



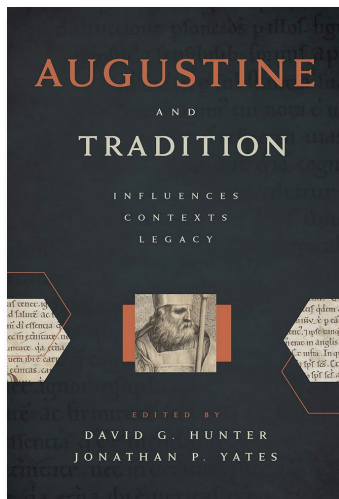
Book Reviews

July 2025

Section Editors: Craig L. Nesson, Troy M. Troftgruben

Review a book!

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Augustine and Tradition: Influences, Contexts, Legacy.

Edited by David G. Hunter and Jonathan P. Yates.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7699-7. xix & 481 pages. Cloth. \$80.00.

This festschrift, created in honor of J. Patout Burns, is a collection of essays on the intersection of Augustine and four specific tradi-

tions: North African, philosophical and literary, Greek Patristic, and Latin. The authors of the essays are scholars influenced by Burns. The book is authored by men from similar academic and religious backgrounds, and many of the themes will not be new to a reader of Augustine. However, there are a few exceptions that make the book an important contribution.

First, the opening section of the book is critical to Augustine scholarship insofar as it names what is too often ignored: Augustine was formed in an African context and his writings are aimed for an African audience. Notable contributions in this section include Andrew McGowen's essay on Augustine's lectionary as an African preacher. McGowen brings forward excerpts from Augustine's sermons that help the reader feel what it was like to be in Augustine's church listening to the African doctor preach not only on the text at hand but widely from Scriptures and from beyond Scripture. One delight is a line McGowen highlights in which Augustine notes during a service that it has run long because the lector read an exceedingly long psalm by accident instead of the one assigned to the day. Augustine charms the audience by quipping that reflection on this psalm must be what the Spirit willed.

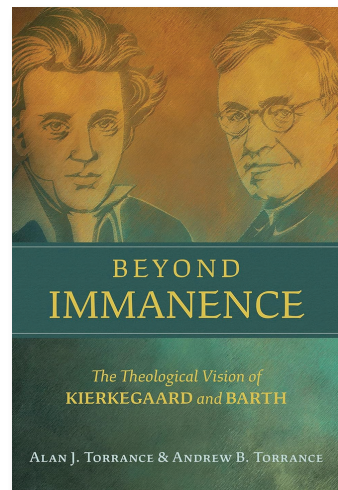
Two other essays in this section warrant highlighting. Geoffrey Dunn's essay on Augustine's critiques of Tertullian based on the latter's schismatic stance against remarriage of widows is

helpful in seeing Augustine as fundamentally an evangelist for unity against schism. This is also highlighted in William Tabbernee's essay on Augustine and the North African traditions surrounding martyrs. Augustine praises most those who died for unity. Notable, too, is Augustine's holding up of female martyrs as defenders of the faith, which parallels Augustine's own encouragement of women to read, write, and speak about the Gospel.

The rest of the book relies mostly on older research. The absence of women scholars of Augustine is notable as is the frequent use of Henry Chadwick's translation, which erases Augustine's feminine pronouns for God, rather than Sarah Rudin's recent excellent edition. However, there are points made that are important to remember in today's age. For example, the second section is an apt reminder of the importance of the liberal arts for Augustine; his use of them in Christian preaching has significance for today. The third section is important at the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea; Augustine firmly believed in the unity of the Western and Eastern church. While the final section on Augustine's influence in the Latin church might seem obvious, the reader will likely find Theodore de Bruyn's essay on Augustine and Ambrosiaster to be an eye-opening comparison of two theodicies. Ambrosiaster's appeals to the devil fell out of fashion, perhaps due to Augustine's dismissal.

This book is worth reading for both those new to Augustine and those who have studied him as it places him firmly in his context and reminds the reader of Augustinian lessons that still apply today for the church and the academy.

Jennifer Hockenbery
Interim Executive Director
Women of the ELCA



Beyond Immanence: The Theological Vision of Kierkegaard and Barth. By Alan J. Torrance and Andrew B. Torrance. Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-6803-0, xiv & 393 pages. Cloth. \$49.99.

Alan J. Torrance, professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of St. Andrews and Andrew B. Torrance, senior lecturer in theology at the University of St. Andrews, are a father/son duo. While recognizing that much as been written about both Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, the authors' stated purpose for this book is "to offer a close examination of several key theological ideas that connect the two thinkers, with an eye to presenting their mutual vision for the theolog-



ical task" (1). Specifically, their focus is on "ideas Barth developed (directly and indirectly) under the influence of Kierkegaard" (1). Along the way, they bring attention to the continuity and discontinuity between the two thinkers.

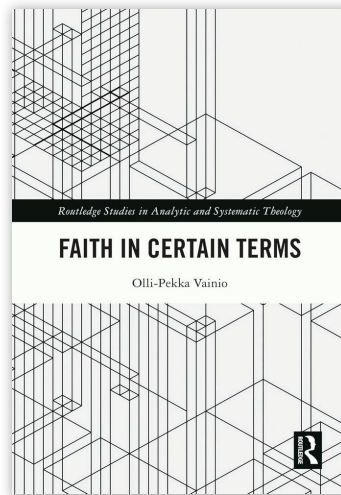
In the introduction, noting Barth's earlier positive reception of Kierkegaard, the authors argue that Barth's later "apathy" and "even hostility" (3) toward Kierkegaard "was not based on a careful understanding" (3) of the latter. Two reasons are presented for this misunderstanding on Barth's part: First, his reception of Kierkegaard was largely based on a "mistranslation and misinterpretation" (3) of the same; and second, Barth's rejection of Emmanuel Hirsch's theology was bound up with his reception of Kierkegaard by way of Hirsch. Barth was unaware that, had Kierkegaard been a part of the former's debate with Hirsch, "Kierkegaard would have sided with Barth" (8) as they share the same basic commitments.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first two chapters are focused on Kierkegaard's audience, approach, and theological insights. Chapters three and four discuss Barth's stand against idealism and nationalism and the theological implications of the bond of kinship shared by all humans. Chapter five gives more attention to Barth's engagement with Kierkegaard throughout his career. The sixth chapter explores the implications of Barth's (and, in the background, Kierkegaard's) theology for secular society. The final chapter discusses major ways the "Kierkegaard-Barth trajectory" (303) differs from competing theological and philosophical claims.

Much commends this book. First, the authors help to establish Kierkegaard as a theologian in his own right such as his attempts to expose "the limits of human knowing" regarding "the Christian faith" (104) and his thoroughly Christocentric understanding of "God's relationship with humans" (104). Second, the book demonstrates the viability of Kierkegaard and, later Barth's theological projects (or, what the authors call the "Kierkegaard-Barth trajectory") for offering a penetrating critique of negative tendencies in sociopolitical ethics in a secular age. Third, the final chapter provides a powerful and compelling account of the strengths of Kierkegaard and Barth's vision by discussing God's self-disclosure to "finite, sinful human creatures" (26), the historicity of God's revelation in Christ, and, consequently, the bearing of these on epistemology and a philosophy of language.

In sum, for those who desire to see two thinkers who powerfully argued for a vision for God, the world, and ourselves rooted in and centered on the revelation of God in Christ, this book by the Torrance duo is a clear place to turn.

*Thomas Haviland-Pabst
Montreat College
Montreat, NC*



Faith in Certain Terms. By Olli-Pekka Vainio. Routledge Studies in Analytic and Systematic Theology.

New York: Routledge, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-0325-1778-0, vii & 167 pages. Cloth. \$190.00.

Vainio, Professor of Dogmatics at the University of Helsinki and author of numerous books, provides penetrating exploration of

the nature of faith and its relation to certainty and doubt.

Noting the lacuna regarding the relationship between "certitude and doubt" (2) in the introductory chapter, he brings to the reader's attention the fact that there is no unanimous view of certainty in the Christian tradition. As a starting point, he notes three kinds of certainty: (I) "Certainty about knowledge concerning the world," e.g., "When did Julius Caesar live?" (4); (II) "... about knowledge concerning theological entities," e.g., "Does God exist?" (4); and (III) "... about knowledge concerning the status of one's soul" (4). Of these three forms of certainty, the author's focus throughout the book is on the second and third. Vainio seeks to combine historical-theological and analytic-theological tools in his study.

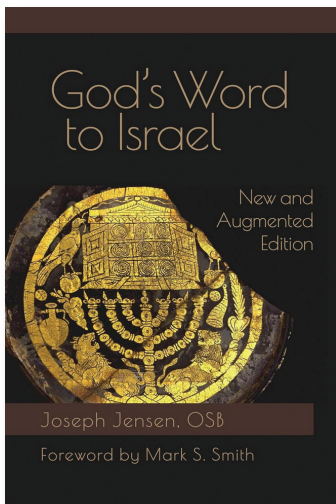
The book is divided into six chapters. After the first, introductory chapter, he insightfully argues in the second chapter that certainty and doubt have different default positions. On the one hand, "religious traditions ... underline the certainty of core [theological] convictions" (14); on the other hand, "pastoral counseling ... deals with uncertainty and doubt" (14). The conflict between theological certainty and personal doubt, Vainio argues, ought to inform how we understand faith, namely, as giving room for "doubt in the lives of the faithful" (19).

The third chapter discusses various approaches to certainty in historical theology. Here, he discusses church fathers, scholastic theology, the mystical tradition, Reformers such as Luther and Calvin as well as the teachings of Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions on assurance. The fourth chapter explores faith in philosophical theology, surveying a taxonomy of faith consisting of six models, such as "the Personal Relationship Model," which "views faith as something between two persons" (73). The fifth chapter gives attention to doubt from various perspectives before discussing the Lutheran model of faith (understanding, ascent, and trust). The sixth chapter explores two challenges to certainty—luck (one believes something because one is placed in an environment conducive to said belief) and fickleness (people change their minds)—before offering a definition of faith.



The overall strength of this book is that the author's rigorous argumentation offers a viable defense for an understanding of a faith that is not equivalent to absolute certainty but rather allows for doubt. Thus, he makes a compelling case for a version of faith that bridges the gap between theological conviction and personal doubt or uncertainty. This is based on his fallibilist account of religious certainty, i.e., infallible certainty is excluded, and assurance of salvation is "conjectural" (146) at best. Faith, for Vainio, includes realistic (said object of faith has some truth value) and affectual (said object is important, valuable and "serves as a basis for thinking" [147] and action) aspects. While not all will find Vainio's conclusions helpful, he has provided an excellent starting point for further rigorous and critical analysis of faith.

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***God's Word to Israel:
New and Augmented
Edition.*** By Joseph
Jensen, OSB.

Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-8146-8817-5. Paper. 380 pages. \$39.95.

Seldom does one come across a book published in its original form more than fifty years ago (1968), whose author is still living and actively teaching and writing! Much less would one expect

to encounter a "new and augmented" text that is a clearly written and formatted exemplar of the tried-and-true genre called "introduction to the Old Testament" and "intended for undergraduates, seminary students and intelligent lay audiences." The author is a longtime Benedictine monk at St. Anselm's Abbey in Washington, D.C. He "chants the Psalms multiple times each day, week in and week out" (xi) as well as carrying out his daily calling as a biblical scholar at Catholic University and in the larger church where he served forty-two years as Executive Director of the Catholic Biblical Association, including the production of the New American Bible.

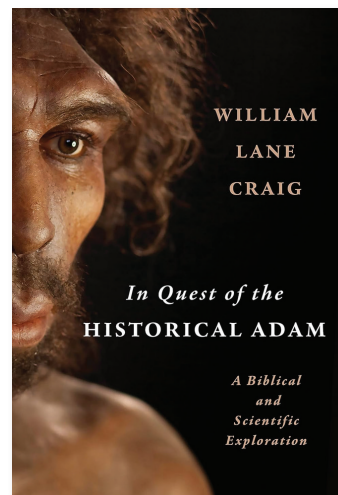
The book begins with three introductory chapters. Chapter 2, "Modern Study of the Bible," is a particularly revealing and successful effort to acquaint the reader with the author's perspective on the historical critical method and various literary approaches to the OT. Here the author takes care to acknowledge the strides made in recent years in ecumenical understandings that have been embraced and deepened by Roman Catholic participation. A good example occurs in the chapter on the "Composition of the Pentateuch" where great care is taken to describe the origins

of the "documentary hypothesis" and how it can be utilized to enhance the church's understanding of Scripture.

An appendix on "Evolution, Creationism, and Intelligent Design," similarly explains how the Genesis accounts of creation can be understood in the light of modern science without resorting to unconvincing theories put forth by conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists opposed to scientific viewpoints. Three additional appendices consider other neuralgic issues: "The Word of God in Human Words," "Christian Use of the OT," and "Church Teaching and the Bible." The latter is particularly helpful to non-Catholics by laying out the basis of papal and conciliar teaching.

Jensen's book is a genuinely mainstream interpretation of the OT including careful appreciation of its Jewish origins and continuing constituency in modern Judaism. Illustrations, maps, and a concluding "Chronological Chart" facilitate the book's use as a classroom text, together with "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the conclusion of each chapter. A "Recommended Scripture Reading" opens each chapter to highlight how the texts under discussion best should be read. I have not read an OT introduction straight through since Samuel Terrien's *The Elusive Presence* and found it a delight to do so again under Benedictine tutelage.

John Rollefson
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***In Quest of the
Historical Adam: A
Biblical and Scientific
Exploration.*** By
William Lane Craig.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7911-0. Cloth.
421 pages. \$38.00.

This is a highly unusual and difficult book. The author begins by making the disarming admission: "This book is not a scholarly treatise, although it draws on high scholarship to make its case" (xi). This case takes nearly 400 pages, leading the reader through complicated explications of and arguments with scholars in the widely diverse fields of biblical studies, ancient Near Eastern history, archaeology, literature, religion/mythopoesis, paleontology, paleoneurology, paleoanthropology, genetics, and related fields. Craig does claim expertise in philosophy as a professor at Houston Baptist University.

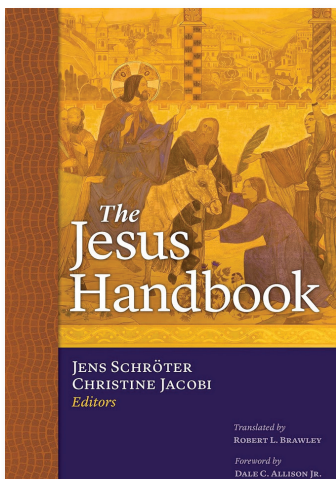
The purpose of rummaging through these myriad fields of knowledge is to provide a reliable, if not definitive, positive answer to the question: Was there an historical Adam? Without



this, the author believes, “the traditional doctrine of original sin cannot be maintained,” although admitting “it is, however, dubious that the doctrine of original sin is essential to the Christian faith” (4-5).

Craig, an admitted conservative evangelical, is fluent in evolutionary science and spends enormous intellectual energy to persuade the reader that a reasonable case can be made for trusting the possibility that the biblical Adam (and Eve) in the Book of Genesis could have been earth’s earliest human progenitors perhaps 500,000 years ago. As two individuals of the species *Homo Heidelbergensis*, “a truly cosmopolitan hominid species,” they may lie at the origin of the European and African lineages that led to Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* (331). This book demonstrates an enormous feat of research and reasoning to reach this conclusion, which is far from certain but, by my reading, could be at best a remote possibility.

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The Jesus Handbook.

Edited by Jens Schröter
and Christine Jacobi.

Translated by Robert L.
Brawley.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7692-8. xxiii &
688 pages. Paper. \$74.99.

This collection overviews and updates the academic discussion of Jesus of Nazareth, reflecting the current state of Jesus research

considering its past stages. The authors come from various scholarly perspectives and faith backgrounds (Jewish and Christian, Protestant and Catholic), creating an assorted approach and offering divergent interpretations on key issues. This diversity is an important feature of the book. The volume takes a primarily historical-critical and contextual view. It also incorporates one of the latest interdisciplinary approaches to Jesus studies: collective memory. Main aspects of memory theory give shape to this volume, including the ways that the memory of Jesus is “recorded in narratives, represented in the performance of Christian rituals such as the Eucharist, [and] brought to view in visual portrayals” (7). This book is deeply concerned with the full-fledged context of Jesus’ life and work, includes extrabiblical material as sources, and is essentially interdisciplinary.

The essays have been translated from German, giving English-speaking audiences insight from scholars whose monographs have not yet been translated into English, such as Christine Jacobi on analogies between Paul’s letters and the Synoptic Gos-

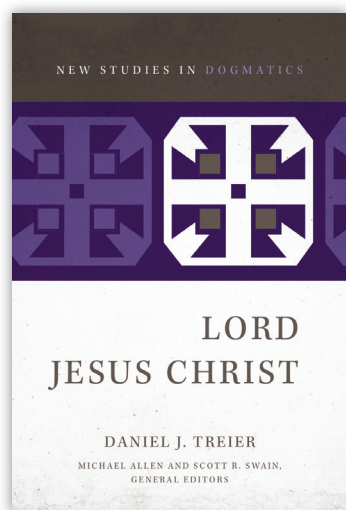
pels and Knut Backhaus on John the Baptist. Having one translator handle the entire collection lends consistency to the many voices throughout and helps the volume feel coherent. While the writing is clear, it does read like English translated from German, maintaining a German style of long, complex sentences and specialized vocabulary.

The book is divided into four major sections. First is a History of Historical-Critical Research on Jesus. This section puts together a timeline of historical Jesus work, including key theorists from Schweitzer to Käsemann, major milestones of the discipline throughout the chronology of academic and church history, and important aspects of the leading theories such as the various criteria, document hypotheses, literary works, kerygmatic narratives, and the stages of the three quests. It concludes with a chapter on the remembered Jesus and memory theory.

Second is The Historical Material, which covers literary evidence in and outside the Christian tradition as well as material culture and archaeological evidence. This casts a wider net for sources than has often been used in historical Jesus work. Third is The Life and Work of Jesus. This extensive section goes through the context in which Jesus lived, both religious and political. It offers a biography of his life and an analysis of his public ministry and his death. And fourth is Early Traces of the Effects and Reception of Jesus, examining the reception history of the teachings of Jesus, how confessions of faith in Jesus have changed over time, the many titles given to Jesus, early communities who followed Jesus, non-canonical texts about Jesus, representations of Jesus in art, and a particular focus on the ethics derived from Jesus’ most famous teaching, the Sermon on the Mount.

This book is an important contribution to the fields of New Testament, historical Jesus studies, and early church history. This volume should certainly be included on book lists for comprehensive exams for PhD students in New Testament. It would be a good starting place for graduate students beginning their work in New Testament, as it is an excellent overview of Jesus studies, Synoptic Gospels, and New Testament context. Each chapter reads somewhat like a Bible dictionary article, offering simple overviews of many complex topics. The table of contents and indices will help more casual students find the chapters that will be most useful to them. There are no footnotes and there is limited use of Greek (though the Greek that is included is not transliterated), making the book accessible to lay readers. The bibliographies at the end of each chapter will be helpful jumping off points for further research. The section most useful to pastors is likely to be the last one (E: VIII) about the Sermon on the Mount.

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Lord Jesus Christ. By Daniel J. Treier. *New Studies in Dogmatics*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain.

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023. ISBN: 978-0-3104-9177-4, 384 pages. Paper. \$41.99.

Daniel Treier, Knoedler Professor of Theology at Wheaton College and author of numerous books, offers, with this volume, the

installment on Christology in the growing *New Studies in Dogmatics* series. Consistent with the concerns of this series, Treier notes that his approach to Christology is (I) “evangelical and ecumenical” (35); (II) “biblical and historical,” by which he means, a “theological interpretation of Scripture” informed by “early high Christology” and “historical-Jesus research” (37); (III) “ontological and analogical understanding ... by focusing on the identity of Jesus Christ and incorporating dialectic in articulating that identity” (40); and (IV) “conceptual and contextual,” that is, his approach is attentive to patristic and scholastic writers as well as “the global South and other marginalized communities” (42).

The book is divided into ten chapters, with the basic structure of each consisting of a theological exegesis of a passage of Scripture followed by discussion of systematic-theological issues that arise from said exposition. Treier’s exposition of the person of Christ is highly informative, discussing the various issues surrounding Christology as well as offering a positive construction of the doctrine, and doing so in a clear and easy to follow manner.

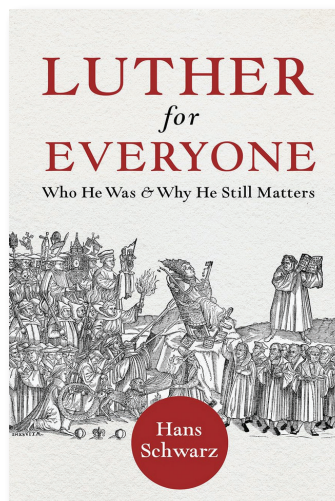
There are a number of additional strengths that characterize this work. To begin with, though writing from a classic and Reformed understanding of Christology, the depth and breadth of Treier’s treatment is shown in his engagement with modern theology (e.g., Barth, Robert Jenson), church fathers (e.g., Athanasius), Orthodox and Catholic authors, as well as New Testament scholarship. Additionally, the author discusses and defends such issues as eternal generation, Christ’s virginal conception, dyothelitism, Christ’s sinlessness, and inseparable operations, to name a few.

Readers familiar with Christology will wonder how he handles the doctrine of atonement, Spirit Christology, Kenoticism, and the nature of the Eucharist. Though penal substitution is central to understanding the atonement, he argues that other metaphors “should not be marginalized” (261) by this view. Given the inseparable operations of the Trinity, the Spirit’s role in Christ’s “active human obedience” (225), and the empowerment of God’s kingdom by the Spirit, he argues that the insights of “Spirit Christology ... should already be integral to a biblical

Christology” (224). Regarding kenotic accounts, Treier argues Christ as “a single agent” who performs “dual” (i.e., God and human), “principles of agency” (210) renders kenotic accounts superfluous while at the same time avoiding its theological pitfalls. Omitting an explicit discussion of consubstantiation, Treier argues that the Reformed view of a “real yet spiritual presence incorporates the Holy Spirit’s ministry more than impanation [and, by implication, consubstantiation]” (301).

The thoroughness of Treier’s exposition of Christology from an explicitly Reformed and conciliary perspective, in engagement with various modern concerns and distinct ecclesial voices, establishes this as the best to-date articulation of a classically Reformed understanding of the person of Christ and, as such, it ought to be consulted by any serious student of the doctrine in view.

*Thomas Haviland-Pabst
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Luther for Everyone: Who He Was and Why He Still Matters. By Hans Schwarz.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-5064-9830-0. xiii & 210 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

Hans Schwarz has written a fresh and accessible introduction to the legacy of Martin Luther that especially invites ordinary people into the story. Originally imagined as a text to intro-

duce Roman Catholics to Luther, this volume succeeds as a narrative not only for those beyond the Lutheran fold but also on topics for those very familiar with Luther’s life and thought.

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Six opening chapters lay the groundwork on Luther's core contributions to church and theology: confessional commitments, clarity about law and gospel, Christ alone and sacraments, grace alone, knowledge of God, theology of the cross, and the two kingdoms. These themes are discussed with the clarity of an expert teacher who knows how to communicate with general readers.

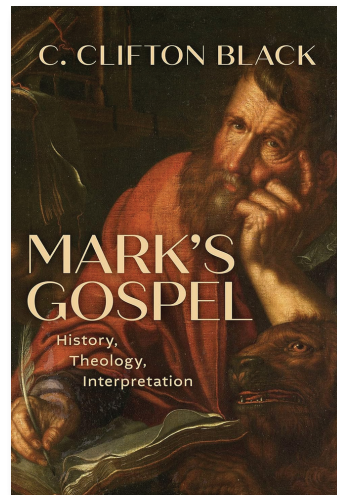
The remaining nine chapters are organized topically to address themes of enduring interest. Chapter Seven "Education Is for Everyone" emphasizes the commitment of the Lutheran Reformation to universal education through methods and materials for use in churches, schools, and homes. Chapter Eight "A Calling Is Not Just for Priests" lays out Luther's vocational commitment to the sharing of gifts by all the baptized in every life station for service of neighbors. Chapter Nine "Watching How People Speak" takes up Luther's aptitude for communicating and translating the faith into the vernacular language of the people.

The next four chapters take up themes aimed at correcting abuses in church practice. Chapter Ten "Against Predatory Capitalism" references largely forgotten texts by Luther against usury and incipient capitalism. Chapter Eleven "The Christian Faith Is Not Hostile to Science" locates Luther within circles that were open to exploring the heliocentric worldview of Copernicus. Chapter Twelve "Astrology Does Not Give Us a Glimpse of the Future" demonstrates Luther's opposition to the speculations of astrology that compromise the sovereignty of God. Chapter Thirteen "Against Patriarchalism" discusses Luther's views on marriage, sexuality, family, and parenthood that promoted more equitable relationships than prevailed in his age.

Luther's contributions to worship through hymn writing and his theology of music are highlighted in Chapter Fourteen "A Church Service Must Be Joyful." His use of the vernacular both for worship and in Bible translation are two of the achievements that distinguish Luther's legacy for the life of the church. Chapter Fifteen "Martin Luther: Heretic, Saint, or Reformer?" acknowledges charges of heresy made against Luther for the schism of the Reformation and his writings against the Jews, while defending the need of and ongoing achievements of his program for reform.

The book concludes: "Luther belongs not only to Lutherans, even if they do not always rightly call themselves after him. He belongs first of all to us Christians and also to all those who are still inspired by his understanding of life being lived in service to others" (208). This book could serve well as an introductory text on Luther and the Reformation for both ecumenical and Lutheran study groups. Each chapter ends with well-formulated discussion questions. A book by a master teacher of the Christian faith!

Craig L. Nesson
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***Mark's Gospel:
History, Theology,
Interpretation.***

By C. Clifton Black.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023.

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7918-9. xxiii &

534 pages. Cloth. \$59.99.

C. Clifton Black's latest book will be of immense use to ministers of various sorts during Year B in the lectionary. In addition to containing a brief commentary on the Gospel of Mark itself,

it collects and revises seventeen essays (some new, some previously published) from over the last forty years of his career. The chapters often bear a retrospective quality, examining what has changed or remained the same over the duration of the author's career, rendering it particularly useful for readers who want to get a sense of how the field has changed or developed over the past few decades—whether to keep up to date or to understand why the discussion is at its present place.

The essays contained within cover a range of topics, divided into three sections: the historical (six chapters cover, e.g., what can we know about the author of Mark's Gospel?); to the theological (includes nine chapters dealing with, e.g., the theology of crucifixion in Mark as distinct from that of Paul); to the homiletical (two chapters containing reflections on individual pericopae). All of this makes an appealing book for those actively engaged in ministry or straddling the line between ministry and the academic.

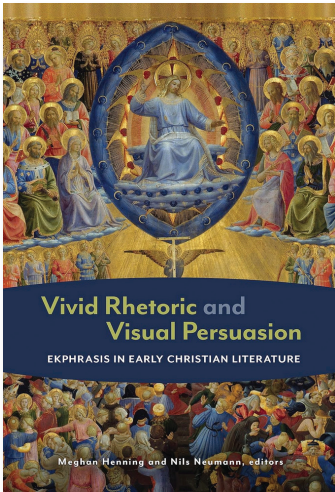
Throughout all of this, Black avoids any theorizing, speculating, or postulating that might distract from his careful analysis. This is a refreshing work of biblical scholarship that offers no pretensions of a "Grand Theory" to explain the entirety of one or another biblical text. There is no interest in chasing the latest trend. Rather, Black's discussions always arise from diligent study and methods that remain familiar and useful to both biblical scholars and working pastors. This is not to suggest that either Mark or the book under review isn't consistently interesting; Mark presents several enigmas that defy easy explanation (authorship, Jesus' identity, etc.). Rather, these are questions that theologians have wrestled with for centuries to no secure resolution. Never one to rush to a conclusion, each chapter is even-handed, often acknowledging that opposing sides of a given issue have considerable evidence in their favor. To the extent that the book has weaknesses, it would be Black's occasional foray into personality-oriented discussion of other New Testament scholars. While we should not forget that scholarship is ultimately produced by people with relationships and lives of their own, there were a few points where it felt like the discussion of such matters



could have been shorter.

The book's style is accessible to anyone with a post-secondary education in theology. This would be a valuable purchase for seminary libraries as well as those of individual pastors. Should readers need any further reason to purchase the book, Black indicates in his preface that all royalties will be donated to the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (xii).

Christopher B. Zeichmann
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Canada



Vivid Rhetoric and Visual Persuasion: Ekphrasis in early Christian Literature.

Edited by Meghan Henning and Nils Neumann.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-8357-5. Cloth.
400 pages. \$56.99.

Who knew? There's been developing, over the last few years, a sub-genre of biblical and classical stud-

ies that focuses on passages from ancient texts (including the Bible) that utilize "ekphrasis." Ekphrasis is "a rhetorical exercise that describes something vividly" (4) or as Quintilian, the first century CE Roman rhetorician, once described it, "a quality which makes us seem not so much to be talking about something as exhibiting it. Emotions will ensue just as if we were present at the event itself" (258).

This book collects fourteen essays investigating ancient texts that contain examples of ekphrasis from the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline and deutero-Pauline epistles, Revelation, and early Christian literature, including martyrologies. Each chapter is extensively documented and contains its own bibliography. Several New Testament passages are subjected to "ekphrastic analysis" including the Matthew 14 account of Jesus walking on water, the Matthew 25 account of the Last Judgment, Mary's and Elizabeth's encounter in Luke 1, and the raising of Lazarus in John 11. The analysis consists of pointing out how vivid language helps turn the listeners of scriptural stories (most are judged to be nonliterate), using ekphrasis, into emotionally engaged viewers of the scenes described.

I cannot say that such analysis, even when convincing, helped deepen my understanding or appreciation for these well-known biblical stories, except to suggest that their native literary skill at description might have helped the biblical authors connect with the larger cultural and linguistic milieu of Greco-Roman culture.

The most effective chapter, titled "Making a Spectacle," uses post-biblical accounts of early Christian martyrologies (Polycarp, Perpetua, and Felicitas) to demonstrate how the ekphrastic descriptiveness employed by authors served to draw in the hearers emotionally to become active witnesses to these bloody spectacles as if "seen secondhand." A final chapter suggests that ancient ekphrasis might be seen through the modern lens of cinematography as a way of creating suspense and emotional involvement on the part of the listener.

The authors do not take the next step from ekphrastic analysis as an exegetical method to homiletical encouragement for spicing up preachers' stories and visual aids. For enlightening examples of ancient rhetoric's relevance to the interpretation and preaching of scripture, see Jon Ericsson's book, *The Rhetoric of the Pulpit* (2016).

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Retired ELCA Pastor
San Obispo, California



2025 Ad Pricing and Specifications

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is now accepting advertisements in our quarterly journal. Please see full details in the ad rate sheet at the end of the Introduction (page 3 of this issue).

Publication Dates and Deadlines

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is published four times per year: January, April, July, and October. Ad deadlines for each issue are one month prior to publication (December 1, March 1, June 1, September 1). Late submissions may be published in the next issue. Issue-specific themes are available from the co-editors: [Craig Nesson](#) and [Kadi Billman](#).