

BOOK REVIEWS

Dockery, David. *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008. pp. 256. \$9.99.

David Dockery's book *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* is a much-needed treatise on the issues of Southern Baptist identity. For the past few decades, Southern Baptists have questioned their identity for various reasons. Dockery has written this excellent work as a reminder of why we need to cooperate as Southern Baptists. Dockery is a well-known Southern Baptist educator, having previously served as a seminary professor and currently as the president of Union University in Jackson, TN.

Dockery writes six chapters covering what he believes to be the primary issues challenging the Convention: cooperative missions, understanding the Gospel, worship, education, theology, and leadership. Dockery's methodology is as follows. With each chapter, Dockery gives a helpful historical overview that examines the various streams of influence into the contemporary SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) regarding the issue of the chapter. I believe Dockery is generally fair in his treatment of the various traditions that have influenced SBC life. He then gives an overview of the contemporary scene of SBC life in each of the six chapters. For example, in the chapter on worship, he examines the various influences of worship in the early SBC including the Sandy Creek and Charleston traditions. He then gives an excellent treatment of contemporary models of worship, from traditional to seeker-sensitive. At the end of each chapter Dockery proposes what he believes are the basic principles for renewal on which all Southern Baptist can agree.

Dockery begins the book by examining those things that brought Southern Baptists together from the beginning: belief in the inspiration of Scripture, a commitment to global missions, and a spirit of cooperation. Under girding all these issues was a confessional and orthodox faith that helped to guard against heresy. Dockery examines the core doctrines that have been a part of Southern Baptist life, especially relating to soteriological and Christological issues. Dockery cannot help but address the Calvinism/Arminianism debate that is currently rising in the SBC. Dockery's exposition of Southern Baptist doctrine shows that he certainly believes that God is the initiator in salvation, but He works wonderfully and mysteriously with the human will. For some Dockery's position may be too Calvinistic; for others, it may be too Arminian. Nevertheless, I believe Dockery presents an exposition that all Southern Baptists can support. He states, "As Southern Baptists we reject hyper-Calvinism, Pelagianism, consistent Arminianism...while concentrating on our shared work of missions and evangelism, proclaiming God's grace to a lost and needy world" (69).

In the second half of the book, Dockery turns to more practical matters. He gives a helpful survey of Southern Baptist worship styles in both the historical and contemporary settings. Whatever the worship style of a Southern Baptist church, Dockery rightly states that

all worship must be God glorifying. Worship that glorifies God is worship that moves away from the secular influences and individualistic emphases of the culture and concentrates on the mutual edification of the congregation. Dockery next proposes that renewal in education must happen as the educational institutions stay connected to the churches. Baptist universities and seminaries must promote academic freedom but within a confessional context. Being a seminary professor myself, I believe that Dockery correctly emphasizes that the focus of Southern Baptist seminaries must be on “doing theology” for the church. For too long the SBC has had a false dichotomy between theology and praxis. The theological work coming from the seminaries must be accessible to the churches and laypeople.

Dockery closes the book with two helpful chapters that focus upon the necessity of maintaining confessional standards and maintaining character and cooperation among Church and Convention leaders. If the SBC is to move forward in the future, it must do so under the firm confessional tradition of the past. This is especially true if Southern Baptists are to avoid the encroachment of any type of liberalism and eroding of biblical inerrancy that has happened before. There must also be a renewed sense of cooperation to the things that first brought the Southern Baptist Convention churches together.

Dockery writes to a broad audience that can include professors, pastors, and laypersons. While covering many theological issues that will be of interests to those in our seminaries, he writes on practical issues that are of interest to pastors. Yet, his writing is so that laypersons can understand even the more complicated theological issues he covers.

Is this book a step forward to bringing Southern Baptist consensus and renewal for a new generation of Baptists? I believe it is and that it is a must read for everyone involved in Southern Baptist life. Dockery provides a helpful reminder of the history that brought Southern Baptists together and why a re-examination of that history is so important in dealing with contemporary SBC issues. Despite the various traditions, Southern Baptists came together to promote the propagation of the gospel. They realized they could do some things better together than apart. This same idea needs to be heard again today.

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The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue. Robert B. Stewart, ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. xix+220pp. \$18.00

The book is more or less the script of the 2005 inaugural Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The annual forum allows for genuine public dialogue between evangelical and non-evangelical scholars related to a specific issue of religious and/or cultural significance. These proceedings of the initial forum illustrate the intentional “model for civil discourse on important topics and an environment in which to discuss differences—without abandoning one’s convictions—and to make a case for one perspective over against another” (xiii). This first forum on the

resurrection of Jesus brought together two prominent proponents from opposing perspectives—N. T. Wright, who develops the case for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus in his comprehensive *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress Press, Christian Origins and the Question of God series, 2003), and John Dominic Crossan, a chief contemporary proponent for a metaphorical resurrection. The organizers are to be commended for bringing together such scholars of distinction for a respectful and candid dialogue of the topic. The forum and the book provide a refreshing face-to-face encounter between theological opponents.

The editor opens the book by providing the reader a concise summary of the 200-year framework of historical scholarship related to the topic. Chapter 1, “The Resurrection: Historical Event or Theological Explanation? A Dialogue,” presents the transcript of the focal point of the forum, the actual dialogue between Crossan and Wright that occurred during the spring of 2005. Both participants made opening statements—Wright’s statement is a brief summary of his comprehensive *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Crossan’s statement is a talk-through of a paper entitled “Mode and Meaning in Bodily Resurrection,” which is captured in the appendix of the book under the title “Bodily-Resurrection Faith.” He has developed these ideas more extensively in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) and in *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). These opening statements set the tone for a delightful interchange that highlights differences in presuppositions, methodologies, and conclusions.

The remaining 120 pages replicate six papers that were also presented at the Greer-Heard Forum, related either to a resurrection theme and/or the works of Crossan/Wright. They represent, as might be expected, the confessional perspective of the host institution and not the divergent perspectives of the headliners. Six of the papers were presented on the day following the Crossan-Wright dialogue with opportunity for Crossan and Wright to respond briefly and ask questions of the presenters. These responses, not included in the *The Resurrection of Jesus*, would have strengthened the book. A seventh paper, prepared for but not presented at the forum, is also included.

In Chapter 2, “In Appreciation of the Dominical and Thomistic Traditions: The Contribution of J. D. Crossan and N. T. Wright to Jesus Research,” Craig A. Evans highlights the unique contributions of Crossan and Wright both to gospel studies and more directly to the resurrection of Jesus. Robert B. Stewart, in “The Hermeneutics of Resurrection: How N. T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan Read the Resurrection Narratives,” addresses biblical texts and the relationship between history and hermeneutics. Gary R. Habermas charts the scholarly trends in the reading of resurrection narratives in his essay, “Mapping the Recent Trend toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions.” R. Douglas Geivett, in “The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief,” speaks to epistemological concerns about what he regards as similar methodologies between Crossan and Wright related to historical evidence for the resurrection.

In “The Gospel of Peter: Does It Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?” Charles L. Quarles argues for a second-century dating of the Gospel of Peter that is dependent on the Gospel of Matthew. Alan F. Segal concludes in “The Resurrection: Faith

or History?” that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be proven historically, so it is a faith issue, whether one accepts the resurrection as historical with Wright or as metaphorical with Crossan. William Lane Craig, in “Wright and Crossan on the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus” in some ways fine-tunes Wright’s argument and presses Crossan to engage the argument historically. Finally, in “The Future of the Resurrection,” Ted Peters challenges systematic theologians to interact consciously between history and eschatology.

The Resurrection of Jesus offers evangelical readers an engaging entrance into the world of resurrection study. The distinctions between Crossan and Wright are apparent and certainly the scales are tilted in Wright’s direction, but the lines are drawn with care and with great respect for Crossan and others who share differing perspectives.

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Caputo, John D. *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007. 162 pp.

John D. Caputo’s *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* is a popular-level primer on postmodern reconstructions of Jesus and the Christian mission written by one of America’s foremost postmodern thinkers and “a/theologians.” This postmodern vision of the Christian message plays the game of Derridean deconstruction while reconstructing an image of Jesus that looks strangely familiar—the socially-concerned Jesus of early twentieth-century liberalism. Although the book is written for evangelicals by a non-evangelical (Caputo’s non-realistic interpretation of religious language puts him in the category of atheism for most), *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* is a fitting introduction to postmodern theology from an actual Derridean postmodern.

Caputo begins with a critique of the WWJD phenomenon of recent years, noting that Charles Sheldon’s version of the question—“What would Jesus do?”—was radically different than the question presented by the Religious Right—“a call for social justice” (22). The dramatic narrative of *In His Steps* speaks of an ordinary church in an ordinary town that is turned upside down by a marginalized tramp whose tale of misfortune challenges the townspeople to consider that most important question. Caputo interprets the story as a tale of deconstruction wherein an “event” crashes the “same” and causes destruction and reconfiguration (26). Caputo labels the “event” (or “the other” or “the coming of the other”) as “figure of truth” that brings with it significant change (27). His version of truth is not a “complementary theory of truth” (30). Caputo claims that deconstruction has exposed this type of correspondence of its failures and hypocrisy. This “event of truth” can be a gradual one that slowly brings transformation, and he likens this to the New Testament concept of *metanoia*—“undergoing a fundamental change of heart” (27).

For Caputo, “[d]econstruction is organized around the idea that things contain a kind of uncontainable truth, that they contain what they cannot contain” (29). Deconstruction is

not something that someone does to things, rather, “[t]hings are auto-deconstructed by the tendencies of their own inner truth” (Ibid.). The “other” gives the truth of the “same” by reconfiguration, reassembly, and reconstruction. The Jesus of Caputo’s hypothesis is a Deconstructor—a truth event that radically usurps the normalcy of religious dogma. Caputo writes, “[I]n the view that I am advancing here, deconstruction is treated as the hermeneutics of the *kingdom* of God, as an interpretative style that helps get at the prophetic spirit of Jesus—who was a surprising and sometime strident outsider, who took a stand with the ‘other’...” (26). The kingdom of God is the “other” that radically upsets the “same” of the church—the “Plan B” the apostles settled on when the manifestation of God’s kingdom was not made evident. The church, Caputo contends, is deconstructible and must be deconstructed in order that the kingdom of God—“if there is such a thing”—can emerge (35).

Caputo uses Sheldon’s title, *In His Steps*, as an analogy for this postmodern religious seeker who lives in an eternal search for something significant—the deconstruction that will help the seeker get to the “other” that is in the Kingdom of God. Caputo explains that when Derrida says, “There is nothing outside of the text,” he means that “there is nothing outside of the context of a text and therefore nothing that happens that does not follow in someone else’s steps...” (38). In chapter four, Caputo discusses the discourse that he calls the “theo-poetics of the kingdom.” Here he paints Jesus as a revolutionary figure who seems hell bent on reversing the irreversible. Jesus is a unique divine figure who finds power in powerlessness. Borrowing from the Apostle Paul, Caputo calls this paradox “the weakness of God”—the “icon of God we find in Jesus on the cross” (82). The Jesus of Caputo’s description is a vehicle for all the impossibilities of deconstruction—justice, forgiveness, hospitality, and most importantly, “love without measure” (86). In chapter five, Caputo addresses the particulars of the question, “What Would Jesus Deconstruct?” Here, he discusses issues serious to the New Testament that he sees going largely ignored by mainstream Christians of the religious Right—issues such as poverty, war, and gender equality. Seeing Jesus as a voice for the marginalized, Caputo writes, “Based on the gospel of love by which [Jesus] was driven, he would today have found love in homosexual love and a mission among the advocates of gay and lesbian rights” (109). Here Caputo reveals that he is comfortable with what his interpretation of Jesus, and this does not usurp his view of the Scriptures. For Caputo, New Testament is the archive (likened to a historic prototype), not the arche (likened to a timeless archetype); he deems any view of “scriptural literalism” or “papal infallibility” as idolatry (110).

Caputo intends the final chapter to put into concrete terms for the church the question “What would Jesus deconstruct?” Rather, he suggests that these examples are what the “church might be like after deconstruction” (135)—not institutions but rather groups of individuals practicing the hermeneutics of the kingdom of God. Caputo presents in a more popular format several of his key discussions, including the hermeneutics of deconstruction, the prayers and tears of the impossible, and the weakness of God. He challenges what he views as distortions of postmodernity made by its critics—claims that postmodernity is nihilistic, anti-realistic, and relativistic. This reader, a novice to postmodern philosophy, is certainly thankful that Caputo put the cookies on a slightly lower shelf.

The author wants those in the church to read Derrida, Foucault, and even Augustine. The way he imitates Derrida’s love for words and their multiple meanings makes reading his

work a fun and challenging task. The hermeneutics of the kingdom of God—the question of “What would Jesus do?” interpreted for the twenty-first century—was a helpful way to discuss how deconstruction works. The book, however, is unbalanced in its presentation. Caputo makes the promises and claims of deconstruction for the first three chapters but seems to abandon much of his argumentation in the chapters four and five, which draw more from personal politics and observation than they do deconstruction. Caputo has opened the question “What would Jesus do?” is open to a number of possibilities. He contends that the New Testament is an “archive” that is a “depository of memories” (33). He calls it “poetics of the kingdom”—a collection not intended to be systematic theology but rather a collection of memories or discourse that calls for “transformation into existence” (Ibid.). The New Testament is a sufficient source of inspiration for the tasks, but an essential part of hermeneutics is developing an argument independent of the text (91, 94).

Caputo’s approach to Jesus is much like that of classical liberalism in that he seems to make a radical distinction between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of ecclesial imagination. Who Jesus is in relation to God is inconsequential and his suffering on the cross is tragic at best, because according to Caputo’s radical vision, Jesus was primarily concerned with shaking up the establishment. He is fascinated with what Jesus says about God in his weakness, but he distains traditional orthodoxy. Yet in all his discussion of Jesus the Deconstructor, one most important reversal of Jesus—really *the* impossible, the “event,” the wholly unexpected—goes unmentioned in Caputo’s account: the deconstruction of death itself. Resurrection, it seems, stands in a similar aporetic fashion with love, forgiveness, the gift, and justice. Resurrection can only occur with death; the only condition under which resurrection occurs is when resurrection is impossible.

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Clark, David K. *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003. xiv + 464 pp.

To Know and Love God is an introductory discussion of evangelical theological method. As his title suggests, Clark believes that the knowledge of God’s person leads one to a committed life of discipleship and obedience to him. The uniqueness of evangelical theology, Clark argues, is in its “spirituality—a theological experience, an experiential theology, all at once” (xxix). Clark begins by defining the task of theology as a science that “seeks to articulate the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the context of a particular culture” (33). He evaluates a number of historical and contemporary models for theology. Following Augustine, Clark makes the distinction between *scientia* (“knowledge”) and *sapientia* (“wisdom”) and concludes that evangelical theology is “*scientia* directed towards the purposes of *sapientia*” (37), i.e., theology is a propositional knowledge of God that shapes the Christian life and community. Among the host of contemporary theologies, he sees a basic tension between the contextual pole—the concern for the expression of the gospel in a given context—and the kerygmatic pole—the emphasis on theology, faith, and Scripture. Clark warns of the dangers of taking both poles to their extremes: the danger of contextualization

to the point of transforming the gospel message (e.g., in the works of Schleiermacher, James Cone, and Paul Tillich) and the danger of over-objectification of the gospel message that fails to translate the gospel message to the culture.

The author discusses the possibility of unity in the theological disciplines. The emergence of theological studies as scholarly disciplines in the Enlightenment ultimately led to the fragmentation of these fields. Even doctrinal studies received four sub-disciplines: biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and philosophical theology (169). When Brevard Childs spoke of the “growing polarity between Biblical studies and dogmatic theology,” he noted the radical fragmentation of these theological disciplines among contemporary practitioners that has led to ignorance of each other’s work (174). While Clark contends that the distinction of the disciplines is an appropriate and necessary (177-8), he notes that the “unity of... God and his will and his ways” makes possible the integration of these distinct disciplines—different microperspectives—under one “macroperspective” (182). Clark hopes to have a “genuine encounter between horizons” without dissolving differences—even noting that there is a need for a softer concept of incommensurability needed in interdisciplinary engagement (186-7).

Clark offers a valuable explanation as to how *scientia* and *sapientia* are integrated in the spiritual life of a believer. Theology for Clark is a spiritual discipline that engages both the mind and the heart. Christian theology describes the “metaphysical reality that... will sustain the moral life” (232), i.e., orthodoxy shapes orthopraxy. Clark notes that there are five phases by which people encounter reality, process truth, and find personal application from cognitive information. The first is engagement, which happens when one comes into contact with reality through the mediation of language (233)—language that can be expressed in a wide variety of media. Secondly and thirdly, a person discovers and tests reality, both of which involve the creative and critical evaluation of that reality. Fourth, a person integrates that reality by “personally applying truth to the issues of one’s own heart”—forging “theological conviction, inward character, and the events of everyday living” (237). Fifth, one communicates that experience with reality. For the Christian’s encounter with God, this communication results in ministry. Communication also brings the difficult but necessary challenge of finding appropriate means to communicate theological concepts with those not acquainted with its language (241-2).

Clark’s project concludes with an assessment of epistemology for evangelical theology and a discussion of how language expresses truth statements about God. The author desires to affirm a critical realist position that demands that our language of God have some referentiality to his reality (383). He writes, “As evangelical theologians, we should retain the conviction that absolute truth exists, yet we should piously and humbly acknowledge the objective-yet-relative character of our own human knowledge” (362). Religious language relates to that reality in expressing to us the person and nature of God. Clark critiques Thomas’s analogical approach to religious language (389-96) and contemporary models like Sally McFague’s panmetaphoricism—the idea that all language about God is metaphorical and open to reconstruction (405-10). Following William Alston, he contends that religious language univocally applies abstract concepts to Creator and creature alike in such away that our language can be informative speech about God (393-7).

Theology as transformation integrates the spiritual power of the triune God into the lives of individual people, specific communities, and whole cultures. Theology as information speaks truly about the reality of the triune God. Mere information without spiritual transformation is dead... Not only are there informational assertions that tell us truly about God the Father, the work of Christ, and the presence of the Spirit proper and good, but so are the formational utterances that spur us on to worship, spiritual growth, inner healing, godly community, and sacrificial service (417).

In many ways, Clark's *To Know and Love God* is an even-handed response to Stan Grenz's theological program. Joining in with Grenz's critics, he warns that Grenz's program—centered around what Grenz calls “convertive piety”—makes theology a fundamentally experiential movement with Schleiermacherian tendencies. Clark is equally frustrated with an entirely propositional systematic theology in the vein of Protestant Scholasticism and late nineteenth century theologies. He demands that evangelicalism—and its theological enterprise—be both theological in its commitment to knowledge (*scientia*) and experiential in its commitment to Christian wisdom (*sapientia*). Like Grenz, Clark welcomes a more pietistic approach to theology, but only on the condition that it is guided by the authority the Bible—referring to the external world. Unlike many other evangelical systematics, Clark humbly acknowledges our epistemic limitations and the provisional nature of our theological knowledge but without fleeing to postmodern perspectivalism. He does not resort to Grenz's plea for a nonfoundational or postfoundational Christian theology married to coherentism but rather a soft foundationalism (and like Grenz he is informed here by Reformed epistemology) that puts God at the center of reality. Whereas Grenz follows Kuhn in seeing science as a purely constructive task with a degree of committed incommensurability—and Clark acknowledges the constructive nature of both theology and science—Clark sees both theology and the sciences in a soft incommensurability and a dialogical relationship as they both attempt to explain the reality of God's world around them.

Clark's definition of the goal of theology to express “content of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the context of a particular culture” has the ring of Tillichian correlation to it. The particularity of each context ensures that the Christian theologian always has a job because the task of translation and transmission is never complete. Contextualization is always led by the voice of the biblical text, not the other way around (122). The question prompted by this definition, however, is its limited scope. Does the gospel of Jesus Christ—albeit the cornerstone of evangelical distinctiveness—cover the entire spectrum of the Christian theological enterprise. Would it not be more appropriate to make the case that the theologian brings the content of God's self-revelation in history and (to borrow from Vanhoozer) divine speech-acts to the context of a cultural setting.

Perhaps the greatest strength and the most unique contribution of Clark's prolegomena is his deep-seated conviction that *scientia* informs *sapientia*—theology as a second-order discipline that guides the first-order priority of spiritual life before God and the community of faith. Clark not only makes a brilliant case for this in these interlocking discussions of theology's purpose, theology as an academic enterprise, and theology as the shaper of the spiritual life, he also models this thesis in the way he writes as both philosopher and pastor. He tackles difficult concepts with remarkable clarity and is never afraid to interject personal illustrations or devotional application.

Clark's prose is clear and concise. He warns that a Christian theology that does not engage the culture or lead us to faith in Christ has lost its flavor. Good contextual theology can have a place in the academy and can shape a successful evangelistic enterprise. Clark rightly contends that theology done well "leads us to a passionate love for God, genuine worship of the Trinity, true community with fellow Christians, and loving service in personal evangelism and social compassion—all to the glory of God" (424). His prolegomena—directing us towards these concerns—is a very welcomed approach.

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