

Book Reviews

The Transfiguration of Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Reading. By Patrick Schreiner. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024, xi + 183 pp., \$28.

Patrick Schreiner's thesis in *The Transfiguration of Christ* is that "the transfiguration reveals Jesus's double sonship," by revealing "the future glory of the earthly and suffering messianic Son and the preexistent glory of the heavenly and eternally begotten Son" (4, emphasis removed). To this end, each of book's main chapters concludes with a reflection on how the aspect of the transfiguration under consideration serves to reveal *both* Jesus's messianic *and* eternal sonships. For example, Schreiner argues that in Scripture mountains are often places where the Bible's covenantal story advances and the location of major theophanies. Therefore, the transfiguration's mountaintop setting reveals both that Jesus is the human messiah who will inaugurate the new covenant (advancing the covenantal story), *and* that he is the very glory of God revealed—that is, God incarnate, the subject of a theophany (53). Each of these insights is summarized in convenient tables (53, 91, 128) which clearly advance Schreiner's thesis and provide the backbone of the book.

First, a word of praise for the book. Schreiner's thesis, as well as much of his exegetical work, is commendable. He clearly demonstrates that the transfiguration accounts in all three gospels identify Jesus not only as a human messiah who will be glorified by God, but as a preexistent divine figure—the Son of God (4–5, 7, 148). For example, Schreiner rightly notes that Jesus's brightness (his white clothes and shining face) symbolize both his divinity and his humanity: his garments radiate heavenly light because he is from heaven and his face shines because he is the radiance of the Father's glory, while at the same time these things symbolize that he is the new Moses, mediating a better covenant and the "light of the world" that has come to save us (63–69, 91).

Particularly notable is Schreiner's work connecting the transfiguration account to other texts in the gospels and demonstrating how those texts ought to inform our understanding of transfiguration. Among numerous texts, Schreiner connects the transfiguration accounts to Jesus's

baptism (Matt 3; Mark 1; Luke 3, pp. 133–135), the Garden of Gethsemane (135–137) and the cross (137–139) within the gospels, and to the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22, 106–109) and coming of the Son of Man (Dan. 7; pp. 31–37, 107–115)) in the OT. In doing so, Schreiner emphasizes that the definitive statement of Jesus's identity in the transfiguration is both *informed by* and *informs* these other texts. Jesus, the God-man who is gloriously revealed in the transfiguration is also the one who came to die, and the one who was crucified is both God himself and the glorious Messiah who shines like the sun. Readers will appreciate that the linguistic, thematic, and theological parallels between such passages are often summarized in convenient tables, making the most valuable content in the book its most accessible as well (105, 135, 137, 138, etc.). If one were to purchase this book for the tables and intra-biblical connections alone, they would not be disappointed.

Second, a word of critique. Despite a needed thesis and strong exegetical work, *The Transfiguration of Christ* raises substantive theological concerns. The central theological problem in the book is Schreiner's failure to distinguish between created effects and the divine realities symbolized by those effects. This issue threatens the Creator-creature distinction and the Chalcedonian separation of Christ's natures and is further compounded by Schreiner's adoption of Eastern Orthodox theological categories, especially the Palamite distinction between God's essence and energies. The problem is methodological as much as theological: Schreiner's retrieval of Palamite sources is overly sympathetic and lacks the critical audit such retrieval requires. As a result, Schreiner imports a theological framework that undercuts the Chalcedonian doctrine he means to secure.

Schreiner repeatedly states that the light the disciples saw on the mount of transfiguration was "uncreated light" (57–64). This term is drawn from Gregory Palamas, who famously introduced the doctrine of uncreated divine energies. For Palamas, the energies of God are emanations from the essence, which were less than the essence of God but still God. Following Palamas, Schreiner asserts that the disciples truly saw "God" on the mount of transfiguration, but they did not see the divine essence, since God in himself is invisible (1 Tim 6:16). Instead, they saw the divine energy (or energies) of uncreated light (153–158). However, this has the disastrous

effect of blurring the Creator-creature distinction by positing a middle term between Creator and created. Although Schreiner recognizes this concern, he does not find it significant (pp. 155–56). Rather than the Creator God, in all that he is on one side of the divide and created things on the other, the doctrine of uncreated energies introduces a third term, the energies, which are not created and are “God” and yet not fully God. These errors are not mere abstractions but affect Schreiner’s exegesis. Thus, Schreiner argues that it was not Jesus but the disciples were transfigured, as they passed “from flesh to spirit” such that they could see the invisible uncreated light of God (53n5). This is a direct appropriation of Palamas, who argues that the disciples became uncreated light—that is, they became God (in energy)—such that they could see God. Schreiner reproduces this view, perhaps not realizing the implication that if creatures can transcend createdness, we no longer have a Creator-creature *distinction* only a Creator-creature continuum. It is all the more surprising to see Schreiner adopt this view, given that his own exegesis militates against it—even while seeing the vision, the disciples missed the point and distorted Jesus’s identity and mission (e.g., 100–103).

Similarly, Schreiner argues that though God is invisible, the disciples saw his uncreated light. It is of course true that the disciples saw God, because they saw a divine person according to his human nature (cf. John 1:14). But Schreiner makes this claim not in reference to the divine person revealed in the transfiguration, but in reference to the divine nature. The disciples not only saw a divine person, but something akin to the divine essence (the energies). Schreiner’s aim in defining the light of the transfiguration as uncreated and embracing the essence-energies distinction is simply to affirm that the transfiguration reveals Jesus’s divinity as well as his messianic office (62). Yet in doing so, he imports categories that, on inspection, distort the nature of God and threaten the Chalcedonian distinction between Christ’s two natures when applied to the transfiguration.

The light of the transfiguration was no doubt ineffably glorious, far beyond the natural light of the sun, which revealed Christ’s divinity. Yet even so, it must be a *sign* of Christ’s divinity rather than the divinity itself (or an emanation/energy of that divinity) or the distinction between Christ’s natures would be blurred. Both the Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds clearly state that the divine and human natures of Christ do not mingle with one another—though Christ has both divine and human attributes,

according to his divine and human nature, these attributes do not bleed over from one nature to the other. Yet on Schreiner's reading, Christ's flesh and clothes shone with an *uncreated* light—a predicate that, on Chalcedonian terms, belongs properly to the divine nature. Locating it in the humanity strains the distinction the creeds are at pains to preserve. When Schreiner reads the transfiguration in light of the essence-energies distinction, he ends up endangering the very Chalcedonian doctrine he set out to prove. Schreiner's exegesis would be better served by a Reformed doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, in which both divine and human attributes are predicated of one person without transferring between natures. It would also benefit from an Augustinian account of theophany (see *De Trinitate*, bks. 2–3). The person revealed at the Transfiguration is of course more than a theophany—he is the incarnate Son—but the light itself is theophanic: a created effect that discloses the glory of God the Son, just as the voice from heaven does.

Schreiner's retrieval effort also leads him to identify the disciples' ascent up the mountain to see Jesus with progress in virtue. Peter, James, and John ascend the mountain not because of Jesus's undeserved favor bestowed on them, but because they were the most virtuous of the twelve disciples (46). So we also, Schreiner claims, must first purge ourselves of sin in order to see God and finally be united with him (50–52, 88–90, 124–128). Yet such conclusions are difficult to sustain, even in light of Schreiner's own theological insights (e.g., the blindness of these three disciples to both the glory they are witnessing and the mission of Jesus, and their later arguments about their own greatness). I should clarify that I do not believe that Schreiner is adopting a false gospel of works-righteousness, and there is an element of truth to this presentation of sanctification—it is the pure in heart that will see God (Matt. 5:8). Yet the spiritual interpretation Schreiner provides of the disciples' ascent, rooted as it is in Eastern conviction that the disciples were divinized, undercuts two critical aspects of the text's teaching: 1) Jesus Christ reveals his glory to unworthy and undeserving sinners, and 2) the full revelation of his glory (and its transformative effect) requires his death as a substitutionary sacrifice and his resurrection, both of which are yet to come in the transfiguration accounts. A preacher relying on this book for their understanding of the transfiguration might too quickly turn to moralism (the requirement of virtue for the ascent to the vision of God)

rather than the vision of Christ itself, which God bestows on his unworthy people *in order to transform them*.

Overall, Patrick Schreiner's *The Transfiguration of Christ* is a dynamic work. On the one hand, his thesis is spot on — the transfiguration reveals Jesus as both the glorious divine Son and the exalted human messiah, one person with two natures, and Schreiner substantiates this with rigorous exegesis and wonderful insights both from Schreiner's own work and the tradition, all in an extremely accessible format. On the other, there are serious theological problems that run through the book and even warp some of Schreiner's exegetical conclusions due to his adoption of medieval Eastern Orthodox theology. It seems to me that Schreiner's adoption of these categories is more an issue of uncritical retrieval and failure to recognize their theological implications than a deeply held conviction or a sign of more issues to come. And so, while I would be happy to draw from parts of this book for my own study of the transfiguration texts, I would be wary of recommending it to those without enough training in systematic theology to untangle Schreiner's Reformed and baptistic theology from the Eastern Orthodox sources on which he relies.

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Preparing Sermons from the Page to the Pulpit: Exegesis to Exposition in Seven Steps. By Wayne Baxter. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023, 184 pp., \$15.99 paper.

Wayne Baxter's *Preparing Sermons from the Page to the Pulpit* is a helpful tool to add to the preacher's toolbox. Baxter is the professor of New Testament and Greek at Heritage College and Seminary in Ontario, Canada. His work is an attempt to help preachers bring exegesis and exposition together with the hope of making it easier to do so in the study. The author begins with identifying the problem he sees with contemporary expository preaching. This problem is threefold. Many sermons preached today contain truths not derived from the passage in question and thus lead to preaching the right doctrine from the wrong text. Moralistic preaching continues to plague many pulpits. As such, many sermons have the main point of "be like Joseph"

or “slay your own giants like David.” Spiritualized messages also continue to abound. Spiritualizing occurs when the preacher bypasses the historical and theological significance of the text in favor of teaching some general spiritual reality or moral. Baxter’s solution is a call back to a kind of expository preaching that weds exegesis and exposition together again.

Baxter admits that doing so is often difficult. This is because writing a sermon can often be like a giant jigsaw puzzle. He writes, “Everything is there before the task begins: all the pieces required to assemble it, as well as the box cover that gives the picture and final goal to work toward. But the task is rarely easy. It is sometimes confusing and often frustrating” (10). Yet, those who are committed to expository preaching will persevere if only through trial. Baxter’s hope is to make this process easier. His intended audience is a very specific kind of preacher since he addresses those who are already committed to expository preaching, those who have already graduated from some type of seminary study in the original languages, who are already dedicated to interpreting a passage along its sociohistorical background, and who have some preaching experience.

What follows are seven essential steps from exegesis to exposition. Each chapter focuses on the process of moving from exegesis to exposition, using genre analysis, and working from the Greek or Hebrew. His seven steps include determining the outer limits and boundaries of the text, analyzing the co-text or immediate context, outlining the passage using independent and dependent clauses, taking the passage outline to exegetical summary outline to homiletical outline, engaging in word studies and nuance, making theological connections to the rest of Scripture, and applying the text appropriately.

Baxter’s primary strength is his helpful suggestions on the exegetical level. The first five steps are Baxter’s strongest points in the book. For example, whereas most preachers might move from a passage outline (sometimes called an exegetical outline) to their homiletical outline, Baxter inserts a middle step that he calls the “exegetical summary outline.” Whereas the passage outline points out the independent and dependent clauses in the text, the exegetical summary outline functions as a pre-homiletical outline that serves both the clarity and accuracy of interpretation. This involves writing a summary (he puts emphasis on summary) of the independent clauses in a list of points. The key is to summarize the independent clauses only, since

they drive the action of the text. Only once this middle step is complete can the preacher move to the homiletical outline. Whereas the exegetical summary outline is descriptive and essentially repeats the words of the text in summary form, the homiletical outline places the audience themselves into the text. Taking each point and transforming it into a rhetorical or exhortative statement brings shape to the sermon, but also does justice to the authorial intent. Baxter's middle step could be a very useful tool for helping preachers faithfully exposit a text without making the passage seem merely remote to the audience. Also, this middle step will aid in the clarity of sermons. Baxter writes, "Without this intermediate step, the preacher is more likely to offer a confusing homily, that pulls in many, sometimes competing, directions, all the while lacking a central thread. Or you might fall into the trap of delivering an overly complicated twelve-point, hard-to-follow message" (102–03).

Despite this strength, there is one potential weakness with the book. Baxter culminates his first six steps with biblical theology (i.e. making theological connections). He argues that the penultimate stage of preparing a sermon is taking a look at how the preacher's text fits within the canonical storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This can be helpful, but readers might wonder what place other theological disciplines might have in the preparation of sermons as well. For example, what role does systematic or historical theology play in sermon preparation? Should preachers isolate a particular doctrine for explanation in the sermon? At what point should the preacher use commentaries and engage in the conversation of the Great Tradition? Answering these questions does not negate the book's work but would have made for an even stronger book on preaching. The same could be *applied* to his chapter on application (pun intended). Although Baxter gives a few pointers as to how a preacher should approach application, his most helpful suggestion is relegated to making specific applications rather than general applications. Preachers will have to go to other resources listed at the end of the chapter for further help in this area.

Overall, Baxter's work is short, practical, encouraging, and packed with insight and further suggested resources. Preachers who love expository preaching and want to get better at it will not only profit from this work

but will be thankful they read it. And I am sure many congregations will be thankful their pastors read this book as well.

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How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible: Seven Hermeneutical Choices for the Old and New Testaments. By Gary Edward Schnittjer and Matthew S. Harmon. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024, 260 pp., \$39.99.

Gary Schnittjer and Matthew Harmon have collaborated to write a book providing a methodology for interpreting uses of Scripture throughout Scripture. By “use of Scripture,” Schnittjer and Harmon refer to “some kind of relationship” between two Scripture texts “while purposely avoiding issues of (in)direct dependence, authorial intention, and distinctions between echo, allusion, paraphrase, and quotation” (212). The intentionally broad term “use” allows Schnittjer and Harmon to bridge the divide between diverse camps of biblical scholars. Debates over whether a use of Scripture is authorially intended sometimes result in biblical scholars talking past each other. The authors’ term “use” facilitates bringing these disparate perspectives into dialogue with one another. The breadth of this book makes it invaluable for scholars, pastors, and students alike who seek to interpret how evocations of Scripture function throughout the Bible. In the authors’ words, *How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible* “takes the next step” from introductory hermeneutical principles “and narrowly focuses on the special issues of interpreting the Bible’s use of the Bible,” framed as seven choices that interpreters must make as they conduct these studies (xxvi). The seven choices comprise the first seven chapters of the book.

First, one must choose whether to interpret uses of Scripture in a “sequestered” or “connected” manner (1). Against scholars who separate the study of how earlier Scripture functions in the Old and New Testaments, Schnittjer and Harmon advocate connecting uses of Scripture in both Testaments, since New Testament authors use Old Testament Scriptures in similar ways to Old Testament authors. The second choice overlaps with the first: one chooses whether later texts “adjust meaning and/or adjust context” of previous texts or whether later Scriptural

uses of earlier Scripture are “a subset of the progressive revelation of God’s redemptive will” (24). Schnittjer and Harmon note that, in the Law of Moses alone, God Himself amends five of His own laws that He gave Israel (44n85). These examples illustrate “Yahweh’s commitment to advancing revelation by means of scriptural exegesis” (44). Therefore, rather than interpreting later uses of Scripture as changing the meaning (as theologically liberal scholars) or context (as other theologically conservative scholars), one should interpret later uses of Scripture as examples of progressive revelation.

Third, one must investigate allusions not only as science but also as art. A citation formula undoubtedly marks a later author’s use of earlier Scripture, and lexical similarity can also indicate intentional reuse. However, even thematic similarities belong on the spectrum of ways an earlier text can influence a later text (60). Fourth, the donor text’s horizontal and vertical contexts alike should be investigated when interpreting the receptor text’s use of the donor text. While many scholars consider how “the surrounding verses, paragraphs and chapters,” the entire book, or “even all of Israel’s scriptures” (horizontal context) affects the use of a donor text by a receptor text, Schnittjer and Harmon also advocate examining “the relationship between the earlier donor and later receptor texts” prior to the final receptor text (vertical context) when interpreting the reuse of Scripture (85). Such a vertical context enriches one’s understanding of how earlier Scripture texts function in later passages. Fifth, Schnittjer and Harmon instruct readers to prioritize biblical texts in relation to one another over extrabiblical texts’ uses of Scripture: “The starting point must be how other *biblical* authors interact with the same or related donor text(s). Then and only then should one consult extrabiblical literature for insight into the larger exegetical and hermeneutical context in which the biblical author lived” (109).

Penultimately, Schnittjer and Harmon consider the function of typology within the study of later biblical authors’ use of earlier biblical texts. They define typology as “intentional scriptural shaping to draw selective expectational analogies between persons, events, institutions, procedures, oracles, or a combination of these, within the historical framework of progressive revelation” (132). The authors thus consider both prospective predictive typology and retrospective prefigural typology to be valid. Finally, they endorse prosopological exegesis as a valid subset of typology.

They consider “a biblical author *reading an earlier biblical speech in the light of a new character*” as a valid use of that earlier Scripture (160). Based on later revelation, earlier nonexpectational passages may be read in light of a new person. Luke, Acts, and Hebrews especially feature prosopological exegesis applied to one of the Persons of the Triune God. In their concluding chapter, Schnittjer and Harmon treat two case studies at length, illustrating their process for using this book’s principles to study the use of Scripture in a later scriptural text (180, Table 8-B).

Given the diverse methods for studying how later biblical authors use earlier biblical texts, readers may find individual points with which to disagree with Schnittjer and Harmon. For example, this reviewer is not persuaded by the authors’ argument that Psalm superscriptions are “an important precursor” to the prosopological exegesis of later biblical authors (167). Indeed, their proposal of prosopological exegesis as a subset of typology seems unnecessary. Nevertheless, much commends this handbook to a wide audience. The readability of this text commends it, as does the incorporation of the decade’s worth of scholarship since G. K. Beale’s *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (2012, Baker). Numerous tables portray Schnittjer and Harmon’s argument in an accurate but simple way. Each chapter concludes with at least one case study illustrating the choice presented in that chapter. The concluding chapter is a practical guide for putting the principles of this book into practice. The second through fourth chapters of this book especially advance evangelical study of intertextuality within the Bible and of biblical theology more broadly. Scholars, pastors, and students alike should welcome this resource and use it regularly.

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The Communion of the Book: Milton and the Humanist Revolution in Reading.
By David Williams. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press,
2022, 528 pp., \$133.00.

Even among congregants and pastors relatively well studied and well informed regarding the period, the Protestant Reformation can easily

become a two-dimensional narrative centered on a handful of important individuals and key events. In truth, despite the monumental achievements of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their contemporaries, their work and the movement which they led did not develop within a historical, cultural, and intellectual vacuum. The approach and habits of mind by which they and their theological descendants read and applied Scripture had been formed and developed before them over the proceeding decades and centuries by humanist scholars and antiquarians who renewed studies of the ancient texts and fundamentally altered how the reader approached the written word. *The Communion of the Book* is a historical, literary, and sociological study of the impact new humanist approaches to reading had on historiography, textual criticism, theology, neurocircuitry, and the conception of the individual from the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries. In his meticulously researched volume, David Williams strives to fill a gap he perceives in scholarship concerning the transition of society from a manuscript-based one to one based on the printed word. He sets about this task by tracing the impact of humanist scholarship and the printed word in and through the works of Francesco Petrarch, Desiderius Erasmus, John Foxe, and John Milton. Williams is professor emeritus in the University of Manitoba Department of English, Theatre, Film, and Media. He earned his PhD in English at the University of Massachusetts, and his research specialties incorporate medium theory, John Milton, and Renaissance humanism. Williams has written several academic works on these topics in addition to three novels.

Williams sets about a difficult, nuanced, and multifaceted task in *The Communion of the Book*, and thus his major thesis for the work can be difficult to articulate. One may summarize the primary thrust of the volume's central argument as follows: The humanist view of reading as a communion with the author's mind resulted in a conception of Bible reading as a means of partaking in the real presence of Christ. This undermined ecclesiastical authority in much of Europe and—through the manifestation and example of this new form of reading found in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*—brought about both religious and political change in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England as reflected in the works of Milton. Beginning with Petrarch's efforts to reassemble the scattered scraps of Livy's history of Rome and to verify an authentic text from the multiple variants,

humanists brought attention and concern back to the words and historical contexts of ancient texts. These methods required, as Williams explains, “a reader to share the mental processes of the author” (18). Within the text, humanists—particularly Erasmus and his intellectual heirs—found a communion between the mind of the reader and the mind of the author, one deeper and more intimate than that between two men in years of familiar discourse. Williams draws deeply from Erasmus’s writings to demonstrate his application of this concept when reading Scripture as not merely a communion with the mind of the biblical author but with the real presence of Christ.

Williams makes the point that this method of reading began to replace the role of the bread and wine of the Mass with the printed words of Scripture as the primary means by which Christians could engage with the substance of Christ. This change was further propelled by the emergence of a growing literary culture brought on by the increasing availability of printed books which enabled, for the first time, large numbers of people to have access to identical texts without them being largely mediated by church hierarchy. Although Erasmus and many of his fellow humanists would remain loyal to the church in Rome throughout the Protestant Reformation, the changes to reading habits which they promoted removed the necessity of the church hierarchy as the dispenser of the real presence of Christ and opened the way for questioning the legitimacy of the established institutions of church and state.

Williams’s volume proves to be a highly interdisciplinary study of his subject. The presentation of his argument relies heavily on historical and literary analysis of primary source texts. These are primarily used in revealing Erasmus’s own views of reading, demonstrating how his views were later rearticulated by Milton and showing written portrayals of humanist readers in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* and in Milton’s *Paradise Regained*. Williams also deals frequently with secondary sources and at several points seeks to mediate between conflicting positions within the existing scholarship. Williams makes a strong case for his thesis by drawing extensively from primary sources and principally utilizing secondary sources to support conclusions made from the period texts. The research provided in the book concerning the substance and significance of humanist reading practices is a significant contribution to the fields of

intellectual and church history, and the first three chapters are indispensable to anyone who wishes to understand the development of biblicism in Protestant Christianity.

Despite the work's noted virtues, there are a couple of perceived shortfalls which may be mentioned. The scope of Williams's thesis can make his argument seem unwieldy and unnecessarily complicated at times, particularly in the earlier chapters when parts of his argument are not fully fleshed out. The argument is split in half between the third and fourth chapters with the first three chapters being devoted to the cultural, theological, and metaphysical aspects of the Renaissance humanist reshaping of the act of reading in Europe and the last five chapters being focused on the more political and literary impact of humanist reading in England (with particular attention paid to William's theory regarding the literary composition of Milton's *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* within their broader historical and political context). Many pastors and lay Christians may find Williams's account in the first section fascinating and profitable. However, the content of the second section, although valuable, is unlikely to interest a broad audience outside of those particularly interested in Milton's works or in the culture of seventeenth century England.

Overall, Williams has produced an impressive and enlightening work of scholarship regarding the role of humanist reading in enabling the Protestant Reformation and in initiating the psychological, religious, and political changes that were to follow. Without the view of reading Scripture as a kind of holy communion engaging the reader with a real presence of Christ, Williams contends, the Protestant Reformation and the religious and political changes which followed may have never occurred.

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Now and Not Yet: Theology and Mission in Ezra – Nehemiah. New Studies in Biblical Theology 57. By Dean R. Ulrich. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. 184 pp., \$29.99 paper.

Dean R. Ulrich served at Trinity School for Ministry, China Reformed Theological Seminary, and Belhaven University. He has written *From Famine*

to Fullness: The Gospel According to Ruth (2007, P&R), *The Antiochene Crisis and Jubilee Theology in Daniel's Seventy Sevens* (2015, Brill). *Now and Not Yet: Theology and Mission in Ezra-Nehemiah* is his entry in InterVarsity Press's New Studies in Biblical Theology, and the book consists of eight chapters. The introduction laments the neglect of Ezra–Nehemiah (EN) in the twentieth century (1), discusses reasons for that neglect (1–6), and sets forth Ulrich's hermeneutic (6–7). The author treats EN as a unified work and states that he will not approach EN moralistically (5–6). Instead, he reads the book as “the record of the beginning of a new work of God among his people after the exile” (6–7), a work which culminates in Jesus's first coming (7).

Chapter 2 briefly compares systematic and biblical theology (9–17) before setting EN in its historical and literary context (17–24). According to Ulrich, the lists of names in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7:4–73a serve to set apart three sections that cover the balance of the rest of the book: Ezra 1, Ezra 3:1–Nehemiah 7:3, and Nehemiah 7:73b–13:31 (17). In chapter 3, Ulrich demonstrates that the exile did not thwart God's redemptive plan (47). In fact, their return is a second exodus (33). Chapters 4–6 discuss the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 3–6), the people (Ezra 7–10), and the wall (Neh 1–7), respectively. Chapter 7 addresses both the commitment and failure of the returned community. Chapter 8's conclusion reminds readers that EN anticipates its fulfillment in the NT.

Four features of the book stand out. First, it is clearly written with helpful summaries at the end of each chapter. The author is concise and to the point. Second, Ulrich consistently shows the relevance of EN, as well as its NT parallels. This proves helpful for those who plan to preach the book as they contemplate potential applications and gospel connections. Third, Ulrich rejects the xenophobic interpretation of how EN handles the intermarriage problem (Ezra 9–10; Neh 13:23–27). He clarifies that “the issue was not so much racial or consanguineous (mixing blood through marriage) as religious or theological (mixing ideas through marriage)” (84). Fourth, Ulrich brings a fresh look at EN using an NT “already/not yet” framework. The return from exile, the completion of the temple and the wall, and the teaching of Ezra display many “already” aspects in God's redemptive plan. At the same time, the people's sin points to the “not yet” aspects. As Ulrich puts it, “Those who lived in Ezra–Nehemiah's Jerusalem might have sampled a preview of the city of God (the

‘now’) but fell short of the eventual perfection of the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem (the ‘not yet’)” (160).

Meanwhile, the book has two weaknesses. First, it sometimes reads like a survey of the narrative in EN. To be sure, Ulrich tackles theological cruxes, but in general, he does not add much to the conversation. Second, Ulrich posits that mission is a key message in EN and defines mission as “participating in God’s purpose for his world” (5). Granted, the concept of mission is present in both the OT and NT, albeit with different emphases. In the OT, the emphasis is *come and see*, while in the NT, the focus is *go and tell* (Matt 28:18–20). Ulrich’s understanding of mission thus flattens the unique modes of mission in the biblical narrative. For those reasons, I do not see mission as a key concern in EN.

Overall, these weaknesses do not detract from the book’s value. Ulrich’s keen attention to EN’s relevance and its relationship to the NT may rescue the corpus from contemporary neglect. Those wanting to study and preach EN will benefit from this helpful volume. *Now and Not Yet* is a welcome contribution to this neglected area of OT scholarship.

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Antioch, Nicaea, and the Synthesis of Constantinople: Revisiting Trajectories in the Fourth-Century Christological Debates. By Andrei-Dragoş Giulea. Leiden: Brill, 2024, 324 pp., \$167.00.

Giulea has published widely on Early Christianity and Patristics, culminating in *Pre-Nicene Christology in Paschal Contexts*. Additionally, he lectures on Patristics at St. Maximus the Confessor Theological Centre, Montreal. He breaks the current work into two major parts: “Reassessing the Map of the Main Trajectories” and “Reassessing the Pro-Nicene Trajectory as a Synthesis of Antioch and Nicaea.” The goal across these two parts is to “generate a new map of the theological trajectories involved in the debate and unveil their logical articulation and historical evolution” (12). This new map would include not just the theological cultures of Antioch and Nicaea but also those of the pro-Nicene synthesis and even the Arian movement.

Part one of this work focuses on the lead-up to the work of Basil of Caesarea. Beginning with the Council of Antioch in 268, Giulea attempts to outline a theological grammar coming from the Council of Antioch. In his view, a theological grammar consists of a “*metaphysical component* and a *traditional tenets of the faith component*” (30, italics original). His main contention is that the use of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις as synonyms meaning individual substance shows that Antioch’s grammar “is a widely conveyed language” (32). By tying this use of language to Origen, Giulea attempts to present the Antiochene trajectory as a “third theoretical pole” (69) in the conversation between Nicaea and Arianism. Through the next two chapters, Giulea attempts to differentiate this Homoian Antiochene theological trajectory from the Arian theological trajectory. Finally, he closes part one by identifying the pro-Nicene synthesis as a fourth theological trajectory differentiated not only from Arianism and Antiochenism but also from the Nicene theological trajectory.

Before part two, Giulea gives a short excursus that serves as a bridge between the two parts. In it, he argues that the pro-Nicene trajectory is fundamentally centered around “a new type of language able to generate a new grammar with more explanatory capacities” (181). In part two, he focuses on the work of Basil and how he evolved as a thinker over time. He begins by looking at how the early Basil interacted with both Homoians and Nicenes, even arguing that he has “an obvious leaning to the Homoiousian solution” (196). It is the conflict between these two positions that Giulea argues accounts for the discrepancies in Basil’s language in *Contra Eunomius* (206–07). Ultimately, this results in a “dual Trinitarian discourse” (243). It is this discourse that secures the victory of the pro-Nicene solution by assimilating the grammars of Antioch and Nicaea into a single metaphysical system.

This work is quite helpful for understanding some of the Trinitarian conversations going on in the fourth century. Overall, I found part one to be more beneficial than part two. While there are still questions to be answered about the map of the theological trajectories that Giulea gives, the breadth of thinkers that he overviews, mixed with its focus on the grammar and metaphysics behind the conversations, is very helpful for anyone attempting to understand what is going on in the time period around Nicaea. Additionally, part two provides the English-reading world with one of its most comprehensive studies into the Trinitarian theology of

Basil of Caesarea. The combination of these two strengths makes this book a vital resource for anyone attempting to do work on the fourth-century Trinitarian debates.

With that said, there are two primary questions that I have from this work. First, why do the pro-Nicenes never talk about Antioch if it is a foundational part of their grammatical and theological synthesis? While the author makes a compelling case that there was some crosspollination between the Antiochenes and the Nicenes, leaders of the synthesis such as Gregory the Theologian harken back to Nicaea but not Antioch. This is certainly not a death blow to Giulea's argument, but it is a place that I would like to see expanded in the future. Second, why does Giulea present Basil as the primary innovator of the pro-Nicene synthesis? By the author's own admission, Basil's *Contra Eunomius* is a book in which Basil's understanding of words like *οὐσία* is highly contested and inconsistent (206). Add to this Basil's well-known reluctance to call the Holy Spirit God and his position as theological ringleader becomes highly suspect. Again, this does not kill his argument. However, the relationship between the Cappadocians and the development of the pro-Nicene community's grammar needs expansion. Particular attention on this point should be given to the work of Gregory the Theologian prior to his time in Constantinople.

Overall, this work is highly useful for any scholar or student of the Nicene period or who is interested in the development of theological grammar. While there are places that need more research, Giulea provides a solid basis for more critical engagement. Hopefully, scholars will see this as an invitation and a tentative roadmap into one of the most complex time periods in Christian history. This work deserves its place next to the studies of thinkers such as Lewis Ayers, John Behr, R.P.C. Hanson, and John Henry Newman.

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Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically. By Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024, 448 pp., \$39.99 hardback.

Kevin Vanhoozer is one of the greatest scholars of theology hermeneutics in contemporary Evangelicalism, as is evidenced by his numerous books, including *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* (1998, Zondervan), *The Drama of Doctrine* (2005, Westminster John Knox), and *Biblical Authority After Babel* (2016, Baker). In his latest volume, Vanhoozer returns to the issue of theological interpretation of Scripture, arguing that “we need all the theological disciplines, and several kinds of biblical criticism, to read the Bible rightly, in ways that do justice to both its human and divine authorship” (xxii). His goal is to establish “mere hermeneutics”—a system of basic principles that all Christians believe when reading Scripture.

Let’s first give a summary of the book. Vanhoozer sets out his paradigm for hermeneutics with scriptural terms. He employs the language of an “economy of light” to refer to what Scripture does, as illustrated by the transfiguration. By using Scripture to guide theological interpretation, Vanhoozer intends to overcome the historic divide between biblical studies and systematic theology. The result would be (1) agreed upon by the historic Church, (2) privileging no particular critical method, (3) preferring no specific theological community, and (4) shaping its readers’ hearts and minds.

Vanhoozer begins his trek up “the mountain of God” of biblical interpretation by first mapping the terrain of divergent schools that have made paths up the mountain. These originate from different reading cultures, communities with shared values, practices, and habits. Two cultures have marked the history of the church. What was sown as the Antiochene-Alexandrian divide has blossomed into biblical studies versus systematic theology. Vanhoozer proposes that all Christians belong to the same *eschatological* reading culture, scanning the canon closely for its Christological fulfillment, and both exegetes and systematicians are a necessary rope team for a successful climb.

At base camp is the formal principle of his hermeneutics: the letter. Believing Scripture to be divine discourse, Vanhoozer argues that the literal sense finds its fullness in Christ. The task begins with proper philology which he divides into verbal, authorial, historical, literary, and “ruled” sense. However, all readers impose their frame of reference, either immanent or transcendent. The latter is the “Christian” in “mere Christian hermeneutics.” The reader must read the text as unified divine discourse, God speaking

to his people for covenantal communion. Is this intended by the human authors? While the prophets knew what they were saying, they did not know the referent about whom they spoke, a *referens plenior*. Thus, a literal reading of Scripture within a transcendental frame of reference demands a theological reading. This is the plain, canonical, transfigural literal sense. These figures are not imposed by readers but intended by the divine author, a figural realism. His shift in terminology bridges the ravine in the allegory-typology debates. Transfigural readings follow the literal sense to the figures it anticipates. The divine Author's intent extends further than the human's to its ultimate referent. This provides consensus beyond the debate over literality in that the literal sense has been in the writing and events of the human authors *and* their fulfillment. Vanhoozer explains that "*the literal meaning of Scripture is the meaning of the letter, viewed as human-divine authorial discourse, when read in canonical context with an eschatological frame of reference*" (179). The former is the grammatical-historical, the latter eschatological. Both are legitimate. They differ in frames of reference but can be united: the grammatical-eschatological.

The summit of the climb provides the material principle — the knowledge of God through the light of Christ. God as Light brings understanding to the text. As the Father is the Originator of light (Gen 1:3), so he is the Author of Scripture; as the Son is himself Light (John 8:12), so he is the Word of God; as the Spirit is the Illuminator, so he guides the reader to comprehend the richness of the text. Rather than abandoning or adding to the text, the theological reading should display the glory latent within the literal sense as Christ's transfiguration displays his glory without distorting his identity outside the event. The Old Testament is a room dimly lit, but the reader sees more clearly when the veil is taken away, and Christ is on full display. By beholding him, the reader is transformed as one who wrestles with God to become a sanctified servant of the Word. The Church needs all the saints together to read well, and the only way to honor the literal sense is *to read it spiritually*.

In his conclusion, Vanhoozer anticipates the objection that reading theologically will be arbitrary, taking Song of Solomon as a test case. On the one hand, to say that the two breasts are the two Testaments is farfetched since it could also refer to sacraments, the church offices, or any number of things. On the other hand, interpreting it with *only* an immanent frame of

reference does not do justice to the text since there are clues that the author has more in mind. The Song finds its fulfillment when read as a poem of union with Christ.

Let's now turn to an evaluation of the book. Without a doubt, Vanhoozer's work can only be described as monumental. He interacts with seemingly every major voice on the topic of hermeneutics from the early church to the present day. Moreover, he gives them all a fair hearing. This alone makes the volume a rich resource for research to gain a lay of the land. I hope that this book will be a staple for courses on hermeneutics for years to come. His desire to reunite factions that have been warring since the Church's inception is laudable. Perhaps it is better to move to "figural" over "typological" or "allegorical," since such a term does not come with the same historical baggage. Although interpreters will debate specific texts and methodologies, Vanhoozer provides a common ground by reminding the saints of their shared transcendent frame of reference, eschatological reading culture, and scriptural social imaginary (these terms and more he defines in a necessary glossary).

Where can improvements be made for a second edition? The reader would be helped with further definitions of key terms appearing throughout. Examples include not defining "formal/material principle," waiting to explain what "the way the words run" means (first mentioned, 107; defined, 171), or defining words improperly, such as "allegory." Additionally, Vanhoozer could clarify whether meaning can be singular or plural. It seems he would say frames of reference are numerous, so we need methods of all the disciplines brought to bear on the text, but does this mean that the text means something different for different readers? Finally, I find his example of bad spiritual reading confusing. Could a transfigural reading not say that the breasts in the Song are, for example, the offices of the church? This does not impose a foreign frame of reference; it looks to the literal meaning of the text canonically considered with Christ's church. My concern is more than this case study: I wonder whether many "allegorical" readings that Vanhoozer would dismiss would fit under his umbrella of transfigural readings.

The ultimate question, however, is this: does Vanhoozer succeed in his purpose to lay out a mere hermeneutics upon which all Christians agree? He says, "The notion of a 'mere' hermeneutics alternately made me laugh, then gasp, at the sheer folly and magnitude of the task: achieving interpretive

peace after centuries of interpretive conflict” (xxi). Time will best tell whether he has succeeded. For further study, an excellent companion to this volume is Stephen O. Presley’s *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church*, which likewise goes behind methodology and focuses on principles for theological interpretation.

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