

BOOK REVIEWS

The Qur'an and the Christian: An In-depth Look into the Book of Islam for Followers of Jesus. By Matthew Aaron Bennett. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022, 253pp., \$19.99.

Christian laymen and scholars alike may have significant caution when it comes to the topic of the Qur'an. As the holy book of the Islamic faith there is a tendency to view it as completely opposed to the Bible and the Christian faith. Consequently, it should be avoided and condemned. Bennett provides a useful resource to address these concerns and goes a long way towards making a very complex issue understandable for non-Muslims. He is clear that this is an outsider/etic perspective that is trying to hear and understand the insider/emic perspective. As such throughout the book he does well to let the Islamic scholars speak and so give insight into the insider view. A positive is that Bennett does not leave the reader wondering where he stands on the issue but from the beginning shows that his purpose is to understand the insider perspective while clearly holding to a belief that the basic claims and beliefs of Islam are not compatible with biblical teaching.

In the opening chapters he explains how revelation in Islam is not God revealing Himself but rather revealing His will. This is useful in understanding the Islamic emphasis on God's transcendence and the downplaying of God's imminence with the resultant rejection of the Son of God who is God incarnate. It also points to the Islamic focus on deeds as a way for man to achieve God's will contrasted with man's need for a savior in Christianity due to man's inability to achieve God's will. In chapter four Bennett does well to explain how even though one can read about familiar biblical characters and events in the Qur'an, this does not mean that the Qur'an endorses the Bible. He points out how the Qur'an uses these for its own narrative and to fulfil its own purposes. Building on this in chapter five Bennett shows how ultimately the Qur'an does not

portray Christians in a positive light but rather issues serious warnings and judgment.

Chapter six exposes the argument of how extra-Qur'anic material such as the Sunnah have impacted an objective interpretation of the Qur'an. This is a fascinating glimpse into the current state of Islamic scholarship where there are various approaches that are attempting to free the Qur'an from external influences on its interpretation. Chapter seven deals with a Christian's reluctance to read the Qur'an and provides useful arguments and suggestions for how this could be done. There is the danger that this can be done uncritically and so in chapter eight there is a word of caution as what can be called bridging methods are evaluated. Two critical principles are addressed: firstly, the problem of eisegesis where Christian readers impose meaning on verses in the Qur'an that Muslims would not accept. Secondly that the Qur'an can be used by Christians in a way that even unknowingly elevates it to the level of valid scripture. This strong caution against hermeneutical creativity that contradicts the Qur'an's own rules could have been strengthened by Bennett making direct reference to Islamic rules of interpretation such as those found in chapter three and verse seven of the Qur'an.

For those readers who are less familiar with Islam it would be useful to include more examples/application in certain areas such as the discussion of Islamic orthodoxy versus orthopraxy. That said, Bennett provides a helpful example of how to take a learner rather than debater posture in interactions with Muslims, so that instead of trying to win an argument the reader is equipped to open a gospel conversation. This book locates itself in Christian/Muslim dialogue and understanding as a valuable resource from an outsider perspective and would be complemented by those from an insider perspective. It is well researched and written and should be considered as a textbook in any course that takes a serious look at the Qur'an. It would be valuable to students at both a college and seminary level.

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The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution. By Carl R. Trueman. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 432pp., \$34.99.

Carl Trueman has written a sweeping intellectual history that chronicles the rise of the contemporary Western conception of what it is to be a human person. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is clearly written. Non-academics or those not familiar with the thinkers in the book will benefit from a close read. In addition, Truman's ability to synthesize diverse intellectual traditions will provide professional philosophers, historians, and sociologists, among others, inspiration for further research in their fields. Finally, it is a necessary book. The church needs to engage current cultural debates with a nuanced understanding of the society it finds itself in. Not only so that we might love God with all our mind but so that we can love others.

In Part 1 the book begins with setting up theoretical scaffolding through an examination of Charles Taylor, Philip Rieff, and Alasdair MacIntyre. All three thinkers are referred to throughout the work as Trueman does an exceptional job of fulling the promissory notes he leaves in the text. He concludes Part 1 with the claim that "questions connected to notions of human identity...cannot be abstracted from broader questions of how the self is understood, how ethical discourse operates, how history and tradition are valued...and how cultural elites understand the content and purpose of art" (p. 102).

Part 2 is robust and perhaps the most ambitious and powerful of all the parts. Rousseau, Wordsworth, Shelly, Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin are examined to demonstrate that the roots of our contemporary attitudes of the self go deep into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is an important point, as crisis has a way of making us myopic in our understanding. Trueman is charitable with his handling of the texts and often is generous with his quotations. It his contention that during these times the Western world, or at least its political and social elite, lost their metaphysical bearings and what replaced it was a worldview where goodness is primarily a subjective matter and what is valued is whatever is psychologically fulling or pleasurable. In addition, he details how Christianity became the villain, as upending the church's teaching on sexual ethics was seen as essential for psychological well-being.

Part 3 explains how the understanding of psychological well-being and

our sense of identity became sexualized and then how sex became politicized. Trueman suggests that perhaps “Freud is actually the key figure in this book” (p. 203). The basis for this claim is that it is in Freud’s theories where the West began to imagine that we are sexual beings primarily and in sexual pleasure that we find utmost fulfillment. In the second chapter of part 3, *The New Left and the Politization of Sex*, Trueman persuasively demonstrates that sexual identity is now an essential part of our political space. Through the combination of Marxist thinking on oppression and the sexualization of the self, the New Left has succeeded in making sexual freedom central to our understanding of freedom simpliciter.

Trueman deploys his cultural analysis to three areas in Part 4: art, public ethics, and transgenderism. In these chapters he touches on surrealism, pornography, the ethics of Peter Singer, contemporary Supreme Court cases, campus protests, and the formation of the LGBTQ+ political movement. He ends the book with words of wisdom for the church and thoughts on the future.

There are opportunities for further research to fill in parts of Trueman’s argument. There are times when he does a fine job correlating the ideas of a thinker with a trend in contemporary society but where he also acknowledges that the line from the original works to present thought is not direct. For example, he writes “Few of the campus protesters of recent years may have read Marchuse, but the basic ideas that he promulgated have penetrated the popular consciousness in such a way that challenges to classical liberal thinking are commonplace and often well received” (p. 252). Correlation is not causation and so there is an opportunity to tell the stories of *how* the ideas highlighted by Trueman influenced culture, laying out the causal process by which they entered the zeitgeist. This is important not just for completion of the story but to explain the ways in which Western societies have differed in their absorption of these ideas. While the West is often treated as a monolith in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, a look at abortion laws in Europe and America or attitudes to campus protests in France and the United States will reveal a great deal of particularness as well in the ways in which different societies in the West have created the modern person.

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Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary. By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022, 349pp., \$39.99.

This title is an accurate reflection of this work. It is a commentary that embodies some critical work, but primarily is pastoral. At the end of each section there are questions that address spiritual, pastoral, and theological issues, reflecting more of a practical than a technical commentary, such as NAC or ICC.

The hermeneutic is centered in the “participatory” work of justification as outlined in the first chapter. As Gorman writes: “Romans demonstrates, no less than any other Pauline letter, that Paul’s theology always has a pastoral function: he has a formational, or transformational agenda” (p. 26).

This is the prime focus as to the pastoral application in the commentary. He argues that the atonement is not just about acquittal but rather participation. It is not that our sins are only forgiven or removed, but far more than that. It is the idea of our participating in the redemption, in the sense that Christ becomes our life and not just our Savior from sins. “Human beings need a solution that deals with both: forgiveness for sins and liberation (redemption) from Sin - both an act of atonement and a new exodus” (p. 11).

As a former pastor for 43 years this resonates with my heart. I have seen so many people misunderstand the depth of the atonement regarding its ramifications for their life. They love and live in the idea of acquittal without ever grasping the depth of the cross and his substitution for us. This premise drives the commentary and thus is very beneficial for pastors and anyone seeking to lead others into legitimate discipleship.

The only difficulty in his writing is the appearance of demeaning one who only addresses acquittal in the atonement. His definition of the Roman Road, so long used in Baptist life, is very accurate regarding the verses he quotes. This has been a staple for many in their witnessing, but he seems to view the verses and their juxtaposition with derision: “While each of these is arguably a component of Romans, the overall path of this road is, unfortunately, a dead end” (p. 35). This type of statement, without understanding his argument, could lead some to view this is a liberal take on Paul’s letter. However, that is not the purpose of his argument. I wish he had been a little softer in his response, but it does not negate his position regarding an improper understanding of the atonement. It is not just an acquittal but a complete and utter revolution in the life of the believer.

I would not recommend this work as a technical study of the book of Romans, but it is an excellent work for a pastor seeking to apply the text to his people. It is also an excellent tool for the laity to utilize. The technical commentaries are sometimes difficult for those without a language base to operate from, but this is an excellent addition to anyone's library. It is well worth the purchase.

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Preaching: A Simple Approach to the Sacred Task. By Daniel Overdorf. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022, 240pp., \$20.99.

The subtitle to this book is a “simple approach to the sacred task.” This accurately sums up this little book on homiletics. Overdorf discusses everything a homiletic professor would address for an intro class on preaching. He does it well without overstating his case, or as he said with a “simple approach.”

Overdorf's reliance on some of the New Homiletic teachers might cause consternation among some conservatives, but his adherence to the sacred text seems to be spot on. There is a need to address the flow of a sermon in the manner of the New Homiletic. This has been ignored because the end for the New Homiletic is the dilution of the Word's authority. He never argues to simply allow people to glean what they wish to glean, but to preach the text as it is written, thus negating that argument.

In chapter two he argues against the idea of beginning with a topic as this can lead us to “preaching our thoughts rather than God's” (p. 42). This is very beneficial, as so many do exactly that in their preaching calendars, thus the reason for our nomenclature at Southwestern Seminary of “text-driven preaching.” We desire for a text to be addressed in its whole and not just an idea we then impose on the Scripture, rooted in some topic.

He tackles the major facets of a sermon from introduction to conclusion. In addition, he has a section on how to tell a story which is helpful for those who struggle with that effort. This is needed as so many see deductive preaching as the only proper method for one who stands on the Scripture.

I particularly like his nomenclature for the delivery portion of the sermon. He uses the word “embody” which carries a better word picture than just how to speak a message. One needs to embody the text and the delivery be natural.

He addresses the idea of adding technology to the preaching experience by arguing there are several advantages to using technology in our sermons. It can bring emphasis to the sermon, engage multiple senses, is compatible with the way people learn in other venues and helps us to see different learning styles (pp. 172-73). Yet in chapter 8 he posits: “people see and hear the truth through us. We communicate the message with our voices and our bodies...They can see it in our eyes, hear it in our voices, and watch it in our body language....” These seem to be somewhat contradictory in their assessment. He wrestles with this problem when, in discussing some cons in using technology, he points out this can cause a break in communication which may be difficult to get back (p. 174). This is something to be very careful about and I fear he brought more confusion than light to this part of the book.

He argues for collaborating with other preachers on a consistent basis when writing a sermon. I certainly see wisdom in picking someone’s brain when the text is difficult in either content or application. However, I can see one being too dependent on the work of others and not his own work in the text. Since I am preaching for my people, from God, through his word, to the sheep He appointed me over, I would prefer to do the work primarily on my own. Every church community is different and the truths and their application in the text I see my people need, may differ drastically from another community of believers. I feel far more comfortable after having written the sermon, than before, meeting in a collaborative effort.

All in all, I found this to be a good resource for a quick and easy addressing of the preaching moment. I would not recommend it as a textbook for a class but as ancillary reading material, I feel it would very beneficial.

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Courage is Calling: Fortune Favors the Brave. By Ryan Holiday. New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021, 304pp., \$25.00.

Say too much about courage today and you will probably be dismissed as corny or patriarchal. Suggest philosophy is useful, even important, for everyday life and you will probably be left standing alone at social gatherings. But Ryan Holiday is brave enough to take on both topics in this recent book, which is the inaugural volume in the Stoic Virtues series. Holiday has become known as a leading proponent of Stoicism via best-selling books and his podcast, *The Daily Stoic*. Judging by the book sales and eager reception ranging from the Silicon Valley to the NBA and NFL, he has hit a nerve and at least garnered a lot of attention.

Holiday is a wonderful storyteller and most of the book is him telling stories, from Greek myths, the Bible, and broader history, which illustrate various aspects of courage, its importance, and the results of the lack of it. Holiday primarily illustrates courage but early on he describes it this way:

“Courage is risk.

It is sacrifice...

...commitment

...perseverance

...truth

...determination.

When you do the thing others cannot or will not do. When you do the thing that people think you shouldn't or can't do” (p. xix).

His approach, illustrating with stories, is captured well early in the book when he urges, “Let us look to the courageous moments and learn from them rather than focus on another's flaws as a way of excusing our

own” (p. xxi).

This book is valuable simply as a collection of great stories, illustrations, and quotes about courage, but it is much more than that. Holiday mounts a full-scale argument for the importance, possibility, and necessity of courage and gives the reader specific examples to see courage at work. Holiday argues, as have others, that all the other virtues depend on courage. In many ways this book is the best of a coach’s pregame speech tailored to a broader audience calling for people to throw off passivity and apathy and to engage their world courageously. Courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to learn from and harness fear in order to do what must be done. Holiday punctures the lure of bitterness and victimhood, calling us to rise above challenges and to find purpose amidst difficulty. We only need more of this sort of message.

Holiday is good with his words as well, and truth stated well is especially helpful. Here are a few examples.

“History is written with blood, sweat, and tears, and it is etched into eternity by the quiet endurance of courageous people” (p. xxii).

“Of cowards, though, nothing is written. Nothing is remembered. Nothing is admired. Name one good thing that did not require at least a few hard seconds of bravery” (p. 1).

“At the root of most fear is what other people will think of us” (p. 20).

“The brave don’t despair. They believe. They are not cynical, they care” (p. 47).

“Fear speaks the powerful logic of self-interest. It is also an inveterate liar” (p. 61).

“Fear votes for hesitation, it always has a reason for *not doing* and so it rarely does anything” (p. 65).

“It [real life] begins by choosing virtue. Not virtue signaling,

but virtuous *living*” (p. 263).

It does not take too long in the book, though, for an important truth to dawn on the reader. Courage is, by necessity a moral virtue. I am indebted to Holiday for bringing this truth home to me with more clarity than I had had before. Some of his examples of courage I would not affirm, because I did not think what was being supported or affirmed was true or moral. Also, as much as I appreciated the call to courage, I began to wonder how he would distinguish his calls to courage from the vapid Disney mantra to believe in yourself and to “know that you can do it.” All of this is related to the need of a moral basis for courage to make sense. Without a moral basis we cannot distinguish between courage and mere stubbornness (which can be related).

I was pleased to discover that in the last about third of the book, Holiday directly addressed the issue of a moral basis for courage. He argues well that true courage is not simply about ourselves, but it is about helping and defending others. It is not surprising, though, that a Christian reading such a book as this would not be completely satisfied with its moral argument. Holiday does not work (in the book) from any explicit authoritative norm so the moral basis remains less distinct than a Christian argument would be.

My primary critique, then, is that this Stoic book is not Christian; but then, it never claimed to be. Taking it for what it is, *Courage is Calling* is a fine book which I hope finds a wide readership. Christians should engage it as well since, as Holiday notes, the Bible calls for courage. Engage the book and think about how you would articulate the moral basis for courage more completely. We certainly need more courage in the Western church today, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7).

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Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition. By Michael A. G. Haykin. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022, 153pp., \$24.99.

Haykin demonstrates that Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used the term “sacrament” without any apparent worry, at times using that term and “ordinances” interchangeably (as quite a few nineteenth century Baptists did as well). Our Baptist forebears saw baptism and the Lord’s Supper as precious means of grace, not as mere externals, but divinely ordained venues by which the Holy Spirit ministers to the people of God. Our churches desperately need to recover this understanding.

On baptism, I was encouraged to see the clear affirmation by seventeenth century Baptists of baptism as *the* profession of faith. I think the New Testament is clear on this point, so I was delighted to see agreement from these forebears. I believe Haykin is correct in suggesting the “altar call” has lamentably replaced baptism as the profession of faith in the regular practice of most of our Baptist churches, thus diminishing the perceived value of baptism.

A good bit more space in the book is devoted to communion, so I will give it more space as well. The most important contribution of the book is demonstrating how prized communion was to these Baptists, how much they benefited from it, and how earnestly they approached it. Modern Baptists should read this and wonder what we have missed when so often indication of the Lord’s Supper being celebrated on a Sunday is met with a sigh and resignation to a slightly longer service. We would do well to meditate on the beautiful language they used. I love Benjamin Keach’s phrase for the Supper, “Soul-reviving Cordial” (p. 37). It is helpful also to note the care with which churches protected the table. I was encouraged to see they did not allow for private celebration of the Supper (seeing that as too much like Catholic Mass). I have argued against this practice as well, but that argument has not always been well received.

The argument over who is qualified to preside over communion is instructive since this question often comes up today. It seems Baptists today usually agree that anyone designated by the church can preside. It was helpful to read the arguments of earlier Baptists that only pastors can preside. I think those arguments end up as man-made law fearing to trust the congregation, no matter how well intended (pp. 88-90). I am still unconvinced by the arguments for closed communion and was happy

to see William Carey (at least at one time) and John Rylands, Jr. on my side (pp. 88-90). As a side note, the aorist tense does not mean a single, once-for-all action (discussion of 1 Cor 12:13, p. 79).

Perhaps the most central point in the book is the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Haykin makes a strong argument that most Baptists in the eighteenth century affirmed this. Mostly it seems to me, they saw no conflict between the Supper being a memorial and the fact that Christ was present in a way such as the Puritans had affirmed.

Eventually Baptists moved away from real presence toward a memorial-only view. Without entering that debate, I am not sure Haykin demonstrates that the memorial view led to all the ills he suggests. This is often suggested but never proven. Causality is often hard to prove. I will simply say that I would heartily welcome memorialists such as Sutcliff whom Haykin quotes at length. Sutcliff saw the Table as "a place of re-consecration," and "an open avowal that one was subject to Christ as his Sovereign, according to Haykin (p. 49). Haykin notes that Sutcliff sought to guard against indifference about the Lord's Supper, but his perspective intime would "help to foster" indifference (p. 50). Perhaps, but not proven. There may be more historical data, but with what is given here, we need to be careful not to conflate bad results from bad examples with better examples of that idea.

Haykin seems critical of those describing Supper as a "commemoration" or "memorial" of Christ's death, but this is the language of Scripture (p. 52). It may be more, but these are good things to affirm and here he does not cite these people as saying "merely" or "only" this (similarly, p. 55).

I am not always convinced of every aspect of the argument about presence or at least that the more memorialists discussed in the book are doing poorly. My main take away is that both sides seem to be far more engaged with communion, appreciative of it, and benefiting from it than most Baptist churches today. I'd welcome at least a return to the hearty memorialist practices described here!

One of the great values of this book is its engagement with the hymnody of the era which focused on the ordinances. Not surprisingly, as our practice of the ordinances has faded so has our hymnody related to them. Haykin notes that the authors of hymns expressly intended to raise proper affections and "kindling devotion to Christ" (p. 94). This is an important way to help people not simply go through the motions. Our songs train our affections. Haykin quotes from these hymns at length,

and the doctrinal robustness paired with earnest affection is wonderful. Pastors today can use some of this language as they preside at the Table. I have marked several I am eager to use soon!

This is a wonderful book, accessible and valuable for all church leaders. Its great value is as an encouragement and exhortation to more meaningful engagement with the Lord's Supper and baptism, and as an aid to stirring up our affections thereto. Too bad so many important works on Baptist history and practice, like this book, have to look outside our denomination for publication. Like John Ryland, Jr. and Andrew Fuller, I am happy to disagree with Haykin on some points while celebrating his great work and the help it will be to pastors and churches.

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Persuading Shipwrecked Men: The Rhetorical Strategies of 1 Timothy 1.
By Lyn M. Kidson. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, 327pp., \$125.19.

Lyn Kidson earned her Ph.D. under the supervision of Alanna Nobbs, a professor at Macquarie University, and this monograph is the published version of her thesis. She contends that the command in 1:3-4 “is the key to understanding how the letter functions as a persuasive literary unit” (2, 274). She explains 1 Timothy 1:5-20 then is an “ethical digression” which is “tightly knit” and employs “a range of rhetorical devices and ideologically significant threads” (p. 274). She focuses on chapter 1 of 1 Timothy as the key to understanding the rest of the letter. En route to substantiating her argument she investigates the setting of the letter including the question of background and authorship, rhetorical devices, and a great deal of Greco-Roman background including ideas of sonship, education, hubris. This leads to her central thesis: The letter is primarily aimed at the “certain men” in 1:3, seeking to shame them for their departure from Pauline teaching by showing that this is hubris on their part and, by other means, creating “emotional tension” within these men calling them to the proper example of Timothy, a true son, as portrayed in the letter.

I appreciate the attention to the role of rhetoric and the argument that

this letter makes a positive contribution to the canon. Her argument that the letter has a coherent, cohesive argument is most welcome. I also like her argument (following Johnson and contra Mitchell) that 1 Timothy is an administrative letter of some type. Kidson also does a great deal of spade work on lexical issues and Greco-Roman background. It seems at times, though, that any potentially related data has been included such that the train of thought is obscured and that the data may not always be assessed well.

Kidson begins with an assumption that the “certain men” are the real addressees of the letter and later argues that the letter is pseudonymous. At the end of the book, she says that a specific stance on the authorship question does not affect her argument. However, it seems to me that her argument requires pseudonymity. If Paul is actually writing, then the audience is Timothy, first, with the church overhearing (suggested at least by the plural “you” which is the last word of the letter). The second person pronouns and verbs are overwhelming. And Timothy’s concern is for the rest of the church more than specifically for these certain men. I did not see enough argument for these “certain men” and their retrieval being the focus of the letter.

In various places there were inconsistencies. On page 5 she works from the idea of the Pauline Epistles as a collection, but then on pages 28-29 says the letters function independently, then on pages 42-43 she is back to deducing from the idea of the letters as a fictitious collection. She argues that pseudonymous letters were acceptable in the ancient world (pp. 42-43) but does not address the church’s contrary take. She spends a lot of time on education in the ancient world but does not interact at all with Claire Smith’s significant monograph, *Pauline Communities as “Scholastic Communities”* (2012) which is also in the Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament [WUNT] series. She asserts that the reference to the “other teaching” as “doctrines of demons” is hyperbole (p. 172) but does not substantiate that. It seems to be assumed that such a comment would be an exaggeration, but such a statement would not be out of place in the ancient world (even if does seem to be today). It seems that her argument that the letter is a gentle appeal has required the softening of this charge.

Central to Kidson’s argument is the idea that the letter is a call for these “certain men” to return to their filial obligation to Paul as their spiritual father. To this end she argues that the ἀγάπη which is the goal of Paul’s

command in 1:5 is the proper love due to Paul as spiritual father, rather than love for God or for fellow believers. I found this unpersuasive. She also argues at length that the “digression” of 1:5-20 is primarily concerned with *hybris*, insolence or arrogance, that typically characterized youth. She says the point is that the author seeks to persuade the “certain men” that they are guilty of this *hybris* by rejecting the teaching of Paul. While Paul does identify himself as a ὑβριστής in 1:13, the argument for this idea being behind this entire section seemed a stretch as did the argument that νόμος here refers to “the Greek law against hybris, which is reflected in the Septuagint” (p. 214).

In general, a thorough editing could have improved the work. In various places words are out of place and odd phrases occur. There are also gaps either in flow of thought or logic. The opening sentence of Chapter 2 says the principal objective of the study will be to identify the rhetorical strategy of the author. The next sentence says, “This means the writer of 1 Timothy must have received, at some point, some training in rhetoric” (p. 3). The goal of the study cannot “mean” that the ancient author had training in rhetoric. This is more than just a typo as it calls into question what is assumed and what will be proven.

In the end, I did not find Kidson’s argument persuasive. However, she has gathered a lot potentially helpful data on lexical and Greco-Roman background issues which can be helpful for others working in these letters.

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Becoming C. S. Lewis: 3-Volume Set. By Harry Lee Poe. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 1128pp., \$89.99.

Nearly 60 years after his death, C. S. Lewis is still one of Christianity’s most influential voices. Biographical accounts of his life are common, written by friends such as George Sayer, critics such as A.N. Wilson, and most recently, admirers such as Alister McGrath. However, none of these have produced a detailed and coherent account of Lewis’s life as Harry Lee Poe in his *Becoming C. S. Lewis* trilogy, the final volume of which

was released this past October. Sparked by a curiosity about what Lewis liked to eat (p. 11), Poe set out to give an account of Lewis's childhood, eventually leading him to study Lewis's life in its entirety to understand better the man who has influenced so much of Poe's writing.

Poe is a fitting author to produce such a work. As the Charles Colson Professor of Faith and Culture at Union University, he has taught a course on Lewis for decades. Before this trilogy, he authored two previous books related to Lewis, *The Inklings of Oxford* and *C. S. Lewis Remembered*, along with numerous articles and essays. He travels the country speaking at conferences and retreats related to Lewis and the Inklings. He is also the founder of the Inklings Fellowship, an academic society that seeks to model itself after the Inklings to transform the academic world through teaching and writing. It is clear that Lewis profoundly influenced Poe, and his respect and admiration are evident in this three-volume biography.

The trilogy begins with *Becoming C. S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1908-1918)*. It was initially the only book Poe intended to write, focusing on Lewis's childhood. As such, it provides the newest insight of the trilogy, giving the most detailed treatment of Lewis's childhood since Lewis discussed it in *Surprised by Joy*.

Both scholars and fans alike will be especially interested in Poe's detailing of Lewis's rocky relationship with his father, Albert. Poe illustrates how the relationship between Lewis and his father, particularly after the death of his mother, continually deteriorated as he matured. Nevertheless, while his relationship with his father was complicated and non-existent for long periods, his father also gave Lewis perhaps the most crucial teacher of his childhood, the tutor W. T. Kirkpatrick, known as "The Great Knock." Kirkpatrick would push, mold, and unlock the vast potential of young Lewis's mind. Poe seizes the opportunity to introduce the reader to many of the assigned books of young Lewis by Kirkpatrick that provide crucial context for how Lewis viewed the world in his days before becoming a Christian.

As the reader moves through the first book, sympathy will grow continually toward the young Lewis. Though Kirkpatrick may have given Lewis confidence in his worldview, Poe shows that Lewis's fall into atheism was no mere rebellion of youth but the result of a childhood wrought with pain and loss. First, he loses his mother at age nine, with whom he was very close. Shortly after, he is sent to England to attend a school Poe describes as a "concentration camp" led by an abusive headmaster (p. 27).

His troubled childhood concludes with Lewis leaving college to fight in the deadliest war the world had known up to that point. He spends two years on the Western Front, witnessing the unimaginable horrors of war, only to return injured in both body and spirit.

The second book, *The Making of C. S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist (1918-1945)*, shows that although Europe was done with war, Lewis was not. He returned from the Great War, the trauma of which solidified his atheistic worldview. However, upon his return, he enters another kind of war within his heart and mind. Lewis resumes his studies at Oxford with a very different mindset, and as he would write later in *Surprised by Joy*, “A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading.” Stealth attacks on his imagination from his favorite fantasy stories and long debates with friends such as J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson prove fatal to the fortress Lewis had built in his mind toward the God he did not want to exist. When Lewis finally surrenders a self-described “reluctant” defeat in this inner war, he discovers his purpose and role in the next war.

With his rediscovered faith firmly established, Lewis finds his purpose for the next war in his life and the life of Europe. He becomes a sort of special forces soldier, in the same vein as Tolkien and Dyson were for him. Tasked with the mission of clearly and winsomely presenting the Christian faith, he addresses the entire nation through his Wartime Broadcasts, which later became his well-known apologetic work *Mere Christianity*. Add to this his other works during the war, such as *The Screwtape Letters*, and Lewis quickly produced writings that would one day garner him the reputation as the most significant Christian apologist of the twentieth century.

The second volume concludes by showing how the conversion of C. S. Lewis impacted the world. The third and final volume, *The Completion of C. S. Lewis: From War to Joy (1945-1963)*, shows how his conversion changed the man. To use Paul’s analogy in 2 Timothy, the final book shows how Lewis finished his race.

Keeping with the theme of war, Lewis finally enters a time of peace emotionally, relationally, and spiritually, though this final season was not without grief. In fact, it contained the greatest sorrow of his life with the passing of his wife, Joy. However, Poe shows that even this event helped Lewis learn to finally experience peace by not only trusting Christ but making Christ his greatest treasure. Friends begin to pass away and his health declines, yet through it all, Lewis maintains what has become

most valuable to him - his faith. This peace left Lewis feeling that he had done what God had called him to, dying at the relatively young age of 64. Regarding the completion of his life, Poe closes with a beautiful observation, "Some will say that it was a tragedy for Lewis to have died so young. I think it remarkable that he became complete so young" (p. 352).

From the beginning, Poe's narrative and analytical abilities leap off the page. Moreover, he writes in a style that would make Lewis beam with approval. Lewis said his writing goal was to communicate Christianity's complex ideas in clear terms that anyone could understand, often by telling a story. In the same way, Poe beautifully narrates the life of Lewis while simultaneously communicating Lewis's thoughts clearly, which will appeal to both scholars and fans.

Poe blends biography with analysis seamlessly. The reader feels as if Poe has entered the very mind of Lewis, guiding them through his thoughts while providing the often-missed contextual details of Lewis's writing as the events of his life are displayed. The reader quickly realizes how much his experience, not just his education, influenced Lewis's writing. Poe does not stop at simply sharing a connected series of events; he analyzes the thoughts of Lewis as he goes, pointing out both philosophical and theological implications. In this way, the series has a slightly devotional element, providing a personal and experiential aspect to many of Lewis's ideas that have been so formative for generations. The Christian reader will be encouraged by the lessons from Poe's insights, and the non-Christian reader will be presented with much to consider.

As mentioned, Poe's most significant contribution in this trilogy is his detailed account of Lewis's childhood. He shows how Lewis, raised by Christian parents, had a childhood that produced the conditions that would eventually send him into atheism. However, it also imparted skills and ideas that would take him on his journey out of atheism and firmly into Christianity. Poe offering a complete work devoted to Jack's childhood is groundbreaking and will almost certainly open the door for further research in this gap of Lewis studies.

Nonetheless, the final two volumes of Poe's trilogy also contain stories and details that many fans of Lewis may be unfamiliar with and find interesting. Most often, these stories revolve around the creation of Lewis's works or the people in Lewis's life. For example, some readers may be familiar with the BBC radio talks that would become *Mere Christianity*, but perhaps not familiar with another set of talks that would become *The*

Four Loves. Regarding people in his life, Poe writes in great detail about Lewis's brother Warnie, a military officer, alcoholic, and best friend of Lewis.

In the second volume, the reader also finds Poe's most unique claim of the trilogy. Poe asserts that *The Allegory of Love* was the only book Lewis ever wrote. Poe writes, "All other books flow from it like a stream. In it can be found the synthesis of all the ideas that had been swirling in his head for years" (p. 151). He believes this book gives the foundation for the thoughts expressed throughout Lewis's more popular works. Where the first volume could spark new interest in a lesser period of Lewis's life, this observation from Poe could cause further investigation into a lesser-known work of Lewis and its connection to his later work.

Many authors have written biographies of Lewis before, and there will almost certainly be more to come. Numerous others have written about Lewis's philosophy, theology, apologetics, and historical context. However, no writer has combined all of these aspects so accessibly. This blend makes the trilogy a valuable asset to any Christian philosophy, apologetics, or church history student, as Lewis is an influential figure in all of these disciplines. Also, it serves as a great introduction to both primary and secondary sources on Lewis, as Poe shows extensive knowledge of both.

Simply put, Poe has given Lewis studies what could be considered its most important work to date. Anyone wishing to be a serious scholar of Lewis's life and writings ought to engage with Poe's comprehensive work, and any admirer of Lewis wanting to understand the man better should look no further than this trilogy.

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The Practices of Christian Preaching: Essentials for Effective Proclamation.
By Jared E. Alcántara. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019, 224pp., \$24.99.

"I'm supposed to be the franchise player, and we're in here talking about practice. I mean, listen, we're talking about practice. Not a game."

While preachers may not rant like a professional basketball star in a press conference, we are tempted to think we've learned all we need in our seminary training. Now we focus on the game, the preaching moment. But practice isn't only for professional athletes or student musicians. Hours of intentional hard work to improve will equip beginning preachers and strengthen experienced preachers. In *The Practices of Christian Preaching*, Alcántara calls preachers to "deliberate practice" rooted in four commitments: "well-defined and specific goals, focused attention, a consistent feedback loop, and a willingness to get out of one's comfort zone" (p. 5). Chapter one establishes the foundation of a gospel emphasis in every sermon: "The gospel scandalizes our sensibilities by exposing our idols, interrogating our priorities, and calling into question our alliances" (p. 19). Alcántara then provides five areas of practice in the five remaining chapters. Preachers should grow in their ability and willingness to preach convictionally, contextually, clearly, concretely, and creatively.

What sets *The Practices of Christian Preaching* apart from other introductory homiletics texts is Alcántara's "intentionally collaborative" and "strategically diverse" strategy (p. 191). The book is accompanied by online video discussions, questions for groups, sample sermon snippets, and personal reflection activities. Readers are invited to a robust conversation with an ethnically diverse group of preachers. Alcántara intentionally highlights, in the book and online, "courageous female preachers" which may limit the value of his book in some contexts (p. 48). Yet the overall strength of the book is his interaction with homileticians from non-majority cultures to help preachers overcome our "cultural blind spots" resulting from "our nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and class" (p. 92). Alcántara's viewpoint expands preachers' intercultural competence. His own perspective, "I am half Honduran....my wife is half Puerto Rican," helps expose the importance of cultural contextualization (p. 83). His entire book is a master class in contextuality.

Alcántara expects preachers to work on the skills of exegesis and crafting a homiletical outline and main idea, but he moves the conversation deeper into his five areas of deliberate practice. Even experienced preachers will gain insight and encouragement in Alcántara's wisdom. He is a fantastic storyteller and master of analogies. Samples from his chapter on preaching convictionally highlight his clear writing style and deep understanding of key issues: "God's decision to preach through preachers seems about as counterintuitive as a parent deciding to give dynamite to toddlers" (p.

53), “Pastoral ministry is a lot like trying to clean a house with young children in it. The moment you think it’s clean, it’s messy again” (p. 60), and “A preacher without conviction is like a car without gasoline. It serves *a* purpose, but it does not serve the purpose for which it was created” (p. 71). Alcántara offers insights into the important theories of homiletics but remains practical throughout. He warns against “the specific struggles that preachers face” including workaholism, vanity, celebrity, arrogance, inauthenticity, and prayerlessness (p. 60).

Alcántara’s chapters on preaching clearly and concretely rest upon solid homiletical foundations but shine in their practical applications. He gathers useful quotes and offers his own pithy wisdom. To Sunukjian’s insight “We talk so that eleven-year-olds can understand us” (p. 117) he adds “*make every minute count no matter the sermon length*” (p. 124) and “Challenge yourself to write a main idea that is *twelve words or less*” (p. 127). He warns, “Too many sermons major on abstraction and minor on concreteness” (p. 153) as he aims at preaching that is applicable “on Monday mornings” (p. 133). Alcántara’s emphasis on the importance of illustrations will help preachers reach listeners. Illustrations move down the ladder of abstraction to concrete understanding.

The strength of Alcántara’s final chapter on preaching creatively is when he moves beyond his historical explanation of creativity to practical ideas for fostering creativity. While risking a reductionistic summary, since there are many valuable insights, the chapter, and perhaps the book as a whole, can be captured by Ken Robinson’s reminder, “Creativity thrives on diversity” (p. 177). Alcántara serves the church by gathering diverse voices to strengthen preachers. Intentional and deliberate practice, in the midst of a diverse community, will improve preaching. Alcántara’s *The Practices of Christian Preaching* should be added as a supplementary text to introductory homiletics programs and deserves to be in the hands of experienced preachers eager to grow in gospel proclamation.

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40 Questions About Women in Ministry. By Sue Edwards and Kelley Matthews. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022, 332pp., \$23.99.

“Where can women serve in ministry?” is not a new question, but in the last decade the question has been asked more loudly across the evangelical world. While most believers look to the Scriptures for God’s direction and guidance for the role of women in ministry, hermeneutical interpretation, including but not limited to translation of Hebrew and Greek words, modern-day appropriation of cultural settings in the epistles, and God’s plan and intent for men’s and women’s roles pre- and post-fall and following the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ have left many asking what is biblically permissible and what is not. Sue Edwards, professor of educational ministry and leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Kelley Matthews, a former women’s ministry director and Doctor of Ministry student at Northern Seminary, seek to help address forty of the questions about women in ministry in their latest release.

Edwards and Matthews approach the questions from complementarian and egalitarian perspectives, though at the onset of the book the authors rename the terms hierarch and heterarch, respectively, to avoid an alliance with “any factions” and because they do not “believe either group has an absolute corner on biblical truth” related to the role of women in ministry (p. 27). Within the book’s introduction, the authors also note the “challenge” of “capturing the essence” of both perspectives, “especially on the ‘complementarian’ side” (p. 17). As the questions are presented in each chapter, the authors share the hierarch answer to the proposed query as well as the heterarch response. Edwards notes in chapter one that both complementarians and egalitarians can be charged with interpreting the Bible “*evangelistically*,” which she defines as “stretch[ing] the text to give credence to what they want it to say” (p. 26).

The questions are divided into four parts as they relate to introductory issues, the Old Testament, the New Testament and beyond, including women in church history, and current issues. The introductory issues include the aforementioned renaming of the two perspectives, a discussion of hierarchy and heterarchy views on feminism, principles of biblical interpretation, and a chapter focused on when issues are biblical cultural issues and when they are unchanging. Part two, questions related to the Old Testament, includes a lengthy discussion on God being imaged as male and female, what Genesis 1-2 shows about male and female relationships, an

understanding of God's command for men and women to have dominion over the earth, woman as being a corresponding helpmate for the man, male and female relationships as shown in Genesis 3, and an explanation Gen 3:16. Two chapters that focus on what can be learned from the women prophets of the Old Testament and the Proverbs 31 woman, as well as God's plan and design for women complete part two.

The longest is part three, which categorizes the questions under the headings of women in the Gospels and Acts, women in the epistles, and women in church history. Part three focuses on questions related to the New Testament and beyond. The first section, women in the Gospels and Acts, includes questions related to Jesus's interaction with the women who traveled and supported his ministry, his choosing only men as the Twelve Apostles, and the significance that Mary, a woman, first witnessed Jesus's resurrection. Lengthy discussion surrounding questions related to the women commended by Paul in Romans 16, whether women can teach or prophesy, what is meant by the metaphor "head," conclusions and views on 1 Tim 2:11-15, and what it means for wives to submit to their husbands are found in part three. This section also includes three chapters focused on women in church history.

Questions related to current issues are discussed in the final section of the book. These chapters include an examination of whether women can be deacons, priests, pastors, or elders; the titles women can be given for ministry roles; and how women can appropriately use leadership and teaching gifts, among other questions.

Edwards and Kelley should be commended for their willingness to tackle such weighty questions facing the church in the 2020s. The questions they address in their work are those both women and men are genuinely asking as women seek to advance the Kingdom of God and serve the Lord with excellence. The co-authors address many questions in a short amount of space as robustly as possible for the average reader who may or may not have a theological academic background.

Having observed the above, it should be noted the book appears to be lacking a complete argument from the hierarch perspective. Though the authors mention in the introduction "complementarians fall within a wide spectrum of perspectives differing from one another in many ways" (p. 17), the full spectrum of perspectives was not presented as the authors penned in the next paragraph they were going to focus more on the views of the heterarchs because "the hierarch's view is generally more

well-known, and often heterarchs are responding to hierarchs” (p. 18). The hierarch response for each question is then predominately presented from the standpoint of two complementarians who do not represent the full spectrum of views from the complementarian perspective. In contrast, the heterarch perspective is well-represented with a wide swath of scholars who range from the most extreme to more centered. The arguments then come across as unbalanced.

Another item of note includes the discussion of Greek words in relationship to Paul’s letters. It is difficult to distill what would normally constitute an entire academic semester into a few paragraphs focused on such an important topic. Though the book was written in “everyday language” (p. 17) these chapters could become cumbersome for those who have not had academic training in Greek. Chapters such as these would be best read with the assistance of one who has had academic study in biblical languages.

Edwards and Kelly’s work will encourage readers to look more deeply into what Scripture has to say about each of the questions that were posed. God’s Word is the final authority.

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Truth, Theology, and Perspective: An Approach to Understanding Biblical Doctrine. By Vern S. Poythress. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 159pp., \$21.99.

Vern S. Poythress, distinguished professor of theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, makes it clear that the purpose of this book is not just to explore theological topics as typical theological texts do. Rather, rejecting postmodern relativism and skepticism, he aims to unfold each chapter of biblical doctrine with the presuppositional commitment to a Christian understanding of truth.

For Poythress, truth functions as a perspective through which all the biblical doctrines, as traditionally taught in systematic theology, are interpreted and appreciated. Four components frame the book: the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, redemption, and application of redemption,

which reflects a typical way of direction in the redemptive history of biblical interpretation.

The first section of the doctrine of God deals with the concept of truth in which all other attributes of God are displayed. Each attribute of God is described and confirmed in light of the idea of divine simplicity. Poythress notes that, "Truth is one attribute of God. So, in this attribute it ought to be possible to see the other attributes, all of which belong to truth" (p. 27). When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature of truth is revealed in the Trinity by the interpersonal love within the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as by the coinherence that "each person of the Trinity indwells each other person" (p. 41). Through the rest of the sub-sections, i.e., creation, providence, and revelation, Poythress relates truth as perspective to God's unique nature and work to harmonize with those theological doctrines (pp. 53-69).

Next, Poythress unfolds the doctrine of man and redemption. God who is and possesses truth in himself, in the power of "the archetypal communicating truth in the Trinity," manifests truth by speaking creation into being, including mankind (pp.73-74). When the first covenantal communion with God in truth was broken in the fall, "Adam failed to believe the truth about God's truthfulness and his goodness" (p. 81). Then, the incarnate Christ, in harmony with the truth in the Godhead planned before the foundation of the world, comes in the second person of the Trinity, providing atonement by his penal substitutionary work (pp. 105-6, 113-19). Poythress, discussing penal substitution, sharply criticizes modern theology's "antipathy to penal substitution," which it considered "irrational." But, claims Poythress, "the real irrationalism is to try to be more rational than God!... Modernism has in its arrogance discarded whatever it cannot fit into its own impoverished framework" (p. 118).

The truth of God that has been initiated in fulfillment of salvation in the redemptive history affects in a comprehensive way the people of God: the gospel of truth demanding a response to the truth; justification indicating God's judgment in truth; sanctification expecting conformity to Christ the truth (John 14:6); and, finally the church sharing the truth, all of which together will draw "the consummation of the manifestation of truth" (pp. 129-45).

Poythress successfully demonstrates the truthfulness of biblical and theological doctrines in systematic theology, demonstrating their harmony in and from the perspective of truth. The existence of God who

condescended and accommodated himself for the sake of his creatures in the second person of the triune God, translates himself in theology on a human level, and manifests truth in Jesus Christ who himself is the way, the truth, and the life. I gladly recommend this short book, which will provide a prolonged impression on orthodox Christian truth for those who seek to trace the understanding of biblical doctrines in light of God's truthfulness.

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