

Reformation
& Revival



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In the third century, a prophet called Novatian gathered a huge following by crying, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Donatus, a fourth-century prophet, commanded attention when he stressed that only 144,000 people would be chosen by God. He found this magic figure in Revelation 14:1 (a verse which the Jehovah's Witnesses use to proclaim their own version of this heresy). Both Novatian and Donatus were branded as heretics by the church.

John C. Souter

Many people will be surprised when Jesus comes again—but nobody will be mistaken.

John Blanchard

As Christians, we should not be exitists, looking for our going, but adventists, looking for His coming.

William Freel

In the first advent God veiled his divinity to prove the faithful; in the second advent he will manifest his glory to reward their faith.

John Chrysostom

Book Reviews

The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary

Phillip Edgcumbe Hughes

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1990).

242 pages, cloth, \$19.99.

This posthumous publication, the final work of the late Philip E. Hughes, takes its place alongside the author's other commentaries on 2 Corinthians and Hebrews. Although very much an admirer of the Cambridge tradition of New Testament exegesis represented by such names as B. F. Westcott, F. J. A. Hort, and J. B. Lightfoot, Hughes departs from this tradition by bringing to his readers a spirit of devotion and practicality, along with an uncommon ability to illuminate the biblical text from historical sources. Hughes was, in fact, equally at home in both historical theology and New Testament studies.

At a hurried first glance, I must confess that I was disappointed with the size of the volume, considering the bulk of his two previous commentaries and that of many expositions of Revelation (e.g., R. H. Charles' two-volume contribution to the International Critical Commentary). However, my initial disappointment was quickly dispelled as I began to read closely. Though somewhat slender page-wise, content-wise Hughes' book is a ready source of information on the text and of devotional thought for its readers. In keeping with his other commentaries, there is less emphasis on the minutiae of the original language and more on the actual content of John's book and its application. For instance, in commenting on Revelation 9:20-21, which depicts the "rest of mankind . . . who did not repent of the works of their hands to give up worshipping demons and idols of gold," etc., Hughes remarks:

The much vaunted civilization of our day may be free from graven images, but it is certainly not free from idolatry. As St. Paul explained long since, the person who is covetous is an idolater (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), and this means that virtually anything can become an idol: money, power, fame, pleasure, sex—in short, humanistic self-centeredness in all its forms. Accordingly, the idolatry of which St. John speaks here is not remote from us and irrelevant to our situation (p. 115).

Particular mention may be made of the treatment of the letters to the seven churches (pp. 33-69).

The author's approach to the Apocalypse is the so-called "historicist" interpretation. Consequently, "the Patmos visions portray the development of the church and its affairs in a sequence of periods that stretch successively from the beginning to the end of its history" (p. 9). Hughes finds a key to understanding Revelation in "the Lord God's identification of himself as 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end'."

This self-designation signifies the absolute existence of God from eternity to eternity and moreover, it implies that what God starts He finishes. The last two chapters of this book reveal the consummation of creation, the end for which the created order was intended and designed, the omega-point that is the actualization of the potential that was contained, like a germ, in the alpha-seed. For the end was enclosed in the beginning like a promise, and the beginning is there in the end that is its completion (pp. 10-11).

The eschatological position espoused is decidedly amillennial, though, in Hughes' words, the term is misleading since amillennialists "do not reject the teaching concerning the millennium, but only the interpretation proposed by pre- and post-millennialists" (p. 9). Of particular interest

here is Hughes' reading of the "first resurrection" of Revelation 20:5-6 (pp. 213-15), which is reproduced from his earlier study, "The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 39 (1976-77), 315-18. For Hughes the "first resurrection" is organically one with the resurrection of Christ: the saints come to life and reign with Christ just because of their union with Him, "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). In other words, the "first resurrection" is that of Christ Himself, in which the deceased saints, in John's throne room scene, participate. In this he differs with the customary amillennial exegesis, which views the "first resurrection" as the intermediate state. Hughes considers that such a construction "spiritualizes" the resurrection in question so as to leave it as "a mere theological concept unconnected with bodily resurrection" (p. 214).

It must be added that even though Hughes is convinced that the "amillennial" position is the most compatible with the biblical revelation, his commentary is not, as he puts it, "polemical in its thrust, but positive and straightforward," because "there are many things in St. John's Revelation whose meaning will be fully clear to us only when we see and experience the wonderful realities to which they point in the pure light of that glory which is hereafter" (p. 10).

Readers may be concerned about Hughes' denial of the doctrine of eternal punishment in his book *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ*, and its bearing on the exposition of Revelation. As far as the present commentary is concerned, the language chosen by him is not objectionable in itself, though one does sense an inclination to resist any idea of the infliction of punishment on the wicked. He understands the "second death" of Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8 to be the effect of Adam's fall and is, properly speaking, his death: "To be in Adam is to partake of his death, the first death, of which one's own death on earth is the entail, and

which leads on to the second death of final judgment" (p. 216). The "second death," then, we infer from this statement, is the reversal of the "paradise of God" and the converse of the bliss of the creation covenant as symbolized by the Garden of Eden. Consequently, the "second death" "denotes total and endless exclusion from life and from the incomparable glory and perfection of the new heaven and earth" (p. 43). On their own terms, these are legitimate and useful insights. However, taking into account Hughes' remarks in the earlier volume, it would seem that he wanted to suppress the punishment of the wicked and highlight their exclusion from the glory of God. This is precisely the thrust of the exposition of 21:8: "This statement makes it plain that there is no part or inheritance in the holy city for the types of persons named" (p. 225). Interestingly, there is no comment offered on "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone" (21:8) nor on "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (20:10).

Apart from this weakness, Hughes' exposition is warmly recommended. Busy pastors particularly will want to turn to this commentary first in order to come to grips with the central content of John's Apocalypse, and perhaps thereafter to more technical works for the details of language, etc. Hopefully, ministers of the Gospel and others will be encouraged to preach and teach this book which was actually intended to reveal, not obscure the truth. As current events are forcing more and more people to ponder where history is going and what will be its outcome, Revelation ought again to come to the forefront of Christian proclamation. Not only does this book of prophecy, visions, and symbols round off the biblical canon, "it brings the beginning of history to its authentic conclusion" (p. 10).

Donald Garlington

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The Revolt

S. Wise Bauer

Dallas, Texas: Word (1996).

425 pages, paper, \$12.99.

T*he Revolt* is a novel that asks the question, "Just what would a viable, working theonomic government look like if theonomy had legs, not just the theoretical shell of wishful thinking?" And like most wishes-come-true, the reality takes on the garb of a nightmare.

The protagonist, Dr. Kenneth Balder, founder of the California Institute for Theonomic Law, has constructed a model justice system that Charles Merriman, governor of Virginia, intends to implement, a system of civil law based on the Ten Commandments. To do this, Merriman leads Virginia to secede from the United States. Merriman justifies this action on the presupposition that the United States Constitution is flawed at its foundation. The innate Enlightenment goodness of man, so Merriman's reasoning goes, is that stillborn document's point of departure. Balder becomes Merriman's chief of staff. Of course, a major selling point for the Virginia public is the abolition of those ever-increasing and oppressive U.S. taxes in favor of a 9 percent income tax. It's a time-honored American tradition: Any tax we can't vote away is oppressive. To Balder's credit, however, the tax rate is small motivation to him. He is more concerned with moral justice, mercy and accountability, though he is frighteningly capable of applying those standards rigorously.

Matters run awry early on. North Carolina quickly joins the secession with the possibility that Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia might come along, all states which have suffered from the federal government's hostility to the tobacco industry. Merriman quickly turns out to be vulner-

able to the expediency of popular opinion, and this creates a sense of foreboding in Balder.

The real crisis, however, comes when a strict application of theonomic law puts Balder between a rock and a hard place in his personal life. The theonomic state fails to be the hopeful, manageable paradise because it is no better than the depraved people who run it, including himself. For Balder, it turns into the severe crucible of personal sanctification. As he plumbs the depths of the law in quest for its civic efficacy, it bites him like a lurking snake, convicting him of sin, showing him personal sin otherwise well camouflaged in the rank undergrowth of his tidy systems of thought.

It's an old problem, the confusion of the first and third uses of the Law. Towering figures in church history have been bedeviled by it, from Leo the Great to Gregory the Great to Ulrich Zwingli who, by the way, paid for his misunderstanding with his life on the battlefield. Calvin seems to have been unable to fully mitigate against this effect of Zwingli on the Reformed faith, for we find our New England Puritan forefathers and their "Shining City upon a Hill" making the same mistake of confusing the first and third uses of the Law. Michael Horton has so poignantly noted that within three generations, this New Jerusalem in Massachusetts was becoming a Unitarian cesspool.¹ The only way one can stir the first and third uses of the Law together in the same pot is to discount human depravity.

Ironically, in Jesus' first major sermon, He deals with two of the Ten Commandments (murder and adultery), *but He treats only the heart*, i.e., the convicting power of the Law, for out of the heart are the issues of life. We would do well to prioritize our understanding of the Law the way our Lord does. In this way all three uses would retain their full power. Did Jesus delegate power and authority to us? Certainly! We must speak comfortably to Jerusalem with the flabbergasting news that she has received a double reward from the

hand of the Lord in place of her (our) sin. But as for the sword, can there be any ambiguity to the command, "Put away your sword, Peter"?

Systems of theology (especially eschatology) have tracked with the general public outlook down through history. In the late nineteenth century, postmillennialism was in great vogue while the sun never set on the British Empire. Things never looked rosier. By contrast, consider the high fashion of premillennial dispensationalism at the apex of the Cold War. ("Will Russia invade Israel?") In the same way, theonomy is a theological system peculiarly suited to the sentiments of our time. We're worried and angry, mad as hornets, and this time, it's not a Cold War threat. No, it seems our own government is foisting a heavy tax load on us. It is poisoning the minds of our children in public schools. It is fostering a burgeoning prison culture. It is using our tax dollars to murder unborn children, and it is aiding and abetting sloth with a welfare state. Doesn't it make sense to replace such a decadent and impotent system with one based on the Ten Commandments? I suspect most Christians are less than content with our present government.

Martin Luther once wisely said, "When God wills to punish a people or a kingdom, he takes away from it the good and godly teachers and preachers, and bereaves it of wise, godly, and honest rulers and counselors, and of brave, upright, and experienced soldiers, and of other good men."² If Luther is correct, the proper course is not to wrest Caesar's sword from him. No, we ought rather to repent and cry to God for mercy.

Bauer wisely leaves the history of the Reformed American States incomplete. Kenneth Balder wistfully concedes that the new Christian legal system might even effect a visibly civil righteousness, but the canonized hypocrisy that comes with it is a high price he had not anticipated. It

is a bitter pill. *The Revolt* is a tale worth reading, for the painful confrontation with the Law will drive us to Christ where we will always hear Good News, news that Christ died for lawbreakers, even us.

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Endnotes

- 1 Michael Scott Horton, *Made in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1991) 15-27.
- 2 *Table Talk* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1995) 47.

Engaging with God

David Peterson
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1993).
317 Pages, paper, \$17.00.

For every church leader who has been besieged and disappointed by the mass of popular literature promising to bring order out of chaos in the area of worship, your prayers have been answered. David Peterson's book serves up a banquet of biblical theology that will get you beyond questions about contemporary music, to the foundational aspects of new covenant worship. Peterson, lecturer in New Testament and head of the department of ministry at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia, packs large bundles of scholarship, devotion, and conviction into this, the best book on this subject that I have read, ever.

For those unfamiliar with biblical theology, Peterson is an excellent introduction to the discipline. Beginning with the terms and practice of worship in the Old Testament, he moves through the Bible to give insightful and riveting explanations of worship as seen in the various books. Along

the way he explains many of the key texts, and in addition to his insights on worship, I found his brilliant textual summaries to be a great resource for understanding the flow of individual books. Chapter summaries succinctly weave together the various worship themes considered by the author.

Peterson begins his study where he should—defining worship. He casts off any definition that would limit biblical worship to what happens in corporate church services, that would seek to define worship by the word itself, or any definition that unduly separates worship from life. He states:

The theme of worship is far more central and significant in Scripture than many Christians imagine. It is intimately linked with all the major emphases of biblical theology such as creation, sin, covenant, redemption, the people of God and the future of hope. Far from being a peripheral subject, it has to do with the fundamental question of how we can be in a right relationship with God and please him in all that we do (pp. 17-18).

From this beginning point, the reader is quickly shown that this is no ordinary book on worship. It is a theological treatise that sees all of life as dependent upon our "engaging with God." Peterson is quick to point out that worship—this engagement with God—is not a human endeavor; rather, it is an engagement that is made possible for us only by God Himself. Hence, his short definition of worship "as an engagement with God on the terms he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible" (p. 20). One of the themes drawn out in this study is that true worship is impossible apart from Christ, and that designing worship services for the unbeliever is simply to misunderstand worship itself.

Peterson's brilliant overview of worship in the Old Testament sets the tone for the entire book. After looking at themes including revelation, redemption, cultic system, and

covenant, Peterson concludes that God's dealings with Israel were meant to secure for Himself a people who would worship Him exclusively. They were redeemed from Egypt in order to engage God, initially at Mt. Sinai, but afterward in the wilderness and in the land He gave them. The symbols and commanded activities of the cultus were to be an expression of God's continuing presence and His rule over them in order that they would come to see obedience and worship as going hand in hand. The failure of Israel to worship/obey correctly culminated in the exile. Yet, the prophetic hope of renewed worship in a restored temple continued the understanding that God will ultimately bring Israel, and indeed all the nations, to worship Him.

A helpful chapter is the one dedicated to worship terminology; Peterson concludes that worship may be broadly defined in terms of honoring, serving and respecting God. He then proceeds to demonstrate how this understanding is seen in every section of divine revelation.

The richness of this book makes a detailed review impossible. I found myself underlining something on virtually every page. However, there are some specific themes that bear special mention:

1) Christ as the fulfillment of the temple and sacrificial system. Peterson goes to great lengths to show that the new covenant is better because it engages God through Christ, who Himself fulfills the Old Testament system in every detail. For example, he writes:

More than any other New Testament document, Hebrews makes it clear that the inauguration of the New Covenant by Jesus means the fulfillment and replacement of the whole pattern of approach to God established under the Mosaic covenant. The writer proclaims the end of that earthly cult, by expounding Christ's work as the ultimate, heavenly cult (p. 228).

2) Preaching as a foundational act of worship. Unlike many contemporary writers who distinguish between worship and edification, Peterson rightly considers the act of preaching and the activity of listening to preaching to be core components of new covenant worship. He writes: "For one thing, as I have observed, the terminology of worship is used quite specifically with reference to gospel preaching and the ministries that support gospel work" (p. 194). "... [the] expressions of faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ and ministries that encourage such faith are specifically the worship acceptable and pleasing to God in the gospel era. There is a new kind of service to God made possible through the preaching of the gospel" (p. 187). "Paul's apostolic ministry was a particular expression of the worship all Christians are to offer to God (Rom. 12:1). His proclamation of the gospel was a religious act comparable with the praise offered in conjunction with the sacrificial ritual of the tabernacle or temple" (p. 180).

3) Worship as service. Peterson is masterful at weaving throughout this study the idea that true worship is synonymous with service to God in Christ. This may take many forms. Meeting with the body is worship, prayer is worship, ministering to others is worship, loving your spouse is worship, and so on. Commenting on worship in the Epistle to the Hebrews he says:

Christian worship is the service rendered by those who have truly grasped the gospel of God's grace and its implications. The motivation and power for such service in Hebrews is quite specifically the cleansing that derives from the finished work of Christ (9:14) and the hope which that work sets before us (12:28). Gratitude expressed in service is the sign that the grace of God has been apprehended and appreciated (p. 242).

In addition to being a well of biblical delights, Peterson's book is also skilfully written, well organized, and comes to the reader in a very "user friendly" format. Each chapter has extensive and informative endnotes. I soon developed the habit of keeping a marker at the beginning of the note section for ease of turning. As well, the chapter summaries are very well done, and serve to keep the reader on track. They also allow for quick review should reading the book take many weeks' time. Additionally, the Scripture index will be quite helpful in finding Peterson's insight on key texts in the future. And as for what Peterson thinks a biblically aligned worship service might look like, he describes one in a short final chapter. But resist the temptation to go to this last chapter first! Pay your dues, travel the road from Genesis to Revelation, with Peterson as a guide.

Peterson's book is exceptionally Christ-centered, which I found to be a very refreshing change from the plethora of modern worship books that have deluged my study. How comforting to find that Christ is the One who makes real worship possible, and not the worship leader or the worship team. And how freeing to know that the theology of the cross, rather than being an obstacle to attracting people, is actually the foundation of true worship. I will let Peterson have the final word: "The blood of Jesus, however, provides a once-for-all cleansing consecration to the service of God under the new covenant. Thus, the sacrifice of Christ is foundational to a Christian theology of worship" (p. 237).

May God always have His way, and may His word have complete freedom in our worship. Now, buy this book and begin reading.

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God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love

Donald G. Bloesch

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (1995).

329 pages, cloth, \$24.99.

Prolific author, Donald Bloesch, has completed yet another volume of his *magnum opus*, *Christian Foundations*. This projected seven-volume work will be the most important evangelical systematic theology written at the turn of the century and will take its place alongside Carl Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority* as the other major alternative approach to evangelical theology.

Volume 3, *God the Almighty*, constitutes Bloesch's first extended treatment of the Christian doctrine of God. In this book Bloesch's "principal mentors" are Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr. Other important influences include Luther (especially on the problem of evil), Calvin, Kierkegaard, P.T. Forsyth, and T.F. Torrance.

A Mounting Controversy

Bloesch sees a mounting controversy today over the concept of God which, since theological movements are often rendered distinctive via their conceptualizations of God, makes this particular volume perhaps the most important in the series. Classical theism, though not without contemporary proponents, is embattled and in partial eclipse. It has given way to a different construing of the God-world relation; a new immanentalism stressing the inseparability of that relation and God's pathos and vulnerability; a this-worldly mysticism in which God is inextricably enmeshed in nature and history.

Process philosophers and theologians have provided the most sophisticated and sustained attempt to reformulate a doctrine of God along these lines. No evangelical scholar

has had a more prolonged and profound encounter with this formidable challenge to the traditional view of God, and Bloesch acknowledges that process theology has been a primary impetus prodding his redefinition of the Christian doctrine of God. Rosemary Ruether and Paul Tillich are among the other primary protagonists in the unfolding drama of Bloesch's newest volume.

According to Bloesch, the emphases of this new immanentalism are not entirely unbiblical in its reaction against classical theism. But what is lacking is a strong affirmation of the almightiness (and holiness) of God—hence the title of the book which appears to come from a chapter by the same title (chapter 18) in Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*.

A Viable Doctrine of God

The goal of *God the Almighty* is to reforge a viable doctrine of God on the basis of God's Self-revelation attested in Holy Scripture in dialogue with the history of Christian thought. For Bloesch, this means promoting the living God of *biblical theism* over against both the remote transcendent God of classical theism and modern immanental misconceptions of God in particular. But, as always, Bloesch is a dialectical theologian never content simply to negate; he wants to learn from the signal contributions of the various protagonists, incorporating their insights into a "comprehensive vision of evangelical catholicity."

The first two chapters of the book are introductory in character and define the themes and issues in the contemporary context and the history of theology relevant to the subject of the book. The heart of the work (chapters 3-7) develops the basis for knowledge of God, the God-world relation, the attributes of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Basis of Our Knowledge of God

Against mysticism, scholastic theology, and modern experiential-expressivism, Bloesch argues that we cannot achieve cognitive union with God by moral virtue, thought, or creative imagination. But God can and has come to us in Self-manifestation in Jesus Christ and enables us to truly know God. Thus Bloesch qualifies the Reformed *finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite cannot bear the infinite), for the Infinite can graciously condescend to the finite. Such a God who "freely identifies with the human predicament is far more enveloped in mystery than the God who remains supremely detached from the world of temporality and materiality."

Yet God retains God's mystery even in Self-revelation. Here Bloesch emphasizes the motto of the church fathers, *Deus semper maior* (God is always greater), for God always surpasses the limits of human imagination and conceptualization.

While all human beings are recipients of common grace, this "natural" knowledge is "clouded by sinful proclivity" and sufficient only to render every person inexcusable. A doctrine of God cannot be constructed on the basis of natural theology!

Thus Bloesch proposes "an expositional theology—one that expounds the abiding truth of God's Word and relates it to the contemporary situation." This means that theology's task is neither imaginative construction that facilitates liberation (Kaufman), nor simply description of what a particular Christian community believes (Lindbeck). Rather, theology is a witness to, and explication of, God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Scripture is the primary source, guide, and norm for theology.

Yet theology does not simply repeat Scripture. In its articulation of faith, theology is free to use philosophical terminology and the conceptuality of the age, but it brings them

“under the searing critique of divine revelation” which transforms them in the process. Indeed some philosophical concepts are helpful in safeguarding the mystery of the revelation, as the early church discovered at Nicaea and Chalcedon. However, Scripture always remains the touchstone for theology.

God's Attributes

A significant part of *God the Almighty* is devoted to the various attributes or perfections of God. While Bloesch grants that attributes or perfections are not something different from the nature and existence of God, he also argues that the God of biblical faith “is not monochrome,” but “radiates his splendor in myriad ways.” God’s attributes manifest God’s essence. Bloesch rejects the notion of singling out any particular attribute as giving an exhaustive definition of God and is especially critical of the contemporary “love reductionism” which neglects the holiness and majesty of God.

Nevertheless, Bloesch argues that some of God’s perfections are more illustrative of God’s nature and activity than others. This leads to one of the peculiar features of the book. Bloesch maintains that there are biblical warrants for identifying “holiness, love, wisdom, power, and glory” as God’s essential attributes, though they are to be celebrated in their unity and never separated (p. 41). Yet in Bloesch’s actual treatment of attributes he devotes chapters to Transcendence and Immanence (chapter 4), Power and Wisdom (chapter 5), Holiness and Love (chapter 6), and then discusses glory within the chapter on power and wisdom. Furthermore, while Bloesch outlines several schemes for classifying the various attributes, he provides no rationale for his own system of categorization. The book could use a bit more clarity and development in this area, though this is a long-standing problem which appears in many other theologies as well.

Transcendence and Immanence

Bloesch’s actual treatment of the various attributes is quite insightful. God in unstinting love has come into our midst in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, and this indicates that God is radically immanent, as well as utterly transcendent. But God’s immanence is not a quality of God’s being, as in the case of process theology and other forms of pantheism. Rather, it is an act of God’s freedom. The God of biblical faith is not static being, but a free personal being who is ever active; free to remain in the utter glory of God’s Trinitarian life, but also free to call the universe into existence, free to enter history and take on suffering and pain in order to redeem a sinful and broken humanity.

Thus, over against both classical theism and modern immanentism, Bloesch calls for doctrine of dynamic transcendence. God is utterly transcendent, yet wholly *with us* and *for us*. God “identifies with pain and misery caused by our sin,” but overcomes it “through the cross and resurrection of his Son.” God is free to have new experiences, but these bring out God’s perfection rather than add to it. This is a God who interacts with history and human lives, a God to whom we can pray and whose promises we can trust. It is in Jesus Christ that we meet this God of dynamic transcendence and unbounded love.

Power and Wisdom

By now it should be clear that, for Bloesch, God’s power is not manifested in arbitrary decrees or determinist omnicausality. God is all powerful, but God’s power is “his conquering love”; God’s almightiness is “his persevering and indefatigable will” to love, redeem, and restore.

God’s wisdom and power are closely associated throughout Scripture and unified in God’s being and activity. Thus God’s power always manifests itself in indelible wisdom which takes us by surprise and renders human wisdom fool-

ishness. This is the wisdom of God found in Jesus Christ. It is a wisdom in which we can participate through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Holiness and Love

According to Bloesch, "holiness together with love is the quintessential attribute of God." Holiness and love indicate the "two sides of God" which "shape the interaction of God with his people" as portrayed in biblical faith. These quintessential perfections "coexist in a certain tension" and Bloesch is unwilling to follow the fashionable tendency to relax the tension by subordinating holiness to love.

God's holiness is His implacable intolerance to moral evil rooted in God's majestic purity. Bloesch is not afraid to affirm the "real objective power" of God's wrath, though it is, of course, qualitatively different from human anger.

God's love is *agape*, God's overflowing concern and compassion that embrace unworthy *sinner*s in the midst of their *sin*. It "transcends" God's holiness "even while it infuses and upholds it." The good news is that in infinite love God "turns his wrath upon himself" in the life and death of Jesus Christ that we might be forgiven, reconciled, and redeemed.

Bloesch is adamantly opposed to bifurcating God's holiness and love as did older theologies which portrayed God as hating from all eternity those on His left and loving those on His right. In an intriguing anticipation of his volume on eschatology Bloesch's unification of holiness and love leads him to "envision hell as a creation of his [God's] love as well as of his justice" (p.143).

The Trinity

For Bloesch, the doctrine of the Trinity represents "the culmination of biblical and apostolic reflection on the nature and activity of the living God." This means that it can be neither "an appendix" to theology (contra Schleiermacher) nor

"a prolegomenon" (contra Barth!), but rather the "apex and goal of theology."

This powerful emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity redresses a distinct weakness of Bloesch's earlier two-volume *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, which provided only a scant twelve-paragraph treatment of the doctrine. One problem in North American evangelicalism generally is that its polemical emphasis on Scripture, combined with its soteriological/Christological orientation, and at times pragmatic spirit, has often led to an unconscious deemphasis of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is somewhat ironic since evangelicalism's high Christology and clear awareness of the importance of the Holy Spirit ought to lead quite naturally to Bloesch's assertion of the Trinity as the apex and goal of theology.

There is no question about Bloesch's commitment to a Trinitarian perspective, but the polemical orientation of his book tends to focus the discussion on the God-world relation and the attributes of God, preventing the doctrine of the Trinity from occupying the center of attention. This is reinforced by Bloesch's apparent preference for Brunner over Barth on the placement of the doctrine of the Trinity within the structure of Christian theology. If the doctrine of the Trinity is the apex and goal of theology, and if its development "follows the pattern of sacred history" from "God's self-revelation to the people of Israel . . . to the incarnation . . . and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church" (p. 167), then it would seem that the discussion of the Trinity should follow the volumes on Christology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology. In fact, my one overall question regarding Bloesch's theology is whether the *structure* of his seven-volume Christian Foundations is sufficiently trinitarian, given his astute observation that the doctrine of the Trinity is the apex and goal of theology. Once again, Bloesch might have provided a bit more development of the

rationale for the placement of his discussion of the Trinity within his overall theology and within volume three.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not deduced from a general concept of God, nor is it found as such in Scripture. Bloesch astutely observes that it is drawn from the total biblical and apostolic witness concerning God. "It is the production of a developing understanding of the significance of God's redeeming action in human history and how this action mirrors the inner life of God."

The Triune God is "one person in three modes of being or three persons in one being." Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not simply metaphors or symbols originating in human experience of God, but refer "to ontological realities," differentiations in God's Self-revelation which correspond to real distinctions in God. These distinctions constitute a fellowship of personal relations within God.

This means that Bloesch is utterly resistant to current attempts to resymbolize God which undermine the Trinitarian formula, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. God is not male, for majestic God of biblical faith transcends sexuality and gender. But God is Triune in reality, not just in activity, and therefore the Trinitarian formula must be respected.

Bloesch rejects any kind of Monarchian ontological subordination which makes the Father supreme over the Son and the Spirit. Yet within the full equality of the Trinity, he does affirm "an existential priority" of the Father in that "his existence is the presupposition of the existence of the Son and the Spirit" (p. 187).

Despite his extremely careful development of this existential priority of the Father, a slight element of subordinationism remains, as is evident in the pictorial model he deploys representing his position (p. 202). Here Bloesch might have further developed the concept of *perichoresis* (the mutual indwelling of the members of the Trinity), utilizing it to tame this vestige of subordinationism. (See

Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* [T. & T. Clark, 1996], chapter 7, especially pages 175-94, for a discussion of this and an alternative approach.)

Bloesch's section of Trinitarian spirituality is a welcome relief from the often abstract discussions of the Trinity in theology. It also indicates that the doctrine of the Trinity has far-reaching implications for day-to-day Christian life.

Biblical-Classical/Biblical-Modern Syntheses

The final two chapters of *God the Almighty* represent Bloesch at his very best. Here Bloesch presents a penetrating analysis and critique of the biblical-classical synthesis and the biblical modern synthesis. These chapters create a rich tapestry of insight into the way Christian faith and theology all too easily accommodated themselves to the surrounding cultural ethos and generated an unhealthy synthesis that compromises the integrity of the faith at certain critical points.

The final chapter is one of the most brilliant brief treatments to date of the contemporary tendency to synthesize Christian faith with the neo-immanent world-view so prevalent today. Here, Bloesch reserves some of his most pointed comments for the "so-called progressive evangelicals" like the authors of *The Openness of God* (Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger). In an appendix on their book, Bloesch vigorously dissents from this free-will theism with its "God (who) is still learning, whose kingdom finally depends on human cooperation," for it seems to accommodate the faith to the ethos of modernity and appears at times "to be perilously close to process theism."

Throughout these final chapters Bloesch proposes his biblical theism as a prophetic alternative, faithful to Scripture, yet relevant to contextual concerns.

God the Almighty is a major contribution to evangelical

theology. No contemporary American evangelical theologian is as historically well-read as Bloesch. It is hard to imagine any layperson, pastor, or scholar who could not learn and grow theologically and spiritually from this learned, encyclopedic conversation with the history of Christian thought on the doctrine of God. Bloesch's own position provides an intellectually mature and biblically sound way to be a "centrist evangelical" in an age of repristination and accommodation.

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The Theology of the Book of Revelation

Richard Bauckham
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1994).
169 pages, paper, \$13.95.

This work is part of the ongoing series edited by Dr. James D. G. Dunn of the University of Durham which now includes Matthew and Galatians. The series fills a need that has been long-standing, i.e., to treat with reverent scholarship, not the literature, historical setting or exegesis of the New Testament books, but the distinctive theology of each one. As such these works (I have read *Galatians* and *Revelation*) promise to be real helps to any serious student of the New Testament, and especially to preachers.

Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament Studies, St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, is well qualified to write on the book of Revelation, having produced what is surely the most impressive piece of work on the book to come along in a great while.¹ This smaller work is a condensation of the theological insights found in the earlier work, but is all the more powerful because of this. The seri-

ous (non-Greek) reader can immediately grasp the heart of Bauckham's thesis.

And the heart of this thesis is simple: The Revelation is a work of theology, but the form in which it comes to its modern readers makes it mysterious and difficult, if not impossible to understand. If such understanding is to occur, then we must go back to that original context of the first-century Roman Empire in which the book originated. Only by coming to grips with the book's structure and composition can we hope to make sense of its images and symbols. When this is done the message, the theology of the book will begin to become clear. Christians in any age must face the religious-political ideologies of the times with a fearless witness to the Gospel. In so doing they participate in God's purpose to bring the kingdoms of this world under His rule of salvation and judgment.

It is this thesis that makes this book riveting from the first page to the last. One can hardly turn a page without confronting some new and fresh insight derived from the Old Testament, the historical background or the literary structure of the book. And for the most part, these insights ring true—they lack the dull, cracked-bell effect of so much speculation that takes place around the book.

The thesis itself is essential as to be novel: "The book of Revelation is a work of profound theology." And what a theology! It is a theocentric theology. "This," says Bauckham, "along with its distinctive doctrine of God, is its greatest contribution to New Testament theology."² What follows is a New Testament biblical theology of this God, as Trinity, as *Yhwh*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the Sovereign Lord God Almighty, who in His holiness and power sits opposed to every vain opposition to His, especially the Roman power of the late first century, A.D. This God is identifiable with Jesus Christ, as the First and the Last, as the One receiving worship, and as the One whose

activities are identical with those of Christ (chapter 2). And the Holy Spirit, as “the Seven Spirits sent out into all the earth” and as “the Spirit of prophecy,” is the One whose agency is bringing the kingdom of God to the earth (chapter 5). This coming of the kingdom is the direct result of a messianic war carried out through the slaughtered Lamb who in His sufferings and conquest has won the right to carry out this war. The result of this war waged in the sufferings and witness of the followers of the Lamb will be the full realization of the reign of God (which is already taking place in heaven) on earth through the gathering of the nations in judgment and salvation. This will take place when the demonic forces of the Beast, the Prophet, and the Whore of Babylon are defeated and destroyed, and the elect are brought into the new heavens and earth and the heavenly metropolis of the New Jerusalem at the Parousia of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (chapter 4).

Bauckham’s knowledge of the book is impressive, even though some will not find all his arguments compelling (see pp. 98-104). His familiarity with the critical literature surrounding the book is equally admirable. The force of his logic is inescapable. And yet he manages to write with humility before the mysteries of the Revelation and with reverence before the God whom the book reveals. This is not always the case in works of a critical or scientific nature.

But, what makes this book so profitable for preachers is that Bauckham manages to capture the great themes of the Revelation and to set them forth with such clarity and simplicity. We find ourselves realizing, perhaps for the first time, that the Revelation was really meant to be “read, heard, and kept,” and therefore *preached*. And what a wonderful thing it would be if preachers all over the country began to preach from the book of Revelation! Notice, I said “preach,” that is, to *proclaim* its message of this glorious God, who has triumphed in the sufferings of the Lamb, *reigns* in heaven

and shall reign on earth. To preach that the need of the church is a willingness to suffer in bearing witness to Jesus Christ. To preach to a church of Thyatiran worldliness and Laodicean lukewarmness to repent, to overcome, and to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Such preaching could produce the spiritual revolution which the words “reformation and revival” are shorthand for.

So, I would say to every preacher: Get this book. And I would especially say this to those preachers who have, because of the phantasmogoric fanaticism of most of its interpreters (?) in our day, become skeptical about the message of the Revelation. This book will inflame your love for God. This book will ignite your love for theology, for preaching, for the book of Revelation itself. It might even kindle a revival.

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Endnotes

- 1 *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 1992.
- 2 *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 23.

That day lies hid in order that every day we be on the watch.

Augustine

He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms that it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near. It is he who, whether it be far or near, awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope and fervent love.

Augustine

I never preach a sermon without thinking that possibly the Lord may come before I preach another.

D. L. Moody

The fact that Jesus Christ is to come again is not a reason for star-gazing, but for working in the power of the Holy Ghost.

C. H. Spurgeon

I am daily waiting for the coming of the Son of God.

George Whitefield

The Christian hope is not a matter for tickling our minds, but for changing our minds and influencing society.

Stephen Travis

Oh, foolish people! They do not understand what has been proved again and again, that two manifestations of His arrival are prophesied; in the one He suffers, is robbed of glory and honour, and is crucified as was prophesied; in the other He will appear in glory from Heaven.

Justin, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew
