

Book Reviews

Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach. By Kenneth Keathley. Nashville: B&H, 2010, xiv + 232 pp., \$24.99 paper.

Finding both classic Calvinism and classic Arminianism problematic for articulating the sovereignty of God in our salvation, Kenneth Keathley proposes an alternative to both. As Keathley understands these historic traditions, classic Calvinism upholds strong divine sovereignty but fails to account rightly for true human freedom and evangelistic zeal, whereas classic Arminianism accounts well for the role of human freedom in our salvation but is unable to account for strong divine sovereignty. Keathley's "Molinist approach" is offered to bring together both of these strengths—i.e., strong divine sovereignty and true human freedom in our salvation—while avoiding the weaknesses of each. As he asserts, "The Molinist model is the only game in town for anyone who wishes to affirm a high view of God's sovereignty while holding to a genuine definition of human choice, freedom, and responsibility.... The attractiveness of Molinism is that it presents a logically coherent view of providence, which holds that God is meticulously sovereign, while at the same time humans are genuinely free" (6, 9).

Keathley begins (chapter one) by outlining his biblical case for Molinism, which, he suggests,

succeeds precisely in its understanding of and appeal to the divine omniscience. Neither mere foreknowledge of what we will do (as in classic Arminianism) nor omni-causal divine control of all human choices and actions (as in classic Calvinism) can yield a model that has the qualities of both strong sovereignty and genuine human freedom. But for Keathley, understanding rightly the divine omniscience holds the key to satisfying both concerns. Molinism proposes that God not only knows all that "could be" (i.e., knowledge of all possible states of affairs that could be true in one or more possible worlds—called God's "natural knowledge") and all that "will be" (i.e., knowledge of all actual states of affairs that make up the real world in which we live—called God's "free knowledge"), God also knows all that "would be" (i.e., knowledge of all things that free creatures would choose in various possible worlds in which circumstances vary from one world to another—called God's "middle knowledge"). And importantly, this "would be" or "middle knowledge" category is both in between God's knowledge of all possibilities and all actualities (hence, it is "middle" knowledge), and it is logically prior to God's choice to bring into existence this particular world. In other words, God's middle knowledge (i.e., his knowledge of what "would be") is "pre-volitional"—it is logically prior to his volitional

decision to bring into existence this particular world, whose states of affairs he only foreknows (i.e., he knows all that “will be”) the (logical) moment he chooses to create.

The cash value of “middle knowledge,” for Keathley, is inestimably large. By God’s middle knowledge, God can envision in his mind’s eye (pre-volitionally) what his free creatures would decide in one or another possible world, as they would make their decisions in varying contexts, with varying circumstances. From the totality of choices that God envisions his free creatures making, he then can select a preferred set of possibilities within which certain free decisions would be made and bring it to pass that this possible world is the one that he freely creates. Keathley summarizes his view this way:

From the infinite set of possible worlds that could happen (God’s natural knowledge), there is an infinite subset of feasible worlds which would accomplish His will (God’s middle knowledge). God freely chooses one of the feasible worlds, and He perfectly knows what will happen in the actual world (God’s free knowledge). In the Molinist model, God sovereignly controls all things, yet humans possess real freedom for which they must give an account.... Molinism—and its advocacy of the concept of middle knowledge—is the one view of providence that holds to a consistent view of both biblical teachings (18-19).

Following his overview of Molinism, Keathley proceeds to lay out his understanding of the relation between divine sovereignty and our salvation. Chapter two answers affirmatively the question, “Does God Desire the Salvation of All?” Keathley appeals here to the distinction between “antecedent and consequent wills” in God, arguing that “God antecedently wills all to be saved. But for those who refuse to repent and believe, He consequently wills that they should be condemned” (58). Keathley finds this “two wills” model pref-

erable to the singular divine will models of universalism and supralapsarian Calvinism, while he also finds it superior to the “two wills” Calvinist model that distinguishes the “hidden and revealed wills” of God. Oddly, Keathley does not explain just how his Molinism accounts for or aligns with the antecedent/consequent wills distinction, and his development here resembles most closely a classic Arminian understanding (as evidenced by his appeals to Shank, Tiessen, Geisler, Walls and Dongell in support of his view).

In the remainder of the book (chapters three through seven), Keathley’s argument follows the acrostic “ROSES,” as a replacement of and improvement on the 5-point Calvinist “TULIP.” Chapter three defends “radical depravity,” in which Keathley argues for “concurrence” over the Calvinist “determinism” as that which explains our entrance into sin, our complete inability to do good as sinners apart from grace, and our grace-enabled ability to grow in pleasing God through the Christian life. A key element here is Keathley’s advocacy of “soft libertarian” freedom, which proposes that while most often our freedom is expressed by our having the power to choose one way or another, there are some “will-setting” choices in which our characters are formed, leading us henceforth to choose one way instead of another. Keathley’s appeal to concurrence and soft libertarianism are central in his understanding of how sin affects us and the kind of freedom we have and by which we are held responsible.

Chapter four defends “overcoming grace,” which he pits against the Calvinist doctrine of effectual calling or irresistible grace. He asks, “How do we formulate a theological system that genuinely gives God all the credit for grace and the sinner all the blame for unbelief?” His answer is found in his defense of “overcoming grace” which he claims is both monergist (i.e., God alone works to bring to pass the good we do by his grace) and resistible (i.e., we retain libertarian freedom by which we may refrain from resisting this grace or, instead, rebuff this grace). God, then, is the only

one who works to bring our salvation to pass, while we are called not to refuse or resist his gracious work. As such, God receives all the credit in our salvation and we, should we refuse, receive the blame. Keathley writes, “God’s drawing grace should and would be efficacious for all. The only thing that could stop it is if, inexplicably, a person decides to refuse.... The question is no longer, ‘Why do some believe?’ but ‘Why doesn’t everyone believe?’ The evil of unbelief remains a mystery, but this model moves this evil from God to the unbeliever” (106).

Chapter five defends Keathley’s Molinist understanding of “sovereign election,” contrasting it with both the supralapsarian and infralapsarian traditions in Calvinism and with the “passive foreknowledge” view of classic Arminianism. Since in Molinism, God is said to control all things while not being the determinative cause of all things, this leaves room for genuine human freedom to operate within the scope of God’s “permissive” divine will. Keathley writes,

When God made the sovereign choice to bring this particular world into existence, He rendered certain but did not cause the destruction of certain ones who would reject God’s overtures of grace. According to Molinism, our free choice determines how we would respond in any given setting, but God decides the setting in which we actually find ourselves.... Molinists contend that God uses His exhaustive foreknowledge in an active, sovereign way [unlike the passive foreknowledge of Arminianism]. God determines the world in which we live. Whether I exist at all, have the opportunity to respond to the gospel, or am placed in a setting where I would be graciously enabled to believe are sovereign decisions made by Him.... In other words, God actively elected the saved but passively allows the ruin of the lost (154, 155, 160).

And although God sovereignly chose to create a world in which it would be certain that many

would not be saved, this does not conflict with God’s genuine desire that all be saved. For Keathley, “God has created a world with the maximal ratio of the number of saved to those lost” (153). Just why this is so, is not explained by Keathley. Given Keathley’s claims of God’s “meticulous sovereignty” through his use of middle knowledge, one would like to see why even with middle knowledge, the God who “desires all to be saved” was not able to create a world in which this desire was met.

Chapter six defends the view that “eternal life” is given to those who trust in Christ, and that assurance of salvation is found in our justification in Christ, not in our sanctification or growth in good works in the Christian life. Keathley sets his view against the backdrop of Reformed views that would stress the necessity of faith-wrought works as the evidence of one having exercised true saving faith. In contrast, Keathley suggests that the Reformation principle of *sola fide* means that our assurance of salvation is the objective work of Christ alone which we have embraced by faith and not the subjective transformation of character that, though commanded and desired, cannot form the basis of the believer’s assurance. Assurance, then, is the essence of saving faith—trusting in the work of Christ and not in anything I can or should do before God. Good works are called forth from us, and will be rewarded by God, but they cannot be the basis of either our eternal life or of our assurance of having received that gift of eternal life.

Chapter seven closes out “ROSES” with a defense of the “singular redemption” brought about in Christ. Keathley understands his position, again, as something of a *via media* between classic Arminian and Reformed views. He writes, “The general atonement position [of Arminianism] sees the death of Christ as obtaining redemption for all but securing it for none. The limited atonement view [of 5-point Calvinism] understands Christ’s death to secure salvation for the elect—but only for the elect. The singu-

lar redemption position [Keathley's view] understands Christ's death to provide salvation for all humanity, but the benefits of the atonement are secured only for those who believe, and those benefits are applied at the time of their conversion" (193). Much of the chapter presents his arguments against the limited atonement position of 5-point Calvinism and the case for his own version of singular redemption. Although he is aware of the "moderate Calvinist" 4-point view, he chooses not to interact with it, though it would have many affinities to his own position.

Having surveyed the overall scope and argument of the book, we turn now to a critical review of Keathley's proposal. Before detailing some of my concerns, I wish to begin by commending Keathley for providing a very thoughtful and engaging presentation of his middle knowledge understanding of the relation of divine sovereignty to the salvation of sinners. His view deals with many difficult issues, and he discusses these with competence throughout. I benefitted much from a careful reading of this book and have gained a heightened appreciation for Keathley's Molinist approach to these complex and weighty issues. But as one might suspect, a number of areas throughout the book raise questions and concerns, and it is to some of the most important of these that I now turn.

First, I find Keathley's claim that his Molinist approach satisfies the strengths of both the Calvinist and Arminian approaches unsustainable. As mentioned above, Keathley sees the strengths of classic Calvinism and Arminianism as their respective appeals to strong divine sovereignty (Calvinism) and genuine human freedom (Arminianism). And of these strengths, he asserts, "I argue that we must affirm God's ultimate sovereignty and man's genuine ownership of his choices in such a way that does not play fast and loose with the definitions of either truth" (15). But is it true that this Molinist model truly accounts for both truths as understood in each tradition? Let's take the Calvinist quality first. Keathley's assertions

are strong and clear. He says, for example, that Molinism "argues that God *perfectly accomplishes* His will in free creatures" (5, emphasis added), that it "holds to a Calvinistic view of *comprehensive divine sovereignty*" (5, emphasis added), that it "holds that God is *meticulously sovereign*" (9, emphasis added), and that by it "God *sovereignly controls all things*" (18, emphasis added). But here's the problem: the only way that Keathley can sustain these claims is by re-defining them from what they actually mean in the Calvinist tradition.

To give a simple example, Keathley holds that God truly does desire all to be saved, and that the only reason people are not saved is that they persist in resisting God's grace brought to them. In other words, as in classic Arminianism, the libertarian freedom given to creatures means that when the gospel comes to them, they have the power to accept or refuse God's gift of salvation. Whether they accept or refuse is, ultimately, up to them, not God. And yet God does not want any to refuse. Isn't it clear, then, that God's sovereignty here is anything but "meticulous" or "comprehensive," and that it is not the case that God "sovereignly controls all things" or "perfectly accomplishes His will in free creatures"? Even though Keathley sees God using middle knowledge to achieve the optimal set of possibilities that he freely actualizes when he creates the world, still middle knowledge does not provide God the ability to ensure that exactly what he wants, in every situation and with every decision in the real world, is carried out. That there is sin and hell and massive evil and widespread refusal to believe the gospel testifies to this fact, in Keathley's model. Many, many other examples could be given. To give just one: if God meticulously controls all things, then he meticulously controlled the Holocaust. Does this mean that God designed the Holocaust and intended to bring it to pass for purposes he unilaterally planned and knew would be best when he conceived of the world that he willed to create? For Keathley, the answer must be, no. Rather, despite God's ability to utilize

the powerful resource of middle knowledge, it must be the case that he still could not create a world in which free creatures would not devise and carry out the Holocaust. Again, this hardly qualifies for “meticulous” sovereign control over the world God freely chooses to make. Keathley may truly mean it when he says that his Molinist model accounts for the Calvinist understanding of meticulous or comprehensive divine sovereignty, but if so, it shows that Keathley either does not understand correctly what Calvinists hold or that he is unaware that his model significantly redefines divine sovereignty in a way unacceptable to Calvinists. Molinism simply cannot accomplish, by its appeal to the divine omniscience (and to “middle knowledge,” most centrally) what Calvinism secures by its appeal to comprehensive and exhaustive divine determination.

And what of Keathley’s corresponding claim to account for libertarian freedom as held in the Arminian model? If Keathley had retained full and unqualified libertarianism, then his claim would be true. But instead, Keathley opts for “soft libertarianism” in which he envisions there being certain “will-setting” decisions. But if so, does this not cancel out our power of contrary choice, in which case we do not act freely? Or, if we retain this power of contrary choice, in what sense were these “will-setting” decisions? Part of the beauty (although, not its correctness!) of the libertarian model is its intuitive simplicity—we are free in making a choice precisely when, all things being just what they are when we make this choice, we could have at that moment chosen otherwise. But it does seem that Keathley’s preference for soft libertarianism challenges the very core concept of libertarianism itself, and either calls for a new but non-libertarian concept of freedom (as with the compatibilist freedom of Calvinism), or his model ends up being internally contradictory. In any case, it seems that here, too, Keathley’s claim to account for this strength of classic Arminianism is suspect, at best, and false, at worst.

Given that Keathley’s Molinism represents cor-

rectly neither the concept of divine sovereignty (comprehensive, exhaustive, determinative sovereignty) as held in Calvinism nor the concept of freedom (libertarian freedom’s power of contrary choice) as held in Arminianism, his claim to account for both is simply misguided. Keathley’s Molinism clearly is a third alternative, but it cannot rightly be said that it incorporates Calvinism’s high sovereignty and Arminianism’s libertarian freedom. In fact it incorporates neither.

Second, Keathley seems either unaware of or he chose to ignore the major philosophical criticism of libertarian freedom that is brought against it by Calvinists. Granted, some of our actions in Keathley’s soft libertarianism are “will-setting” (and I’ve already commented briefly on the conceptual problems here), nonetheless, the “bread and butter” concept of freedom upheld in Molinism, as in Arminianism, is libertarian freedom, in which we choose freely if and only if we have, at the point of our choosing, the power of contrary choice. But herein lays the problem. If it is the case that when we choose A, all things being just what they are when we make the choice for A, we could at that very moment instead have chosen not-A, or B, then what exactly accounts for why we chose A over not-A, or A over B? There seems no answer here, and this is why: for every reason or set of reasons you give for why you chose A, you would have to provide the identical reason or set of reasons for why, instead, you would have chosen not-A, or B. But, if every reason or set of reasons for choosing A is the identical reason or set of reasons for instead choosing not-A, or B, then there is no reason you can give for why you chose A *instead of* not-A, or A *instead of* B. Hence, your choices are, strictly speaking, arbitrary. This is why Calvinists refer to “libertarian freedom” as a “freedom of indifference”—precisely because if every reason you give for choosing A is identical to choosing not-A, then you are in fact indifferent to choosing A over not-A or not-A over A. Of course, this problem affects every theological model that relies on libertarian freedom and is not a unique problem of

Molinism. But it is Molinism's problem, too, and Keathley must deal with this if he hopes to present a compelling model. Simply asserting that libertarian freedom is "genuine" or "true" freedom may play well to those already convinced, but it rings hollow to those aware of this significant problem.

Third, Keathley's advocacy of overcoming grace as both monergistic and resistible also seems unworkable. Again here, definitions seem to have been "swapped out" without being clear that this has occurred. No Calvinist I know would be willing to accept Keathley's description of monergism as God doing all the work, which work we only must not refuse or resist. The problem is precisely that if we can refuse and resist God's gracious work which would otherwise lead to our salvation, this is an active, intentional, purposeful, willful and deliberate refusal. But if so, then our willingness not to refuse or resist God's gracious work would likewise (and perhaps even more so) be an active, intentional, purposeful, willful and deliberate willingness. After all, it is our decision (not God's) that ultimately decides whether we individually are saved or not. Whether one would be inclined to use the word "work" of what we do is debatable. Nevertheless, we are the decisive actors and our decision is the ultimate decision. Our involvement, then, is of paramount importance, and as such, it is strained beyond clear comprehension to call our salvation, in Keathley's model, truly monergistic.

Part of the strain felt in Keathley's insistence on "monergism" is seen in how he describes unbelief. As noted above, Keathley asserts, "God's drawing grace should and would be efficacious for all. The only thing that could stop it is if, inexplicably, a person decides to refuse.... The question is no longer, 'Why do some believe?' but 'Why doesn't everyone believe?'" (106). "Inexplicably?" Really? Keathley's drive to see us as nearly passive in our salvation leads him to underestimate vastly just how resolved and determined we are as sinners in our opposition to God and his gracious salvation. No, what is inexplicable is acceptance, not refusal.

Indeed, apart from God's grace that regenerates dead hearts, opens blind eyes, and shows Christ as the glorious Savior that he is, no one would ever believe! As for me and my house, I'll stick with the question, "Why does anyone, ever, under any circumstances, believe?" And the answer can only be that God has drawn with irresistible grace.

And speaking of irresistible grace, Keathley fails to interact with the strongest passages and arguments that Calvinists have put forward for this doctrine. His dismissive stance here is odd, since he engages much other Calvinist argumentation elsewhere. But it stands as true: if the Bible teaches that God's saving grace is irresistible, then both Arminian and Molinist models fail. Much hinges on this very point, and Keathley has done his readers a disservice by not interacting with the substantial biblical and theological argumentation for irresistible grace.

Fourth, Keathley's treatment of "sovereign election" is confusing, if not contradictory. On the one hand, he clearly articulates a view, similar to that held in Arminianism, that "our free choice determines how we would respond in any given setting" (154), such that even though God regulates the setting (via middle knowledge) in which we hear the gospel, in that setting, when the gospel is presented, we freely (libertarian freedom) decide whether to respond in faith to the gospel or not. As indicated before, our decision, then, is the ultimate decision in whether we are saved or not. But on the other hand, Keathley also asserts, "Whether I ... have the opportunity to respond to the gospel, or am placed in a setting where I would be graciously enabled to believe are sovereign decisions made by Him" (155). This would indicate, it would seem, that God decides whether he grants some the very opportunity to hear the gospel, and for those granted a hearing, whether they are given grace that would enable them to respond positively to the gospel. The Calvinistic overtones here are notable, and it raises questions whether this is coherent within Keathley's larger theological model. After all, does God

want all to be saved? If so, would he not work (via middle knowledge) to give every person possible the opportunity to hear, and would he not grant enabling grace to all who hear? So, does it really make sense to speak of God electing (by his ultimate choice) those whom he will surely save by his grace? It seems that Keathley wants it both ways, but it is clear that neither he, nor anyone else, can have it both ways. Either God sovereignly and unilaterally chooses those whom he will save such that they (the elect) are given irresistible grace by which they, but they alone, will come to saving faith; or, God endeavors, via middle knowledge, to put as many people as possible in settings where they will freely accept the gospel offered to them, while he also accepts the fact that some (many?) will choose to resist and refuse the gift of salvation offered them. Yes, it is either/or, not both/and. Keathley's attempt to satisfy both a strong sense of God's electing grace, while also leaving the ultimate decision of salvation in the hands of libertarianly free creatures, simply fails.

Fifth and finally, Keathley's final two chapters argue for positions that are reasonably held within both Arminian and Calvinist circles. His criticism of certain Calvinist proposals on the place of works in our salvation (particularly his treatment of Schreiner and Caneday), and his negative assessment of limited atonement within 5-point Calvinism, were both less charitable and harsher critiques than fair, in my judgment. Actually, the views that he ends up advancing in both of these chapters are ones that are very close to the positions held by a number of Calvinists. Hence, his prior critique against some versions of Calvinist teachings serves to disguise the fact that Keathley's own constructive proposal fits already established views within both Arminianism and Calvinism.

I am grateful for the sustained treatment Keathley gave to a number of very difficult and important theological issues, and I appreciate the thoughtfulness he showed throughout the development of his own positions. In the end, though, I

conclude that his model fails to accomplish what he set out to do, and that its many problems render it an untenable accounting of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners.

—Bruce A. Ware

Professor of Christian Theology
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: 1859-2009.
By Gregory A. Wills. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, xiv + 566 pp., \$35.00.

With the publication of this important and well-written sesquicentennial history of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Gregory Wills has provided a marvelous gift for the larger community. In addition, he has also provided a wonderful resource for Southern Baptists in general, and for all who are interested in the history of American Christianity. This work is more than a history of one of the most significant seminaries in the world; it is a running commentary on movements and issues within American Christianity and the Southern Baptist Convention as viewed through the window of Southern Seminary. The massive work reads like anything but a pedantic work of institutional history. This splendid portrait of the SBC's "mother seminary" reads more like a personal biography. Readers are given insightful and first-hand looks at the giants who have shaped the seminary—including Boyce, Broadus, Manly, Mullins, Robertson, Sampey, Dobbins, and so many more. The incredibly extensive research standing behind this work, as reflected in the footnotes, will serve historians well for years to come.

In many ways the hero for the story, and appropriately so, is James P. Boyce. The label "hero" is not reserved for Boyce alone, however, for the founding faculty members are also rightly honored. Their vision, sacrifice, and confidence in God are certainly worthy of imitation by this generation and those to come. Readers will sense the

challenges faced by all associated with the seminary's early days, while also seeing God's faithful provision and providential guidance along the way. For those who are unfamiliar with the Southern Seminary story, they will be inspired by reading the early chapters. For those who know the story, even for those who know it well, they will be amazed at the detail in Wills's account, while learning much, particularly related to the transition years from Boyce to Broadus. The struggle for Broadus from teaching scholar to administrator-leader contains many valuable lessons.

Two obvious themes for Wills in this book, which are found all along the winding roads of the seminary's history, are the importance of theological orthodoxy and the significance of faithful theological education, both for the churches and the denominational entities. Wills's defense of the necessity of orthodoxy in the seminary is given full expression in the sad story of C. H. Toy. This chapter brilliantly serves as a platform for Wills not only to make his case, but to help the readers see the larger implications in light of the movements that were simultaneously taking place in theological education in this country and in Europe. Wills attempts to draw similar applications from the issues surrounding the Whitsitt years. While readers will once again find Wills's research to be impeccable, as new details and twists in the old story are revealed, the Whitsitt and Toy controversies do not have the same implications for the thesis regarding faithful theological education.

Without question, the most influential Baptist leader in the country in the first half of the twentieth century was E. Y. Mullins. Wills's portrayal of Mullins as seminary leader and denominational statesman will receive applause by readers. His interpretation of Mullins as theologian will most likely be met with a mixed response. Clearly the theological focus moved from Boyce's emphasis on divine sovereignty to Mullins's paradigm characterized by personal revelation and experience. The initial inroads of Darwinian thought were

introduced at the seminary and in some sectors of the SBC during the Mullins's era. For Wills, the response by Mullins was muddled and ambiguous. Wills concludes the lengthy discussion on Mullins by recognizing the efforts in the mid-1920s to reassert the importance of orthodoxy for the health of the seminary and the SBC.

Though Mullins shifted the theological discussion to new playing fields, he nevertheless contended for the Bible's full authority and reliability. This commitment evidences itself in Mullins's stirring address to the SBC in 1923 titled, "The Duties and Dangers of This Present Hour." At this time Mullins claimed that Southern Baptists believe that adherence to these foundational truths is a necessary condition of service for teachers in our Baptist institutions. Teachers in Baptist institutions, noted Mullins, should demonstrate loyalty to orthodox beliefs in their classroom teaching and in their service to churches. In this regard the concluding years of the long-term Mullins presidency underscore the two themes that shape Wills's thesis regarding the importance of orthodoxy and the significance of faithful theological education.

The Sampey and Fuller eras were both characterized by the manifold challenges coming out of the Great Depression. Moreover, the progressive theological tendencies ushered in by W. O. Carver in previous years were now expanding in their influence. Wills vividly describes these multiple challenges, preparing the reader for the key issues that were taking shape during the early years of Duke McCall's presidency. Wills's understanding of the key shaping years in the seminary's history is reflected in the multiple chapters given to the presidencies of Boyce, Mullins, and McCall.

The brilliant research skills of Greg Wills are perhaps most clearly seen in this volume in the unveiling of little known background information regarding the first decade of the McCall presidency, particularly the 1958 crisis. At stake, according to Wills, were the roles of trustees, administration, faculty, and the relation of

the seminary to the SBC. McCall defended the denomination before the faculty, while redefining the role of the administration. In doing so, McCall wisely clarified what he believed to be the distinction between a divinity school and a theological seminary.

While praising McCall for his leadership in the 1958 crisis, Wills devotes his second chapter on McCall's presidency to the loss of trust and the loss of orthodoxy at the seminary. Nevertheless, McCall receives praise for his courageous leadership in matters regarding desegregation and racial reconciliation. Before the end of McCall's three-decade long presidency, the SBC's conflict over the nature of Scripture was in full bloom with much of the debate centered on Southern Seminary, including its faculty and alumni.

The final chapters of the volume describe the issues at the seminary over the past twenty-five years, including the presidencies of Roy L. Honeycutt and R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Because these events are so recent, they were no doubt the hardest for Wills to write and interpret. The differences in approach and vision between the two administrations are amplified for the readers. Wills concludes by connecting the Mohler vision to that of the founding faculty, and the work of the volume's hero, James P. Boyce, in particular. In conclusion, Wills observes that Mohler embraced and embodied the Boyce vision as fully as anyone previously had ever done. Under Mohler's leadership, "Southern Seminary was once again Boyce's seminary." The seminary had once again reclaimed its commitment to the importance of theological orthodoxy and to the significance of faithful theological education for the churches and the denomination.

Southern Seminary has been a leading institution in American Christianity for a century and a half. The seminary's shaping initiatives have influenced the Southern Baptist Convention over this time like no other single entity. Many creative aspects regarding the expansion of theological education have been associated with the seminary: the study of the English Bible, research

doctoral programs, the study of world religions, Christian education, pastoral care and psychology, social work, leadership, and programs associated with the Billy Graham School. Wills carefully depicts the ebb and flow, the personal struggles and emotional challenges associated with these various initiatives.

While not everyone will agree with every interpretation offered in this volume, few will disagree that rarely has such a comprehensive institutional history ever been penned and told so well. The detailed research is not only brilliantly presented, but communicated in a fascinating and interesting manner. Wills has given the Southern Seminary family a first-rate and scholarly history that will serve that community for years to come. Moreover, he has given students of American Christianity, including students of the Southern Baptist Convention, an invaluable resource regarding the influence of theological institutions for the life and overall health of churches and their denominations. We congratulate Greg Wills on this masterfully researched volume on what many believe to be Southern Baptists' most influential and shaping institution.

—David S. Dockery
President
Professor of Christian Thought and Tradition
Union University

Ezekiel: A Commentary. By Paul M. Joyce. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies. New York: T & T Clark, 2009, ix + 310 pp., \$49.95 paper.

Paul M. Joyce is University Lecturer in Theology in the University of Oxford and a Fellow of St. Peter's College, Oxford. Currently he is the Chairman of the Theology Faculty Board in the University of Oxford and co-chairs the Society of Biblical Literature's "Theological Perspectives on the Book of Ezekiel" Section. Joyce's purpose in

his commentary is to make a contribution to the interpretation and understanding of the book of Ezekiel, especially in terms of its theology with attention to historical and literary issues.

Therefore, before providing a chapter-by-chapter discussion of the book of Ezekiel, Joyce begins by discussing several issues such as the time and place of Ezekiel's ministry. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing Ezekiel's activities happening in the sixth century BC in Babylonia. Another concern is how much of the book of Ezekiel is actually from the prophet and how much of it is actually secondary. He proposes that while most of the book may be attributed to Ezekiel, parts of it may not be from the prophet. He states, "We must endeavor where possible, then, to discriminate between primary material and secondary elaboration, but we must undertake this task in the realization that 'assured results' will be rare" (16). Even though Joyce's attributing most of the book to Ezekiel is more conservative than what most scholars maintain, it is not necessarily obvious that any major sections come from secondary sources. In fact, his attributing chapters 40-48, chapters pertaining to the temple, to a secondary source fail to recognize a major aspect of the book of Ezekiel: Ezekiel the priest.

Necessary to understanding Ezekiel's ministry is recognizing the significance of his being a priest. Joyce acknowledges the "priestly affinities of much of the material" (13). He continues stating, "there seems little doubt the witness of the book of Ezekiel was himself a priest and one would therefore expect his own style to reflect this" (13). However, Joyce gives little attention to the significance of Ezekiel's being a priest. He misses this theme as the book of Ezekiel begins. He provides unconvincing evidence for the "thirtieth year" in Ezekiel 1:1 to refer to the thirtieth year of the exile and rejects the more natural understanding that it refers to Ezekiel's age, thirty being the age one began priestly ministry in Israel. The Lord would not have maligned the defilement of the temple only to defile it himself by taking a layper-

son into the restricted sanctuary even in a vision. Ezekiel's role in safeguarding the sanctity of the sanctuary, his extensive use of cultic language, his emphasis on impurity and death, his reception of the temple instructions, and his participation in the consecration offering of the altar all are some of the examples pointing to the centrality of Ezekiel's priestly office to his prophetic ministry. One might even ask, "Was Ezekiel a priestly prophet, or was he a prophetic priest?"

Besides this shortfall, Joyce is to be commended for providing helpful discussions on the major theological themes of the book of Ezekiel and for demonstrating how the chapters of the book present these themes.

—T. J. Betts
Associate Professor of
Old Testament Interpretation
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Olive Tree BibleReader 4. Spokane, WA: Olive Tree Bible Software, Inc.

In recent years—and particularly with advances in technology—the number of resources available to help one read and study the Bible has exploded. Computer software has transformed advanced Bible study. No longer is it necessary to look up a Greek word in a huge, five-pound concordance to discover its every occurrence in the New Testament. Now with a click of a mouse, such searches, and much more, can be accomplished instantly. No longer does one need shelves full of commentaries, dictionaries, and lexicons. Through various Bible software programs, all of these are immediately accessible and searchable on your PC or Mac. However, not only are we no longer limited to print versions of Bible study resources, but we are also no longer limited to desktops and notebooks for our software. The rise in the use of smartphones and e-readers for computing and connectivity means that Bible study software has gone mobile.

A digital publisher at the forefront of producing Bible resources for mobile devices is Olive Tree Bible Software. The Olive Tree BibleReader was first released for the Palm Pilot in 1998. Today, according to the company's website (www.olive-tree.com), BibleReader 4 is available on 98% of the smartphones in the world. The BibleReader mobile app(lication) itself is free, and many resources are available as free downloads, such as various Bible translations, eBook versions of Christian classics (e.g., Augustine's *Confessions*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, etc.), and sermon collections (e.g., Luther, Spurgeon, Whitefield, and even John Piper). The academic resources and reference materials available for purchase are many of the same items available through traditional Bible software for desktops and notebooks. Examples include the New American Commentary Series, a Bible atlas, the *ESV Study Bible*, Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Louw and Nida's Greek Lexicon, and the *IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

My focus in this review, however, is on the Greek and Hebrew texts available for the BibleReader. As noted above, the BibleReader is supported on many mobile platforms (see the Olive Tree website for a list, as well as to learn which platforms support the original language texts), but I will consider it from the perspective of my own device—the iPhone (other Apple devices that support the BibleReader include the iPod Touch and the iPad). While a few original language texts are available as free downloads (such as the Westcott-Hort NT), those available for purchase on the iPhone include the Nestle-Aland (NA27) Greek New Testament, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), and the Septuagint (LXX) edited by Rahlfs. Moreover, morphologically tagged versions of each of these texts can also be purchased that provide full parsings, as well as lexical information. The parsing information is made available through the following morphological databases: Mounce-Koivisto (NA27), Michigan-Claremont-Westminster (BHS), and

Kraft-Taylor-Wheeler (LXX). The definitions are provided by the UBS Dictionary (NA27), BDB Lexicon (BHS), and LEH Lexicon (LXX). Simply touching a word in the text generates a window with a hyperlinked entry that provides the lexical form, parsing, and gloss. From this, one can then choose to open the lexicon for the full, detailed entry on the word. The lexicons are also available as standalone books, allowing one to look up specific words without linking from the Greek and Hebrew texts.

The BibleReader offers a number of very useful benefits and features: (1) The sheer mobility is extremely convenient. Print versions of the GNT, BHS, and LXX need never leave my office (BHS and LXX are by no means thin!). Whether I am researching in the library, reading at home or church, referencing a passage in class, or traveling, I have no need to carry my hardcopies with me. Having the biblical texts so easily transportable is a definite advantage. (2) Unlike some other mobile Bible software, the Olive Tree texts are actually stored on your mobile device. Since you are not accessing your digital library from a network, connectivity is not an issue. Everything is immediately available. (3) Like desktop software programs, BibleReader is capable of advanced original language searches, whether you search for specific words/phrases or search by morphological characteristics. (4) Personal notes can be added on specific Bible verses. These can then be accessed by verse from any Bible version in your BibleReader library. Moreover, you can back up your notes to your Evernote account (if you have one; see www.evernote.com). (5) BibleReader allows split-screen reading so that you can view two Bible translations side-by-side, thus allowing you to compare your Greek and Hebrew texts to an English translation or to compare the readings of BHS and the LXX on a given text. (6) All titles that you purchase are tracked in your online account in case you need to download another copy. This is helpful for a variety of reasons, not least of which is if you switch to a new mobile plat-

form (assuming the resource is available for the new platform). (7) Olive Tree offers a number of instructional videos (and articles), either online or through the BibleReader, offering tutorials on searching, note taking, and more.

I must confess that when it comes to reading, I much prefer a book in my hand to staring at a computer screen. Personally, I would rather pull a commentary off of my shelf than peruse a digital one (though I readily confess that the latter has some clear benefits). However, with regard to studying the Greek and Hebrew texts, the BibleReader offers amazing advantages over printed texts in terms of usability, efficiency, and searchability. And its mobility rivals traditional Bible software programs. Pastors, scholars, and students who use smartphones or other mobile devices will be excited about Olive Tree's BibleReader and may find that it revolutionizes their Bible study.

[Postscript: After I completed this review, Olive Tree released BibleReader 5 with additional improvements and features.]

—Christopher W. Cowan
Acquisitions Editor
B&H Academic

We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry. By G. K. Beale. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008, 341 pp., \$26.00 paper.

G. K. Beale is well known for significant contributions to biblical scholarship in general and biblical theology in particular. The volume under review here complements his commentary on Revelation, his work on the Old Testament in the New, and his recent work, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. Beale states his thesis clearly and argues it convincingly: "What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration" (16, italics removed). After an introductory chapter, Beale establishes his thesis in Isaiah 6, then broadens out to show it from the rest of the OT. He narrows the lens again

in chapter four to focus on the origin of idolatry in the OT, before tracing the thesis through the "intertestamental bridge" of the literature from early Judaism. Beale then examines the theme in the Gospels, giving particular attention to the use of Isaiah 6 in all four gospels. He proceeds through the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles, concluding the direct examination of the Bible with a chapter on the book of Revelation. The volume is rounded out with two chapters: the first examines the reversal of the process of idolaters becoming like their idols as they worship the true and living God, and in the conclusion Beale pastorally applies his findings to contemporary culture.

In the introduction Beale explains, "we will proceed primarily by tracing the development of earlier biblical passages dealing with this theme and how later portions of Scripture interpret and develop these passages (what is today referred to as 'intertextuality' or 'inner-biblical allusion')" (16). As he elaborates on his interpretive perspective, Beale affirms both the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and the accessibility of the divine author's intentions communicated through the human authors of the biblical texts. He seeks to combine grammatical-historical exegesis with canonical-contextual exegesis, relying on the criteria for validating allusions to earlier texts in later ones set forth by Richard B. Hays. Against those who are opposed to allowing the meaning of later texts to influence the interpretation of earlier ones, Beale writes, "If the presupposition that God ultimately has authored the canon is correct, the later parts of Scripture unpack the 'thick description' of earlier parts.... My view is that if a later text is truly unpacking the idea of an earlier text, then the meaning developed by the later text was originally included in the 'thick meaning' of the earlier text" (26). The idea is that later biblical authors correctly understood earlier biblical texts and commented upon them. This obliges interpreters "to recover unstated or suppressed correspondences between the two texts' (quoting Hays).... [P]art of this task is to discern such

interpretive links that are not verbally stated by the writer making the quotation or allusion” (28). Beale explains that he is “trying to forge a newer way of doing biblical theology in the English-speaking world,” wherein he attempts “to focus on and interpret those Old Testament texts that [are] repeatedly alluded to and quoted in subsequent Scripture, both later in the Old Testament and in the New Testament” (27).

This is an important and helpful work. Beale writes, “I would characterize my biblical-theological approach to be canonical, genetic-progressive (or organically developmental), and intertextual” (34). He convincingly demonstrates his thesis with meticulous (and at times painstaking) detail. It would be hard to overturn Beale’s thesis, given that it is explicitly stated in Psalm 115:4-8, and again in 135:15-18. The connections that Beale makes between texts are always stimulating, even if some are more convincing than others.

This book deserves a wide reading, especially among those who seek demonstrable ways to understand the unified theology of the whole Bible. I have a minor quibble about an interpretive matter here and there, none of which impinge on the book’s main thesis, and I think that at points the thesis was pursued in ways that might eclipse other important aspects of the texts under discussion. But no book can do or say everything, and everything that Beale sets out to do in this book he does very, very well. This book is exemplary, setting high standards for methodological precision, control of primary and secondary sources, and bringing out the wealth of meaning these texts contain. Here’s a warning: if you read this book, you will begin to see the thesis Beale establishes all over the Bible. You’ll also be spurred to return to the texts, to ask questions about how earlier texts are being interpreted, and to establish the connections between texts with criteria that can be examined and understood. I join Beale in the prayer with which he closes the volume: “I pray that all who read this book will revere the Lord in his Word and resemble him for restoration

and redemption. May God be with us as the true, new people of God” (311).

—James M. Hamilton, Jr.
Associate Professor of Biblical Theology
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Toying with God: The World of Religious Games and Dolls. By Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010, xvi + 232 pp., \$24.95 paper.

In a couple hundred pages of text and pictures, Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris manage to meander across a broad range of religious traditions and to dabble in psychological streams that flow from sources as diverse as Carl Jung and Jean Piaget—all while maintaining their focus on religious expressions and functions of games and dolls. The result is a well-written volume that, if nothing else, provides a thorough compendium of information on the various functions of religious toys. Some discussions in the book border on the trivial. Yet, with few exceptions, even the trivia (such as the extended discussion of “Fulla,” a Muslim variation of the Barbie doll) tend to provide fascinating glimpses into what happens when the toy aisle turns religious. Nikki Bado-Fralick directs the religious studies program at Iowa State University, while Rebecca Sachs Norris teaches religious and theological studies at Merrimack College. Both professors utilize religious playthings in their teaching, and they draw many of their examples from their students’ in-class experiences with these games and toys.

One theme provides a recurring touchstone throughout the text: Both religion and play entail embodied expressions of perceptions or realities that stand outside rational categorization (183-84); as a result, the human experiences of play and of the sacred overlap with one another. The border between ritual and play is “permeable, porous, and mutually interpenetrating” (167). By mingling

the corporeal realm with that which cannot be confined to words or matter, both religion and play serve to break down “dualistic ways of perceiving the world” (184). And indeed, from the perspective of Bado-Fralick and Norris, any “set-apartness” or separation between realities is the error that is to be avoided at all cost. The authors wax rhapsodic as they describe how “in many cultures religion is not relegated to a specific hour of Friday, Saturday, or Sunday worship in a building that is set apart. For some, religion is found under a full moon in a grove of trees, in the wind blowing across the plains, or through snow falling on water” (xii). “The sacred is not a separate realm. It is the ground of the universe and is immanent,” they write, echoing Paul Tillich’s description of God as “the ground of being” (xi).

Such a perspective presents an obvious problem for evangelical Christians. In contradistinction to the perspective presented in *Toying with God*, there is for Christians a real and authentic dualism—though not of the sort that the Gnostics derived from Plato or even of the sort that Bado-Fralick and Norris see in the setting apart of certain days and places for worship. God is separate from his world yet present within his world, and he has revealed himself to humanity in Jesus Christ. The Christian distinction is between that which is “in Christ” and that which is outside of Christ. For Christians, it is not humanity’s experience of the “ground of the universe” that draws together the spiritual and the corporeal in perfect harmony but the incarnation and the redemption that has been accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Despite these difficulties, *Toying with God* provides a starting-point for much fruitful reflection. Bado-Fralick and Norris rightly point out that, for a religious theme or character to be produced as a game or toy, some aspect is likely to be “watered down for mass consumption” (117). Jesus dolls and action figures spout a limited list of aphorisms that will be palatable to a particular target audience (180). Games produced to convey Christian truth boast that “no Bible knowledge” is needed to play

(116). The problem that the authors perceive in all of this is that a sacred experience which was once “embedded in a complex historical, cultural, and religious context” becomes separated from a larger tradition and from the faith-community (116-17).

For those who take the text of Scripture to represent the authority of Jesus himself, however, the stakes are far higher than mere separation of a sacred experience from a larger tradition or community. God has revealed himself through particular words and works within human history, and these events have been accurately conveyed to us through the authoritative text of Scripture. Because Christian faith is rooted in these particular words and acts in history, these texts and truths are not malleable, freely adaptable to our own whims and styles and experiences. We are responsible not merely to remain connected to a tradition or to a community but to testify truthfully to the historical words and works of God himself.

The examples found throughout *Toying with God* suggest that, once the characters and principles in God’s metanarrative are converted into playthings, the tendency is to remake God’s words and acts to fit the felt needs of the consumer. “This talking Jesus doll is so encouraging, like a real friend,” declares the website for the Holy Hugables Jesus doll. “He says things that reassure us of what Jesus says to us in Scripture, like ‘I love you and have an exciting plan for your life’” (180). Never mind that these words are not to be found anywhere in Scripture; these are the “encouraging” words that children need a “real friend” to say as they snuggle down to sleep. In the flyer for “Spirit Warriors” action figures, Samson is shown battling Goliath—an encounter which, while intriguing, is not to be found anywhere in the divine metanarrative (49). One Jesus action figure has glow-in-the-dark hands while another comes with accessories to switch water with wine.

In board games, biblical truths are extracted from their context such that, for example, Luke 6:35 becomes a proof-text on a card by which lending another player \$600 can result in “20,000

Eternal Treasures” (80). In another game, having earned thirty or more “Testimonies” enables a player to forgive a neighbor (and to gain fifteen bonus Testimonies!), whereas players who have racked up fewer than thirty Testimonies find themselves unable to forgive (81). One wonders where the gospel or the work of the Holy Spirit fits into such scenarios.

As Bado-Fralick and Norris note, there is a tendency to “project whatever we need” onto action figures, dolls, and games (67). And yet, if it is God’s story that shapes us rather than the other way around, remolding God’s works and deeds into games of conquest, talking vegetables, chubby-cheeked cherubs, plush dolls, and plastic action figures should raise some significant questions in the minds of Christians. In general, one might say that the importance of accurately conveying a particular historical truth in the present is inversely proportional to the suitability of recasting this event as a game or toy. If the words and works of God in history matter in highly significant ways here and now, remolding these events as playthings becomes problematic at best.

The value of *Toying with God* is twofold: It is a useful compendium of information on religious toys and games—this, the authors probably intended. The second value is one which neither Bado-Fralick nor Norris probably planned: For the Christian, the book inadvertently provides evidence of our own proclivity for idolatry even in one of the most mundane areas of life, the ways that we play. It could be hoped that reading this text would result not only in a capacity to consider religious toys more critically but also in a willingness to examine our own hearts for ways that we may be remolding God’s Word to fit our own agendas.

—Timothy Paul Jones
Associate Professor of
Discipleship and Family Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Is God Calling Me? Answering the Question Every Leader Asks. By Jeff Iorg. Nashville: B&H, 2008, 115 pp., \$9.99 paper.

Any church leader who has encouraged his members to consider God’s call knows that the question found in the title of this book is a common one. This work, written by the president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, is a concise, clear, and straightforward guide to answering that question.

Iorg states upfront that this work is not an exhaustive look at God’s calling. His goal is simply to provide “field-tested insights” to help believers clarify calling and respond in obedience. The testing “field” is primarily Iorg’s own life, as he has sought and followed God’s will from seminary student to pastor to denominational leader to seminary president. This approach strengthens the book by allowing the reader to hear Iorg’s story and sense his gratitude for his own calling. For example, his review of the blessings his family received when he served as pastor is both enlightening and inspiring.

Five chapters address the concept of a “call”—types of calls, methods of God’s calling, means to discern God’s call, and effects of God’s call. The final two chapters of the book specifically address the calls to missions and to pastoral ministry. In the middle of the book is an important chapter illustrating that God calls people that we might consider unexpected or unqualified; however, the chapter seems out of order in the middle of general discussions of God’s call. For those readers already struggling with the concept that God might be calling them, this chapter might have been better placed earlier in the book.

Iorg classifies “calls” under three categories: a universal call to Christian service and growth; a general call to ministry leadership (e.g., pastor or missionary); and a specific call to a ministry assignment. Each of these calls develops out of the previous one, like the opening of a collapsible telescope. God calls primarily through crisis (e.g., a

sudden life crisis), contemplation (reasoned decisions), and community (the prompting of others), though all calls are supernatural. Further discernment of that call comes through inner peace, confirmation from others, effectiveness in ministry, and joy in the ministry.

Some readers may question Iorg's conclusion that a call is "a profound impression from God," something you just know "in your heart." Others may debate whether sufficient attention is given to the issue of character when considering one's call. Some may disagree with Iorg's call to formalized ministry training, despite the fact that he credibly argues in this direction. Nevertheless, this work is a valuable resource that reflects the thoughts of a seminary president seeking to help a young generation understand God's call. That generation and those who lead them will appreciate the brevity of this work, the clarity of its guidance, and the pastoral concern of its author.

—Chuck Lawless
Dean, Billy Graham School
of Missions and Evangelism
Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Teaching that Transforms: Facilitating Life Change through Adult Bible Teaching. By Richard R. Melick, Jr. and Shera Melick. Nashville: B&H, 2010, 337 pp., \$29.99.

The authors' stated purpose is to present "an easily understood method for study and teaching the Bible." They divide the book into three parts: the nature of the Bible and how to understand it; various theories of adult learning during the past sixty years; and the Star Method of Transformational Teaching.

The book appears to be targeting both teachers in the local church and students in colleges and universities. Almost all of their illustrations are derived from experiences in the local church,

but for the average Bible teacher in the church, much of this book is too meticulous and detailed to keep a layperson engaged in the content. While I appreciate and agree with the emphasis on knowing and correctly interpreting the Bible, I do not believe the average lay teacher will endure to section two. If they do, the theories of adult learning will be irrelevant to most lay teachers who simply want to know how to teach effectively their lesson next Sunday.

For the college or seminary student, the book presents a good overview of the theories of adult learning and some critical aspects of teacher preparation and presentation. For most seminary classes, however, it is not comprehensive enough. The authors never mention Robert Mager, selected by the International Society for Performance Improvement as the most influential individual in the field of instructional education. His book, *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, is one of the Museum of Education's "Books of the Century." They have a brief reference to *Design for Teaching and Training* by LeRoy Ford but reference his 1998 edition and not the updated 2002 edition.

The Melicks promote adults taking responsibility for their own learning. They believe Christian educators need to move from being the authority in the classroom to facilitator and then consultant (126). As an educator, I agree with this concept. We want adults to be like the Bereans who "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11, NIV). There is a danger, however, in this concept being misunderstood. Christian teachers must be certain to teach the Word with authority for the Word is the authority, not the learner's discovery. They give a little balance to this approach when they say, "Christians may learn significantly through dialogue, but in the end, commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible, shape our understanding of truth" (146). There is a reason the Bible says teachers of the Word will be held accountable (Jas 3:1). God's Word is truth and we make no apology for teaching the Word with authority.

I appreciate the authors' emphasis on knowing and teaching the Word. Much of the book will be helpful to teachers at every level. The Melecks, however, should have written two books, one for laypeople and one for colleges and seminaries. In attempting to accomplish both in one volume, they accomplish neither.

—Brian C. Richardson
Basil Manly Jr. Professor of
Church and Family Ministry
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message. By D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo. Edited by Andrew David Naselli. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, 169 pp., \$12.99 paper.

Andrew David Naselli, a doctor of philosophy graduate of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in theological studies (New Testament) and author of *Let Go and Let God?* (Logos, 2010), recently condensed the formative volume of introductory New Testament studies by D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo entitled, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. The resulting work is *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message*, a short, readable, and helpful guide to basic matters of NT content and form.

The text offers a book-by-book approach and asks seven basic questions of each book: what it is about, who wrote it, where was it written, when was it written, to whom was it written, why was it written, and what it contributes to our understanding of the faith. *Introducing the New Testament* will serve pastors, Sunday school teachers, college workers, and lay Christians well in their work to quickly grasp the core data of the New Testament, which must be the backbone of any proper biblical inquiry. The text also concisely covers core question of NT studies, offering chapters on such important topics as the Synoptic Gospels, the features of NT letters, and Paul as apostle and theologian.

It is possible to overlook an introductory volume like this text due to its shortness and concision. This would be a most injudicious conclusion. Many summaries are of great value, particularly when those summaries stem from a lifetime in the NT and the fields of scholarship and research it has produced. Whether considering discussions of Lukan authorship, theological contributions of the book of Romans to Christian doctrine, or the core ideas of the book of Revelation, the volume leads the reader to swift and weighty conclusions. The marriage of brevity and careful judgment is a strength, not a weakness, of *Introducing the New Testament*.

Naselli's editing has yielded excellent results. The book's frequent usage of lists will aid many in their study, while others will in places wish for a more narrational approach. This small point does not obviate the helpfulness of the book, which is warmly commended as a brief but potent resource guide that will ultimately lead the reader "to obey with joy your Maker and Redeemer" who is the center not only of the NT but of the Bible itself (163).

—Owen Strachan
Instructor of Christian Theology
and Church History
Boyce College