Book Reviews

Jesus the Priest. By Nicholas Perrin. London: SPCK, 2018. 384 pp. $44.31, paper.

Jesus Christ is a high priest, after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews makes this clear; no one disputes it. What is disputed is whether the Gospels present Jesus as a priest. Because the title "priest" is never assigned to Jesus by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, many who admit the priestly actions of Jesus (e.g., forgiving sins and offering prayer) refuse to pronounce him a priest in the Gospels.

Most recently, Andrew Malone in his helpful study *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of the Priesthood* argues we should derive all priestly identifications from Hebrews (and Revelation 1), not the Gospels (pp. 103–07). "Though some proposed parallels are enticing, they are difficult to confirm with any confidence and leave the minimalist position more convincing" (103). Malone's "minimalist position" stands against others who make a case for seeing Christ as a priest in the Gospels.

To date, Crispin Fletcher-Louis has been the most forceful for observing Christ's priesthood in the Gospels. However, with the publication of *Jesus the Priest,* Nicholas Perrin has made an important contribution to the study of Christ's priesthood in the Gospels. In what follows, I will briefly summary the content of his argument and offer a few observations on his work and cautions for the reader.

In chapter 1, Perrin begins with the Lord's Prayer and the meaning of "Our Father." Following the work of Jeremias, against Bousset, he argues *Abba* is not a newly-minted term in the New Testament. It is the eschatological title of address which all sons may offer, after they have gone through the Exodus (36–38). Thus, Perrin follows the history of "Father" through the Old Testament and the Second Temple period. He argues Jesus' use of "Father" is not novel, but typical of the sons of God (e.g., Adam, Israel, Solomon, etc.), all of whom have a priestly status in God's kingdom.

From this definition, he makes the case for the Lord's Prayer as "a consistently eschatological prayer" for the sons of God (38). Then, one-by-one he shows the priestly background to the seven petitions (38–51). For

instance, the first petition ("*hallowed* be your name") finds its anchor point in Ezekiel 36:23 ("I will *sanctify* my great name"), a passage that presents a "reinvigorated" priesthood "in the eschaton" (40–42). By uniting sonship and priesthood—a theme that will continue throughout his book—Perrin argues "Jesus was ascribing to this movement the priestly status of sonship" (53).

Continuing the focus on sonship, Perrin next considers the baptism of Jesus and the Father's words: "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (67–76). Engaging the antecedent texts informing these words, Perrin argues for a priestly understanding. Critiquing the common connection of these words to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, Perrin argues for Psalm 2:7 and Genesis 22:2 as the background texts. By careful attention to how the Old Testament was understood in Second Temple Judaism (70–76), Perrin makes his case in the Synoptic Gospels (77–88). He concludes, "All three Evangelists depict the baptism as an inaugural moment that marks off a priestly career" (88). Though not often appreciated, there are significant priestly themes associated with Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, and Perrin makes a strong case for seeing Jesus' baptism as a priestly event.

Chapter 3 tackles "the kingdom of Jesus." Returning to Ezekiel's priestly expectations of the eschatological kingdom, Perrin considers the inauguration of the kingdom through a "constellation of expectations" outlined in Ezekiel 36:23–28. These expectations include "(1) the restoration of the cultic space, (2) the establishment of a priestly nation, (3) cleansing from idols, and (4) the granting of the Spirit" (91). With these elements in mind, Perrin considers two kingdom parables and the Beatitudes (92–142). With painstaking attention to the biblical text and first-century Jewish context, Perrin makes a number of cogent points.

First, he argues the parables are Jesus' priestly way of separating the clean from the unclean (cf. Lev 10:11): "Because the making of ritual pronouncements of clean and unclean ... was a fundamentally a sacerdotal task, it follows that Jesus' performance of the parables ... was itself a *priestly activity*" (111). Second, he interprets the parable of the salt (Matt 5:13; Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34–35) as priestly. Again, grounding his argument in priestly laws of the Old Testament (cf. e.g., Lev 2:13; Num 8:8), he argues "each Evangelist seems to have shared the assumption that salt was an appropriate metaphor by which the community might assert its own priestly identity"

(127). Third, Perrin underscores the priestly concepts in Isaiah 61, a passage regularly observed to stand behind the Beatitudes (128–31). Altogether, Perrin argues Jesus announced a *priestly* kingdom or a kingdom comprised of new covenant priests.

Next, Perrin turns to the twin titles of Son of David and Son of Man. He devotes a chapter to each (chapters 4 and 5), and following a similar methodology, he traces the origin of these terms in the Old Testament and how they were understood in Second Temple Judaism, before demonstrating the way the Evangelists used them. First, Perrin observes the priestly vocation of David and Solomon, along the lines of Melchizedek, and argues that the title "Son of David" should likewise be perceived as royal and priestly (cf. Psalm 110). Then, more originally, Perrin argues from Daniel 7, with its "with the clouds of heaven" coming from Leviticus 16 (177), for a high priestly reading of "Son of Man." He concludes, "On my results, the Son of Man emerges neither as human *simpliciter* nor as divine *simpliciter* but an eschatological high-priestly figure in whom the realms of humanity and divinity converge, even as he performs atoning duties appropriate to the Day of Atonement" (188).

Developing the "Son of Man" further, Perrin presents a "re-envisaged priesthood" in chapter 6. Selecting three "Son of Man" texts, Perrin makes the case that Jesus shows himself to be a priest when he permitted his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28), when he confronted Herod and the other "power brokers" in Jerusalem (Matt 8:20; Luke 9:58), and when Jesus told the parable of the children in the marketplace (Matt 11:16–19; Luke 7:31–35). Offering alternative readings of these passages, he gives a priestly interpretation of Christ as "Son of Man," arguing that Jesus' self-designation was the royal and priestly "story" Jesus inhabited, one that invited his kingdom disciples to "a specifically priestly calling" and the "means by which the coming of the kingdom ... would be realized" (238).

In the final chapter of his argument, Perrin explains how Jesus' "confrontations" with the leaders of Jerusalem should be read as competitions for who had the right to be priest. First, he looks at the way Jesus disputed with the Pharisees about the "tribute tax for Caesar" (240–61). He connects the "image" on the coin to Adam and Israel's priest; he also show how Jesus' response in Mark 12:13–17 develops the priestly theology of Daniel (esp., "the things of God"

in Daniel 2:20–23). Second, Perrin examines the "trial of Jesus" (261–80) and the way Jesus' dispute with the high priest ultimately revealed how Jesus saw himself—as the fulfillment of Psalm 110, one who "would die ... as the true priest" (279). In these two rigorously-exegetical sections, Perrin concludes the body of his argument, which presents Jesus as "the bearer of the ephod" and one who "wished to be remembered as such" (281).

All in all, Perrin's book presents a compelling vision of Jesus as Priest. What remains to be seen is how the scholarly community will receive his argument. At present, the minimalist vision of Christ's priesthood seems to reign supreme, as does the assignment of Jesus as Prophet and King. Perrin's book will challenge this position. With his detailed analysis of the Gospels, an exegetical approach grounded in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism, he presents a vision of Christ that is orthodox but also novel. His book contains multiple reinterpretations of passages and as N. T. Wright observes, it "sheds a flood of fresh light on the Gospels and on Jesus himself."

For these reasons the reader should know what they are getting into. First, this is not a boilerplate volume on Jesus in the Gospels, or simply the theology of Hebrews writ large. Rather, this is a groundbreaking study on the Gospels, one that all historical Jesus scholars will need to consider. I am hopeful this book will move the conversation forward on Jesus as a priest in the Gospels, as it shows how the Evangelists (following Jesus' own lead) affirmed Jesus' priesthood even as they did not call him priest.

Second, Perrin's approach to the scholarly community is a model for evangelicals. While regularly addressing the concerns of critical scholars and submitting himself to the constraints of that community, Perrin makes a bold argument for Christ, his priesthood, and his atoning work for salvation. In this way, he exemplifies how a Bible-believing scholar might engage a community of scholars that do not share his evangelical convictions.

Third, this book may not be written for pastors, but I hope pastors—and those writing commentaries for pastors—will read it anyway. For those who are serious about knowing Christ as the Scriptures present him, Perrin provides a glorious vision of Jesus as the fulfillment of all Israel's priestly hopes. Because the priesthood stands at the center of Christ's person and work, not to mention the biblical storyline, his fresh observations about the priesthood provide serious fodder for knowing Christ. Some may have

difficulty following or agreeing with every argument Perrin makes, but I trust that all who engage *Jesus the Priest* will profit from the book, especially those preaching through the passages listed in the summary above.

David Schrock, PhD
Pastor of Preaching and Theology
Occoquan Bible Church, Woodbridge, VA

God for Us: Discovering the Heart of the Father through the Life of the Son.
By Abby Ross Hutto. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019, 212 pp., $14.99 paper.

Abby Ross Hutto serves as the Director of Spiritual Formation at Story Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Westerville, Ohio and as a group leader and trainer for Parakaleo. Employing her personal and ministerial experience in *God for Us*, Hutto seeks to help Christians experience freedom from fear, anxiety, and discouragement by directing them to a proper understanding of the character and nature of God the Father as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ—particularly through the Gospel of John. Ultimately, the author intends to convince readers that God is *for us*, not *against us*.

Hutto bookends each chapter with the story of an anonymous individual (e.g., Desperate, Grieving, Wounded) who has struggled with—and eventually overcomes—the theme of the chapter. The author addresses relevant contemporary issues such as pain and suffering, grief and loss, abuse and victimization, shame and guilt, and hopelessness and despair. She links the opening story with a passage in John's Gospel which corresponds to the same issue, engaging John's prologue; Jesus' encounters with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the woman caught in adultery; the healing of the man born blind and the resurrection of Lazarus; Jesus' teachings during the Jewish Feast of Booths and on the Good Shepherd; the anointing of Jesus' feet; the disciples' betrayal and denial; the passion accounts; and the post-resurrection encounters. Hutto utilizes exegetical insights, cultural backgrounds, and theological reflection to elucidate how Jesus reveals the Father's true—benevolent—intentions toward us in order to overturn our misunderstandings and mistrust of God. The author appends each chapter with Scripture for contemplation and questions for discussion.

Writing from a Reformed perspective, Hutto combines pastoral tenderness, personal vulnerability, and biblical and theological accuracy to provide an objective account of God's true character and nature. She expertly crafts the anecdotal narratives such that readers immediately identify with and relate to the attendant issues, and she the exposits the biblical narratives such that readers readily apprehend the characters—their circumstances, motives, and behaviors—as intimately relevant, not historically distant. Though the author focuses on the Gospel of John, she frequently includes insights from across the biblical canon, especially the Old Testament, thus highlighting Scripture's interconnectivity, Christocentricity, and direct relevance for today. Furthermore, *God for Us* is richly Trinitarian; Hutto focuses on how the Father reveals himself through the incarnate Son, but she always considers the person and work of the Holy Spirit where appropriate. Though Arminian readers may periodically quibble with how the author articulates matters of providence and salvation (e.g., 55, 118, 191), readers from across the evangelical spectrum will enjoy and appreciate Hutto's work.

The book is not without a few weaknesses, however. First, though Hutto does not explicitly state it, she expects readers to read the Bible passage found beneath each chapter title before they read the rest of the chapter. If they do not, they may feel lost as the author actively shifts between the passage and its biblical and historical context, the intro story, and her own experiences. This decision, I believe, results in more fluid prose at the potential expense of clarity. Second, though Hutto has a diverse bibliography, she relies too heavily on a select few dated commentaries for her exegetical, historical, and cultural insights into the Gospel of John: D. A. Carson (1991), Milne (1993), and Boice (2005). As a result, she occasionally passes over issues that require further nuance (e.g., underdeveloped treatment of *kosmos* [38]) or omits matters of direct import (e.g., the contested canonicity of John 7:53–8:11 [chap. 5]). The author acknowledges her dependence upon these authors (208), and she likely smooths over difficult issues so as to not obstruct readability; however, critical readers may take issue with these momentary lapses in depth. Third, though the book evidences a robust Trinitarianism, Hutto often distinguishes too greatly between the divine persons. Saying, for example, that the life of the Son reveals the heart of the Father (per the book's subtitle; see also 149, 169) seems to indicate that the Father and the Son do not share one divine will. Yet, just as the three persons are one, so

do they will and act as one. While I presume that Hutto is sticking close to Johannine language, I worry that this decision may cause readers to perceive the Trinitarian persons as more distinct than they are unified. Overall, however, these weaknesses do not undermine the ultimate success of the book.

God for Us is not a self-help guide or a feel-good tug on the emotions; instead, it is a narratival exposition of a proper doctrine of God as informed by the life of the Son. I recommend that readers digest—not devour—the book in small increments. It will function well for weekly book studies as discussion material and in counseling situations as assigned reading for counselees. The book would also serve as encouraging and edifying devotional reading for world-weary lay-Christians, seminary students, and seasoned pastors who need to be reminded of who God is and what he has done for us in Christ Jesus. If you have ever wrestled with believing that God is in your corner—that he is *for us*, not *against us*—then this book is *for you*.

Torey J. S. Teer, PhD Student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective. Edited by Andrea Zaki Stephanous. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019, 544 pp., $34.99.

For many Christians living in the West, the presence of millions of Arabic-speaking Christians in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) goes unnoticed. Dr. Andrea Zaki Stephanous, president of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches and general editor of the new work, *Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective*, wants believers outside of the MENA area to know that Arabic-speaking Christians are not only devoted followers of Jesus but also have much to contribute to global theological conversations. While one may be tempted to think that Christian scholarship is limited to the West, Stephanous demonstrates that Arabic-speaking Christians can contribute rich, scholarly insight to pressing theological, biblical, social, and moral issues. To that end, Stephanous collected articles from scholars across the MENA region addressing seven pressing issues relevant to their culture and context.

The individual chapters in the text are devoted to issues important in Arabic Christian contexts. Yet, what may be surprising to some readers is that these issues are not limited to Arabic Christian contexts. In fact, the issues are presently being debated even in Western contexts. While generally unrelated to one another, the chapters can be divided into three sections.

The first section of chapters concerns biblical interpretations and backgrounds. In chapter one, "Arab Christians and the Old Testament," Dr. Magdi S. Gendi addresses the difficult Old Testament passages regarding violence and genocide. In particular, Gendi wants Arabic Christians to understand the uniqueness of Israel among other nations and Yahweh among other gods (13, 18). God is not a violent overlord, as some believe, but a gracious, kind, forgiving redeemer. Dr. Riad Aziz Kassis, in chapter two, "The Concept of the Covenant in Evangelical Thought and Its Impact on the Middle East and North Africa," seeks to convince readers that covenant theology is not a "purely academic matter" but rather a concept that will have a "profound, direct, and positive impact on life and reality" in the MENA region (43). Understanding the covenant motivates believers to lives of "righteousness, holiness, and godliness," guides their use of covenants in modern life, and even helps them understand and respond to the current Arab-Israeli conflict (87, 84–85).

The second section of chapters consists of issues broadly related to ethnicity, religion, and politics, and how these concepts influence identity. In chapter three, "Jesus and Judaism: His Identity and Relationship to Judaism," Dr. Ghassan Khalaf seeks to provide clarity regarding Jesus' relationship to Judaism amid growing debate (90). Western Christians have focused much on Jesus' Jewish background, while many Christians from the MENA region are conflicted by love for Jesus and hatred of Jews (90). Khalaf seeks to provide clear biblical teaching and pastoral direction for a proper understanding of Jesus and Judaism. In chapter four, Dr. Makram Naguib provides a helpful examination of the relationship between Old Testament Israel and the modern state of Israel in "Religion and Politics: Ancient Prophecies and Contemporary Policies." Naguib observes that some groups have interpreted signs and prophecies in light of contemporary events, which leads them to error and divisiveness (213). They have mixed "what is Jewish with what is Christian, religion with politics, and so on" (214). Finally, in chapter seven, "Culture and Identity," Stephanous examines how culture shapes identity, and how Arabic Christians can maintain a distinct identity as followers

of Jesus within a diverse religious and political landscape without "either dissolution or alienation" (424). Arab Christians must be bold followers of Jesus even in Muslim contexts, avoiding the "old temptation to withdraw into isolated conclaves in an attempt to avoid their faith melting into the Muslim majority" (423).

The third section of chapters concerns morality and societal relationships. In chapter five, "The Christian Woman," Dr. Mary Mikhael criticizes what she sees as the church's longstanding oppression of women, evidenced by its lack of female church leaders. She claims that "patriarchal" structures in church leadership are not a result of biblical teaching, but rather the result of society changing the church and importing its "barriers and customs" (370). Paul's teaching on women in ministry, Mikhael claims, has been misunderstood such that women have been robbed of their equal opportunity to serve in pastoral leadership. In chapter six, "The Cross and the Power Issue: A Middle Eastern View," Youssef Samir addresses the natural human struggle for power that manifests itself in political uprisings, abuse, and oppression. Samir advocates a Christian alternative to struggling for power, one based on Christlike service to one another. Giving service, Samir argues, "correct[s] the desire for power and its misuse" (422).

Stephanous' edited work is a welcomed contribution to Christian thinking and publication. By collecting articles from such competent scholars, Stephanous shows Western readers that MENA Christians are producing literature that is equal to literature produced by Western Christians, both in terms of academic quality and biblical faithfulness. In other words, the West does not have a monopoly on Christian thinking.

In addition, these articles demonstrate that moral, biblical, theological, and social issues such as identity, women in ministry, the relationship between politics and religion, and violence in the Old Testament are not limited to Western contexts. Christians living in the Middle East and North Africa are wrestling with these same issues, and they are trying to understand biblical texts and apply them faithfully to often difficult situations. Reading MENA Christians engage biblical texts and seek to apply them to their own contexts reminds all readers that the Bible speaks to both Western and non-Western contexts.

Only two minor weaknesses in *Arabic Christian Theology* deserve attention. First, this collection of articles is academic in nature, evidenced by the extensive bibliographies and technical language. Given that the subtitle of the book

is "A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective," and that many of the authors are local church or denominational leaders, I would like to see more writing on how these Arabic perspectives filter down to individual churches and individual Arabic-speaking Christians. The majority of Christians in the MENA region do not have extensive biblical and theological training, yet they are concerned about how to live for Christ in non-Christian contexts. Perhaps Stephanous could encourage a future volume in which the same authors or others apply their research on a more practical level.

The second weakness with Stephanous' text is that the articles address complex issues, some of which having been debated for centuries. Yet, the reader only receives one perspective for each issue. Considering the introductory nature of the text, the limited field of perspectives is expected, but also lamented. I would recommend that Stephanous devote an entire text in the future to each individual issue. Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Western Christians, would benefit from a broader examination of these topics, one that demonstrated a broader scope of perspectives and interpretations.

Stephanous' text is an excellent contribution to Christian thinking. Each of the included articles contains extensive biblical, theological, and historical research. Taken together, *Arabic Christian Theology* demonstrates that careful, biblical thinking is alive and well in the Middle East and North Africa. Western Christians have much to learn from their MENA brothers and sisters as they apply biblical truth to common problems in unique contexts.

Shane Folks, MA, MDiv.
Pastor, Eastside Baptist Church
Sallisaw, OK

A Concise Guide to Reading the New Testament: A Canonical Introduction. By David R. Nienhuis. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018, ix + 197 pp., $21.99 paper.

David Nienhuis's fifteen years of experience teaching undergraduate students the New Testament at Seattle Pacific University shines through *A Concise*

Guide to Reading the New Testament. Throughout these years of teaching, he has seen two practical problems with the typical method for teaching undergraduates the New Testament. First, New Testament introductions are often so long and exhaustive that students read them at the expense of reading the New Testament itself. For Nienhuis, a *concise* guide is necessary to allow students the margin to read the New Testament itself with the help of his guide. Second, the university introduces students to a Bible that is starkly different from the one they have grown up with in church. As Nienhuis describes, the university replaces "the Christian Scripture with the scholars' Bible," and reading the Bible "correctly" begins to require taking it "out of the hands of Christians, and out of the context of the church" (3). When confronted, then, with critical scholarship and historical backgrounds, students begin to disconnect the Bible they believe from the one they have learned to study. In *A Concise Guide*, Nienhuis tries to fix these problems.

Nienhuis's goal, therefore, is to provide "a relatively straightforward bird's-eye view of the text to orient readers so they can get down to the business of building a life habit of reading the Bible carefully for themselves" (5). This guide is *concise* but also *canonical*. Four orienting convictions drive a *canonical* reading of the New Testament. First, the Bible is Scripture, meaning that it is God's Word and best understood within the context of the church (6). Second, the Bible is a collection of individual books unified into one whole (7–9). Third, the Bible's final form guides the reader's understanding as the order and categorization of texts leads to insights about the individual and collective texts themselves (10–11). Fourth, the Bible is a faith-forming narrative (12). It is not full of "disinterested, journalistic stories reporting ancient events from an unbiased point of view" (12–13). Rather, the Bible seeks to form and build up faith within the lives of those who read it (13).

With these four guiding convictions, Nienhuis introduces his readers to each book of the New Testament. His observations on each individual book are clear and illuminating, and his prose reads quite accessibly for an undergraduate level. For example, striking metaphors, like describing the Gospel of Mark as a "canonical speedbump" (37) or Hebrews as an "appendix" (131), lighten his material and connect viscerally with his reader. In *A Concise Guide*, Nienhuis provides several unique contributions to an at-times glutted world of New Testament introductions. First, his *canonical* approach provides a fresh way of introducing the New Testament to students.

Practically, in each chapter he includes a section on the "canonical transition" between the previous book and the present book. For example, Nienhuis deals directly with the seemingly odd separation of Luke and Acts by the Gospel of John. While the transition from the four Gospels to Acts makes good sense, the bifurcation of Luke and Acts by the Gospel of John requires explanation. Nienhuis explains the intentional transition from John to Acts by the common theme of the Holy Spirit, Peter's commission in John and then leadership in Acts, and Jesus' emphasis on acting in Jesus' own name in John and the apostles' working in his name in Acts (89–90). Nienhuis's focus on canonical transition helps students to understand the Bible better on its own terms and in its given order.

Second, Nienhuis provides insight into the reception of each book, with a specific focus on early interpreters. In a day when most New Testament introductions make little to no attempt to interact with pre-Reformation interpreters, Nienhuis gives space at the beginning of each chapter to an early interpreter, almost exclusively pre-Reformation. For example, in one of the first chapters, he quotes at length John Chrysostom as an early voice that defends Matthew as first in the fourfold Gospel because it offers the most straightforward narrative of the gospel (18). Or in opening his chapter on the letters of Paul, he quotes Irenaeus of Lyon and Polycarp of Smyrna as early proponents of the importance and wisdom of Paul's letters (109–10). Especially for undergraduate students generally unfamiliar with (or in Protestant contexts often skeptical of) early interpreters, Nienhuis provides a window into the value that these early interpreters hold for those reading the New Testament. Third, Nienhuis leads his readers with helpful discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Leaning away from overused, content-based questions, he emphasizes his canonical approach and asks insightful questions, like, "What is the canonical function of John's disruption of the Luke-Acts narrative?" and, "If John's Gospel had been left out of the NT, what would be missing?" (85). Again, these questions should prove particularly useful among undergraduate students.

David Nienhuis's *A Concise Guide to Reading the New Testament: A Canonical Introduction* provides a surprisingly thorough but brief introduction to the New Testament that gives students a fresh but helpful way of reading and understanding the New Testament. While its *concise* nature leads to a lack of in-depth discussion of especially the smaller letters, this weakness

also proves to be a strength in that it will allow the student to focus on the primary text itself instead of another thick New Testament introduction. *A Concise Guide* is perfectly suited for an undergraduate New Testament Introduction course and could even be usefully paired with articles or chapters from other works that provide some of the more historical backgrounds. Regardless, students and teachers of the New Testament will find *A Concise Guide* to be an engaging, unique introduction to the New Testament and a refreshing departure from the status quo.

Ben Hussung, PhD Student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11. By C. John Collins. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018, 336 pp., $36.99 paper.

C. John Collins serves as professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. He boasts an impressively diverse list of qualifications with experience as a church planter, Bible translator, and author. His background also includes training in linguistics, Hebrew, and even two degrees from MIT. He has written numerous publications on the relationship between science and Christianity. His newest book *Reading Genesis Well* aims to present an interpretive guide to Genesis 1-11, including how these first chapters of the canon intersect with prevailing scientific views.

Collins's book attempts to address the interpretive issues of Genesis 1-11 by employing theories from linguistics, literary study, and rhetoric (17). He looks to C. S. Lewis as an example for the implementation of these concepts in biblical studies and for the development of the author's approach, which he calls "critically intuitive," (26). By "critically intuitive," Collins explains that he will incorporate elements from linguistic theories but will not rigidly accept every detail of any given theory. His justification for this approach is that since these theories deal with human behavior, we all have some access to empirical data and can evaluate that data with careful judgment (26). Collins seeks to use his approach to dismantle the prevailing view in biblical studies "that anything other than a straightforward literalism is a

less-than-fully-honest way of reading the ancient text," (24).

Collins's book develops in three key parts. His first section is the most extensively developed of the three. It contains all the groundwork for his reading of Genesis 1-11. Collins covers a breadth of topics in this section. Notably, he discusses speech act theory, goodfaith communication, and anachronism among other topics. He presents a host of helpful observations. He mentions the problem of "genre" being used in biblical studies as a catch-all term and suggests a more strictly defined category (48). Regarding the genre of Genesis 1-11, he later determines that this section serves as pre-history, and he emphasizes that this designation is a social function (148). He references and explains familiar linguistic terms, such as the distinctions between locution, illocution, and perlocution (51). He also covers some important hermeneutical categories like phenomenal language, word usage, and portrayal of an event vs. conception of an event. The first portion of Collins's book could function as a linguisticallyminded, intermediate guide to hermeneutics. The presentation of his approach is so thorough that he does not reach fine textual analysis until halfway through the book (158).

Collins's second section involves his analysis of Genesis 1-11, and this portion is comparable to a technical commentary. A few remarks are worth mentioning concerning this part of the book. He skillfully weaves methodological aspects, like discourse grammar, into his textual observations so that the reader is reminded of his approach and can see it in action. His method leads to many helpful observations that are rare in other commentaries and literature, such as the symbolism of Lamech's age in Genesis 5:31 (185). Consistent in many of his comments is the emphasis on the purpose and function of the text, like the Pentateuch's nature as a standard and corrective (202).

The last section involves a movement into the handling of many scientific and philosophical problems of Genesis. Collins addresses several popularly debated problems: creation *ex nihilo*, the flood, the world's shape, and ancient Near Eastern cosmology. His distinction between portrayal and conception features prominently in many of these alleged problems. He asserts that whether the Old Testament presents a world picture (a physical understanding of the world) is not a given (248). He further warns those who would compare scientific findings with "physical" claims in the Bible. Most statements in the Bible, he alleges, are in either conventional or poetic language, not scientific (260). As a result, readers should avoid seeing the

Bible's comments on the world as conflicting with scientific theories. Similarly, statements should not be touted as vindications of later scientific findings. Whether one's goal is to prove or disprove the Bible, to approach the text in this way is fundamentally flawed.

Collins displays impressive scholarship throughout the book. Old Testament scholars generally incorporate linguistic theories less than their New Testament colleagues, but Collins shows their validity for the Hebrew Bible as well. His critique of the literalistic approach to texts is succinct and convincing, and his warnings against misuse of the text are refreshing and astute. For example, he rejects the assumption that scientific language is the most accurate and truthful form of discourse for real life (261). Though a reader might doubt that his initial proposal of a "critically intuitive" method could be both consistent and helpful, Collins has maintained both aspects.

Despite the high quality of Collins's work, it does have a few weaknesses. Occasionally, he seems so intent to avoiding taking a stance on an issue that his neutrality appears awkward and distracting (i.e. 38). He also overemphasizes illocution at some points with the result that the historicity of the event in question is undermined. I argue that while a statement's content and purpose are separate, to completely splice them is misguided because a statement's illocution is typically dependent on an event's actuality to be valid. In comparing Genesis 1-11 to other biblical texts, he overemphasizes cognate connections as a determining factor for allusions. He too easily dismisses the possibility of an allusion due to the absence of a specific word's reoccurrence. Consequently, he ignores other important variables in comparing texts like translation technique (i.e. 237). Slight issues, however, do not invalidate his contribution's significance.

Collins's work focuses heavily on methodology. Although Genesis 1-11 is the area which he has tackled, he could have chosen any other Old Testament text just as easily. That is not to say his decision is arbitrary. Rather, Genesis 1-11 is especially relevant since it bears numerous interpretive issues and has a diverse and controversial reception history. Collins's methodological presentation, however, should not be received exclusively as an application to Genesis 1-11. It holds immense value for hermeneutical understanding of not only the Old Testament, or even the entire Bible, but all ancient texts. His hermeneutical approach is the book's most significant contribution. Although other aspects in the book are helpful as well, some portions, like

the discussion on ancient Near Eastern parallels, are survey in nature, rather than innovative.

With relatively minor flaws, Collins has produced a thought-provoking work on hermeneutics and Genesis 1-11. The most significant issue is that the book seems caught in between existence as a hermeneutics textbook and a commentary on Genesis 1-11. As a result, both facets suffer from a lack of development. On the hermeneutics side, the author's discussion concerning portrayal vs. conception is too thin. He never adequately shows how the reader might distinguish between portrayal and conception without resorting to arbitrary choice. Additionally, his section on anachronisms contains examples that are too briefly explained, so the section raises more questions than it answers (138-47). On the commentary side, one mistake surfaces. He occasionally dismisses alternative readings without due attention (i.e. alternate light source in creation, 172).

Though the book is already immensely valuable, I believe most its small issues could have been avoided had Collins split this book into two works with more room to expand on a few underdeveloped ideas. The book is probably too technical for an introductory hermeneutics course but would be an excellent read for any scholar or student with some knowledge of hermeneutics and linguistics. Furthermore, it would be a fantastic resource for a deeper study of Genesis or the language of the Old Testament. The first half of the book alone is worth the cost.

Duncan Collins, PhD Student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary