seems evolutionary favourable. Perhaps the example given, that the bible forbids adultery even though it might mean more progeny, and hence 'survival' lies that way, seems not altogether convincing. For the biblical authors the fact remains that good and evil often divided sharply, often with the metaphor of light and darkness: this seems like a bit of an afterthought.

There are no topics on Exodus or themes—just as few 'explanations', as on 4:13-16 (Moses & Aaron); 9:12 (God hardening Pharaoh's heart); 14:22-23 (miraculous events); 20:5 –visiting sins to the fourth generation; and 22:17-19 (capital punishment –used to justify witch burning.) For Leviticus we get Lev 23's *lex talionis*, then comes the Jubilee Year of Lev 25,and after that Nu 16:27-33 collective responsibility. Opposite Deut 16 we have theme-articles titled 'Rein en onrein' (Pure and impure), followed immediately by one on Homosexuality. One might conclude that ethical matters takes priority, and that the Pentateuch being a combination of laws and moral stories, this shouldn't be surprising. If covenant and revelation and salvation-history are not to the fore, then perhaps that is because those things are less 'visible', and these annotations are about where the bible meets the world of three (not four) dimensions as it were.

And yet with the New Testament things can get metaphysical. With Jn 10:10 one might be encouraged to ask 'What is life?' The answer seems to want to avoid reductionism by showing the connection with Divine Life. So too with a consideration of the limits of materialism in the theme body and spirit ('lichaam en geest'). However, one would not expect the major contribution of John's gospel to be found in taking a verse like Jn13:16 ('a slave is not more than his master') to offer an opportunity to discuss 'Slavernij', then only to conclude that the bible is not very consistent on the matter. Then a short explanation on Jn 19:14-15 on Jews in John's gospel. Sometimes the choice of topic is refreshing, and can be justified by the aim of the project as a whole, as well as by the consideration that space requires selectivity, yet at other times there seem more obvious things crying out for explanation.

I turn to consider a few more obviously 'theological' themes and topics. On the theme 'Vrije: wil en determinisme' Dolf te Velde contributes a nice article. Accordingly, God's action includes and exceeds ours, and even through our poor choices God reaches his goal. Human freedom is made available through his Son, but to win that freedom in inner conflict (*Tweestrijd*) there is a need of a new heart for (the) good. To be human is to experience limitation but not determinism, and the heart can make the difference, so that there is really not much human freedom unless converted.

Arie Zwiep in his *De opstand van Jezus* observes that resurrection from the dead would have seemed very unusual in the Greek world, but that it *was* part of OT Jewish belief, part of an overall trust in God's faithfulness. Hence 1 Cor15:54 seems to rely on Ps110.1. As to whether the resurrection happened, well the narrators were not modern historians and had no principle of neutrality. We cannot get behind the 'big bang', so to speak, and we can only see the effects in the extent of the disciples' con-

viction about this. The phenomenological approach tests whether this is all reasonable: what can be investigated are beliefs and conceptions.

Kees van der Kooij in his topic-article *Het spreken van God* argues that the biblical God communicates more in actions, but he also uses speech-acts. Above all for John 1:14 Jesus is God's word, so we look at him to know the content of God's speech, just as God established it definitively. Nowadays, however, God continues to speak in a vast variety of ways. Marten Wisse adds a nice topic-article on *God en de wereld* with reference to Acts 17, and then to Eccl 5:1/Is40:25;17:28. (For some reason in the index it gets cross-referenced to Colossians 1:17.) He outlines the challenge of Spinoza then Hegel to the God-world distinction; one problem of this is that God becomes extension of our desires and powerplays.

The co-editor G. van den Brink contributes (inter alia) *Accomodatie* and *Het handelen von God*. God is portrayed in both testaments anthropomorphically, yet at the same time God is beyond form and is Other (holy). To hold these opposite emphases together means we are to grasp him in limited fashion; and to realise that God is not literally embodied. One might find helpful Calvin's image of the grandfather speaking baby language. One should not take biblical language too literally, otherwise there are 'unscientific' elements, for the mustard seed isn't the smallest of all. However, one should also remember that Calvin belonged to a long tradition of deprecating the affective, as did the Enlightenment in its own way in thinking that miracles must be for a credulous public. The heart of the gospel is that God did not appear as a human but became one. Jesus filled human description in with his life, in his performance to help one believe that God can change mind yet is dependable. And through him God shows us how to speak of him: it is God revealed in a human life. My conclusion: I could have read more of this!

There are quite a few treatments of biblical genres and a discussion of apocryphal writings. One senses overall a fundamental-theological approach to the bible by trying to give an account of what the biblical texts were trying to do and seeing to what extent they correspond or correlate to (spiritually open) modern people's experience.

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The Augustine Way: Retrieving a Vision for the Church's Apologetic Witness. By Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. ISBN 978-1-5409-6248-5. x + 197 pp. £19.65.

As late modernity has continued to view the aesthetic and moral vision of Christianity as undesirable, Chatraw and Allen advocate for a new apologetic approach to address the complex intellectual and affective longings

of individuals in our world today. By this 'new' apologetic, however, the authors mean the retrieval of an old one, a model in the spirit of Augustine of Hippo that is pastorally sensitive and seeks to persuade the whole person within his or her cultural context of the truth, goodness, and beauty of the faith with the aim of winning souls to the City of God. *The Augustine Way* is no mere going back to the fifth century, but an attempt to 'place Augustine in our present age' (p. 1) to show how the North African bishop's manner of engaging unbelief in his context can inform the pastor-apologist's witness in a de-Christianizing West.

Chatraw and Allen present their case for a contemporary Augustinian apologetic in two parts. Part one, chapters one and two, explicates Augustine's apologetic witness within the context of his own life, ministry, and cultural situation, using it as a lens through which to critique contemporary methods of defending the Christian faith. Part two, chapters three through five, builds off this foundation to cast a positive apologetic posture for the present age. Central to this posture is its explicitly affective dimension. It entails a holistic anthropology, meaning Christians ought not to appeal to the unbeliever's abstract rationality but to the whole person whose reason is shaped by his or her cultural embeddedness (p. 37). It also includes the centrality of the church for apologetic witness, viewing the congregation's embodiment of the creation-fall-redemption-restoration paradigm as a means to form the apologist (p. 123) and invite the seeker to 'taste and see' (p. 98). In terms of practical engagement, this model follows Augustine's *City of God* by entering the unbeliever's world-and-life-view on its own terms, subverting its narrative from the inside (p. 154), and demonstrating not only the superiority of the redemptive story of Scripture but also how it is the true fulfilment of that person's deepest longings (p. 160).

The Augustine Way is a commendable work on multiple levels. For example, in critiquing modern evangelical apologetic methods for their overreliance on appeals to the intellect and failure to address the heart, the authors are careful not to overcorrect into anti-intellectualism and not to separate reason and desire as independent of each other. Rather Chatraw and Allen promote an intellectualism that speaks to the unbeliever's truth-seeking in a more holistic way, in a way that sees one's rational capacities not as cut off from the rest of the inner life, but as integrally connected to and springing forth from the heart. In rejecting a brain-on-stick account of anthropology, the authors urge the reader not to view appealing to unbelievers as desiring and worshiping creatures as an alternative approach to appealing to their reason, but rather to place the human person's rationality within its proper anthropological context. They insist, 'Augustine does not recommend fideism or reject rational

thinking. Rather, he puts forward a way that is properly rational' (p. 82). This 'properly rational' way, a way that recognizes the fact that 'an individual's aims impact their reasoning' (p. 54), is a useful balance between intellectualism and fideism. By viewing the desiring, loving, and worshiping heart as the source of reason, the authors successfully reject one unbalanced apologetic method without reverting into another one-sided model.

The centrality of the local church and the authors' vision of apologetics as a pastoral endeavour is another welcome distinctive of this text. While Chatraw and Allen do not write off the usefulness of philosophers and academics to address pressing questions (p. 65), their ecclesial approach to the discipline exhorts the reader to be grounded in the local church and its surrounding context 'in a way that keeps the apologist's feet on the ground and their eyes on the hearts of their community' (p. 66). This feature, coupled with their appeal to the formative nature of the church's liturgy as an apologetic (p. 98), helpfully grounds the discipline more tangibly within the practices of evangelism and discipleship and rightly sees the church, its worship, and ordinances as an indispensable means of appealing to the unbeliever and for the believer's perseverance (Heb. 10:25).

On the whole, Chatraw and Allen have produced a useful work on apologetic method that successfully goes back into the past to move into the future as the church seeks to be a faithful witness in late modernity. The insights of Augustine's ministry in his own life and context are explored in depth and applied seamlessly to the reader's own milieu without doing injury to the distinct character of either. It provides a capacious vision of apologetics, demonstrating the discipline is not limited merely to the rational, but seeks to address the whole person with all the resources God's Word and the church have to offer. For these reasons, *The Augustine Way* serves as an excellent manual for the pastor or church leader seeking to invite more individuals into the City of God.

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Conversations by the Sea - Reflections on Discipleship, Ministry and Mission. By Andrew Rollinson. Haddington: Handsel Press, 2023. ISBN 978-1-912052-78-3. 194pp. £10.

Long beach walks for reflection and prayer are often stimulated by the companionship of others, and connect the author with John 21 and Peter's experience of discipleship. This thoughtful and timely book is rooted in ministry and Scottish contexts. Pastor to a number of significant congregations and insightful Advisor for Ministry among Scottish Baptists, Rol-

linson offers clarity of vision and purpose and gently phrased yet sharp observations on the traps churches and their leaders can fall into.

His twelve tightly-packed chapters are well worth the read. Like beach walks, you'll need to pause to take in what he's saying, retracing your steps to make sure you've grasped the implications.

He begins with the frustration of his other hobby, fishing. For Peter it meant the 'personal darkness of deep disorientation and disappointment' (page 10); for us, being 'radically reconfigured and redefined' as we face cultural shifts and navigate the 'trip-wires laid across our culture' (page 12). That plus the pressure of pastoral performance 'to meet expectations of ecclesial shoppers' (page 16).

Memorable phrases await us. 'The fundamental economy of the church is generosity and her only currency is trust' (page 18) is his governing concern as he explores the dangers of ministering out of depletion, our need of others to keep us right, and the sad and shameful realities of unsafe church. 'The great miracle of John 21 is not the miraculous catch of fish but the presence of the Stranger on the beach' (page 23).

Chapter 2 takes us through the encounters and conversations John uses to shape his gospel. Ministry is 'exemplary discipleship… Peter and his friends were bereft and broken… But it was precisely through such brokenness that the Risen Lord was able to reveal his power' (page 30f). Chapter 4 contrasts Peter and John; as they realise 'this is the Lord', their active and contemplative personalities combine to invite us to 'active service with a still centre' (page 52).

Resourcing a missional community is our priority, chapter 5, to facilitate and enable 'a fresh, up-to-date witness to the presence of the kingdom of God among us in word and deed' (page 65). We need inner security as much as skills, especially in settings where religion is perceived as doing damage: 'We need to be plausible before we can be audible' (page 68).

His chapters on the number of fish and the unexpected unbroken net play into our struggle to maintain unity around the evangel. 'Most of all, the quest for unity costs the death of our egos' (page 83). Our aim together, as one church in many places, is 'to exalt Christ in praise and teaching; to create a culture of kindness and generosity, mutual respect and a respecting of difference; and to anticipate potential division' (page 84).

The remainder of the book reflects on how to lead towards that, as we model the presence of the 'Waiting stranger who is the welcoming host' (page 88). Our struggle to exert authority and control is met by the Lord's attentiveness and space: the Lord's 'sovereign power is regal precisely because it is releasing… always given away for the redemption of the world' (page 97). The community emerging extends cross-shaped to offer the welcome of Christ and the Spirit's work of conviction and conversion.

The final chapters explore ministry starvation ('The first half of my ministry I went to conferences; the second half I went on retreats!' page 107); failure and restitution met by a restorative community; and self-awareness and self-deception transformed by 'Lord, you know…'. He's seen too many conversations where 'accountability is in danger of becoming the most talked about and least practiced part of ministry' (page 140).

Do buy, read and ponder this most valuable book, and share it with leaders in your church. As the author finally takes us to the fisherman who became a shepherd, we give thanks for this fellow SETS member's ministry and modelling for us.

Mike Parker, Edinburgh

Landscape of Hope. By Heather Holdsworth. Chicago, Moody, 2023. ISBN 978-0802-429896 hardback; ISBN 978-0802-473424 eBook. 238pp. £16.99; Kindle £9.99.

Scottish Universities have long been known for exploring theology *with* significant areas of public life. Aberdeen, a Centre for Theology and Contemporary Culture; Edinburgh, Theology and Communication, and the Centre for the Study of World Christianity; St Andrew's, the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts. Perhaps the latter would be closest to Heather Holdsworth's heart.

Heather's word-art comes alongside others combining faith and creativity. Karen Sawrey's 'Infographic Bible' (2020, William Collins, ISBN 978-0-00-755461-4); artist Hannah Dunnett's 'Christian Artwork', painted images intertwined with scripture words; and the Bible Project's storytelling and visual commentaries. *Landscape of Hope* is different: illustrations made up entirely of Psalm words, shaded for emphasis, with introduction, deeply personal reflection, and historical and contemporary comment on each. Skipping to the conclusion, you'll see who to watch as we read and learn: look at God, the wicked, the righteous and David.

We're invited to read each Psalm through its word-image: 'find the beginning of the verse with your eyes, or even better, with your fingers. The phrases may be tiny or swirling around, but travel with the sentence, sense the action and meaning, the shrinking and growing through the words of the song. And ponder' (page 17).

Hats off to Moody for taking this on, allowing us to join the journey through this first group of Psalms, 1-14. After 1 and 2 introduce the whole psalter, we follow the losses and laments of 3-7. We move with David toward the longed-for presence of God, plunged into the 'shadowed valleys where anguish has echoed down forgotten ravines… As the imagery becomes stronger, the taunts increasingly vile, we come upon this stun-

ning song' (page 123). Psalm 8, 'The Glory of God and the Dignity of People', is the high point of this group. After celebrating confidence and courage in the acrostic Psalms 9 and 10, David returns to tension, trouble, times of distance from God, upheld by the Lord's strength and justice. Then down again, 11-14 taking us back through the valley of lament into 'discord and yelling; there's collision and noise' among the fools and the lawless (page 221). In all that, 'God identifies Himself as walking with the helpless… He is their refuge, protection, and chain shatterer' (page 232).

I found this combination of art and biblical poetry deeply moving, because they come from depth. The double loss of parents and the lasting experience of the illness that 'decided to stay' left her in 'extraordinary weakness… Restricted to the couch for nearly a year, with a small fold-out table to draw on, I opened King David's dialogue with his powerful Friend. As I sat each day drawing and meditating on his words, my fears were stilled by the peace of God and the room was crammed with bliss. Slow reading and creative meditation have been the steadying joy in both these seasons of disorientation' (page 9). Lament Psalms sustained her. Her subsequent, unexpected healing after a stranger's prayer means she is now steadily strengthening, eagerly telling her story to all who will listen. And there are 136 more Psalms to meditate on, to draw and share. Out of exhaustion has come a book of great beauty and power. I can't wait for the next volume!

Mike Parker, Edinburgh

Not so with you: power and leadership for the church. Edited by Mark Stirling & Mark Meynell. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2023. ISBN 978-1-6667-6016-3 paper; ISBN 978-1-6667-6017-0 hardback; ISBN 978-1-6667-6018-7 eBook. 261pp. £25 or less; Kindle £7.86.

This is a powerful, disturbing, timely book. The back cover gets straight to it: 'The spate of recent scandals of power abuse by leaders within the evangelical world suggests something is wrong in our churches. When a leader misuses power, they have misunderstood and misrepresented God and the gospel.'

Mark Stirling starts with us: 'Our sincere prayer is this book is not used primarily as a resource for judging others, so much as an aid to prayerful self-examination' (page xiii). Part 1 examines biblical foundations of our call to be distinct disciples and be aware of the dangers leaders face. Part 2 changes gear to explore experiences of manipulative behaviours as many have given up and become unchurched.

The contributors are well-placed to listen, bringing missional and pastoral insights to the encounters they've had with victims, survivors and

companions in churches and Christian agencies. Stirling sets the scene: 'Why Another Book on Power and Why Now?' Part 1's seven chapters examine the theological roots of a growing crisis among us.

We have space to reflect on just two. Nick Mackison's concern is Evangelical naivete. While we speak of sin, 'underestimating [its consequences] leaves the church vulnerable to exploitation… Covert abusers are not someone else's problem; they are our problem' (page 47). Ezekiel 34's sharp insights are unpacked, including the case for restoring perpetrators to membership but never to office (page 54); and the fear of damage to church or institutional reputation which leads to cover-up. 'Only when sin is exposed can it be covered… through the blood of Christ' (page 55).

Meynell explores the particular weakness of evangelical churches and the irony that staff teams are one of our most dangerous settings. We need God's power 'to navigate the gap between idealism and realism' (page 62), but we're not talking much about it. Enquirers once asked 'Is what these people believe true?'; now they more likely ask, 'Am I safe with this crowd?' (page 63). Our 'supremely convincing arguments' were overwhelmed 'the moment [enquirers] discerned our power privileges.' He argues that to cross cultural pain barriers, as in Job, 'We must preach victimhood *as well*, regardless of its cultural currency. People *do* suffer at the hands of others, through no fault of their own, especially at the hands of the powerful…' and recognise that 'Every single one of us is a perpetrator of personal sin and a victim of others' sin' (page 65).

This is the constant appeal of Part 1: 'It is not power per se that is our biggest problem but our sinfulness and the damage we have experienced and done to others' (page 66). We all have some power, and are to use it wisely in 'truthfulness like Christ'. The antidote to protecting ourselves is 'a long and painful road of self-discovery and confession' (page 80), aided by key questions to discern if we're crossing lines or exploiting our privileges.

I missed input from women in Part 1, and was grateful for their insightful contributions and more global perspectives in Part 2. Eight more experiential chapters reveal how abuse feels and major on what's needed so people, churches and futures might be rebuilt by God's grace, and valuable questions are offered after each. Again, a look at just two chapters suffices.

Steve Wookey reflects on the bible's portrayal of flawed characters, and the alarming theological ignorance weakening our framework, especially the place of the cross. As a result we focus on celebrity leaders who may lead without criticism or accountability, and the gospel of grace mutates into works. He commends Walter Martin's observation that the American Banking Association's fraud training has tellers handle only

genuine money; if they are 'thoroughly familiar with the original (they) will not be deceived by the counterfeit bill, no matter how like the original it appears' (page 117f).

Blythe Sizemore had an even more raw experience. Accused of lying when she made a complaint, she slid into PTSD before finding a way forward to minister again. In Cornelius Plantinga's memorable words, 'sin is parasitic upon the good' (page 130). Disoriented, ashamed and broken, 'I felt I had been left with a sunburn that just would not heal… Years later, I still feel that sunburn' (page 133). Scripture and friends brought her slowly towards healing: she began to appreciate that 'entering into the suffering… is God's work' (page 134); people's willingness to keep listening; and 'gentle and gracious reminders of the hope (we) have in Jesus… (to) face the dark reality of this broken world and the evil among us, while simultaneously looking beyond to the suffering Christ, the one who truly understands our pain' (page 136).

This book is uncomfortable yet steadily, faithfully insists on the Lord's power to transform our flawed and damaged communities. God's word and Spirit are alert and able to bring repair, and these authors have given us a vital resource to keep one another healthy.

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Reinventing Christian Doctrine. By Maarten Wisse. London: Bloomsbury (T&T Clark), 2023. ISBN: 9780567704306. Paperback £26.09.

Here we have a fine piece of theological writing by the Reformed Professor and Rector of the Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, whose doctoral work was done under the late and much-missed Christoph Schwöbel, to whom the book is dedicated. The first chapter does a very good job of justifying the author's aim of bringing the Law-Gospel distinction back to the centre of theological discussion, a discussion that has become rather propositional in nature (and much concerned with divine metaphysics). The core idea seems to be that God, whatever else he is, is ethical (righteous, holy, good) and that this means theology's focus should be (as it was in the Reformation) on how forgiveness is needed in response to (moral) law-breaking, and just how it can be achieved and received. Practical piety in the form of morality and law is the end and even the essence of Christianity. (Although the question of how God's holiness relates to what can be expected of humans requires a bit more attention than it receives here.)

Wisse insists that God acts in two ways towards human beings (law and gospel) and that realising this is key to reading the bible. 'Starting with the 1535 edition of the *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon expresses him-

self much more positively on the role of the Ten Commandments in the believer's life.' (29) Wisse does not attend to the question of whether and why Melanchthon might have changed his mind again after 1535. Calvin's distinction is more that between Old and New Testaments, but it is a distinction (a difference of degree) and not an opposition. In a close reading of *Institutes* II.10.1 'covenanted to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine', Wisse comments: 'The problem seems to be that Calvin allows for just a single dynamic in both the Old and the New Covenant, and that he calls this dynamic 'law'!' (32) Now apart from whether or not Calvin would use the term 'dynamic', surely a closer-still reading would recognise that 'the same doctrine' is half of the matter. Wisse is probably right to argue that Melanchthon and Calvin were opposed here. The further interesting question is whether most Reformed (Voetius and Cocceius) followed Melanchthon's distinction, as is claimed (35), even if the Gallican and Belgic Confessions do not. It seems unlikely Voetius viewed it as an opposition, but we probably need a bit more information.

He then turns in Chapter 3 to John's Gospel. It was well before the Reformation that John got read through a Pauline lens, such was the predominance of soteriology in medieval biblical interpretation. To interpret Calvin's Christology in his John commentary as 'principial' (as per Arnold Huijgen) seems to strain the evidence in light of Barbara Pitkin's work (*What* Pure *Eyes Could See: Calvin's Doctrine of Faith in Its Exegetical Context*). To my thinking Richard Muller distinction between pre-Enlightenment Reformed and post-Enlightenment (Schleiermacher, Barth) seems fairly sound. There is a boldness in privileging Jn1:3-4 (light that gives light to all) and Jn14:6&9 (the way, the truth and the life/believe in Christ's divinity which requires a clean heart), which seems to put Augustinian mysticism which can contemplate God in Christ-an ontological Christocentrism—over many other Johannine verses with their soteriological Christocentrism. These are deep waters and by the end of the journey one has the impression that Augustine's natural theological instincts mean these verses interest them more than they should, were he, Augustine, a proper Augustinian. The thread of the argument is not always easy to follow, but the material is rich and thought-provoking.

Barth gets accused of an overly radical 'by John alone' in the exclusivity of his version of the Christian faith, to which he might well have pled 'guilty'. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Barth's version was more one about epistemology. I do think this is a bit of a caricature of Barth not for what it describes about his theology but for what it omits—Church Dogmatics III for example.

In Chapter 5 the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is critiqued (too often it is used to lend objectivity to particular, even eccentric interpretations), then

defended so long as it doesn't mean *tota scriptura* (not all books or chapters or verses are equal.) 'The *sola* is infinite, in the sense that it will never be fulfilled'. (128) The appeal to the singularity of the Incarnation and God's acts in history is opposed to a sacramental presence. This reviewer would be happier seeing the alternative as pneumatological, ecclesiological, even with scripture as firmly *norma normans*.

More challenging is the doctrine of 'double predestination', which he seeks to defend in Chapter 6: 'the ultimate verdict on our life does not rest I our own hands.' (133). Confident claims of Universalism involves a will to power. 'One can never put oneself in the position of declaring everyone's sins forgiven. That would be an exceptional form of hubris.' (136) But so equally would be the position of declaring that only some people would be, even if it retains uncertainty and leaves God to be God. Sure, universalism might make grace cheap: but why would an obvious sinner's funeral be more problematic than that of a less obvious sinner? Again, true, a God who forgives every sin might equally be 'a monster'. Indeed what he quotes by 'Gregory MacDonald' ('not saving all people seems utterly out of character with the kind of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ') seems even more a straw man, selectively reading the bible with little justification for it, than even John Piper in the previous chapter. Yet it does seem that Wisse wants to plead a certain agnosticism on the issue of double predestination. Deuteronomy 29:29, as employed by a Brakel is indeed an interesting text here. God is free to save few or all. I find the argument on p.145 a little beset by *non sequiturs*: one could be moved to believe by grace without predestination. Assurance of election (theological) is not the same as assurance of faith (psychological), but surely there is much of an overlap. Distinguishing the *opus Dei* and *opus hominum*, which also drives the chapter on the Eucharist, the recurring motif might well be theologically principled but are they really to be divided?

The final chapter offers an alternative account of a theology of religions to that provided by one modelled on the doctrine of the Trinity. Truth-claims are more like 'law' in their all-encompassing range, but they can form a common core or as Wisse prefers a common critical instrument for religions. The alliance of Melanchthon and Voetius is re-introduced in the last few pages. 'For Voetius, the forgiveness of sins of which Melanchthon speaks is the outcome of the communicative dynamics of the Gospel proclaiming and promising it, and faith embracing Christ proclaimed by the Gospel.' (196) The Gospel is a possibility that needs actualising in faith, an invitation, not a propositional description of reality.

At first I thought this book looked like a collection of essays, but both through some re-writing and editing the whole thing hangs together well. It is original and thoughtful, even of one wishes some matters had been

followed through, which might have meant sacrificing some of the themes and chapters (on Scripture, the Eucharist, and the World Religions perhaps) to allow space for that. I found myself stimulated and provoked in the best possible sense.

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