

# BookReviews

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*New Testament Theology*. By Eckhard J. Schnabel. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023, xxxviii + 1176 pp., \$69.99 hardcover.

In *New Testament Theology*, Eckhard J. Schnabel, the Mary French Rockefeller Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, presents a substantial contribution to the field of NT theology that seeks to incorporate the historical, literary, and theological nature of the NT, the audiences of both the NT texts and the apostolic preaching, the NT's focus on Jesus, and the NT's relevance for modern readers (sec. 1.2). For Schnabel, NT theology is "the reflection on the proclamation of Jesus and the convictions of his earliest followers" (3). In addition, he seeks to make a unique contribution by taking seriously "the historical context of the ecclesial and missionary realities of the early congregations and their theologians" (xxiii).

The book is divided into six parts that includes a discussion of introductory issues (part 1), an analysis of the NT message (parts 2–5), and a synthesis of NT themes (part 6). The introductory section includes a brief history of the discipline, the characteristics that will mark Schnabel's work, a survey of the NT authors, the historical contexts of the NT, and a chapter highlighting how Jesus is "the foundation and heart of the New Testament texts" (58). In this section, chapter 2 is particularly important for Schnabel's unique contribution because it establishes 4 imaginary believers that would be a part of the early church, and 4 imaginary unbelievers that would represent the early church's missionary audience. These 8 figures are then used in parts 2–4 to illustrate how various people would respond to the issue being discussed.

The book then turns to a detailed analysis of the message of the NT by following a historical framework that moves from the message of John the Baptist and Jesus (part 2), to the message of the Jerusalem apostles—Peter, Stephen, Philip, James, Jude, Matthew, John, and Thomas (part 3), to the message of Paul (part 4), and finally to "the consolidation of the apostolic mission" (part 5). For each figure discussed in parts 2–4, Schnabel surveys (1) the person's life, (2) the person's teaching,

and (3) the person's significance filtered through the eight imaginary first century hearers. In part 5 on the consolidation of the apostolic mission, Schnabel follows a different structure, omitting the typical analysis of the person's life. Instead, he examines the theology of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, and the author of Hebrews in terms of key themes, Jesus, and the church. Finally, in part 6 Schnabel pulls together the various theological emphases of the apostolic church to present a coherent NT theology, focusing on the unity and diversity of the NT (chap. 21), theology proper (chap. 22), Christology (chap. 23), soteriology (chap. 24), sanctification and ecclesiology (chap. 25), and eschatology (chap. 26). For each of these chapters except the last, Schnabel highlights numerous ways how the theology discussed impacts the contemporary world.

There is much to love about *New Testament Theology*, which satisfactorily incorporates all seven distinctives from section 1.2. First, Schnabel does an excellent job keeping his discussion tethered to Jesus, whether through starting the book with a chapter on the importance of Jesus in the NT or crafting the titles of nearly every section to connect the current topic back to Jesus. Even the book's flow is a reminder that people are pointing forward to Jesus (John the Baptist) or pointing back to Jesus (Jerusalem apostles, Paul, and apostolic church). Second, although there are inevitable strengths and weaknesses to any structure for a NT theology, Schnabel's blending of historical analysis, synthesis, and application to the present guards against reading modern understandings onto the NT while still offering a useful and coherent NT theology. His chronological analysis follows the typical German paradigm but filtered through Schnabel's evangelical perspective. This format offers a unique look at the NT that might benefit someone who has only read a canonical or thematic NT theology. Third, Schnabel succeeded in making the NT accessible to the modern reader. Between creatively elaborating the significance of a section through imaginary first century hearers or providing contemporary relevance in his synthesis section, Schnabel does not leave NT theology as a fossilized remnant of past beliefs but shows its abiding validity.

Although Schnabel effectively incorporated his seven distinctives, there are a couple of weak points that hinder the book's effectiveness. First, despite being filled with great content, the book is quite long. Due to the emphasis on history, the book ends up incorporating elements that would traditionally be covered in a NT introduction or history, accounting for nearly 200 pages

of the book. The book's length is also a result of Schnabel's chosen structure. While the NT authors all have distinctive elements on any given topic, there is much that they agree on. A chronological order requires discussing similar topics (e.g., salvation) in each section and leads to redundant discussion that a thematic approach could avoid. A second and related weakness is that the length can make it difficult to compare the teachings of various figures when they are separated over hundreds of pages. For example, the discussion of the Jerusalem apostles' teaching on salvation and Paul's teaching is separated by over 200 pages. For major NT themes, the final synthesis section does help draw together the scattered discussions, but even this synthesis can feel isolated from the previous discussions because of all the other material surveyed in-between. A third weakness stems from a lack of clarity on what Schnabel is doing in the apostolic consolidation section. He uses the Gospels to discuss John the Baptist and Jesus (part 2), but then analyzes the writings of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John later (part 5). He seems to be making a distinction between what the authors show us about Jesus and what the author's own theology was. Ultimately, everything we know about Jesus is mediated through these authors, so how much can their theology be distinguished from Jesus' theology? Part 5 seemed somewhat redundant, although it is possible Schnabel simply needed to state more clearly what he was seeking to do with this part of the book.

Despite these critiques, Schnabel wrote an excellent, evangelical NT theology full of insightful analysis and discussion. The book is written for a general audience but would be best for a seminary student or pastor. If the book's size is off-putting, I would recommend at least reading part 6 where Schnabel offers his summary of NT theology. The reader could then go back into the analysis parts if something is unclear or for more in-depth discussion. In addition, this book could be a helpful reference NT theology for those in ministry or scholarship.

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*Chaplaincy: A Comprehensive Introduction.* By Mark A. Jumper, Steven E. Keith, and Michael W. Langston. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2024. 326 pp., \$24.49 paper.

“We believe it is time for chaplaincy to be given its full and rightful place in the panoply of professional ministry” (vii). These words from *Chaplaincy: A Comprehensive Introduction* set the stage for the overall goal and the intent of its authors, Mark A. Jumper, Steven E. Keith, and Michael W. Langston. Their aim is simple. They write *Chaplaincy* to provide an introduction, even an encouragement for a distinctly biblical-theological-evangelical consideration of chaplain ministry across ten functional areas of chaplaincy (1-3). Also, they encourage readers to consider chaplain ministry and if, perhaps, the reader too might be called to this multi-layered ministry (3). The authors write from years of experience, each having served as military chaplains (Jumper and Langston served in the US Navy and Keith served in the US Air Force). They also provide a depth of academic engagement as well, with Jumper and Langston both having PhD’s, Keith a DMin, and all serve as professors (Jumper at Regent University School of Divinity; Keith at Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University; and Langston at Columbia International University).

*Chaplaincy* is divided into two parts. The first part examines the ministry of chaplaincy, covering a wide array of emphases from chaplaincy’s biblical, theological, and philosophical foundations (chapter two), a history of chaplaincy (chapter three), to the importance of the constitution, religious freedom, evangelical identity, endorsement and employment as a chaplain, and the various qualities and skills important to chaplaincy (chapters four-ten). Part two (chapters eleven-twenty) specifically considers ten functional areas of chaplain ministry, with contributors appropriate to each area. The ten functional areas are corporate chaplaincy (Jeff Brown, Robert Terrell, Rick Higgins, and Donnie Jenkins), healthcare chaplaincy (Juliana Leshner), military chaplaincy (Keith Travis), education chaplaincy (Michael W. Langston), prison chaplaincy (Michael W. Langston), community chaplaincy (Leroy Gilbert), disaster relief chaplaincy (Michael W. Langston), public safety chaplaincy (Chris Wade), recreation chaplaincy (Michael W. Langston), and sports chaplaincy (Michael W. Langston).

From the outset, Jumper, Keith, and Langston aim to give a clear definition of a chaplain and chaplaincy. They explain, “A chaplain is a minister (or priest or holder of another such office) who represents a recognized religion and who joins an institution or organization, usually secular, as one of its

people in order to support and minister to its members from the inside” (3). Chaplaincy, on the other hand, “involves chaplains providing religious ministry and service for all people in the context of their organizations” (3). They distinguish these from an evangelical chaplain who is “a born-again believer and follower of Jesus Christ who is called, prepared, and sent out by the church to bear the biblical presence and message of Christ in sacred and secular settings” (71). Their thesis is that “Chaplaincy is rooted in the nature of God, as it represents and applies God’s presence in every possible setting. Chaplaincy, to be effective, must be God based and God centered” (14).

Their emphasis on the “God based and God centered” nature of chaplaincy is one of the book’s foremost strengths. Repeatedly, they contend that “evangelical chaplaincy is first about God” (8) and central to an evangelical chaplain’s ministry is their own relationship with God in Christ (15, 21). Aiming to root their view of chaplaincy in Scripture, they begin in chapter two with setting forth the biblical, theological, and philosophical foundations for chaplaincy. Also, for those concerned with interfaith tensions and the secular work environment that are inextricably bound to chaplain ministry, their refrain and encouragement is that chaplains are to be a convictional, humble, wise, and gospel-emitting presence amid a lost world (27, 54-55). As chaplains face moral and ethical tensions, they encourage chaplains to embody “GC” or the Great Commandment from Matthew 22:35-40 and the Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20 (9-12). By embracing “GC” and a “ministry of presence,” “Chaplains help people live in life-giving relationships with God and others” (12).

Additionally, Jumper, Keith, and Langston provide helpful counsel for navigating the cultural issues chaplains will face, including a chapter discussing the constitution and religious freedom in chaplaincy (chapter six). They provide a word of warning, writing, “Chaplains must take care not to lose their own identity by slipping into the enculturation of their environment” (32). Moreover, amidst an interfaith environment, they counsel chaplains, “to cooperate by honoring those of other faiths without coercion. However, there is no requirement or expectation that a chaplain or anyone else should compromise his or her own faith to do so” (53).

Although they helpfully address the cultural issues chaplains will face, it is surprising they do not more directly address LGBTQ+ issues, of which a

chaplain will certainly need to navigate convictionally, wisely, and graciously in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also, chapter three, “Chaplains in History,” leaves much to be desired. While they do provide a brief overview of the history of chaplaincy (especially highlighting St. Martin of Tours), it would have benefited from greater historical precision, engagement, and further historical examples of chaplains, both for the purpose of education and inspiration toward their thesis of an expressly God centered chaplaincy. However, to their credit, they do provide “Further Reading,” for those who might desire to learn more about chaplains, chaplaincy, and the history of chaplaincy (315-18).

Overall, *Chaplaincy* is a helpful introduction and guide for chaplains, pastors, and those considering chaplaincy. Moreover, the chaplain’s “ministry of presence” is something all Christians can learn from, even considering how their own presence is a ministry of the presence of Christ also.

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*A Concise Guide to Islam: Defining Key Concepts and Terms.* By Ayman S. Ibrahim. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023, xxix + 177 pp., \$16.79 paper.

Ayman Ibrahim is the Bill and Connie Jenkins Professor of Islamic Studies and the Director of the Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Author of numerous publications, Ibrahim has established himself as a renowned scholar of Islam. The book under review is his third published with Baker Academic, offering a concise guide to an Islamic theme. Whereas the previous two books answered thirty key questions about Muhammad and the Qur’an, this encyclopedic book offers entries to over one hundred Islamic concepts and terms.

The purpose of the book is to give those with limited exposure to Islam a better understanding of Islamic terms and concepts cherished by their Muslim neighbors (xxvii, xxix). The concepts and terms defined are sorted under six headings: 1) Islamic Texts, 2) Islamic History, 3)

Islamic Faith and Belief, 4) Islamic Practices and Religious Duties, 5) Islamic Jurisprudence, and 6) Islamic Movements.

Along with offering definitions of concepts and terms, Ibrahim gives information informed by primary and secondary sources. For instance, Ibrahim explains that a *hadith* “generally refers to a saying, statement, or report of any sort; however, for the most part, it is mainly a tradition attributed to Muhammad’s words or actions” (4). Having defined the term, Ibrahim notes the irony that Muhammad allegedly forbade the writing of his statements and that these statements are products centuries removed from Muhammad’s lifetime.

The discipline of Islamic studies has grown significantly since 9/11, evidenced by the boom in articles. Ibrahim has contributed to the discipline by offering a product digestible for novices. Although he incorporates a critical explanation in his entries, Ibrahim honors Muslims by defining concepts and terms congruent with those laid out in Islamic primary sources.

The first section’s entries are devoted to the Islamic texts on which Muslims build their faith. The theological pillars of Islam are the Quran and Muhammad; however, what we know about these comes largely from Islamic texts. Ibrahim’s entries on *hadith*, *sira*, *sunna*, and *maghazi* are particularly illuminating for those unfamiliar with Islam. These entries offer explanations for the portrait of Muhammad as believed by many of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims.

The entry *maghazi* illustrates the different emphases Muslims have stressed about Muhammad historically in contrast to contemporary times. *Maghazi* means “military campaigns,” and it specifically details the raids led or commissioned by Muhammad. Since 9/11, many Muslims in the West have declared that Muhammad was a prophet of peace despite early Muslim sources emphasizing a different portrait of him as a successful military leader of raids against non-Muslims. Ibrahim explains that early Muslims “viewed Muhammad’s life entirely as *maghazi*—a series of successful campaigns against non-Muslims” (9).

The “Islamic History” section highlights important places, people, and events from Islam’s past. Muslims, for the most part, revere their past as sacred history. Ibrahim explains that many Muslims lament the state of affairs in Muslim countries and attribute it to the culture’s incongruity with early generations. By returning to Islam’s origins and basic beliefs,



many Muslims believe their society and culture will thrive (23). A key Islamic term regarding Islam's emergence in history and its implied purpose for all generations is *jahiliyya*. The term refers to the pre-Islamic age of ignorance and connotes the ubiquitous state of spiritual darkness before Muhammad arrived with his reputed illuminative and directive message. Ibrahim explains, "While the term directly describes the pre-Muhammad Arabs as idol worshipers, it extends beyond them to include all humankind, portraying humans as being in a state of disarray, waiting for the light of Islam" (25). The contemporary implication is that all non-Muslims exist in a state of *jahiliyya* and are in need of Islam.

The third section, titled "Islamic Faith and Belief," contains entries to some of Islam's basic terms and concepts. Some concepts are covered in his previous books, such as *nabi*, *rasul*, *kafir*, and *mushrik*. These terms and concepts offer insight into how Islam views Muhammad's status and how it views non-Muslims. Along with these, Ibrahim provides entries regarding the Qur'an. The entries for *i'jaz*, *mushaf*, *qira'at*, and *naskh* deliver an understanding into the complex nature of Islam's most holy book.

The fourth section, "Islamic Practices and Religious Duties," highlights the obligations required of every Muslim and indicates the different ways they are practiced by Sunnis and Shiites (77). Also, Ibrahim defines phrases used by Muslims in the daily practice of their faith. He stresses the importance of this section's entries as they set Islam apart from most world religions as a works-based faith.

The fifth section, "Islamic Jurisprudence," is concerned with Islamic thought. Muslim clerics, scholars, and jurists attempt to explain and execute what they believe are Allah's legal commands (i.e., *sharia*) as derived from Islamic texts. Ibrahim explains that these commands are enacted differently according to the school (Hanafiyya, Malikiyya, Shafi'iyya, and Hanbaliyya) or sect (Sunni or Shiite) and whether the land is Muslim or non-Muslim. Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is unfamiliar to many who have not lived in Muslim lands. This section offers insight into the infrastructure and traits of nations governed by *fiqh*. Entries in this section also explain what is legally clean and permissible for Muslims, as well as the Muslim belief in divinely prescribed punishments for various crimes.

In the final section, "Islamic Movements," Ibrahim highlights the differences among Islam's many sects and visions. While Muslims



tend to view themselves as one united body, the entries in this section demonstrate the inaccuracy of this view. Ibrahim delineates the difference in the expression of these sects in Muslim versus non-Muslim countries. Interactions with Sunnis and Shiites are relatively benign in the West, as both are minority groups. However, in the Middle East, Ibrahim states that enmity and hostility often characterize their interactions (154).

The major sects in Islam are Sunnism and Shiism, making up ninety-eight percent of Muslims worldwide. Within these sects, various visions of Islam exist. A key term to understand several contemporary visions of Islam is *Salafi*. Salafism is a revivalist and reformist trend in Sunnism. *Salafi* refers to “a Muslim devoted to following and applying the teachings and traditions claimed about the *salaf*, the earliest generations of Muslims—the believers close in time to Muhammad who saw him and heard him teach” (154). However, *salaf* is not limited to the eyewitnesses of Muhammad but includes roughly the first three Islamic generations. Ibrahim’s entry on Salafism offers the foundational knowledge for the religious vision of groups like the Wahhabis, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, and al-Shabaab (155). Another vision in Islam is the mystical expression of Sufism. Ibrahim explains that a Sufi may be Sunni or Shiite (156).

Ibrahim accomplishes his goal of providing those with limited exposure to Islam with a better understanding. Yet, the number of entries and the primary and secondary sources consulted also make this a useful resource for those versed in Islam. This book is valuable for anyone who has regular interactions with Muslims. Polls indicate that since 2011, one hundred thousand Muslims have immigrated to the United States annually. Therefore, for Americans, the relevancy of this book increases each year.

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*Uncommon Unity: Wisdom for the Church in an Age of Division.* By Richard Lints. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022, 262 pp., \$29.99 paper.

Richard Lints serves as Senior Distinguished Professor of Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and as Consulting Theologian to Redeemer City-to-City Ministry in New York City. He is an ordained

minister in the Presbyterian Church in America with an extensive resume of pastoral experience. The intersection of his scholarly and churchly interests makes him well suited to tackle the seemingly ‘hopeless task’ of “defending and describing” the unity-in-diversity of the church in these divided times. In *Uncommon Unity*, Dr. Lints turns historical approaches to exploring and explaining church unity on their head, focusing first on the complex nature of difference and diversity. He aims to help readers appreciate how these factor into the church’s experience of unity situated in the gospel narrative’s message, enabling the seeking and granting of forgiveness in these fragmented times.

Lints’ thesis examines “the ways in which committed and confessionally oriented Christians should think and live in a deeply pluralistic context largely interpreted through the constraints of a late-modern democracy” (xvii). The thesis develops in three parts. Part 1 (chapters 1-4) provides an overview of how to understand and address differences, given the influences of culture and context. Chapter 1 explores the way differences bring together or divide. The diversities of the present context are compared and contrasted with those of the ancient Israelite and the early church contexts, revealing vast differences. The world has moved from “fate to choice” (17), polarizing the experience of life inside and outside the church. This context prompts Christians to live as faithful witnesses by cultivating the “desire to live together in, with, and through our differences” (23). Chapter 2 presents a framework for understanding various types of differences. The history of democracy in America, specifically focusing on inclusion and exclusion, shapes how Americans relate. Though the nation was far more inclusionary than any previous nation, at the same time, far more people were excluded than included. Until the mid-twentieth century, the civil religion of mainline Protestantism was the moral glue holding the nation together. Chapter 3 shows a way forward through late secular modernity when no common moral framework or universal American identity is present to overcome the nation’s diversity. The gospel’s inclusion narrative, rather than democracy’s inclusion narrative, provides the grounds for acting upon “the universal dignity and sacredness of humankind” (79). Chapter 4 examines the culture’s fascination with freedom in plurality and diversity and how religion is impacted by and influences the fascination. The author

summons Christians to affirm religion's contribution to current problems while resisting the narrative of full responsibility for these problems.

Part 2 (Chapters 5-8) looks at biblical resources addressing the relationship of difference and unity, providing the reader with tools to think about and navigate this relationship as a faithful Christian. Chapter 5 presents biblical anthropology as a theological imaginary or "the deep structures of the Creator/creature relationship in which all of our lives are embedded" (111). This is contrasted with the social imaginary of current culture that promotes finding identity within oneself. Humans are designed to be persons in relationship who find identity outside ourselves. The opening chapters of Genesis provide the best means of understanding humanity's complex depravity and goodness. Chapter 6 examines three scriptural models of relationships, showing the complex nature of the one and the many. Redemptive history reveals the story, marriage, the relationship, and the Trinity, the mystery of the one and the many. All three illustrate the complexity of unity and difference. Chapter 7 surveys the church's historical understanding and practice of unity in diversity. The relationship between unity and mission is complex within the church. Unity is centered on Christ. Mission expresses the already and not yet tension of the church. Chapter 8 concludes part 2 of the book, representing different kinds of church unity as they relate to the church's unique interest in the mission of God. A church that is culturally flexible and unified in mission provides freedom to be for others and see opportunities for unity-in-diversity.

Part 3 (Chapters 9-10) appeals to wisdom as the key to biblically navigating unity and difference. Chapter 9 investigates the modern context's recent turn of privileging community over the individual as an opportunity for the church to "live with the dialectic between unity and diversity and between communities and individuals" (206) in a growing global context. Chapter 10 concludes the section and book by mining the nature of wisdom. Lints shares five facts about the nature of wisdom, concluding that "wisdom discerns the differences that enrich the unity and the differences that undermine the unity" (253).

A key strength of Lints' work is his development of the potential for the church to strengthen its witness by leaning into differences in biblical ways that can serve to enhance the church's visible unity and thus provide a place within the church for the outcast, the stranger, and the marginalized.

The term unity is often thrown around within churches with a limited understanding of what it means and how it impacts the diversity and mission of the church in the world. This book provides a thorough understanding of the biblical concept of unity and the need for wisdom within the church as it faces the complexity of carrying out God's mission in this fragmented age. Rather than a shallow or flattened view of unity and difference, Lints provides both positive and negative potential and calls for biblical wisdom within the church to discern which is which and pursue what is most reflected in the gospel. The book's approach does not candy-coat the challenge of pursuing unity-in-diversity, nor does it present a scenario in which this unity-in-diversity will be fully realized on this earth. The book's outlook is optimistic without romanticizing the issue.

By way of critique, aside from the practical application of seeking and granting forgiveness presented at the conclusion of the preface, there is little by way of practical application of the concepts and principles presented. Excellent metaphors of difference are provided, displaying unity in the Trinity, marriage, and redemptive history. The case showing the need for the church to pursue unity-in-diversity is convincingly made. Still, the reader is left to himself to discern and determine the practical way forward for the individual believer, the church leader, the local church, and denominational entities.

This book will be a fruitful read for church leaders seeking to biblically engage this polarized culture with the gospel inclusion narrative rather than the inclusion narrative of democracy. The book will provide a clear understanding of what is meant and what is at stake, motivating the reader to take the book's message and find ways to apply it within the context of their church and community.

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*Hurt with Fetters: Theological Reflections on Criminal Justice.* By Jason S. Karch. Coppel, TX: Crosswired Publications, 2022, 187 pp., \$13.95 paper.

In *Hurt with Fetters*, Jason Karch asserted that Christianity blindly supports misguided criminal punishment policies and practices that dehumanize

prisoners. While following its traditional doctrines of grace and mercy, the Church should reorient itself to pursue just punishment that recognizes the dignity and worth of the incarcerated (vi).

Convicted of armed robbery and serving a 30-year to life sentence in the Texas state correctional system, Karch understood the stigma this cast on his writing. But he is also an in-prison graduate of the Southwestern Theological Seminary, ministering within the Texas maximum security prison system for over fifteen years.

Karch's key assertion was that the penal system devastates a prisoner's humanity. While not wishing "to provoke sympathy through sentimentality," he argued for those incarcerated to be recognized and heard. He hoped that his prisoner perspective would humanize the problem, emulating how Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* brilliantly placed a human face on the issue of slavery (5).

The book is organized into three parts, with chapters containing a reflection. In Part One, "Revealing the Problem," Karch stated that "the problem is not mass incarceration itself," which is just a symptom of a systemic problem. The problem is anthropological—prison devalues the dignity and worth of those incarcerated (7). In Part Two, "Responding to the Problem," Karch asserted the solution rests on remembering and respecting that prisoners still possess the *imago Dei*. Part Three, "Reassessing the Problem," noted that many pastors and their congregations are either unaware or do not care about such "peripheral" issues as prison reform. Perhaps due to such inattention, "a weak doctrine of the image of God in man has affected corporate practices of justice." Additionally, Christians have overlooked abusive practices creeping into the system (8–9). These problems have occurred despite the recent emphasis on equality, equity, and human rights. The resulting dehumanization of the incarcerated is seen in how punishment is rendered (14–17).

Karch reserved his harshest, derisive criticism for the "professionals" within the criminal justice system—those controlling the policies. His primary point: policing and punishment are inconsistent and often arbitrary (26, 29). However, this is unsurprising, given the country's fifty states, thousands of localities, innumerable statutes, and the quality and level of training and education of those employed.

A statistical study Karch referenced was severely dated, and some of his related conclusions are questionable. He cited Robert Perkinson's 2010 *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Empire*, which included data only from Texas prisons and a decades-old study. While understandably focusing on Texas data, more timely studies were available before Karch's work was published. From *Texas Tough*, Karch concluded that "prison populations grow not because of an increase in crime rates . . . but because policy makers make them so" (27, 33). Such a conclusion seems to be a corollary to the notion that eliminating laws will eliminate crime.

Karch objected to Texas building "the largest prison system in the world ... a "stunning example of political irresponsibility" (33). Yes, prisons may serve as criminal finishing schools, but alternatively, what should be done? Institute immediate universal parole? Karch also objected to the system imposing qualitative and substantive distinctions upon the criminal (the bad) and the righteous (the good), such as categorization (34). With due respect to championing each person's *imago Dei*, and granting that classification should focus on the act rather than the person, categorization must be tolerated. The "act" and the "acted upon" must be recognized and distinguished; categorization is inherent in all conflict and is especially present in Scripture.

Responding to this ethical "act-consequence" paradigm, Karch stated that "characterizing sin as selfishness puts sin beyond mere activity" (66–67). He acknowledged that most convicted criminals earned their condemnation by committing an act that violates another human. His concern was that the criminal justice narrative focuses only on "the bad people [the only ones who] have the potential to act criminally" (69).

Karch characterizes Aristotelian justice as relying on implied merit and equity within social norms (Chapter Six). However, stressing that justice is an ontological relational phenomenon, he seemed to confuse contractual law with criminal law. He maintained that "Contracts ... may be easily amended, voided, or changed in multiple ways whereas [ontological] being cannot" (81–82). Criminal laws cannot be easily changed, particularly those derived from the Decalogue and New Testament principles, which are ontologically derived.

Karch was correct that many forces clamor to impose qualitative sociological dictates on our laws, relentlessly pushing aside the law's theological underpinnings and rejecting God as lawgiver. He asserted that

such conditions have “become standardized norms from which laws are derived” (91–92, 97). As a result, Karch stated that our criminal justice system does not account for divine law, and the Church “embraces ideas concerning justice, love, and law that fall entirely outside of the Christian narrative” (101). That such sociological dictates have become our new law norms is incorrect. A sociological overhaul of our laws has not occurred—at least not yet. Karch’s statement about the Church is too sweeping. However, his statement that “For those convicted of crimes ... the debt may be paid, but it is never cancelled” is regrettably true. One related example is that a person’s arrest history follows them regardless of conviction (112).

Another concern about Karch’s work is that he conflated our debt owed to God and each other. Without question, Jesus paid our debt to the Father. That does not mean our earthly debts have been cancelled. Karch correctly stated that our debt to God falls under restorative justice and that criminal punishment often smacks of utilitarian expediency. Still, I disagree that our system is based on harsh retribution (123, 129) and that crime punishment “is never about the victim.” This assertion takes no account of victim impact statements at sentencing. His declaration that “Victims in criminal cases in American jurisprudence are merely a means to an end” (133) demeans the efforts of the officers of the court who work hard to serve justice. While in law enforcement, I never met a prosecutor who viewed a victim as merely a means to an end.

Karch’s earnest call for substantial efforts to eliminate the faults of utilitarian expediency and excessive retribution in our prison system is laudable. However, the perennial question remains, “Yes, but how?”

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*A Concise Guide to the Life of Muhammad: Answering Thirty Key Questions.*  
By Ayman S. Ibrahim. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022, 240pp.,  
\$24.99 paper.

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Theological Seminary. His literature underscores his ability to engage Islam and Muslims from their primary sources. He critically evaluates the historicity of Islam and Muslims from Muslim and non-Muslim sources. The thesis of Ibrahim's work focused on the need for non-Muslims, especially Christians, to examine and understand Muhammad's life, i.e., the impact of his sayings and deeds (xv). His work is historical and informative, containing the introductory history (i.e., events and episodes) and teachings of Muhammad in the form of questions. Ibrahim intends non-Muslims, especially Christians, to find a resource for Christian-Muslim interactions (xvii). His approach is thirty critical questions on Muslims' foundational belief systems and traditions, followed by critical analysis in his responses to each question (3). He reveals the centrality of Muhammad's sayings (Hadiths) and biography (Sira) in Islam and the worldview of Muslims. Ibrahim provides the Muslims' view of Muhammad as a legend, tradition, and historical figure. However, he mentions the negative portrayal of Muhammad by some non-Muslims, though he acknowledges that other non-Muslims have a favorable view of Muhammad as a heroic figure, monotheist, and revivalist (xv).

Ibrahim provided arguments based on Sunni and Shiite sources and revealed the ambiguity of mostly the Sunni sources using secular scholarship (6–7). He wrote his book focusing on non-Muslims, especially Christians, who do not know Muslim sources, but he had Muslims in mind. The purpose of Ibrahim's work is threefold: First, to provide robust information on Muhammad from Muslim sources. Second, to reveal the diverse interpretations among Muslims. And third, to spur significant research about Muhammad's sayings and deeds (xix). His work reflects his knowledge of the *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *Maghazi*, *Sira*, *Futuh*, and *Tarikh* as foundational sources for Muslims and non-Muslims to understand Muhammad as portrayed by the authoritative Muslim sources. However, scholars doubt various claims in the Muslim primary sources for two reasons: the documents appear late, i.e., about two centuries later, and have tendentious materials (12n15). Non-Muslim scholars like Ignaz Goldziher, John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Andrew Rippins were skeptical of the Muslim sources because of historical inconsistencies that appear in reconstructed narratives of the past (16–17).

A non-skeptic scholar like Fred Donner reports the dubious validity of the Muslim sources because of their invention tendencies (18). Ibrahim concludes that irrespective of the views of non-Muslim skeptics and non-skeptics, Muslims tend to accept the portrayal of Muhammad in their sources, so “we aim to study what the Muslim community believes about Muhammad’s life and career and to engage with the picture critically” (19). Ibrahim supports his thesis with a critical analysis of each question. He exposes the reason scholars are skeptical and unconvinced of the history of Muhammad’s birth (24), Muhammad’s genealogy (27n29), Muhammad’s attributes (chap. 6), Muhammad’s historical figure (34n41), Muhammad’s birthplace (47), Muhammad’s religion (64), Muhammad’s night journey (chap. 12), Muhammad’s fight with Jews (93) and Christians (chap. 17), and Muhammad’s death (102–3).

Ibrahim’s central focus in Muhammad’s history is how Muslims and non-Muslims perceived him. Muslims see Muhammad as the final legitimate prophet, and non-Muslims refute the claim based on Muhammad’s deeds and teachings (114). Ibrahim reveals Muslims’ perception of Muhammad from three different perspectives. First, Muhammad exists in the minds of Muslims as a legend. Second, Muhammad existed in the time of writing of Muslim sources as a traditional Muhammad, and third, he lived as a historical Muhammad (34n41). Ibrahim suggests that historical Muhammad does not connect with traditional Muhammad because of the lack of connection in the Muslim sources. Muhammad appeared as an Arab warrior. There are Syriac sources that provide information about Muhammad’s existence. All these are non-Christians, including early Chinese sources that portray Muhammad as a warlord, trader, Arab leader, etc. Most of the sources that help with information about Muhammad are Christian sources, sources of John of Damascus, and others. John speaks of Muhammad as an anti-Christ with an Arian monk. Ibrahim disagrees with the view that Arabs descended from Ishmael, as others attest. Timothy I and others like George, the monk, defended Christianity and said Muhammad was a man with some truths. Ibrahim believes only the historical Muhammad probably exists against the legendary and traditional Muhammad portrayed by Muslims and their sources (chap. 20).

The second part of the book focuses on Muhammad’s message. Ibrahim begins with Muhammad’s central message, tawhid, i.e., an Arabic

term that refers to the oneness of Allah. Muhammad called people to “strict monotheism, Unitarianism, or divine unicity” (117). Hence, followers of Islam are “the people of tawhid,” contrasting them with polytheists (121). Ibrahim reveals Muhammad’s deity as Allah. He explains the skepticism around the ninety-nine names of Allah (chap. 22). He critically analyzed Muslim sources and shows Muhammad’s recognition of Jesus as one of the prophets who were honored and respected but denied that Jesus was crucified (chap. 23). Ibrahim rightly says Islamic Jesus differs from the biblical Jesus in a crucial, definitive, and decisive way (131). The claim that Jesus prophesied about Muhammad in the Muslim sources seems to seek the legitimacy of Muhammad’s prophethood and attempt to make Christians believe in Muhammad’s message (ch. 23). Ibrahim’s conclusion exposes the illegitimacy of the claim that Muhammad is in the Bible. He says the reference to Muhammad is not explicit in the Bible and is hardly plausible (136).

Regarding the place to find Muhammad’s message (ch. 25), Ibrahim points to the Qur’an and Muhammad’s hadith as the authentic collections approved by Muslim scholars (140). The remaining part of Ibrahim’s book (chs. 26–30) appears as the application part of Muhammad’s message. The message was for Muslims to use Muhammad’s example to relate with neighbors (ch. 26), apostates (ch. 27), hadith rejecters (chs. 28–29), and how to apply jihad (ch. 30).

Ibrahim’s book appears as an extension of *A Concise Guide to the Qur’an*, though separate works with the same pattern of thirty questions formed each chapter. His writing style of asking questions and responding helps provide straightforward answers. He writes with a particular “focus on episodes, events, and teachings in Muhammad’s life” (xvi). I understood his response with a recap of straight answers at the end of the paragraph of each chapter. Ibrahim seems to know his audience’s knowledge of Islam, so he targets non-Muslims, especially in the West, as his primary audience. However, he writes with Muslims in mind. As seen in the book’s title, Ibrahim provides a concise, thorough, yet inexhaustive work on Muhammad’s history and message. He rooted his work in the most trusted Muslim sources, the earliest authoritative sources. The consistency of avoiding speculations about Muhammad reflects Ibrahim’s deep knowledge of Muslim sources. He did not only rely on Sunni traditions. Instead, Ibrahim consulted Sunni and

Shiite traditions because of his crucial consideration of the Shiite voice in any serious study of Islam (xvii).

As a Christian with shallow knowledge of Islamic history and Muslim sources, the book appears dismissive, unimportant, and irrelevant to my faith. Ibrahim provides helpful information that creates the understanding of Islam and Muslims, especially the two most essential and foundational: the Qur'an and Muhammad. Hence, the book is informative, educative, and equipping for evangelistic and apologetic purposes. The book broadened my understanding of Muhammad and Muslims' perception of Muhammad as a legend, traditional, and historical figure. The information Ibrahim provides is a *sine qua non* to understanding Christian-Muslim encounters, although Ibrahim did not explicitly point out such encounters.

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