



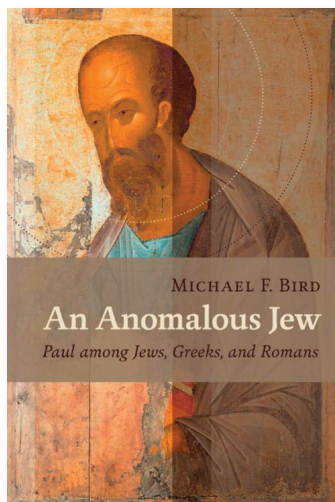
Book Reviews

April 2019

Section Editors: Craig Nessian, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

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***An Anomalous Jew:
Paul among Jews,
Greeks, and Romans.***
Michael F. Bird. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6769-8. xii & 310 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

Michael Bird describes this book as “an attempt to understand Paul’s Jewishness as it was expressed in relation to other Jews, to

Paul’s fellow Jewish Christians, and to Romans and the Roman Empire,” and then notes that his aim “is to identify how Paul could be thoroughly Jewish and yet become a figure of notoriety and controversy among his Jewish compatriots” (vii). To wit, he sets out to describe Paul as “an anomalous Jew” who, when set against the backdrop of his socio-religious milieu, emerges as “a strange figure” characterized by “a blend of common and controversial Jewish beliefs” (vii).

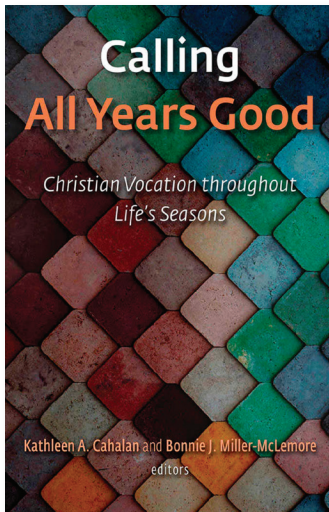
Bird follows John Barclay in identifying Paul as an anomalous Jew, but he parts ways with Barclay in articulating what characterizes that anomaly. Whereas Barclay points to “the paradoxes involved in Paul’s attempt to negotiate his way within Diaspora Hellenism,” Bird argues that the anomaly of Paul is “related to the social epiphenomenon that follows on from his messianic eschatology, namely, his attempt to create a social space for a unified body of Jewish and Gentile Christ-believers worshipping God” (28). On the basis of what Paul refers to as “the revelation of Jesus Christ” and an “apocalyptic interpretation of the Messiah’s death and resurrection, Paul wrought “a transformation of ‘common Judaism’ whereby the story and symbols of Judaism were now redrawn around Jesus the Messiah and his followers” (28), crafting a “gospel [that] both resolutely affirms and yet radically reshapes contemporary narration of the story of Israel” (116).

Over the course of five chapters, Bird works out his argument through analyses of Paul’s conceptualization of salvation, the meaning of Paul’s apostolate, the relationship between salvation history and apocalypticism in Paul’s thought, his resistance to fellow Jewish Christ-believers in Antioch, and his stance toward Rome. Bird seeks to show the precise manner in which Paul occupied a space that is fundamentally indebted to and informed by his Jewish identity, on one hand, but also sufficiently distinct so as both to provoke his fellow Jews and potentially construct a point of connection with those outside Judaism, on the other. In Bird’s estimation, Paul did this without violating certain fundamental tenets of his own Jewish identity, even if he reimagined them in the process.

At the heart of Bird’s argument is the important observation that Paul did not consider his Jewishness to be the quintessential element of his identity. Although Paul situated his identity squarely within Judaism generally, the advent of Christ served to decenter fundamental aspects of that association, making Paul’s “true identity” thus transcend these distinctions as diminished in value. Notwithstanding Bird’s recognition of this alternative identity, what remains insufficiently addressed is what constitutes identity in the first place—whether for Paul himself, or for ourselves as readers of Paul. Moreover, given that we, as readers, are dealing with an imagined author, what precisely is at stake in identifying Paul as “anomalous”? Determining and classifying these fundamentals is tricky business, fraught with ideological implications and consequences.

At times, reading works of this sort can feel like reading a modern, albeit scholarly, adaptation of Walter Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959): where relatively miniscule scraps of text with a precarious relationship to their author form the basis of complex discourses coupled with equally complex systems of practice. However, this is not the sense one gets from reading *An Anomalous Jew*. Bird presents a careful and sophisticated argument in an accessible manner, using close readings of the Pauline corpus in conversation with a wealth of resources that ultimately invite the reader to further study. Along the way, he helps readers see and understand the importance of seemingly arcane debates, both ancient and modern. The book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of earliest Christianity and its relationship to both Judaism and its Greco-Roman context.

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Adrian College



Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons Edited by Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7424-5. 238 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

Christian vocation is an important way to review one's life. For Cahalan and Miller-McLemore, this is a set of tasks from birth until death. Children's vocation is observing adults, as well as playing and enjoying the love and protection of adults. Older individuals, who often are dismissed or think their value to society is in the past, have a vocation of remembering the past and graciously befriending adults and children. They can demonstrate the values that help others accept life's changes.

Over the past months, I have walked with a friend whose spouse is dying. *Calling All Years Good* has helped us as the authors have pointed out the developmental tasks in the older years as well as how these connect to the faith journey. In middle age, adults can often tackle problems, make decisions about the future, and expect a healthier life. Nevertheless, as one ages, learning how to cope with change becomes the task. One does not know how illness, deaths, or circumstances are going to change one's lifestyle and decisions. My friend is caring for the spouse and on a leave of absence. A completely new set of skills and experiences has opened up; a changed marriage relationship has developed; and the prospect of becoming widowed awaits.

The vocation of raising children turns many questions or issues in a different direction. How do we think of children as having significance in the congregation or community? What do they offer to adults? How are they opening the future for everyone? They are not only to be taught and disciplined; they have a vocation and we can assist them to sense their importance.

Biblical scholar Jane Patterson intersperses the chapters with one- to-three-page biblical studies focusing on biblical characters at different stages of their lives. Her short essays are helpful—especially if this book is used for a sermon series, adult education, or leadership training. She provides enough material to start the reflection for a sermon.

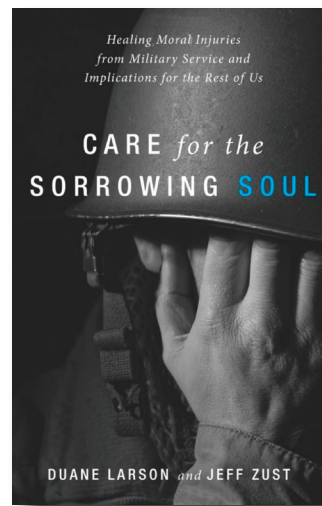
Both in my conversations with my friend, and in my own reflections about retirement, the authors' decisions to focus on late adulthood and then older adulthood as separate life stages were helpful. My own parents were very active and involved in church and community from retirement until they were 85 years old. When my father went blind, life shifted to a different voca-

tion. Together they still had a vocation in the seniors' complex as they welcomed new residents. My father's memory helped leaders in the town as they worked at making political, business, or church decisions. These friends and associates needed to know the town's history. My parents' Christian vocations had not ended.

This book joins human growth and development with spiritual formation. It is most fitting for a Christian context but also could be used in other contexts where spirituality is affirmed as part of being holistic. The authors' writing styles lead to reflection. Several times, I thought about my own life at different stages and found the authors pushing me into the meaning of my experiences and my sense of vocation then. An excellent book for a group of either leaders or parents.

Brice Balmer

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Care for the Sorrowing Soul. By Duane Larson and Jeff Züst. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-5326-1770-6. xii & 273 pages. Paper. \$34.00.

First responders—police, firefighters, nurses, and doctors—often see and respond to situations that are traumatic and unfamiliar to them. A beginning police officer who had grown up in a middle-class suburban family was called into an urban drug den with no way of conceptualizing what he saw. There was a clash in his understanding of life—its meaning, his values, and ideals—with the people whom he met in a situation he could not imagine. His experience and reflection were a moral injury.

Moral injury is defined by Larson and Züst as:

The complex “soul” wound that results from a person's inability to resolve the difference between one's idealized values and one's perceived experiences. This wound produces a chain of emotions and maladaptive behaviors that corrode character and damage an individual's capacity for living (5).

Much of the research on moral injury has been done with the co-operation of soldiers in the American military. These men and women see, hear, and experience circumstances, environments, and behaviors that are unimaginable to them. They may



also find that fellow soldiers and leaders have very different values that clash with their own sense of integrity, loyalty, and compassion. Some of these experiences, or their compilation, result in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is emotional and physiological. Underneath the PTSD often is moral injury—the spiritual dimension of the experience that must also be addressed. Moral injury can also occur without PTSD.

As chaplains and ministers, we need to walk alongside first responders or returning soldiers as they reflect on how their values, ideals, morals, and understanding of life have changed through their experiences in the line of duty. They pose many questions out of their deep angst. Their understanding of God may be profoundly affected as they ask where God was in these experiences.

While *Care for the Sorrowing Soul* focuses on the moral injury of soldiers, I have found the same phenomenon among first responders in my community. Larson and Zust thoroughly explain moral injury. They help spiritual caregivers to sense when these injuries have occurred and provide various means of walking with people who are affected.

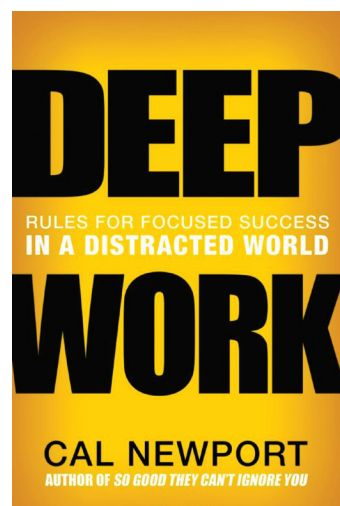
First responders and soldiers are trained in confidentiality, so they are very hesitant to talk about specific incidents. They talk among themselves but do not expect that individuals outside their profession will understand. Therefore, the spiritual caregiver must establish trust and be accepted as one who can listen and understand without offering advice and comment prematurely.

As pastors, we are to care for the soul. The whole discussion of moral injury guides our care for others as well as helping us to be open to the depth of spiritual pain that others encounter in their lives and vocations.

I highly recommend this book especially for those providing spiritual care. How do we help individuals come to new values and ideals that now incorporate the traumatic experiences they have seen, experienced, and felt?

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Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World. By Cal Newport. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4555-8669-1. 296 pages. Cloth. \$28.00

This book comes from the business field but has implications for the work of ministry. “Deep work: Professional activities performed

in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to the limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate” (3). The author, assistant professor of computer science at Georgetown University, witnesses to the challenge in his own experience of dedicating time to those projects that require our best attention. In a world of distractions, especially the incessant lure of social media, we are tempted to allow our lives to become absorbed by “shallow work.” The book’s central argument places it in the same genre as *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to our Brains* by Nicholas Carr (2011).

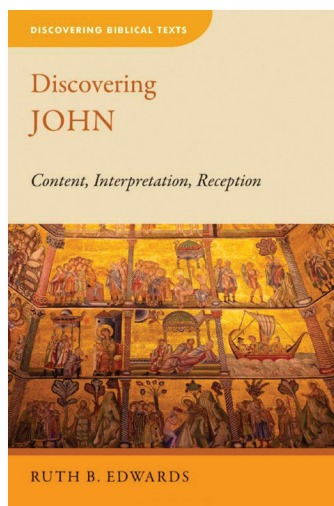
Newport divides the book in two parts. In the first, he makes the case for why deep work is valuable, rare, and meaningful. His thesis: “the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive” (14). He provides many references from other authors and grounds the argument on the transformation of his own experience, the practice of deep work leading to demonstrable outcomes and achievements. His appeal to neuroscience and the possibility of channeling the impulses of the amygdala (78–79) are especially interesting.

The second part outlines the rules for engaging in deep work: 1) work deeply, 2) embrace boredom, 3) quit social media, and 4) drain the shallows. His recommended practices include observing a stringent boundary between work and the end of one’s workday (engage in a strict “shutdown ritual”), learn detachment through “productive meditation,” observe sabbatical time in relation to social media, and discipline your time management. Newport offers many examples of his approach: “Identify the core factors that determine success and happiness in your professional and personal life. Adopt a tool only if its positive impacts on these factors substantially outweigh it negative impacts” (191).

For many readers, the most needful and controversial argument is about the use of social media. One does need to be very strategic about the use of social media to accomplish well-defined goals. This book is about resisting distraction and learning to focus attention on the central things. That could lend the reader to theological reflection about stewardship of one’s time and the practice of spiritual discipline. Newport concludes: “The deep life, of course, is not for everybody. It requires hard work and drastic changes to your habits...But if you’re willing to sidestep these comforts and fears, and instead struggle to deploy your mind to its fullest capacity to create things that matter, then you’ll discover, as others have before you, that depth generates a life rich with productivity and meaning” (263). Here the intersections with the practice of discipline in the spiritual life are fascinating.

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Discovering John: Content, Interpretation, Reception. By Ruth B. Edwards. Second edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7240-1. xiv & 258 pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Ruth B. Edwards, a priest of the Scottish Episcopal Church and honorary senior lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, offers a thoughtful

and thorough study of the Gospel of John. *Discovering John* is a part of the Discovering Biblical Texts series, which focuses on comprehensive and student-friendly introductions to the content, theological concerns, interpretive debates, and historical reception of the books of the Bible. This publication is the second edition, which has updated and expanded the 2003 original to incorporate recent scholarship, to add material related to John's reception history, and to extend its explorations of John's textual history and of the problem of eyewitness history (with these latter two topics addressed in two new excursus located at the end of the book).

The book consists of eleven chapters on key topics, in addition to an introduction and conclusion. The first five chapters provide an introduction to the work and address the topics of reading strategies for John, authorship, sources and traditions behind the Gospel (including their relation to the "Historical Jesus"), and the context of the Gospel (including its purpose, audience, place, and date of composition). The short chapter on reading strategies gives a succinct overview of John's reception in the history of the church (from the church fathers to the Reformation), in historical-critical analysis, in literary and ideological approaches (including feminist and liberationist perspectives), and in artistic and poetic interpretations. This material, with specific details incorporated throughout the text, is often only addressed in part by other works on John, and it offers distinctive value to the work as a whole. Additionally, Edwards' discussion of John's difficult-to-discern relationship to the Jesus of history is balanced and circumspect, emphasizing that John's purpose was "theological, hortatory and evangelistic" (44), without asserting that John lacks any historical foundation whatsoever.

Chapters six through nine focus on key issues in John's Christology, addressing Jesus' miracles (as an expression of narrative theology), Christological confessions and titles, Jesus' passion and resurrection, and Jesus' incarnation and Sonship. These topics are analyzed in concise yet attentive ways, offering rich perspectives into the distinctive portrait of Jesus in John. Chapter ten explores other characters in the Gospel, including the disciples, Nicodemus, female characters, and other minor figures.

The final two chapters address some difficult issues regarding John, such as anti-Judaism and replacement theology, striving to understand John's narrative within its historical context while critiquing the horrifying uses to which it has been put.

Discovering John is a good resource for pastors and students alike, distilling copious scholarship and interpretive difficulties into succinct and accessible sections. Though one may not agree with every conclusion, the issues are discussed fully and fairly. Edwards' own desire is that "from the rather clinical discussion of issues like authorship and sources, and the analysis of how individual passages may be interpreted, a sense will emerge of the Gospel's original aim of conveying a life-enhancing message, still relevant to the Church and the contemporary world" (23). She successfully achieves this goal.

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It Takes a Church to Baptize: What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism. By Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-5874-3416-7. xv & 128 pages. Paper. \$16.99.

In this brief treatment, Scot McKnight offers a helpful exposition of baptism with special attention to the ques-

tion of infant baptism from a distinctly Anglican perspective. His first chapter notes six words that are important for understanding baptism: (1) family, (2) Bible, (3) gospel, (4) conversion, (5) debate, and (6) heritage. The author explores the substance of these words throughout the course of the book.

The second chapter shows how church and family relate to baptism. McKnight begins by walking the reader through the Anglican liturgy for the baptism of an infant to offer a sense of how this gives necessary attention to the family context of baptism. This liturgical focus continues in the third chapter as the author discusses the significance of the presentation for baptism as well as the commitments that come with such a presentation. Helpfully, the commitments surrounding both adult and infant baptism are noted.

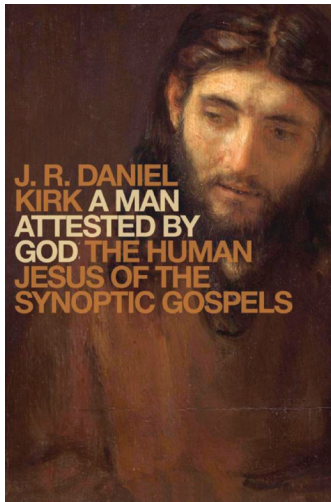
In the next two chapters McKnight shows the theological import of the gospel and the biblical teaching undergirding baptism. Anticipating possible objections to infant baptism, he maintains a conversational and humble tone. McKnight returns to the liturgical setting in chapter six by walking through the act of baptism, and in chapter seven by offering a brief personal note.



Another personal perspective is offered by Gerald R. McDermott in the afterword.

The Anglican liturgical flavor of this volume distinguishes it from others of its kind. It paints a beautiful picture of baptism. The brevity of this volume is complemented by the clearness of expression and gentleness of tone, providing a helpful refresher for those convinced about infant baptism. It would also be a great book to give to someone who is not yet sure about that practice.

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***A Man Attested by God:
The Human Jesus of the
Synoptic Gospels.*** By
J.R. Daniel Kirk. Grand
Rapids: Eerdmans,
2016. ISBN: 978-
0-8028-6795-7. xvii
& 638 pages. Cloth.
\$33.06.

In this lengthy study, Kirk proposes that the Christological portrayals of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels employ traditions within Judaism of “idealized human figures” who act as co-participants in God’s rule and authority here on earth. His proposal is an alternative to both a “low Christology” option that sees Jesus as a mere human being and a “high Christology” that emphasizes Jesus’ divine nature (argued in books by Richard Bauckham, Simon Gathercole, and Richard Hays). For Kirk, his reading of the Synoptic Gospels provides a more coherent interpretation, one that approximates more closely how the authors intended these narratives to be heard and understood. He suggests that if too much of what Jesus does in the Gospels were due to his divinity, there would be little motivation or capacity for his disciples to act in similar ways.

In chapter one, Kirk develops the textual evidence within the Jewish literature of the biblical and second temple periods, wherein divine roles and attributes—typically viewed as reserved for God alone—are ascribed to what he calls idealized human beings. He surveys multiple texts regarding six figures: Adam as an idealized human being, Moses and the prophets as human agents who “play the role of God on earth” (96), the king of Israel (especially David and Solomon) who shares in divine glory and is designated “son of God,” the priest who is exalted and bears God’s creative power among the people, “one like a son of a human” in Daniel 7 who as a human figure symbolizes the called people of God, and finally Israel as the idealized human people.

Kirk consistently argues that these various figures, who can

share God’s attributes and perform divine roles on earth, are *human beings*, not angelic beings or preexistent divine figures who become human. To quote Kirk, “To pair with another being an action that is God’s exclusive purview does not function as an indicator for early Jews that such a being is essentially divine; rather, it demonstrates that the being is a specially chosen agent with whom God has chosen to share” (176). In other words, such a rich variety of chosen agents bearing divine characteristics and executing God’s work does not breach Jewish monotheism.

In chapters two through six, Kirk examines titles attributed to Jesus or used by him as well as his healing acts and miracles. He argues that the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels contrasts with the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel which portrays Jesus as the embodiment of the pre-existent divine Word. In chapter two, he carefully considers all passages that in any way are relevant to a son of God theology and concludes that for each synoptic writer “son of God” is a royal motif and fits within the Jewish tradition of the idealized human king who represents God’s kingdom on earth. In chapter three, Kirk examines “the son of man” sayings, first in Mark and subsequently in Matthew and Luke. Rooted in Daniel 7, he states that this title in Mark designates Jesus as “the human one” who re-enacts successfully the role of the first human being, Adam.

In chapter four, Kirk shifts focus from Mark to the birth and resurrection narratives in Matthew and Luke. A number of passages in Matthew 1–2 and 28—e.g., Jesus as “God with us” (1:23; 28:20), conceived by the Spirit in a virginal woman (1:20, 23), worshipped by the magi and others (2:2,11; 28:17), risen and given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (28:18), and associated with a Trinitarian baptismal formula (28:19)—have been approached and interpreted “with the presuppositions of later Trinitarian theology” (387). Kirk, in contrast, develops an alternative interpretation consistent with his idealized human paradigm. He arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the birth and resurrection stories in Luke, whose attribution of the title “Lord” to Jesus at birth has supported a post-Chalcedonian reading of these texts.

In chapter five, the miracle stories in the Synoptic Gospels are considered in the scholarly categories of exorcisms, nature miracles, and healings. Kirk demonstrates that there are precedents for such powerful deeds (even the “nature miracles”) within Jewish as well as Greco-Roman sources. He argues that these stories can fit within the idealized human figure framework, in particular of a human Jesus who is viewed as the eschatological *bearer* of God’s Spirit with its transforming power. To quote Kirk, “It is the high, human Christology of the agent specially entrusted by God to demonstrate the advent of God’s own reign” (486).

Kirk, in chapter six, examines all scriptural passages quoted or clearly deployed by the synoptic writers. This intertextuality contributes to the Synoptics’ multifaceted Christological portrayals of Jesus. He concludes that all passages fit with Jesus’ being



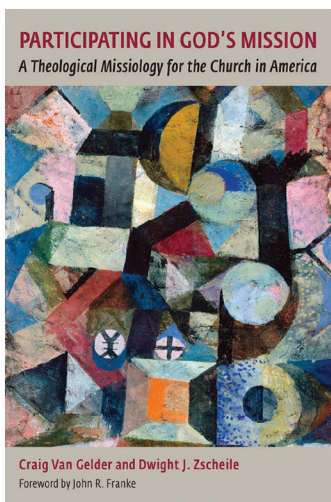
depicted as one of the idealized human figures known within Judaism, thus not violating its monotheism.

In his “Conclusions,” Kirk reasserts that in his study he has demonstrated that the synoptic writers’ Christologies differed from the preexistent Christology of the Gospel of John and scattered passages in Paul and letters attributed to him (e.g., John 1:1–18; Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20). Such passages depict Jesus in two ways that go beyond an idealized human Christology—“(1) a clear sign of preexistence prior to any human embodiment and/or (2) participation with God in creation” (571).

This huge volume is intended for biblical scholars and those pastors who have the patience and acumen to follow an exhaustive exegetical study. The author’s consideration of certain texts offers new insights. Yet only a scholar well aware of the works of those promoting “high Christology” would be in a position to critique Kirk’s argument. I am not one of them.

Kirk’s overarching thesis seems persuasive and congruent with the character of Second Temple Judaism. Jesus’ repeated calls for others to follow him in the Synoptic Gospels make more sense in today’s world if the features of the discipleship community are defined by the character and action of Jesus as the idealized human, not as a preexistent deity walking on earth. If Kirk is correct and there are these differing and distinctive Christologies in the New Testament, then it is crucial to read those texts with a keen awareness of cultural and religious contexts. Today some Christians are satisfied to view the Synoptic Gospels through a post-Chalcedon lens, but others see the need to bear witness to Jesus Christ in a different language. Douglas John Hall states that the Chalcedonian Creed “retained the humanity of Jesus only by the skin of its teeth” (*Professing the Faith*, 446). In contrast, Kirk’s work offers a robust portrayal of the human Jesus.

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Participating in God’s Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America.

By Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile.
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7498-6.
xxiv & 359 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

The authors “argue that American life and American Christianity are experiencing a moment of major transition”

(5). Therefore, they see the urgency for engaging the topic of God’s mission, especially as it concerns the church’s “witness and engagement with the cultures and peoples that make up contemporary America.” The uniqueness of their focus is on a theological missiology that gives special attention to the central role they see congregations playing in the U.S. landscape.

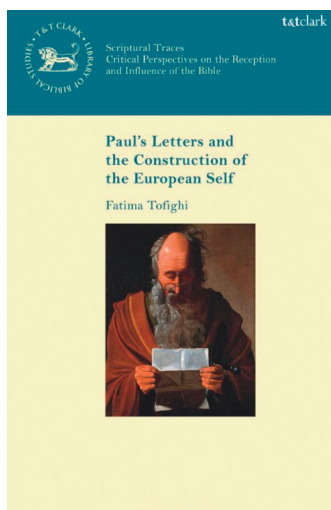
This book is divided into three parts. The first section “sets up ... the story of the church in the United States” (6) both by pinpointing the crisis that is faced and the opportunity arising from this crisis, offering a missiological framework for understanding the church’s development in the U.S. In this section, the authors discuss such phenomena as the postmodern turn, globalism, and changing demographics to pinpoint the crisis, and offer a rich theological missiology, with an emphasis on the theological, that is, *God’s* mission.

The second section surveys the religious landscape of the U.S. from the 1600s to the early 2000s. Over the course of history seven “public missiologies” are discussed, which include, for example, “focus on nation,” “focus on tradition,” and others (88). This survey constitutes the bulk of the book and sets the context for the third section.

In that third section, consisting of four chapters, the authors build upon the previous survey by critiquing the strains of public missiology and offering a positive theological alternative. This alternative is developed throughout this section, which includes addressing denominational structures, leadership development, congregational life, and the necessity of allowing the Spirit of God to lead the church in its current situation.

This brief review cannot do justice to this book. It is a powerful if not also prophetic book. The authors express clearly and forcibly what many if not all of us in the U.S. are experiencing. While the book is clearly wrought from much research and thought, some of the insights or directions offered may appear unpalatable or over the top. Yet this is an argument that needs to be weighed seriously and considered, even if one were to disagree at first glance. This book is highly recommended for anyone concerned with the church and its flourishing in the gospel.

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Paul's Letters and the Construction of the European Self. Fatima Tofghi. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-5676-7253-7. xviii & 152 pages. Cloth. \$45.00.

This deceptively slim volume by Fatima Tofghi is a rich and provocative survey that traces some of the com-

plex and often very curious ways that the figure of “Paul” has factored into the construction and contestation of “self” and “Other” in historic European thought. The interpretive “fixations,” as Tofghi calls them (xii), concern Christian responsibility toward civil authority in Romans 13, the rise and fall of “religion” in Europe vis-à-vis Galatians 2, and debates regarding gender in relation to Paul’s discussion of veiling in 1 Corinthians 11. In Tofghi’s estimation, each of these is a point where “Paul, who sometimes cannot fit in the framework of modern self-identification, through an interpretive twist, turns out to be the hero the moderns would identify with” (xii).

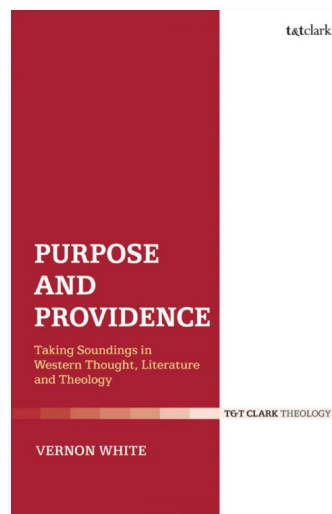
The introductory chapter articulates Tofghi’s central interests and concerns and locates her work in relation to European boundary-marking and identity construction, certain fundamental assumptions characterizing Pauline scholarship generally, the multiple and malleable identities of “Paul” in Western discourse, and finally her “reading of Pauline literature [as] a postmodernist Iranian Muslim woman” (19). Her thesis is that “recent debates on sovereignty, power, universality, secularity, and gender. . . can shed new light on the modern perceptions of Paul” (20).

In Chapter 2, Tofghi argues that readers have effectively disconnected bodily piety from political action by relegating Paul’s immanent eschatology to the transcendent. She advocates for understanding Romans 13 in relation to what she calls a “daily messianic” that transforms the everyday on an existential level. In the third chapter, Tofghi traces the latent Christian supersessionism in various narratives of European universalism and secularism based on precarious readings of “Pauline Christianity” that have contributed to the construction of the “religious other” through a fundamental notion of a Paul whose mission it is “to rescue people from a plight—be it guilt, religion, or the particular” (93) in a never-ending assertion of the modern over the past. Finally, Tofghi turns her attention to “the contingency of an article of clothing that has become a massively invested boundary imagined to distinguish essential aspects of Europe from some of its neighbors” (124): women’s head-coverings. Rather than focus on the rationale for veiling, Tofghi centers her discussion on the discourses used to support not veiling in relation to the ongoing

process of constructing the identity of European Christian men vis-a-vis both European women and the more general Other, namely, “Orientals, Jews, ‘ecstatic’ mystics of the Greco-Roman ‘cults, liberationist women, homosexuals, particularists, and so on” (124). Ultimately, she shows how modern practices of veiling are perceived as a threatening return of a discarded past. She proposes an alternative reading of 1 Corinthians 11 that restores the attitude of indifference reflected on the part of Paul.

Tofghi works through a remarkably wide range of highly complex material in this book. However, she neither gets lost in the weeds nor plays fast and loose with superficial readings of the works she engages. Instead, she presents her nuanced, insightful, and deeply thought-provoking argument in a manner that is quite accessible and easy to follow. *Paul’s Letters and the Construction of the European Self* is not only a fine example of reception studies, but one that skillfully and persuasively demonstrates the knowledge gleaned from such an approach. The paperback and e-edition are very reasonably priced, and I would recommend the book to anyone interested in the persistence of the figure of Paul in relation to the continuously shifting discourses of social and cultural identity in the West.

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Purpose and Providence: Taking Soundings in Western Thought, Literature and Theology.

By Vernon White. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-5676-6432-9. viii & 176 pages. Cloth. \$112.07.

In *Purpose and Providence*, Vernon White raises a theological issue that contemporary Christians—laypeople, pastors, and theologians alike—are disposed to avoid: providence, the assertion that God acts in human history. One of the central themes of modernity has been the expansion of humanity’s sense of its own power and a decline in belief that there is a God who cares about, and participates in, human lives.

White examines two authors of fiction, Thomas Hardy and Julian Barnes, both of whom seem to reject any notion of divine providence. However, White discerns ambivalence in both Hardy and Barnes, finding both a sense of loss at the disappearance of providence and hints of its reappearance. For White, these are clues that society is unable to root out the idea completely; it is the ground of meaning, emerging as we think of life (even



fictionally) in narrative order.

White takes up these hints, arguing for the relevance of providence. Augustine provides an account of God's workings as distinct from human orders, including the order of empire. Aquinas sharpens the point by distinguishing God's primary causality from humanity's secondary causality. Calvin's absolute emphasis upon God's sovereign will calls Thomas' argument into question and sets up the modern refusal of providence.

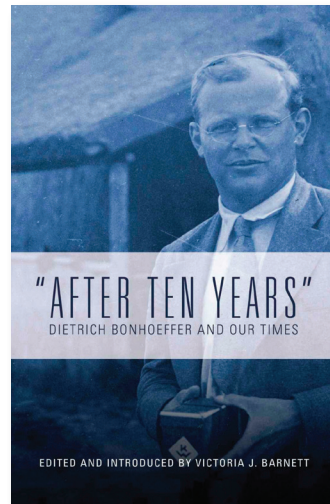
The heart of White's response is in a typological appropriation of Karl Barth's christocentrism. White suggests that Barth's focus upon the Christ story as central to history and explanatory of divine identity is decisive for Christians. Identifying God's action in the world is possible because we can see instances, however fragmentary our sight, of the liberating action of God in the life of the world.

The brevity of White's book is problematic, at times. The predominance of Reformed thinkers seems to shoulder aside other theologies, such as Luther's theology of the cross, which might be helpful in the conversation. Some aspects of the argument could benefit from further expansion. As Aquinas is addressed (and Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Mind of the Maker* gets footnote approbation), some assessment of the psychological analogy to the Trinity—and that analogy's significance for God's relationship with human understanding and action (in Bernard Lonergan's reading of Aquinas, for example)—would strengthen the discussion. As it stands, the book makes Aquinas sound rather like Barth.

Brevity also makes for more challenging reading than is necessary. More pages could make for less dense prose and render the book more accessible for clergy and laypeople, who may find this volume overly academic in tone.

This book is significant because it is programmatic, reminding us of a task that the church dare not shirk while providing hints for directions in which we might move. No pastor can get through a week of engaging with culture, preparing people to share the good news, and being present at moments of pastoral challenge without facing the always-awkward question, "Where is God in this?" White raises the question of providence in a provocative way and gives us some interesting suggestions about a way to broach it in today's world.

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***"After Ten Years":
Dietrich Bonhoeffer
and Our Times.***

Edited and introduced by Victoria J. Barnett. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-5064-3338-7. Paper. 36 pages. \$16.00.

This slender volume features the seminal text by Bonhoeffer written for a select circle of family and friends at the turn of the year to 1943. In her insightful introduction Victoria Barnett prefaces with a disclaimer about drawing facile historical analogies between then and now. Nevertheless, the very publication of this monograph with its explicit subtitle at this moment is indicative of its significance for our political situation. The introduction elucidates incisively Bonhoeffer in context, not neglecting his fallibility.

Bonhoeffer organizes his reflections into seventeen sections, whose very themes speak across the decades. I list his own subtitles with brief comments to serve the prospective reader.

1. Without Ground under One's Feet: Bonhoeffer asks whether his present times are without historical precedent.
2. Who Stands Firm? In the face of radical evil, none of the tested paths seems adequate: conscience, duty, freedom, or virtuousness. Only responsible action at God's beckon will do.
3. Civil Courage: Bonhoeffer bemoans the erosion of civil courage and notes how responsible action can entail the risk of taking sin upon oneself.
4. On Success: The key measure of success will be the judgment of future generations.
5. On Stupidity: One cannot argue with stupidity. Those overtaken by stupidity become possessed by "slogans, catchwords, and the like." Bonhoeffer defends, however, the "inner independence and wisdom" of the majority (23).
6. Contempt for Humanity: For the sake of the God who loves—especially those who are weak—one must resist holding others in contempt.
7. Imminent Justice: God's eternal justice is the final standard that "tries and judges the hearts" of those who act (25).
8. Some Statements of Faith on God's Action in History: God grants strength for resistance but not in advance of the hour it is needed. Moreover, God can make due both with "our mistakes and shortcomings" as well as with "sincere prayer and responsible actions" (25).
9. Trust: While betrayal is real, we need to continue partaking of common work, trusting in trust.



10. The Sense of Quality: Ethical action aspires to quality in spite of all challenges to the contrary.
11. Sympathy: Fear dulls sensitivity to suffering. Christ lends greatness of heart to face danger and to enter into the suffering of others.
12. On Suffering: "Christ suffered in freedom, in solitude, in the shadow, and in dishonor, in body and in spirit. Since then, many Christians have suffered with him" (28).
13. Present and Future: Again, we must keep our focus courageously on God's promised future.
14. Optimism: We continue to invest energy and to work for future generations, hoping against hope.
15. Peril and Death: Loving life and sober about present dangers, we risk faithfulness come what may.
16. Are We Still of Any Use? Forced into lives of duplicity, "[w]e have become silent witnesses of evil deeds." Where will we rediscover inner strength "for simplicity and honesty?" (30).
17. The View from Below: Bonhoeffer testifies to the fruitfulness of having learned to interpret the world from the perspective of those who are suffering. This brief passage gives rise to a theology of the cross undergirding every embodiment of liberation theology.

This brief compendium of themes discloses the value of this text for personal meditation and group discussion exactly in times like these. The reader senses the ethical struggle in which Bonhoeffer was entangled. Thanks to the editor and publisher for this timely edition!

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