

Reviews of Books

Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques, Daniel Strange and David Gibson, eds. Leicester: Apollos, 2008. 416 pages, £19.99, ISBN: 978-1844742455

Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences, Sung Wook Chung, ed. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006. 282 pages, £14.99, ISBN: 978-1842273548

Karl Barth continues to dominate much of the contemporary theological landscape. This is seen not only in the vast and rapidly expanding secondary literature on aspects of his thought, but also in his influence on such significant and diverse theologians as Eberhard Jüngel, Robert Jenson, Colin Gunton, and John Webster. As a widely respected, relatively conservative, theologically sophisticated, and exegetically rich voice in academic theology, he is also increasingly influential on evangelical theology and theologians. However, summarising and assessing Barth is extremely difficult. His output is vast and complex, and his non-linear, dialectical method of argumentation means that, in the words of noted Barth interpreter John Webster, 'No stage of the argument is definitive ... Barth's views on any given topic cannot be comprehended in a single statement (even if the statement be one of his own)' ('Introducing Barth', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 9). These two collections of essays rise to that challenge with varying degrees of success.

Engaging with Barth (hereafter, *EB*) aims 'to model courteous and critical engagement with Barth' (19) in areas where the editors regard him as deficient with respect to Scripture, historical theology, and dogmatics. Gibson and Strange have gathered an impressive line-up of theologians, a number of whom have specialist research interests in the dogmatic loci on which they are writing. Andrew McGowan brings his expertise in historical, biblical and systematic accounts of

covenant theology to bear in a careful, nuanced reading of Barth's covenant theology. Mark Thompson gives a thorough reading of Barth's doctrine of Scripture. Thompson is particularly good at appreciating strengths in Barth's positions—such as his own desire to live under the authority of Scripture—while offering firm rejections of his errors, in particular his account of the relationship of the Word of God to the text of Scripture and his account of the humanity of Scripture. In this, Thompson models his own conclusion that evangelicals should read Barth extensively, and then honour Barth's ministry to us by listening carefully to him and being stimulated 'to present a more robust evangelical doctrine of Scripture' (197). Mike Ovey analyses Barth's doctrine of the Trinity before concluding that we must value Barth's contribution in making the doctrine of the Trinity foundational to theology, but argues that this is undermined 'because of his commitment to the notion of a single divine subject, such that the Persons, or modes of being, are repetitions' (230), which in patristic terms is a species of modalism. Garry Williams considers Barth's account of the atonement. Williams observes that Barth regarded himself as a Reformed theologian, and so, 'in bringing to him questions generated from within historic Reformed theology, we are not doing something alien to his own intentions' (234). This essay provides something of a model for how to do this, evidencing a deep knowledge of Reformed theology and offering a lucid exposition of Barth's views, before giving a rigorous critique. Williams challenges Barth's downplaying of history in his ahistorical treatment of Christ's humiliation and exaltation, his Christology more generally, and his relocation of the doctrine of sin from creation to within the doctrine of reconciliation, which runs the risk of undermining the progressive nature of revelation. He also disputes Barth's redefinition of satisfaction as God's love being satisfied through the destruction of sinful man by the cross, rather than divine hostility to sin being satisfied by retributive punishment.

In addition to these essays, Henri Blocher expounds Barth's Christocentric method, cautiously offering praise and critique; Sebastian Rehnmann contests Barth's unwillingness to submit theological formulations to logical laws; Ryan Glomsrud examines Barth's historical theology in the early *Göttingen Dogmatics*; David Gibson explores some key moments in Barth's use of Romans 9-11 in

formulating his doctrine of election before showing that Barth's christocentric hermeneutic ultimately fails to do justice to the text; Paul Helm questions Barth's claim that his doctrine of God expounds the visibility of God, arguing that he presents us with a hidden God; Oliver Crisp compares Barth's doctrine of reprobation to that of Jonathan Edwards, largely in conversation with Stephen Holmes; Donald Macleod considers whether Barth can truly be styled an ecclesial theologian; and Michael Horton evaluates Barth's legacy for evangelicals.

All of the contributors share a conservative Reformed perspective, which gives the volume a coherence of engagement, significantly strengthening its value, particularly for those who share those theological commitments. This is not to say that there is universal agreement on every point; for example, Andrew McGowan agrees with Barth's rejection of a covenant of redemption, whereas Garry Williams finds this problematic (131, 261); nevertheless, all of the authors offer perspectives that fall comfortably within historic Reformed Orthodoxy. The standard of essays is consistently high, offering dense but rewarding engagements with Barth's theology. They vary somewhat in tone, and in willingness to be positive about Barth's contributions, with some authors finding much to praise, and others apparently finding relatively little. The best essays are, unsurprisingly, those that spend most time and care in expounding Barth before moving to criticism.

Like *EB*, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (hereafter, *KBET*) also contains essays by evangelical experts on particular doctrines: Kevin Vanhoozer considers Barth's view of Scripture, seeking to correct some of his formulations via speech-act theory, while acknowledging that Barth's vast use and interpretation of Scripture in his dogmatics should not be disregarded. Alister McGrath expounds Barth's doctrine of justification; Timothy George his ecclesiology and sacramentology; Veli Matti Kärkäinen writes on Barth and the theology of religions; and John Franke on Barth and the postmodern turn. There are two essays by authors who also contributed to *EB*: Blocher on Barth's anthropology, and Crisp on his account of creation. In addition, there are essays by Gabriel Fackre on revelation; Kurt Anders Richardson on the relationship between Barth's Christology and his theological method; Frank Macchia offers a Pentecostal

appraisal of Barth's pneumatology; John Bolt explores his eschatology; and Sung Wook Chung summarizes Barth's innovative account of God and election.

In contrast to *EB*, the contributors to *KBET* represent a wide range of evangelical voices, including conservative Reformed, Pentecostal, narrative theology and postmodern perspectives. This is intentional on the part of the editor. The advantage is that one receives a variety of perspectives, and for this reason the volume may be of interest to a broader range of evangelicals. The disadvantage is that the volume lacks cohesion, and as a whole is more useful for the insight it offers on the diversity of contemporary evangelical theology and the variety of its appropriations of Barth, than for providing a coherent response to Barth's theology. *KBET* is also more diverse than *EB* in the rigour and tone of the articles. For example, as with his contribution to *EB*, Blocher's essay is a dense, careful exposition and evaluation that interacts with a wide range of scholarly literature in several languages. In contrast, Sun Wook Chung's essay on Barth on God and Election is wide ranging, but at times somewhat shrill and polemical, lacking expository detail and analytical depth. The publication date of *KBET* also means that, unlike Helm in *EB*, he was unable to take advantage of the flurry of more recent articles that interact with Bruce McCormack's influential but controversial account of how God's being relates to his election of Jesus Christ.

Overall, *KBET* gives an interesting flavour of the range of recent evangelical responses to and appropriations of Barth, and contains some articles of real interest and merit. However, for Reformed pastors and students seeking an appraisal of Barth that is neither infatuated nor infuriated, *EB* is a more consistently rigorous and Reformed collection. Of course, for anyone genuinely interested in engaging Barth, secondary literature provides some help, but there is no substitute for careful reading of the primary texts themselves.

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Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament, Thomas R. Schreiner. Nottingham, Apollos, 2009. 131 pages, £9.99, ISBN: 978-1-84474-369-8

This is a readable and concise consideration of the doctrine of perseverance within the New Testament, based on lectures given by Thomas Schreiner at the *Oak Hill Annual School of Theology* in 2008.

Schreiner begins by considering two pastoral situations from his personal experience, in which those who have professed faith in Christ have later seemed to disown this faith. This raises the question of how one should speak in a biblical way about perseverance to those who profess faith. This pastoral approach to the topic is evident throughout the book, which is aimed primarily at thoughtful pastors rather than academic theologians, though his approach is also rigorous throughout. Schreiner notes that this book covers much the same ground as his previous longer book, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (IVP, 2001) with Ardel B. Caneday, but aims at a wider audience.

The pastoral questions raised at the beginning of the book are primarily addressed through a consideration of those texts of the New Testament which warn readers against falling away. Schreiner's thesis is that these warnings are addressed to true believers and do warn of eternal damnation for those who do not persevere to the end. However, Schreiner contends, these warnings are always effective and no true believer to whom they are addressed does fall away. Moreover, these warnings are an important means by which believers do indeed persevere.

In chapter 1, Schreiner briefly considers texts from Acts and the epistles to argue that both new Christians and experienced believers in the New Testament are exhorted to persevere in order to receive eternal life. The argument here is straightforward and convincing, and has important pastoral implications. This chapter thus argues against telling a confessing believer that they will be saved regardless of what they do, but rather encouraging them to persevere trusting in Christ.

Much of the central substance of the book comes in chapter 2 as Schreiner examines how we should understand the warning texts of

the New Testament. He begins by describing three views which he is going to refute: the Arminian view, that the warnings are to true believers, that they are about final salvation and that true believers can fall away; a view that he associates with the Grace Evangelical Society, that the warnings are to true believers but that they are about loss of heavenly rewards; and finally the view that the warnings are about final salvation but that they are addressed to those who are “almost” Christians but not authentically saved’ (26).

Schreiner goes on to look at the evidence in a sample of the Gospels and letters, finally turning to the most contentious passages in Hebrews. This section is a little more technical than much of the rest of the book, with references to the Greek text at various points. Throughout Schreiner has two arguments. Firstly, that the warnings are addressed to believers, both from the context of who is being addressed, and from the language of the warning texts. Secondly, that justice can not be done to the language of the warnings if they are just warnings of a loss of rewards. Schreiner is thoroughly convincing on the second point, and on the first point, I believe, he at least establishes that the warnings are to the believing community. The strongest arguments Schreiner makes, that the warnings address true believers in particular rather than just the believing community, are where he notes the epistle writers suggesting their faith is comparable with that of those to whom they write, and where the recipients are said to have the Holy Spirit.

In relation to the book of Hebrews, Schreiner states, ‘The writer does not admonish the readers repeatedly as if he had several different ends in view,’ (42) and hence he argues for understanding the warnings of the letter as a whole. It would have been helpful to see more evidence in favour of this approach. Indeed Schreiner argues that all the New Testament warning passages of the type in question should be understood the same way, but I think that this approach requires further justification.

The third and fourth chapters refute two possible misunderstandings of Schreiner’s view that have been suggested in response to his previous book: perfectionism and works-righteousness. He argues convincingly that his view does not imply that perfection is available for the believer in this life, through considering a range of texts from the Lord’s Prayer to the exhortations

of the epistles. Similarly convincing is his argument that his view does not imply a form of works-righteousness, 'The call to persevere ... is a call to faith, not a call to summon up the energy to make it to the end by our own strength' (75).

The final chapter deals with a number of outstanding issues. He begins by arguing with clarity but gentleness that while 'the Arminian reading of the warning is not farfetched' (89) it should be rejected given the assurance passages in the New Testament, in line with a Reformed theological understanding. Schreiner briefly interacts with a Federal Vision approach to the warnings, in which people may be within the new covenant but not elect, and hence may apostatise. He rejects this view on the grounds that all members of the new covenant have the Spirit, and thus must be true believers and so elect. While I find convincing the argument that those who have the Spirit must also be elect (against some, but only some, who are supporters of Federal Vision), Schreiner does not consider the different ways of being 'in the covenant' that those holding a covenantal Reformed position have traditionally proposed, in particular, the possibility of being outwardly and sacramentally within the covenant, while not being truly and spiritually a member of it.

In the remainder of the final chapter Schreiner argues that the warnings are a means by which believers persevere, and that thus the warnings are necessary and important even though no-one suffers the fate that is warned about (comparing it with a warning on a bottle of poison not to drink its contents, which is necessary even though hopefully no-one will drink it!), and then that those who appear to fall away were never true believers. Here Schreiner acknowledges that the warnings would have been given to churches containing both true believers and those who profess faith but are not true believers, the latter group not heeding the warnings, while maintaining that the function of the warnings is for believers. The book concludes with a sermon on Galatians 5:2-12, where the essence of the material within the book is presented in sermon form.

I greatly appreciated this book. Its pastoral observations were particularly helpful and will certainly affect how I speak of perseverance in the future. Perhaps more evidence would have been beneficial in supporting Schreiner's argument that the warnings are

designed for true believers only and not for all church members, both true believers and not (particularly as I come from a covenantal paedobaptist position). Overall I would say that this is an excellent concise book written in a thoughtful manner, and Schreiner's courteous but clear way of disagreeing with others is very refreshing.

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Lay Presidency At The Eucharist? An Anglican Approach, Nicholas H. Taylor. London: Mowbray Continuum, 2009. 322 pages, £16.99, ISBN: 978-1-906286-18-7

Almost every word of the title of this book might prove problematic to an Evangelical. It would repay study to consider the distinction between lay and ordained; whether the "leader" of Communion hosts, ministers, presides, celebrates or sacrifices; what is and what happens at the Supper, Communion, Eucharist or Mass; and the nature of Anglicanism.

The author is an Anglican presbyter and Research Fellow in Theology of the University of Zululand, South Africa. This book is the first single-authored work published under the *Affirming Catholicism* banner. The series editor, Mark D. Chapman of Ripon College Cuddesdon, provides a very brief foreword, describing the book as pithy, trenchant, robust and authoritative. I suspect that Nicholas Taylor is neither an Evangelical nor Reformed, and would not claim to be, and I did not agree with everything he said. Sometimes I profoundly disagreed, but the book is a fascinating and enjoyable read. The erudition is impressive and the footnotes are extensive.

Taylor can be balanced and some of his conclusions might be surprisingly welcome to Evangelicals (e.g. the bishop as a senior presbyter, the importance of grace and the sovereignty of God), but there are times when he does not hold back. Tradition and history are prominent, yet they can be trumped by 'reason'. Scripture *contains* (note that) the supreme authority, but on this issue it is unclear.

Much of the book is descriptive and most of the conclusions have a cautious middle of the road or liberal catholic feel. Traditional Catholic views of the priesthood are rejected as quasi-magical and the notion of apostolic succession is seen to reside in faithfulness to the apostolic gospel rather than in a historically suspect unbroken line of episcopal ordinations stretching back to the apostles. Fundamentalist unthinking Evangelical bigotry (whether so-called or real) is also spurned with vigour.

Parts of the book are explicitly Anglican and if you are not interested in the practice, official reports, policies, or laws of the Anglican communion, they may not be for you, though there is plenty here too for the dedicated non-conformist. The book will also be worthwhile for those interested in the Supper generally and not just in the more limited question of the necessary officer for it to take place.

One chapter addresses authority and theological method in the Anglican tradition. Taylor then looks at the Eucharist and ministry in the New Testament church, the Early Church Fathers and Anglicanism. Alternative approaches and proposals (such as Extended Communion and *Agape* meals) are then examined, followed by a chapter dealing with the theological arguments for lay presidency. Final chapters look at the current position and outstanding issues and offer concluding reflections. There is no clear list of fully worked out conclusions and proposals, partly because the book seeks to be acceptable to most Anglicans. Taylor suggests, in my view correctly, that lay presidency is inappropriate rather than impossible. It should also be noted what a departure it would be from most ecumenical practice, including Anglican and Reformed.

Taylor recognises the need for congregations to receive the Supper regularly and the problems that requiring a priest presents. If this is troublesome in multi-parish benefices in rural England, Eucharistic deprivation is even more prevalent in, say, some parts of Africa or South America. If we favour weekly communion, we need to work out the practicalities of this. Taylor rejects Sydney diocese's theological case for lay presidency as among other things, an inconsistent misreading of the Reformation and the historical formularies, and out of line with mainstream Anglicanism, which it finds incidental or disposable. He accuses the Sydney leadership of

an unprincipled political power-grab with respect to the Global South and majority Anglicanism over women and especially practising homosexual bishops through GAFCON (the Global Anglican Future Conference) and the FCA (Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans). Taylor does at least grant that Sydney's drive for lay ministry of communion is theologically motivated, and not mere pragmatism (since they could provide priests to preside at the Eucharist if they wanted to), even if he does not care for the theology. Sydney's mission is seen as a sinister conservative Evangelical agenda to recapture Anglicanism and complete the Reformation which was thwarted by the deaths of Edward VI and Thomas Cranmer. Much of this will be problematic to a generation of English conservative evangelical Anglicans, many of whom have benefited so much from Sydney and will share many of their convictions. Certain types of church plants and *Fresh Expressions* are also dismissed as schismatic, sectarian, consumerist, postmodern and unlikely to be effective as sustainable churches. Taylor recognises, however, that lay presidency need not necessarily mean a lack of decency and order. Lay presidents could be properly trained, authorised and supervised.

There are a number of comparisons in the book between the issues of lay presidency on the one hand and the ordination or consecration of women and practicing homosexuals on the other. Taylor recognises that lay presidency is a second order issue (the main thing is to 'do this' in remembrance of Jesus). However, he argues that, in a way, allowing it would be a more central change to the nature of the ministry of the church than would permitting ordained practicing homosexuals or women instead of straight men. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is a danger here of swallowing camels and straining at gnats. Whilst the Bible clearly says that persistent unrepentant homosexual practice is damnable, few would say the same of lay presidency, or indeed women priests.

Taylor believes that the ministry of word and sacrament belong together. Consistency would lead one to argue that if only presbyters should preside at Communion, preaching in Sunday worship should also be confined to them. Taylor argues, however, that this is especially important where ministry of the word and sacrament is linked to authorised pastoral oversight, as it usually is and should be. In more Reformed terms, we might say that church discipline is also

involved and that this is focused in fencing the table and finally in excommunication. Since presbyters alone hold the power of the keys, they alone should preside at the Supper.

Taylor favours the ordination of more presbyters so that communities can receive regular authorised ministry of the word and sacrament in a context of pastoral oversight. Providing godly and learned candidates can be found, who would argue with that? Perhaps something like more Ordained Local Ministers (OLMs) are called for, with the qualification that theirs is a ministry of the universal church. It seems better to pray and work towards the goal of more presbyters rather than introduce lay presidency for lack of ordinands or the finances to train or pay them. Taylor suggests that the criteria for selection for ministry and the training provided may have to be rethought. He argues that the typical stipendiary minister who went from public school to Oxford or Cambridge and then a quasi-monastic theological college has not in any case been a resounding missionary or pastoral success.

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Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture, Peter J. Leithart. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009. 253 pages, £19.99, ISBN: 978-1602580695

How did you learn to read? No, this is not a discussion of the relative merits of phonics or 'see and say'. It is a more fundamental question: how did you learn to be a reader? How did you learn to make sense of novels, plays or poems? How did you learn to get a joke or interpret a metaphor? How did you learn to see an underlying theme in a novel or to recognise distinctive character traits? Perhaps you have never learned these things. Perhaps you are not a reader.

But God's revelation to us comes as a book and thus requires us, especially those of us who undertake to be pastor-teachers, to be readers who understand these things. Peter Leithart's approach to the mystery of reading Scripture is twofold: first to take the Bible

seriously as a literary work, and second to take Jesus, Paul and the other NT writers as our teachers. They exemplify, through their understanding and appropriation of the OT, how to read. That is to say, they do not merely teach us how to read Scripture, as if this required some special, sacred hermeneutic, but they teach us how to read any complex, literary text.

Leithart uses five analogies to explore the nature of texts: the text as a husk; texts as events; words as players (actors); texts as jokes; and texts as music. The first analogy, text as husk, is illustrated by way of a brief history of modern hermeneutics and some sharply pointed comments about evangelical approaches to scripture. For Leithart, the medium and the message ought not to be separated, and thus he proposes a hermeneutic of the letter, one which is not rigidly literalist but which glories in all the details of the text.

Each of the remaining analogies is used to formulate this hermeneutic of the letter. Texts are likened to events which exist in a wider chronological framework. Just as the significance of an event may change in light of later consequences, so too may the meaning of a text change when it is placed into a wider context, or it may accumulate new significance when it is reused in a new way. For Leithart, this is the basis of biblical typology. As events become part of a pattern, they gain significance which they did not have in isolation.

Words are players in Leithart's discussion of semantics. Here he focusses on the distinction between the dictionary meaning of a word and its functional meaning. Functional meaning is derived from past use, from wider connotations, from the specific referent in the text and so on, and it is through this functional meaning that words perform their roles within a text. Words are not cardboard stereotypes, but rounded characters, carrying with them a multitude of associations based on their previous use, their context, their alternative meanings, and even their sound.

Texts, like jokes, require the reader to interpret them and this interpretation requires knowledge beyond the text itself, as anyone who has ever tried to explain a joke will know. Knowledge of genre and form, lexical and semantic understanding, information about the historical or geographical background and so on are all essential for a reader to fully grasp the meaning of a text – or to get a joke. There is

a very useful section in this chapter discussing how it is possible to have confidence in an interpretation of a text.

Finally, like music, texts may have multiple layers of structure, they may utilise repetition or non-identical repetition, and the order within them is crucial. Like music, texts take time to move from beginning to end, they cannot be comprehended in an instant. Texts may even contain multiple stories just like the melodies in counterpoint composition.

Through the repeated analysis of John 9 in each chapter, Leithart shows how he applies the readerly skills associated with each analogy to a particular text, and how its author demonstrates literary mastery over his material. In the concluding chapter, he uses John 9 to show how this text – like all texts – concerns the *totus Christus*.

Deep Exegesis has all of Leithart's characteristic clarity and insightfulness. He draws on a wealth of classical and contemporary references to illustrate his discussion, with sources ranging from *The Iliad* to *Shrek*, with appreciation for the literary merits of each. His own interpretation of John 9 is rich and many-layered, exemplifying the miracle it describes as blind eyes are opened to see the richness of God's word.

One question which I would have liked Leithart to deal with more fully is that of authorial intent. This is addressed briefly in the chapter on texts as jokes where Leithart identifies the author with the jokester who intends his reader to think outside the text (124). This may be true, but neither the jokester nor the author can control the ways in which their readers think outside the text. Jokes can be made unintentionally and authors can write texts which mean more, or differently, than they realise. This is especially true when we consider that texts are also events. Authors lose control over their texts once written and Leithart himself acknowledges that texts can change or gain new meaning over time. Perhaps a section discussing the way in which texts are *both* jokes and events might have been useful here.

A further, minor criticism is that Leithart is sometimes guilty of overstating his rhetoric. The analogies he has constructed are very helpful in illuminating the nature of texts but they are only analogies and they are not absolute. For example, I found the chapter on texts as music the least useful in the book, because my understanding of

the structures and forms of classical music is much more limited than my understanding of literary structure. Other readers may feel similarly about jokes, players or events. Texts are not music, they are texts, and it is not strictly necessary to first understand music in order to be a good reader of texts.

But these are minor caveats for what is a wonderful book. *Deep Exegesis* does not provide a step by step guide for the interpretation of a biblical text. Nor will it, by itself, transform you into a 'good reader'. But it is a great starting point in the process of learning to read the way that Jesus and the apostles read.

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The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Douglas J. Moo. Nottingham: Apollos 2008. 480 pages, £29.99, ISBN 978-1-84474-341-4

This commentary is the latest addition to the Pillar series, which seeks to blend rigorous exegesis and exposition, an awareness of biblical theology and contemporary relevance, and an approach to the bible as God's Word. This may be considered a challenging objective, but it is one which Douglas Moo's commentary achieves.

In the Introduction, Moo deals first with the recipients in Colossae, before turning to the issue of authorship. He notes how the case for pseudonymity has focused in recent years not on the style of the letter, but on the theology, and perceived differences from Paul's other letters. As well as not being persuaded by the case presented, he also notes the problem with pseudonymity, given how the early church rejected such letters. In dealing with the provenance of the letter, Moo prefers Rome, albeit marginally; it is a feature of this commentary that where conclusions are tentative, Moo treats them as such. This approach marks Moo's discussion of the false teaching in Colossae. He notes the difficulty of knowing precisely what the problem was, but also the hermeneutical usefulness of such uncertainty. He argues for syncretistic teachings, but only as the best reconstruction.

In the final section of the Introduction, Moo deals with some of

the main theological issues of the letter: eschatology and cosmology, the church and the Christian life. He is able to summarise the main issues, and offer insight into contemporary issues and applications with refreshing brevity. For example, his paragraph on the Household Code covers the key problems in about half a page, whilst his discussion of modern applications of Paul's language about powers and principalities is particularly helpful. In another context a few more footnotes would be useful, but in a general commentary these summaries are very helpful.

Within the commentary itself, Moo interacts with recent material on Colossians and Paul, thus providing an update for those whose most recent major commentary on the epistle might date from the last century. There is plenty of interaction with the Greek text, and with the major English translations where necessary. At points, such as in discussion of 'the hymn' (1:15-20), or on difficult verses such as 2:18 there is extensive interaction with scholarship, but generally, with 280 pages of sensibly sized print to cover the four chapters of Colossians, Moo steers away from excessive detail.

Turning to Philemon, Moo covers three topics in his introduction. Dealing first with the setting of the letter, he notes how Philemon himself would point to an Ephesian origin, but that the testimony of Colossians and Ephesians points, slightly, to Rome. He then explores the setting of the letter, noting the difficulty of mirror-reading the letter, and the variety of proposals that have been advanced. In particular he discusses issues with the traditional runaway slave hypothesis, exploring the idea that Onesimus sought Paul out, before marginally preferring the traditional setting. Moo's lack of dogmatism on disputed points makes this material a refreshing read. Finally, he turns to the purpose and significance of the letter, which naturally reads to an extensive reflection on slavery and the attitude of the NT to it. Interestingly, Moo advocates an understanding whereby NT authors 'did not always recognise all the implications of the theological principles that they themselves enunciated' (377), and interacts with the work of W. J. Webb. This is a stimulating section, not just for understanding Philemon, but for an understanding of the NT ethics of slavery.

Twenty eight pages of author, subject, scripture and extra-biblical reference indices, along with a lengthy bibliography for Colossians,

and a shorter, separate bibliography for Philemon, further add to the usefulness of this book.

On the book jacket, Moo's commentary is variously described as brilliant, the best intermediate level commentary on these books, outstanding, and a textbook of choice. This might be considered setting the book up for a fall, but it will certainly be the first commentary on these books I will consult in future.

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Captured by a Better Vision: Living Porn-Free, Tim Chester. Nottingham: IVP, 2010. 192 pages, £8.99, ISBN: 1-184474-435-3

In his earlier books, Tim Chester has demonstrated a gift of being able to combine deep theological understanding with down-to-earth practical advice. There is more of the same here. Those who have read his excellent *You Can Change* (IVP, 2008) will recognise the detailed application of many of those broader principles in *Captured by a Better Vision*. It is hard to imagine a subject more in need of this sort of attention. Chester includes some alarming statistics in his introduction. He cites a recent survey which found that '50% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women are "addicted to porn"' (11). In other words, one in three of the people in our churches or small groups are probably struggling in this area. It was even more sobering to learn that surveys indicate that the same proportion of pastors are struggling too. And yet all too often pornography is not mentioned in our churches or is addressed by legalistic attempts to bully and shame people into godliness. So it is a welcome relief to find Chester writing with his usual mixture of startling honesty and deep confidence in God's power to bring about lasting change through the gospel of grace.

Chester identifies five key ingredients that need to be in place if someone is going to win their battle with porn. These provide the framework for much of the book. 'An abhorrence of porn' is the first: 'a hatred of porn itself (not just the shame it brings) and a longing to change' (21). Most of the first chapter, therefore, is written to help us

to 'look beyond the frame' of pornographic pictures or films, so that we see what the industry really does to those who are caught up in it, and how watching porn warps our view of sex and women and our wives, damages our relationship with God and our service of his people, and rouses God's just anger.

The second and third ingredients are what make *Captured by a Better Vision* distinct from so many other books on the subject of sexual temptation. Chester recognises that only a deepening grasp of the gospel and a deepening love for the God of the gospel will lead to lasting change in the way we live. So ingredient number two is 'an adoration of God.' As Chester puts it: 'We sin because we believe lies about God, instead of believing God's word, and because we worship idols instead of worshipping God' (47). He spends time showing how the things people may look for in porn (respect, relationship, refuge, reward, revenge, and redemption) can only be truly found in God and encourages those struggling in this area to fight for faith to believe God's greater promises.

Ingredient number three is 'an assurance of grace... that [we] are loved by God and right with God through faith in the work of Jesus' (21). So many often-recommended books on this subject encourage us to find the solution to sexual temptation inside ourselves, for example, by distancing ourselves further from it or by being more disciplined in resisting it, but Chester reminds us that self-reliance is no way to go and that truly changed behaviour will only result from recognising that, through Christ, we are already sexually pure in the sight of God. But he is realistic too: 'Be assured of this - the Spirit will win this battle. Eventually.' (97). He addresses the question of whether struggling in this area should exclude someone from Christian service, and suggests that, provided they are committed to the struggle and are relying on God's grace, they should absolutely continue in their area of service. It might, however, have been helpful had he included some reflections on how this fits with Paul's instruction that overseers should be men of self-control.

With ingredients one to three firmly in place, Chester is able to address the final two ('avoidance of temptation' and 'accountability to others') in their proper context. Chapter four includes a heart-warming description of ten means of grace that God means us to use to reinforce our faith in him, along with some very helpful and

specific advice about the use of internet controls and making accountability work well. Finally, Chester closes with a chapter on the life that we were made for and that, through the gospel, we are now freed to live. He includes lovely descriptions of the biblical visions of sex and marriage, and a very helpful outline of the biblical view of singleness.

This book could usefully be read by anyone wanting a worked example of how to apply the gospel to a specific area of temptation or sin. It really ought to be read by those who struggle in this particular area and also by those who have pastoral responsibility for such people, in other words, by every church leader. It is worth noting that, as Chester himself acknowledges, his book is written from a predominantly male perspective. He is admirably clear that pornography is a problem for women too (although with some differences in how they tend to use it). But, as Chester says, he tends not to have in-depth discussions about sexuality with women, and so it is worth recognising that a woman struggling with porn might not find the book quite as helpful as a man would do.

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