



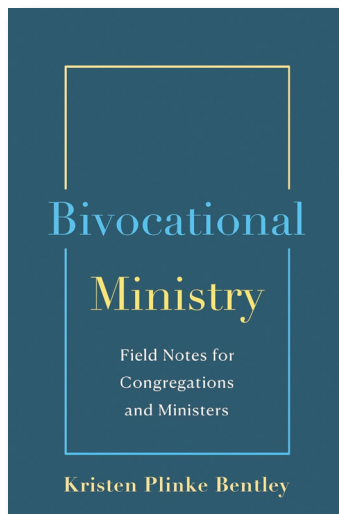
Book Reviews

July 2026

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Review a book!

***Currents in Theology and Mission* is seeking to expand its number of regular book reviewers. If you have interest, please send name, contact information, and areas of primary interest to currents@lstc.edu.**



Bivocational Ministry: Field Notes for Congregations and Ministers. By Kristen Plinke Bentley.

Chalice, 2024. ISBN: 978-0-8272-0341-9. x & 105 pages. Paper. \$17.99.

Where can congregational leaders turn for advice and support when the pastor needs a second job? Whether responding to membership decline, strate-

gizing for growth, or continuing a long-held practice, congregations that embrace bivocational ministry can benefit from the wisdom shared by the Rev. Dr. Kristen Plinke Bentley.

Concise and engaging, this book invites congregational leaders to consider bivocational ministry as “good for the church” and provides wisdom for the journey. In Chapter 1, Bentley begins with a vignette of a small congregation at a crossroads. Facing typical demographic and cultural changes, this rural congregation must overcome its bias against part-time ministry and “re-align [its] relationship between congregation and minister” (23). Wisdom for doing so comes from the author’s interviews with pastors and lay leaders of bivocational congregations.

Stories and reflections by congregations and bivocational pastors animate every chapter of the book. Chapter 2 listens to bivocational ministers discussing challenges such as scheduling, overload, being selective in ministry tasks, strengthening the laity, gaining valuable perspectives on ministry from outside employment. Chapter 3 offers wisdom for congregations by examining expectations for ministers, operating from a perspective of sufficiency, and monitoring congregational health. Chapter 4 offers wisdom for ministers on planning, rest, recognizing the spiritual gifts of others, lifelong learning, and seeking feedback.

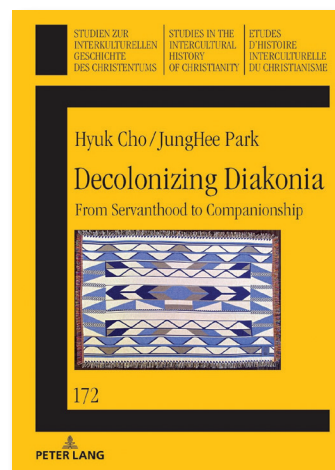
Chapter 5 directly addresses a common source of anxiety and motivation for bivocational ministry: finances. Here, she

discusses the emotional and missional aspects of money, encouraging congregations to be “clear—open, honest, and transparent—about finances” (80) as they provide for the pastor and to allow missional priorities to guide their spending. Bentley concludes the book with encouraging observations about how “God is at work in bivocational ministry” (87) and reminds her readers, “The church... functions better when we share the sense that we are all in this together” (91).

Bentley knows her subject well and communicates effectively and creatively. She is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Project Director of Bi-Vocational Ministry Research at Lexington Theological Seminary. In the latter capacity, she directed a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., allowing her to research the financial challenges of ministers of the Christian Church in Kentucky in 2015. She expanded this research beyond Kentucky in 2023. While ministry in the Disciples of Christ serves as a case study, her findings are relevant to many North American churches, particularly in white, rural contexts. However, readers must venture beyond this thin volume for discussions of race, gender, immigrant congregations, urban settings, and more specific bivocational challenges.

This practical book is a welcome addition to the literature on bivocational ministry. Congregation councils, personnel committees, consistories, sessions, and other congregational governance bodies would do well to heed its advice. Each chapter concludes with questions suitable for group discussion. Judicious footnotes and a select bibliography point to relevant literature. Three appendices provide handy materials: a worksheet on expectations of ministers, a ministerial compensation checklist, and a sample bivocational ministry agreement.

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Decolonizing Diakonia: From Servanthood to Companionship. By Hyuk Cho and JungHee Park.

Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang, 2025. ISBN: 978-3631937297. viii & 178 pages. Cloth. \$50.95.

D*ecolonizing Diakonia*, a posthumous work by JungHee Park (1964–2016), is lovingly and expertly com-

piled from “the fragments” (153) of her research notes and writings by her surviving spouse, Hyuk Cho, a scholar of intercultural theology and mission. Park’s experience in urban mission with oppressed laborers, the *minjung*, in Korea and as a Diaconal Minister in the United Church of Canada motivated and



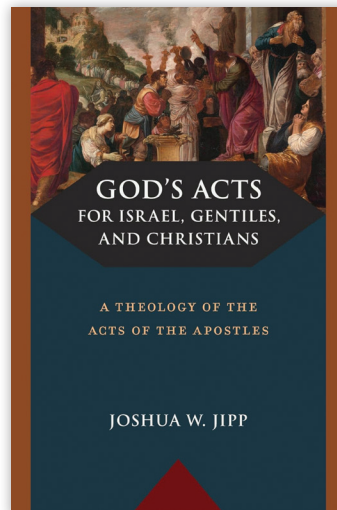
informed her effort to decolonize diakonia as a doctoral student at the Toronto School of Theology. The fruit of her theological labor is preserved in this valuable study, in which Park and Cho reimagine diakonia as companionship.

Each of four parts begins with personal reflections by Park, revealing insights central to the text. As an urban missionary she found she could not identify with the oppressed simply by choosing to live with and among laborers (9). During her discernment to enter the diaconate, a friend questioned why she would choose a role characterized by servanthood, compounding her already low social status as a female Korean immigrant in Canada (35). Later, reciting Philippians 2:5-8 in a dream, she awoke with the realization that her Christology of privilege assured a distance between her and those she sought to serve (85). Thus, Park experienced the ambiguous power dynamics of colonization and missional service firsthand. Together, the authors seek to “reshape the practice of diakonia in a way that contributes to the liberation of women and all marginalized people” (83).

Part I helpfully summarizes John N. Collins’s groundbreaking word study of the *diakon*-word group in the New Testament and locates this study within the emerging ecumenical understanding of diakonia. Part II offers feminist critiques of the servanthood model through Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza’s study of women’s diakonia in the New Testament, the Beguines movement in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries in western Europe, and the Women’s Missionary Societies in nineteenth and twentieth century Canada. The servanthood model proves inadequate to the theological depth of these diaconal practices, which reveal women navigating patriarchal and colonial structures of power and privilege and “attending to and participating in God’s mission” through the in-between space of diakonia. Part III establishes Katherine B. Hockin, a twentieth century missionary to China and influential Canadian missiologist, as an essential interlocutor and example in diaconal studies, shifting from servanthood to companionship. Part IV engages postcolonial and intercultural hermeneutics to show the fittingness of Hockin’s companionship model in the in-between spaces (interstices) in which mission finds meaning, hybridity emerges, and a “diakonia of listening” functions as a hermeneutical bridge for accompanying each other on the journey.

This book makes a compelling case for reimagining diakonia as companionship, exposing the harmful power dynamics and colonial assumptions embedded in the servanthood model and innocuous sounding but equally complicit alternatives, such as partnership and hospitality. Parts II and III are the most fully developed, providing in-depth theological descriptions of women participating in the *missio Dei* through diakonia. This important book will interest missiologists, reflective practitioners, and all who teach about diakonia or Christian servanthood.

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***God's Acts for
Israel, Gentiles, and
Christians: A Theology
of the Acts of the
Apostles.***

By Joshua W. Jipp.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-8378-0. xiv &
328 pages. Cloth. \$49.99.

Despite its title only mentioning Acts (twice!), this collection of essays puts Joshua W. Jipp’s thorough expertise of both Luke and

Acts on display. In chapter 10 (“The Beginnings of a Theology of Luke-Acts”), Jipp writes what could be a summary of the entire collection: “Given that the subject matter of Luke-Acts is the one God who has intervened within history through Jesus to fulfill the promises he made to Israel, and for the salvation of the world, the narrative makes a totalizing claim on every reader” (195). I would recommend reading chapter 10 first, since it could easily serve as the volume’s introduction. Even when read in order, however, each essay stands well on its own and offers new insights into the New Testament’s longest narratives.

In the first section, “God’s Acts for Israel,” Jipp, combats traditional interpretations that place Luke-Acts, and Paul in particular, at odds with ancient Judaism. Jipp explains that the Lukan Paul preaches a “re-evaluation (not rejection) of Israel’s primary identity markers” (4). Jipp explores multiple themes of abandonment and opposition within Davidic psalms cited by Luke that envision a royal figure who suffers at the hands of his contemporaries, prefiguring Jesus and his followers. Two additional essays portray Jesus and Paul as typological prophets who call for repentance and are rejected for their efforts. Jipp also traces references to Abraham in all four gospels that situate Luke’s narratives squarely within the Abrahamic story of God’s promise and favor.

Section two, “God’s Acts for Gentiles,” sees Israel’s history put to work for the salvation of the world. Two essays place Paul’s Areopagus speech in Acts 17 within the language and setting of Greco-Roman philosophy, especially Stoicism. Two further chapters round out this section: “Hospitable Barbarians,” a discussion of Luke’s ethnic reasoning within Paul’s encounter with the Maltese in Acts 28, and “Why Did Gentiles Convert to Christianity?” in which Jipp illustrates how Luke portrays the earliest Christians as sharing the Greco-Roman values of hospitality, philanthropy, and fellowship with the gentiles they encounter. In all four chapters, Jipp reads Luke as “converting” the values of Greco-Roman society, so to speak, for Christian purposes.

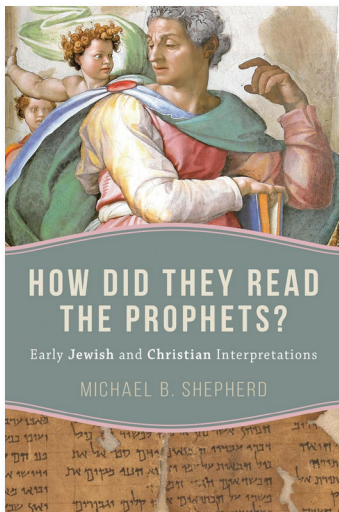
The third section, “God’s Acts for the Church,” applies



themes from Luke's Gospel and Acts to the church's modern responsibilities as the representatives of Christ: hospitality and philanthropy to migrants and other strangers, communion with those suffering from mental illness, and concern for economic parity. Though Jipp's essays stay largely within the context of the first century, he provides readings that offer clear parallels to modern social concerns.

Whether a reader is looking for a solid historical-critical interpretation of Luke's theological relationship to the Old Testament or guidance for applying the Gospel's parables to modern contexts, Jipp has something to offer here. As Jipp points out, Acts tells the story of and to first-century Christians who sought to "discern divine activity and respond accordingly" (192). Modern Christians who seek to do the same can find multiple helpful interpretive tools in Jipp's book.

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How Did They Read the Prophets? Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations. By Michael B. Shepherd.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-8541-8. xiii & 162 pages. Paper. \$24.99.

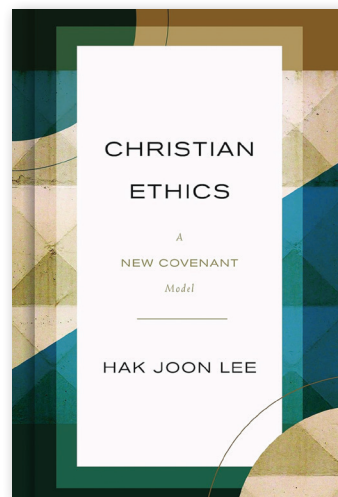
In *How Did They Read the Prophets*, Michael B. Shepherd demonstrates how ancient authors and scribes reinterpreted earlier prophetic texts to fit their own contexts through the tradition of "rewritten scripture." Taking example passages from the Old Testament's latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets), Shepherd traces how each passage is reused in later Jewish and Christian writings. He points out places where manuscripts differ or editors intentionally altered them to fit the changing needs of their audiences in order to illustrate, as he explains, that "From its very inception the Bible has been an interpreted text" (4).

The introduction offers a quick summary of text-critical issues in biblical scholarship, identifying the primary sources for what became the biblical canon. The book's final chapter, "Prophets as Exegetes," discusses the authoritative transition in the scriptural tradition from prophets to scribes, and how or where those two labels overlap. The chapters in between address Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel individually, and then the twelve Minor Prophets as a unit. Each chapter discusses the general textual composition of each prophet before homing in on specific passages and their use/reuse in later biblical books or writings.

Shepherd spends relatively little time on each prophet's historical context, preferring instead to draw out themes that he sees continued in each passage's later uses. Shepherd rarely mentions any early Christian literature beyond the New Testament, but he brings Jewish writings from much later periods into the conversation, such as the Targums (2nd-6th centuries) and Rashi (11th century), without discussion of their interpretive contexts.

How Did They Read the Prophets is helpful for locating the prophetic texts utilized in the New Testament in concert with some other ancient voices. Shepherd's discussion of the texts is generally readable, though he assumes his reader will have some knowledge of ancient languages (primarily Hebrew), history, and rabbinic Jewish literature. It is important to note that when Shepherd asks how "they" read the prophets, the "they" ultimately refers to early Christianity; he intentionally selects passages from the latter prophets that appear in the New Testament. Using James Kugel's exegetical methods for the Old Testament, which assume some form of univocality among biblical books, Shepherd favors texts that promote gentile inclusion, universal salvation, unrealized eschatology, and new covenant theology. This comes through especially in his use of Revelation, which he sees as a continuation of Old Testament prophecy. In this book, Shepherd offers a nice exploration of the Bible's fascinatingly intricate intertextuality, calling attention to how often ancient prophetic works were read and reused to fit the needs of new contexts and communities. Modern preachers can easily find themselves standing within that long tradition and feel encouraged to bring the words of those ancient prophets to their own congregations in fresh, new ways.

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Christian Ethics: A New Covenant Model. By Hak Joon Lee.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7687-4. xiii & 558 pages. Cloth. \$47.99.

In this impressive tome, Hak Joon Lee offers a fresh vision of Christian ethics rooted in the covenantal themes found throughout Scripture, pointing toward the world's fulfillment in God's shalom. Lee clearly defines ethics as the attempt to "organize human life toward goodness, happiness, and thriving, while avoiding or mitigating confusion and chaos" (3). He uses the idea of covenant as the guide to Christian ethics: "...covenant is the art or method of God's organizing a community towards sha-



lom” (7). In the first two chapters he comprehensively explores references to covenant in scripture—emphasizing its ability to be used as a guide for ethics.

In chapter three, Lee explains three core “dialectics” of understanding covenantal ethics and its application. He frames this discussion through the overarching theme of covenant, which is Liberation-Restoration, in which God liberates people from chaos and evil and restores them to new life and just community (53). Justice, love, and power are three intertwined components of Liberation-Restoration (54-56). The first dialectic is Unilateral-Bilateral, the idea that, “every biblical covenant is *unilateral* in God’s unmerited act of redemption and God’s free offer of enduring fellowship but then takes on a *bilateral* form and character once established” (57). Without this key concept Lee’s ethics becomes a lengthy works-righteousness handbook. He makes it clear, however, that covenant happens first because of God’s unilateral action. The second is Communal-Communicative. *Communal* refers to the mutual connection between God and humanity reflecting the “inner Trinitarian life” (63). *Communicative* is the dialogue between the covenantal participants and the promised actions and behaviors (67). Finally, is Memory-Hope: “The memory-hope pattern literally describes how covenant is tied with the past experiences of God’s liberation (*memory*) and the future completion of restoration (*hope*)” (70).

With this foundation, Lee next constructs the framework before its application in part two. Lee covers the distinctive nature of covenant ethics by looking at everything from eschatology (79-80) to eucharistic significance (86-88) and nonviolent action (95-97). Lee is comprehensive in his engagement with theologies, different perspectives (expressly so in chapter six), and applying covenant ethics to real life. In chapter five, he highlights its strengths, while chapter seven uses the new lens to look at several biblical norms and values. Chapter nine addresses scripture and its authority, followed by chapter ten on ethical reasoning. Sometimes, there is almost *too much* information. In many ways this is seminary-in-a-book, as Lee engages not only with ethics, but worship, biblical studies, systematic theology, pastoral theology, and more.

In part two of the book, Lee applies his model to contemporary social issues and public engagement (chapter 12). The next chapters range from politics (chapter 13) and economics (chapter 14) to sex and marriage (chapter 18) and medical ethics (chapter 19). Each chapter follows a format of first addressing the issue and exploring contemporary views, before offering what the new covenant model has to say. Despite the controversial topics, Lee is fair, balanced, and thorough.

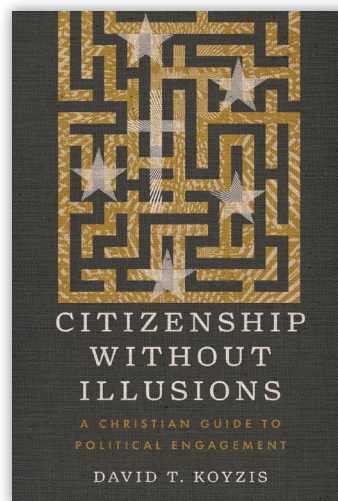
Lee concludes the work with an exceptionally clear conclusion. One could read this alone and understand well what the book discussed! He states, “God challenges us to reciprocate God’s love and justice, using power in every realm of our life, based on and already experienced in God’s love and justice, expressed in the power of the incarnation, earthly ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. New covenant is a centrifugal hub from

which God’s moral vision shines out to every domain of society and creation” (502).

While there are discussion questions (503-513), this book may be too specialized for congregational study. Seminary and divinity students would benefit from its study or an ethics class could use it as a text. This approach to new covenant ethics is needed for our times as a plausible third way in contrast to conservative evangelicalism and secular liberalism. New covenant ethics affirms that the Christian’s life is in response to what God has done, not a list to accomplish, while being robust to face the uncertainty which lies ahead.

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Citizenship Without Illusions: A Christian Guide to Political Engagement. By David T. Koyzis.

Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2024, ISBN:978-1-5140-0862-1. 168 pages. Paper. \$18.99.

This international scholar from Canada has written a guidebook for people of faith who are seeking to be politically active without sur-

rendering their beliefs to any given political cult. Koyzis frames the volume by acknowledging that the feeling of belonging is important to everyone. People want to be part of something larger than themselves. This translates into a sense of comradery and loyalty to a group of like-minded people who profess the greatest good for humanity as their primary objective (1-2).

Koyzis traces the history of citizenship in several chapters. The modern Western definition of “one person, one vote” is fairly new. As far back as the Hebrew Bible, most residents of a nation were subjects to a monarch, landowner, or a powerful group. Loyalty is the shared core value of any given group that accompanies citizenship. What makes modern times unique is the right to vote. This is an action that modern people of faith should never take lightly (63).

The meanings of “conservative” and “progressive” are constantly shifting. Changed views on slavery and women’s rights are examples. Those on every side of these issues believed they were distinctively Christian (104) The author warns that any political ideology can become an idol that does not easily share space with other gods or beliefs (125).

Belief systems as “kingdoms” do collide (56). The preference, Koyzis suggests, is to seek reform in given political structure over



violent revolution. Second, we need to discern whether obeying or disobeying a given policy benefits the community. Third, we should consider the appropriate means of civil disobedience, such as the example of Martin Luther King Jr. Finally, we need to be prepared to accept the consequences for disobedience to unjust law, such as Dietrich Bohoeffter and other Confessing Church leaders did in Germany in the Third Reich.

Being a citizen of both the kingdom of God and a nation need not be mutually exclusive. The basic command to love one's neighbor goes a long way in being politically active. All religious and ideological groups seek safe, clean communities. Compromise is a vital path toward progress.

One example refers to an abandoned factory which is a community eyesore. One group thinks the building should be torn down and replaced with an ecologically sound park. Another equally sincere group thinks that the building should be refurbished for future business development. The compromise was for the town to buy the building and surrounding property to create a public park, while renovating the building for possible future business development. This is a win-win solution (97).

Koyzis appeals to John Calvin's view that Scripture acts as spectacles that help clarify the vision citizens might use before pursuing any path of political movement (12). There are discussion questions at the end of the book for use by church groups.

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Defeating the Evil-God Challenge: In Defense of God's Goodness. By Jack Symes.

New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-3504-1928-5. xvi & 206 pages. Cloth. \$120.00.

Symes is Teacher and Researcher at Durham University, UK and producer of *The Panpsychist Philosophy* Podcast. In this book, he seeks to argue against the evil-god challenge to theism. As he

notes in the introduction, he is seeking to refute the claim by such scholars as Stephen Law that “in order for the orthodox theist's belief in good god to be considered reasonable, one must offer a sufficiently powerful reason for rejecting the symmetry thesis” (1). The symmetry thesis posits that it is as equally reasonable to posit that God is evil as it is to argue that God is good. Specifically, Symes is attempting to address evil-God arguments that would seek to ground or establish God's moral character as

evil. Hence, throughout this book he offers counterarguments which attempt to establish the superior reasonableness of God as good as opposed to evil.

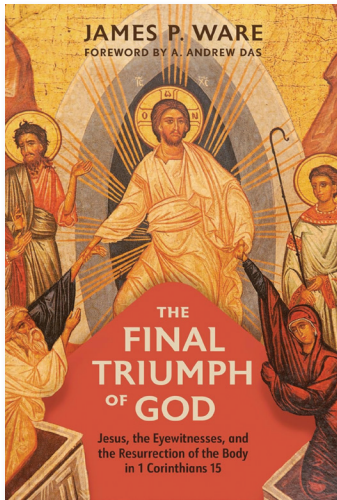
Symes divides the book into four chapters. With the first chapter, he orients the reader to the philosophical discussion surrounding the evil-God challenge, exploring, for example, the greater reasonableness of attempting to ground God's moral character rather than merely after the fact assessing the compatibility of God's character in light of countervailing evidence.

In the second chapter, he seeks to ground God's goodness in perfect being theology, i.e., God as the greatest being conceivable. Drawing from morality and great-making properties to name a few, he argues that because morality objectively exists, God is inclined toward moral goodness, and such goodness is a great-making property whereas evil does not make a being great. Thus, “the worst conceivable being” (44) required of evil-God proponents does not reasonably account for the goodness of existence and morality.

The third chapter seeks to ground God's goodness in creation. Important for his discussion here is the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic goodness. Extrinsic goods are only good as a means toward an end whereas intrinsic goods are good in and of themselves. Symes argues that a good God better accounts for both extrinsic and intrinsic goods since such things as consciousness, free will, life, and beauty are intrinsically good while such goods could not be explained by a God void of goodness. The fourth chapter turns to revelation. Here, the author argues that religious scriptures, experience and miracles all point to God's goodness. Negative religion experiences and miracles, on the other hand, are consistently not attributed to God but to demons.

Symes succeeds at defending theism against the evil-God challenge with this book by providing a thorough, wide-ranging defense of grounding God's character in the good. He does this while also offering a penetrating examination of evil-God challenges that avoids strawmen. Perhaps what is most useful about this volume is that it causes the reader to reflect upon God's goodness. This is especially vital in a world incessantly preoccupied with suffering and evil. Though there is evil in the world and even in our own hearts, there is also beauty, life, morality, and truth. There is, in a word, God.

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The Final Triumph of God. Jesus, the Eyewitnesses, and the Resurrection of the Body in 1 Corinthians 15. By James P. Ware.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7947-9. iii &
458 pages. Cloth. \$59.99.

In this phrase-by-phrase translation and commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, James Ware pays admirable attention to the Greek text,

with creative exegetical and theological insight accompanied by clearly supported argumentation. This book is an important contribution to the scholarship of 1 Corinthians 15, yet it remains accessible to the interested non-expert.

There are four major pillars that Ware constructs as he leads the reader through 1 Corinthians 15. First, contrary to many recent studies which find 1 Corinthians to be a loosely compiled set of topics with chapter 15 awkwardly added at the end, Ware demonstrates that 1 Corinthians 15 is the carefully integrated culmination of the entire letter. The “wisdom” that Paul confronts in 1 Corinthians 1–4 is not fascination with eloquent rhetoric (nearly a scholarly consensus in recent years) but false doctrine which denied bodily resurrection. Thus, chapter 15 emerges as the unifying concern of the letter.

Second, Ware argues that at the foundation of Paul’s presentation in chapter 15 is the opening summary of eyewitness accounts of the risen Christ. Here, Paul identifies many people to whom the Corinthians still have access. Ware concludes that Paul’s claims are thus on solid historical ground.

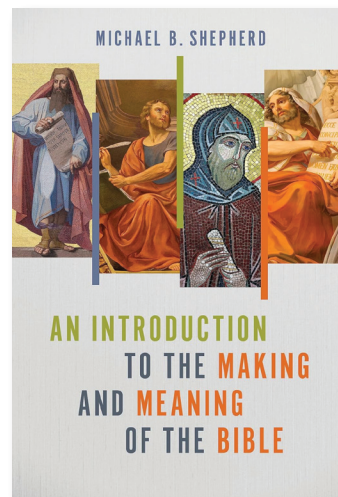
Third, Ware claims that the Christology Paul expresses is thoroughly incarnational and Trinitarian.

Finally, Ware insists that a careful reading of 1 Corinthians 15 shows beyond any reasonable doubt that Paul understands the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of his people as not only a bodily but a flesh-and-bone reality. This is in opposition to the suggestions of several scholars in recent years that Paul, looking for a compromise with some Corinthian teachers, affirms not a resurrection of flesh but a body composed of some otherworldly substance (Marcus Borg, Dale Martin, Troels Engberg-Pedersen *et al.*). The heart of this book is Ware’s argument that 1 Corinthians 15 teaches the resurrection of “the flesh.” In recent centuries this ancient understanding of resurrection has been abandoned in large swaths of ecclesiastical life and of biblical scholarship. Ware presents an insightful insistence that much of what passes as “hope beyond death” today would be utterly rejected by Paul.

Given this centering claim, more clarity is needed from Ware about the meaning of “soul.” Ware spends considerable time discussing the “body of the Spirit / spiritual body.” However, though he does gloss over Paul’s “body of the soul / soulish body” as “a perishable, mortal life” (347), he does not support this with an equally thorough discussion of “soul.” Cultural assumptions (ancient and modern) about an “immortal soul” have the potential to blunt all that Ware says about the resurrection of the body. In an otherwise detailed accounting of 1 Corinthians 15, this is a topic that needs further explanation.

This book is a fresh, vigorously confident, and richly argued interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15. It will be at the center of scholarly discussions for years to come. It is also indispensable reading for pastors and teachers who are interested in Paul’s theology and the meaning of resurrection within the New Testament and within Paul’s letters in particular.

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An Introduction to the Making and Meaning of the Bible by Michael B. Shepherd.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.
ISBN 978-0-8028-8393-3. xiv &
209 pages. Paper. \$26.99.

The author is a professor of biblical studies at Cedarville University and has published several books and articles in the field of Old Testament studies for undergraduates and seminarians.

After a List of Tables (10) and Abbreviations, the Introduction offers an overview of biblical composition designed to show how the Bible is built to interpret itself at every level, from individual verses to whole canonical divisions (Deut 34:5–12; Josh 1:1–9; Mal 4:4–6; Pss 1–2). It also includes a treatment of the various literary forms and genres (narrative, poetry, law, letter) that comprise the biblical text.

Chapter One, “The Making of the Bible,” focuses on the “interpretive clues” embedded in the text—such as authorial (Ruth 4:7) and scribal comments (Haggai 2:5), repetitive stories with subtle variations, and intertextual citations (Gen 24; 41)—that guide the reader’s understanding of how the different books are woven together. It addresses self-interpretation at both micro-levels (clauses and sentences) and macro-levels (compositional references to source material, Num 21:14–15; Josh 10:13; 1 Kgs 11:41).

Chapter Two, “Text, Transmission, and Translation,” serving as a primer on textual criticism, discusses various textual witnesses



(Masoretic Text, Dead Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls) to raise awareness of the “textual plurality” in antiquity. It covers “variant literary editions” (Greek and the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah) and concludes by tracing the history of Bible translation, explaining how modern English versions (NKJV, ESV, NRSV, NIV) are influenced by both differing translation philosophies (formal, dynamic) and different source texts.

Chapter Three, “The Meaning of the Bible in the Compositional Strategy of the Hebrew Bible,” applies the compositional principles from Chapter 1 to the Old Testament. It argues that the Hebrew Bible uses a macrostructural strategy—such as the strategic placement of “poetic seams” and legal material—to communicate a unified theological message directing the reader to a messianic expectation and the anticipation of a new covenant (Gen 3:14; 49:1; Exod 15:18; Num 24:14; Deut 31:29). The chapter draws insights from John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (2009), a canonical-theological approach.

Chapter Four, “The Meaning of the Bible in the Compositional Strategy of the New Testament,” demonstrates how the New Testament mirrors the compositional strategies of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44-47). It focuses on how the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation draw from Old Testament content, imagery, and style to show the mirroring and fulfillment of earlier messianic patterns.

Chapter Five, “The Textual World of the Bible,” looks at the Bible holistically through its extensive system of intertextuality. Shepherd argues that readers should not merely “apply” the Bible to their lives but should enter the “textual world” of the Bible, allowing its theological representation of reality—specifically regarding the Kingdom of God and the covenants—to define their own worldview. Noteworthy insights here draw from Hans Frei and Erich Auerbach. The book includes a Glossary of Terms, Selected Bibliography, Index of Subjects, and an Index of Scripture.

This work is more than an academic textbook. By showing how the Bible directs its own interpretation, Shepherd encourages his readers to listen to the Word of God on its own terms, rather

than to fit their own ends. “It is the reader’s responsibility to adopt the biblical story as their own and to subordinate everything else to it” (149).

Although Shepherd’s focus is on the text in its final form, employing textual criticism to establish it, I wanted to know more regarding his criticisms of the Deuteronomistic hypothesis, the Tetrateuch, and Hexateuch (94–95). What about the priestly material of the Pentateuch? Shepherd’s preference for the Mosaic authorship of much of the Pentateuch prompts my concern (79). Although Isaiah 1–66 shares many common themes, perhaps reflecting a school of Isaiah (8th–6th centuries, BCE), I have problems viewing it as a unified work by a single author (which he appears to suggest, pp. 104–105). In the New Testament section, he writes about “Peter’s discussion of eschatology on 2 Peter 3:11” (152). In short, I think Shepherd would have broadened his audience beyond conservative Evangelicals if he had discussed diachronic layers, editorial processes, and sociopolitical contexts.

Shepherd classes the anonymous Letter to the Hebrews with the General Epistles (James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude, p. 142), although almost every canonical list of the fourth and fifth centuries classes it with the Letters of Paul (14 total). These canonical lists support our canonical arrangement of the Pauline letters according to length from largest to smallest (Romans to Philemon) with Hebrews at the end (see also the Vulgate). Most canonical lists support our canonical arrangement of James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John.

In the end, this work is a biblically informed compositional analysis that connects both the first and second testaments in a meaningful canonical relationship with attention to poetic seams concerned with Israel’s failings and messianic expectation. It is a carefully written work from an accomplished Evangelical scholar that certainly invites thoughtful consideration.

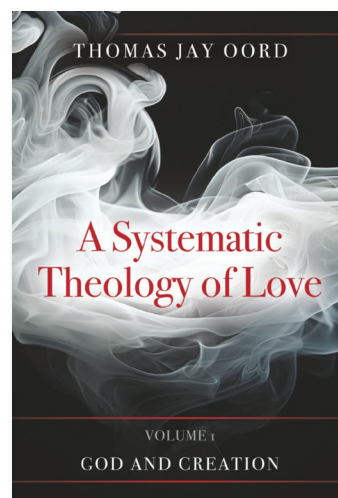
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A Systematic Theology of Love: God and Creation, Vol. 1.

Collector’s Edition. By Thomas Jay Oord.

Grasmere, Idaho: SacraSage Press, 2026. ISBN: 978-1-9681-3650-5. x & 446 pages. Cloth. \$34.99.

This volume of systematic theology is the first of its kind with love as its primary guide (Chapter 1). Thomas Jay Oord’s objective

in this and the forthcoming volumes is to have the definitive explanation of Open and Relational Theology (ORT)—a theol-



ogy which sees the future as open (not predetermined by God) and God as deeply relational. Oord is accessible and writes without unnecessary theological jargon, though this volume is certainly more academic than his other works. A handy “Big Ideas” section is placed at the start of each chapter.

The book is divided into three sections. The first defines the project, including his definition of love (24) and argues for reasons to believe in God (Chapter 2). The second section includes eight chapters on who the Spirit is, a term Oord uses, sometimes confusingly, to describe God. The strength of this section is in chapters 6 and 8. In chapter 6, Oord declares God is *not* omnipotent as traditionally understood in terms of power (139-140) and spends the chapter picking apart the argument that God has absolute control over everything. In chapter 7, he introduces “amipotence” (coming from love and power, 163) which describes God’s power as “uncontrolling love.”

Chapter 8 challenges the traditionally held belief that God is impassible. Core to ORT is that God *is* relational and can be affected by creation. Oord is careful to distinguish between God’s unchanging essence (love) and changeable divine experience (205-206). The remainder of the section covers other “omni’s” (Chapter 9) and the role of mystery (Chapter 10). Section three moves from God to creation and providence. Here, Oord excels at debating against *creatio ex nihilo* (Chapter 11) and for God’s ongoing connectedness to creation, including how God co-creates with humans and non-humans (Chapter 12). Finally, the crown jewel for ORT deals with the problem of evil (Chapter 14). Chapter 15 discusses the “problem of good,” miracles, and God’s will.

Oord set out to write a systematic theology guided by love and ORT and succeeds. This book has deep theological reflection for academics, while retaining accessibility for clergy and interested laity. It is a worthwhile read for those seeking to encounter new ways of thinking about God. Oord’s engagement with *creatio ex nihilo* was particularly eye-opening for me as another alternative. While there are occasional errors in the footnotes—for example, the misspelling of names (347, n. 84) and publication date errors (107, n. 59)—they do not detract from the overall quality of the work. Oord has written a valuable book for considering God in new ways. I look forward to the next two volumes.

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