

Book Reviews

God at Work in the World

Pachau, Lalsangkima
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2022, 177 pp., paper, \$22.99
ISBN 978-1-5409-6136-5

Reviewed by Michael D Simants

In his new book, *God at Work in the World*, Lalsangkima Pachau seeks to clear “a pathway in the thick jungle of theological thoughts,” leading the reader to a “theology of mission” (15). Consequently, Pachau’s work winds its way through various theological thoughts, traditions, and individuals, exploring various soteriological, missiological, ecclesiological, and anthropological ideas. He aims to present the reader with a framework for thinking about the theology of mission.

The book opens by setting the background of what is to come, exploring the idea of God’s mission in the world, and defining theology of mission as an understanding of God that “has been passed down through the tradition of theological discussions” (15). The first chapter explores the doctrine of the Trinity from various perspectives, including Kant, Tillich, Barth, and Rahner. He also creatively engages with the theandric ideas of Raimundo Panikkar and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay’s connection of the Trinity with the Hindu concept of Satchitananda. Pachau then turns his attention to the *missio Dei* construct, and its place in Trinitarian and Incarnational thought. In this discussion, he pays particular attention to the work of T.F. Torrance.

From there, Pachau spends the following two chapters exploring his central theme of soteriology. He takes this theme into two parts: Biblical Images and Christological Motifs (Chapter 2) and Dimensions and Scope

(Chapter 3). Throughout this discussion, Pachuau continues engaging with various theologians and theological traditions to create typologies of soteriology. In Chapter 2, he creates a series of frameworks that build upon each other to outline various soteriological theories ranging from liberation readings of salvation to ideas of new birth and ecological renewal. In Chapter 3, Pachuau frames the debate regarding the universalness of salvation in “two major circles” (96): pluralism and the fate of the unevangelized. He reaches an “inconclusive conclusion,” arguing that the “overemphasis” of either extreme “sacrifices interpretive credibility” (108).

In Chapter 4, Pachuau turns his attention to ecclesiology by using Nicea’s definition of the church as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” as his outline. He offers a historical reading of ecumenical ecclesiology, calling ecumenism one of the most significant movements in church history. He then explores a variety of “analogical images” that includes Dulles’ five models, Sherman’s three rubrics, and Jenson’s characterizations of church, which he uses as the framework for the remainder of the chapter. In this vein, he explores the church as God’s covenant people, the Body of Christ, and the Spirit-led servant-herald of the Kingdom.

Finally, Pachuau engages with Kathryn Tanner and others to explore connections between theology and culture. Here he draws on Stephen Long’s work to build a framework of culture’s place in the theological discussion. He then re-centers the discussion moving from cultural to theological anthropology. In this part of the discussion, he explores Nicean and Chalcedonian Christology to argue for consideration of the Incarnation as God coming in the person of Jesus in a particular place, culture, and time. He offers this as a hermeneutic for reading mission and human culture, concluding that in the particularities of Jesus’ incarnation, we can see a model of God working in the world.

While his engagement with non-majority world scholars could be more robust, especially concerning ecclesiology and anthropology, Lalsangkima Pachuau’s work provides a helpful and wide-ranging literature review of four crucial issues in formulating a theology of mission. By carefully articulating various views on the Trinity, soteriology, ecclesiology, and anthropology, he guides the reader through a complex jungle of thought, providing the reader with a series of typologies and frameworks that are helpful in the reading and creation of a robust theology of mission.

Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition

Bernier, Jonathan

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2022, 336 pp., paper, \$23.49

ISBN: 978-1-5409-6180-8

Reviewed by Alberto I. Bonilla-Giovanetti

Jonathan Bernier's *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament* provides a fresh look at the dating of the New Testament (NT) texts and key early non-canonical Christian texts. His methodology is striking for its simplicity and the extent of its implications if adopted by the scholarly community.

The book is divided into front matter (Acknowledgments, Abbreviations, and an Introduction), five parts that are composed by five different literary corpora of the New Testament and early Christian literature, and back matter (Conclusion, Bibliography, Author, Scripture and Ancient Writings, and Subject Indexes). The five parts are: "The Synoptic Gospels and Acts"; "The Johannine Tradition"; "The Pauline Corpus"; "Hebrews and the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude"; and "Early Extracanonical Literature" (i.e., 1 Clement, the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas).

In his Introduction, Bernier lays out his methodology, his presuppositions, a brief history of scholarship regarding the dating of the NT documents, and tentative conclusions. Each subsequent part is the application of the methodology to each NT corpus. (This review will focus mainly on Bernier's methodology and will give examples of its application.) The author begins by noting that the NT as we have it today is inextricably interlinked to itself, so that redating one NT book would require the redating of other ones (1). Thus, a synthetic approach is needed. Based on his research, Bernier will argue for a "lower" chronology despite the majority of scholarship leaning on a "middle" chronology for dating NT texts. Bernier concludes that, except for the undisputed Pauline letters, "the majority of the texts that were eventually incorporated into the New Testament corpus were likely written twenty to thirty years earlier than is typically supposed by contemporary biblical scholars" (1).

While most of modern critical scholars argue for middle and late chronologies (3–8), even dating some books into the early 100s AD, Bernier follows John A. T. Robinson’s instincts as presented in his *Redating the New Testament* (published in 1976). This was the only systematic presentation for a “lower” chronology in the twentieth century—Bernier seeks to be the first in the twenty-first century. While greatly appreciative of Robinson’s argument and approach, Bernier finds some problems in his methodology—namely, arguments from silence regarding AD 70, the “Neronian error,” and ineffective presentation of the data (8–9).

Bernier seeks to remedy these issues by clearly defining the question at hand and evaluating the data clearly and arriving at defensible conclusions. To define the question, Bernier seeks to know when the completed texts of the NT were written. He will seek to answer this question by understanding synchronization between NT texts by using the common critical methodologies of “textual, reception, source, and redaction criticisms” (23). These should at least narrow down the possibilities. Beyond this, Bernier seeks to use the historical context of the early church (contextualization) to understand when NT texts were written based on how their views of Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and other such doctrines align with what is historically known to have been the case in different periods of the early Jesus movement (26–27). Finally, Bernier seeks to discern the authorial biographies of the NT writers and decide if the traditional authors are the actual authors or not (27). After these data are gathered, Bernier will seek to find answers that are as free from logical fallacies as possible and provide solid evidence for conclusions that can explain the data in the simplest manner (cf. Occam’s razor [28–29]). While certainly interacting with relevant secondary literature, Bernier will seek to lean on primary sources as much as possible to arrive at his conclusions (30–31).

Since Bernier systematically goes through his methodology on each of the NT corpora, I will choose one of these to exemplify how he proceeds (you can read the rest of his conclusions in his book). The Gospel of John is usually dated around AD 90, but Bernier dates it between AD 60 and 70 (87–111). Why? First, he does the heavy work of synchronization. External attestation of early NT manuscripts and early Christian reception of John suggest composition of the Gospel post-120 to be unlikely, though not impossible (89). The relationship of John to the Synoptics is sufficiently complex and ambiguous that no solid conclusions may be arrived at to date

John (90). After these, Bernier analyzes several passages in John's Gospel that may be relevant to its dating (90–102): Peter's death (John 21:18–19), the Beloved Disciple's death (John 21:22–23), passages that describe synagogue expulsions (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), the Temple being raised after the third day (John 2:19–22), the proper place to worship (John 4:21), and the pool of Bethsaida (John 5:2). Bernier considers the narrative of the deaths of Peter and the Beloved Disciple to further neither the pre- nor post-70 dating for John since the data are ambiguous and could be read to favor either possibility, thus he considers them "nonprobative." Regarding the synagogue expulsion passages, Bernier argues that scholarship's comparison of these Johannine narratives with the Birkat Haminim (attested ca. 85) are faulty. After reproducing the text of this prayer against heretics and an early account from the Talmud, Bernier concludes that this prayer and John lack thematic parallels and have difficulties with dating, since it is quite possible that the Birkat Haminim postdates John. Thus, the Birkat Haminim are nonprobative for Bernier. For archaeological and interpretive reasons, Bernier considers the narratives of Jesus raising the Jerusalem temple and his conversation with the woman in Samaria to be nonprobative since it is not clear whether reading them as texts from before or after 70 would have greater explanatory power. One data point that proves key for Bernier is the reference to the pool of Bethsaida. John 5:2 states that "there *is* a pool . . . *having* five porticoes" (NASB; emphasis added). Bernier goes through the grammatical and archeological data to sustain that the verbs *eimi* and *echō* should be considered as present temporally, not just grammatically, which suggests that the pool was there at the time of the writing of John. This is significant if it is assumed that the pool was probably destroyed in the Roman invasion that culminated in AD 70, though this is not certain. Thus, this passage provides Bernier with his strongest positive synchronic evidence that John was written before 70.

Now, regarding the historical context of John, Bernier evaluates the author's knowledge of pre-70 Palestine, the scholarly understanding of the development of the Johannine tradition, whether or not there were proto-gnostic elements addressed in John, the development of Johannine Christology (102–08). Bernier considers John's knowledge of pre-70 Judea, Samaria, and Galilee to be interesting, but nonprobative. The author likewise considers the Johannine tradition to be unhelpful to date the Gospel since there are elements of circular reasoning for arriving at absolute dates. Since many of the scholarly comparisons of John with Gnosticism were done

before the discoveries in Qumran and Nag Hammadi, Bernier considers Gnosticism to not have influenced John, since it is more likely a second century development. Johannine Christology is traditionally thought to be high and late, but after the works of Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, among others, it is equally if not more plausible to argue high Christology came at earlier dates, thus making it unnecessary to date John to later dates for his high Christology. Since there are similarities with Paul's high Christology, Bernier dates John no earlier than around 60, but considers Christology to be a hard element to use to date John.

Finally, Bernier goes over the authorial biography of John. He considers the author of John to have been an actual "John," but the question remains which John from the NT it was. After going through the evidence, Bernier considers the author's identity to be inconclusive to date the Gospel.

Thus, Bernier concludes that John was written between 60 and 70 based on John 5:2 and the pool of Bethesda being in existence at the time of writing, that there is no evidence in the Gospel that is more intelligible after 70 than before 70, and John's Christology having similarities with Paul's (111). Bernier acknowledges that it would be preferable to have stronger evidence for dating John, but he does not wish to go beyond what the evidence suggests.

Now, to evaluate Bernier's method and conclusions. It is worth noting that Bernier's methodology is not entirely groundbreaking in that he introduces no new methods. Rather, he utilizes familiar methodologies and reapplies them to the question of dating the NT. This is significant, however, if one considers why many NT scholars arrive at such later dates for the NT texts. If Bernier is not applying a new method, not utilizing new data, and not arguing beyond what the data can sustain, what does this suggest about those who argue for middle or higher dates of composition? Bernier's approach is minimalistic in a way, in that he does not wish to provide complex theories with possible, or even plausible elements, but that are ultimately unprovable. In this way Bernier provides a subtle and implicit challenge to scholars who base their interpretive conclusions of NT texts on hypothetical grounds. For this Bernier is to be commended.

Likewise, Bernier strongly focuses on primary sources from the NT and early Christian literature, as well as wider Greco-Roman and Second Temple Jewish texts and realia. While he helpfully interacts with secondary sources as necessary, he does well to avoid the interminable debates that scholars have with each other and instead he goes back to the primary data

once more. In this sense, his inductive approach to the primary source data helpfully brings his audience back to the most important aspects regarding the question of dating the NT.

A possible critique, however weak, is that at times Bernier could have given more evidence or explanation for his conclusions. For example, Bernier argues that John's knowledge of pre-70 Palestine should be considered non-probative since the Gospel would be intelligible equally well if it was written before or after 70 (103). However, one of his main arguments for a pre-70 composition of John is that the author understood the pool of Bethesda to be still in place in pre-70 Jerusalem, which would obviously mean the author had knowledge of the city before its destruction. His dismissal of geography and topography for the dating of John may have been abrupt and warranted further justification, especially considering one of his main arguments depended on these data.

In conclusion, Bernier provides a challenging argument to the academic community. If scholars wish to make a strong argument for an interpretive or theological point that depends on a middle or higher dating system, they should reckon with Bernier's work. His simple and profound arguments should not be ignored—they should be evaluated and even challenged, something the author himself invites (280). Bernier's work is a helpful starting point for scholars who wish to reevaluate what many in the scholarly community take for granted.

Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary

Gorman, Michael J.

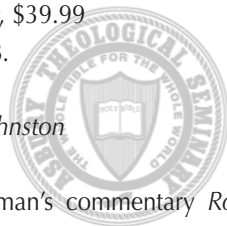
Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2022, 325 pp., hardcover, \$39.99

ISBN-978-0-8028-7762-8.

Reviewed by Kenny R. Johnston

Michael J. Gorman's commentary *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* is a refreshing take on Paul's letter that will prove pleasing and helpful to the pastoral theologian within the Wesleyan tradition. Gorman grounds his discussion theologically in a *participationist Trinitarianism* whereby believers are shaped and formed as they mutually participate in the life of the trinitarian persons (15, 39–42). He grounds his



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discussion pastorally in *transformationalist cruciformity* whereby believers experience transformed lives that take the moral shape of the cross of Christ (11, 16–17). These two themes pervade the entire commentary. “Salvation,” he writes, “means participation and transformation; it means life through death and resurrection; it means becoming more and more Godlike by becoming more and more Christlike,” (38). Structurally, he approaches the text of the epistle as a “series of arguments” in the form of diatribe set “within an overall careful plan” for the church at Rome (32–3). He divides the epistle into five sections set between an opening and a closing (33–5). At the end of each section of the commentary are a summary of important points, pastoral reflections and questions for further discussion, and bibliographies for further reading that range on a variety of technical and practical issues related to each section respectively. Additionally, maybe unfortunately, the text of the epistle is not included but is assumed throughout.

Gorman’s book is divided into two primary sections, an introduction and commentary. The fifty-five-page introduction provides the interpretive and methodological sinew of the commentary by disclosing major themes and assumptions that Gorman incorporates when addressing the text. This proves important given that his style of persuasion uses what I can only describe as an *overarching coherence* of the whole utilizing said themes and assumptions. The introduction is further divided into two subsections, one introducing Paul and one introducing the letter to the Romans itself. In the introduction, readers will quickly recognize Gorman’s use of the most influential theological ideas of recent years including G.E. Ladd’s *already not yet* (“now but not yet” 14; see also Gorman’s use of *inauguration* 117–18) distinction alongside of Gordon Fee’s assimilation of the same regarding the age of the Spirit (though he references neither theologian); N.T. Wright’s version of the *new perspective*, *anti-imperialism*, and the use of *grand narrative* thinking (5, 10, 13); and even Matthew Bates’ recent use of “allegiance” as the heart of faith (“what we might call believing allegiance” 15; see also 30–1, 125, 148, and 242). And yet, readers will also quickly pick up on the more ancient Orthodox Trinitarian themes of *perichoresis* and its corollary in *theosis* (see especially 47), which Gorman has written about elsewhere (see Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009]). In this book, however, these ancient themes are identified more practically as *mutual indwelling* tending toward Christlike

cruciformity (16, 40–1). Additionally, Gorman lets his readers know that he adopts a *reconstitution* view of Israel as opposed to a *replacement* view in his approach to the epistle (49).

The commentary divides the letter to the Romans by seven sections. The first section (1:1–17) is the opening of the letter that Paul uses to “whet” the appetite of its readers and to “set the stage” by introducing key themes related to the letter’s argument (59, 63). Particularly, these themes are Christocentric *grace* and the obedience of *faith* as conjoined in the Gospel (61–2, 71–3); and the *righteousness* of God as “God’s covenant fidelity to Israel demonstrated in saving power to make things right” (68). In section two (1:18–4:25) Paul is said to be “gospelizing in absentia” (77) whereby he “retrospectively ... views humanity’s dire straits and God’s gracious solution through the lens of the crucified and resurrected Messiah,” (76). Key to this section is the idea of *covenantal dysfunctionism* whereby all persons, Gentile and Jew, are subject to the empire of Sin (77, 80). Section three (5:1–8:39) “[p]rincipally...functions to spell out the multifaceted meaning and character of justification” (143) and progresses along “three sets of narrative antitheses,” (145). The result of Paul’s argument in section three is that “[j]ustification means to experience the fullness of the life of the triune God,” (145, italics original). Section four (9:1–11:36) deals with the problem of Jewish unbelief within a covenantal framework, the conclusion of which is that God has a “habit of demonstrating undeserved mercy in unexpected ways” (229, italics original). Section five (12:1–15:13) explores the life of holiness that is rooted in believing allegiance and which has the form of “resurrectional cruciformity” (242, italics original) working itself out in hospitality (266–7). Section six (15:14–33) takes believing allegiance to the ends of the earth missionally. Finally, the final section is Paul’s closing, and Gorman focuses particularly on Paul’s deliberate inclusion of diversity in his list of people to greet as a demonstration of how “several house churches of Rome embody the Pauline vision of an inclusive community: gentiles and Jews; slave, free, and freedpersons (former slaves); elite and non-elite; men and women; from all corners of the empire” (294).

This commentary will be a cherished volume in any library on Paul’s epistle to the Romans. Furthermore, for pastors in ministry, it should be recommended as a must read for theological grounding and holiness living. This is perhaps the first thing to be said about the volume. It promotes themes that are near and dear to Wesleyan pastors particularly. Transformation for holiness is a central theme defended

throughout the entire work. This is demonstrated in Gorman's perspective on the controversial passage in Romans 7:7–13, which he interprets as a "description of the frustrated human (and especially Jewish) condition apart from Christ in spite of the law" (184). Also, Gorman clearly rejects Calvinistic interpretations of Romans 9–11 in favor of a wider view of the "ongoing universality of the Gospel" (226). Anyone looking for a take on Romans that argues these Wesleyan themes alongside of a participationist Trinitarianism will be excited with this volume.

On the other hand, Gorman's work has two perceivable weaknesses, both related to Romans 9–11. First, his interpretive work on Romans 9 is underwhelming compared to the rest of the commentary. Second, his conclusions on Romans 11 are questionable. In Romans 9, Gorman is so focused on God's surprising and unexpected mercy that he fails to offer a sense-making interpretation of the more concerning aspects of Paul's claims, though plenty are available in the scholarly literature. Compared to the other sections, this one appears to receive much less serious engagement from both Gorman and in reference to the literature in the bibliography section. In Romans 11, he argues for the strong possibility of a Pauline universalism regarding the salvation of the Jews in 11:30–2 (though he gives evidence against such a reading as well). I found Gorman's arguments here a bit unscholarly and unconvincing. Throughout the commentary on Romans 9–11 I was left baffled by the lack of equal theological treatment compared to the rest of his work in the book. Better and more thorough work on this section would have made this an almost flawless commentary.

In the final analysis, Gorman's treatment in this book will become an essential reference for both lay people and scholars who are looking for the larger picture, particularly in the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions. Though needing more clarity on Romans 9–11, it is one of the most satisfying treatments on Romans that is non-technical and accessible to the laity. Readers will not find detailed scholarly discussions on the stickier questions surrounding Romans, but they will find a very compelling theological vision for Paul's letters as a whole. I can honestly conclude that this is a new favorite and I am now looking forward to more of Gorman's work.

Religion's Power: What Makes It Work

Wuthnow, Robert

New York, NY: Oxford University Press

2023, 248 pp., hardcover, \$35.00

ISBN: 978-0-19-765253-4

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

Robert Wuthnow has created an excellent sociology of religion textbook for understanding the various exercises of power within religious contexts. In *Religion's Power: What Makes It Work*, Wuthnow shows a magisterial command of the discourse within sociological scholarship related to power, giving the reader an overview of the field as well as a superb source to mine for further reading. The framework within the text also provides a lucid structure to begin thinking through the various manifestations of power within the religious sphere.

How power works, what it means, where it comes from, and who it benefits are not easy questions to answer. That can be especially so in religious settings where the use of power can be obfuscated or mystified by commonly held and strongly defended narratives and normalized practices. While this is not totally unique to religion, there is a certain flavor and unique features to the flow of power in this area. Wuthnow points out early on that this discussion is not only about abuses of power but will look closely at the use of power in general, the good and the bad. There are many instances of power being used in the name of religion to do both wonderful and terrible things.

The five main chapters give a schematic for thinking through the issues involved. They cover ritual practice, discursive power, institutional power, identity power, and political power, giving multiple facets through which to view power in religious life. What, though, is the concept of power that Wuthnow is piecing apart? He defines it as "the asymmetric capacity that enables a person, group, or whole sector of a population acting in the name of religion to accomplish what it wants" (2). How this asymmetry comes about will be different if the mechanism is ritual, discourse, or some combination. It is easy to spot the asymmetric capacity when we think about hierarchies of religious leaders and laypeople, boundaries around who is and who is not allowed to fulfill roles, choices about the use of money and resources, or discrimination by class, race, gender, or sexuality.

However, it takes a critical eye to see the ways that this imbalance is maintained through time, and Wuthnow directs the reader toward the large and small ways that power is created, maintained, and, often, usurped.

The references and illustrations are dense throughout the book. Usually, the examples of uses of power are brought up in an irenic, neutral style; thought-provoking without being incendiary. There were times where one would expect a hard-hitting example of an abuse of power that easily comes to mind, but the text alludes to these more often than entering into the particulars of a current, controversial debate. There are also places where the text moves very quickly over references, noting rather than delving. In some ways, this leaves a desire for directly confronting more contentious examples and a slower pace to analysis. In other ways, though, one can see how this approach would serve the pedagogical purpose of drawing in a wider audience and would generate classroom discussion, with students bubbling to bring up their own examples and talk about this or that use of power. There are plenty of openings where instructors could push the conversation deeper.

Religion's Power is an insightful work that would shine in a sociology of religion classroom. Though scholarly, critical, and having a bibliography that is impressive in scope, Wuthnow has a style that is approachable and engaging. While touching on subjects that have been the center of volatile and polarized debate, the conversation always stays focused on the topic at hand: growing the skills to recognize and understand uses of power in religious contexts. *Religion's Power* is a worthwhile resource for the professor, the student, and the curious.

What is a Gospel?

Watson, Francis

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

2022, 353 pp., hardcover, \$49.00

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7292-0



Reviewed by Tyler Hallstrom

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Readers versed in the debate concerning the genre of the Gospels readily recognize the long shadow cast over the discussion since the 1992 publication of Richard Burridge's seminal monograph, *What are*

the Gospels?, a shadow that Francis Watson seeks Gospel scholarship to step out of in his evocatively titled 2022 publication, *What is a Gospel?* Whereas Burrige's work focused on the four canonical Gospels, Watson calls for a critical reexamination of "the ancient boundaries that created binary distinctions between 'canonical' and 'apocryphal,' 'orthodox' and heretical'" (xii). Instead, he posits that these boundaries should be erased in order "to view the diverse field of early gospel literature as a single undivided whole," an interrelatedness which constitutes the book's "primary theme" (xii–xiii). Offered as a sequel to his *Gospel Writing* (2013), the present volume is largely a compilation of previously published essays (11 of 14 chapters) brought together in service of answering the question, "What is a Gospel?"

The clearest and most direct answer to this question comes from both the first and last chapters of the book, appropriately titled "What is a Gospel?" (chapter 1) and "A Reply to My Critics" (chapter 14). Although the consensus view since Burrige's work has been to see the Gospels as Greco-Roman biographies, Watson maintains that this thesis is only sustainable if one neglects the noncanonical gospels and the dynamic nature of genre (13). Having redrawn the boundary of investigation to include non-canonical gospels and "gospel-like" texts, such as the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, Mary, etc., he posits that these texts exist within a "new" and "emergent genre" characterized by "(1) a focus on the human, earthly Jesus in his interactions with other humans; (2) an emphasis on his supreme and unsurpassable authority; and (3) direct or indirect attribution to an apostolic or quasi-apostolic source" (1, 13). Aware of the controversial nature of his claims, the final chapter likewise addresses the "substantive criticism" he has received by a number of notable Biblical scholars (279).

The intervening chapters offer a series of wide-ranging and heavily detailed studies on the interrelatedness of early gospel literature. Chapter 2, for example, traces the tradition of Judas Iscariot through the Gospel of Matthew, Acts, Papias, Apollinaris, the Gospel of John, the Gospel of Peter, and the Gospel of Judas. Alternatively, Chapter 4 argues that Luke's use of Matthew, which scholarship has "widely regarded as virtually impossible," should instead be seen as "highly likely" (66). Other topics include the *Epistula Apostolorum* (chapter 7), the conflict between Tertullian and Marcion (chapter 10), the Lindisfarne gospel codex (chapter 11), and Albert Schweitzer's eschatology (chapter 13). Since the volume is a collection of

individual essays rather than a carefully structured monograph wherein each chapter builds upon and extends the argument of the previous chapter, one disadvantage is the sense of disjointedness that attends to the work as a whole. Watson has attempted to alleviate this issue by adding italicized introductions to each chapter to show how the material bears upon the central thesis, though with limited success, and a concluding chapter summarizing and synthesizing the material would have added to its strengths. Nevertheless, while not all will agree to Watson's daring proposals, all may appreciate the rigor and erudition manifest in his various studies which already have and will continue to provoke discussion within Gospel scholarship. As he rightly concludes, "It is never a bad thing to be made to think again" (303).

Reading the Prophets as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Introduction

Tully, Eric J.,

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2022, 432 pp., hardcover, \$49.99

ISBN: 978-0-8010-9973-1

Reviewed by Marshall C. Johns

The section of Christian scripture entitled "The Prophets" encompasses a corpus that can, simply, be described as "enormous." The Prophets possess enormous content, several hundred pages in most Bibles. They also proffer an enormous amount of diversity; genre distinctions are myriad. This is not to mention the enormous, though understandable and expected, ideological diversity among more than a dozen implied authors covering, conservatively, a period of roughly four hundred years that saw no fewer than three major, oppressive, foreign regime changes. And, considering the majority of the written prophets' work is in an "elevated" or "poetic" style, the task of interpreting any given prophetic oracle (let alone book!) can require an enormous lift on the part of the interpreter. Eric J. Tully's *Reading the Prophets as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Introduction*, however,

is not enormous, nor does it seek to crush its reader under the potential enormity of its task.

Tully's *Reading the Prophets* is a compact book that seeks to survey the entirety of what is termed "prophetic literature" in Protestant, Christian Bibles. In this endeavor, Tully is, by necessity, brief and selective; to "distill" something requires an outside apparatus to heighten desired aspects of the finished product at the expense of "incidental" aspects, and this survey is certainly a distillation. Tully is not to be faulted in this; *Reading the Prophets* is one volume within Baker Academic's burgeoning "Reading Christian Scripture" series which seeks to distill the proliferation of biblical studies work termed "biblical theology." The vagueries of this nomenclature notwithstanding, Tully's work fits within what this series hopes to provide: "interdisciplinary" approaches to the Protestant scriptures for introductory classes.

Many features of this book, and series, should be praised. Though not unique to the series, Tully's contribution includes helpful charts for issues of chronology and full-color inset texts with visual aids to manageably chunk sections of in-text reading. In fact, the series has these inset text boxes flagged with individual color-coded icons based on different scholarly approaches to queue readers to the correct supplemental material; for example, a reader may find icons of a yellow book and a group of tan figures at the end of a paragraph to signal them to both literary and reception history notes that the author has deemed helpful for the biblical passage just discussed. Other color-coded inset categories include "canonical connections," "historical matters," "theological issues," and "thinking visually." Alongside this are the choices to use endnotes rather than footnotes, to have maps strategically placed throughout the chapters, to have chapters use tables to visualize aspects of structural importance (e.g. outlines of biblical books), and to conclude chapters with proposed discussion questions. Thus, if only for the overt pedagogical decisions in the formatting of the material, Tully's text should be praised. It is clear that this series is thoughtfully incorporating new and developing instructional research, and any tool that seeks to engage more students is worth familiarizing oneself with.

Reading the Prophets is divided into three major sections, though the first two ("The Context of the Prophets" and "The Old Testament Prophet") can, for the sake of review, be taken together. As is often the way with scholarship, it is here that the dreary, yet important, work of establishing

definitions and the construction of a framework will set the trajectory for both the project and its impending critiques. Tully situates the prophetic tradition both “theologically” and “historically” before beginning the task of defining what a prophet is/does in scripture; Tully gives an overview of “covenant theology” (reminiscent of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant*) for the theological context and walks briskly through Israel’s history from “the wilderness” to the postexilic period for the historical context. He then defines a prophet as someone “chosen by God to receive his [sic] message and then to proclaim it to an audience in a particular historical setting” (58), requiring that a prophet be selected from the covenant community by God to speak a specific message dictated by God. This definition deftly navigates many pitfalls for Tully’s overall goals. Many Christian interpreters desire a position that sees the ancient Hebrew prophets as distinct from diviners of the ANE, especially since (outside of Deuteronomy 18:19-22) the understanding of what an ancient Hebrew prophet was/did seems more implied by narratives than by strict prescription in the Hebrew scriptures, and Tully’s definition can concretize this position. Though with a self-admitted lack of consistency across all the prophetic books, Tully also uses a five-fold formal schema for understanding prophetic writings: 1) Accusation of covenant unfaithfulness in the past, 2) Warning of God’s judgment in the near future, 3) Call to repent/prediction of restoration in the near future, 4) Announcement of restoration in the eschatological future, and 5) Announcement of final judgment in the eschatological future. Tully closes this section with respective overviews of “persuasive strategies” used by prophets and the process of canonization of prophetic works. These two chapters do leave versed practitioners wanting, but are helpful guides for introductory material; an example is the limited exposure to theories of poetics or redaction in their respective chapters.

The third section, “The Prophetic Books,” is understandably the largest section. It is also a very predictable section given the definitions and framework laid out by Tully in the first two sections. If one is familiar with more traditional or “evangelical” approaches to prophetic literature, much of this section can be predicted. Tully, for example, wants to hold to a singular “historical prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem” (152), bristles at the conclusions (that are largely agreed upon by critical scholars) of redaction criticism related to dating books in the Book of the Twelve, and considers Daniel 1) prophetic literature that is 2) predictive. That is to say, while individual points of exegesis may differ from the likes of J. Daniel Hays

or Robert B. Chisholm, Tully's thrust is similar. To return to the idea of *Reading the Prophets* as a distillation, this thrust is due to the "outside apparatus" used to heighten the desired aspects of this project: An overtly "Christological" framework of approaching the Hebrew scriptures. Tully, to his credit, does hedge in some areas where previous interpreters within conservative, Protestant thought have not; his tempered approach to "messianic" aspects early in Isaiah is an example, where he cautions readers against too quickly assuming Jesus to be the fulfillment of the sign-acts of chapters seven and nine. Said differently, Tully does (expectantly) take every uncontroversial opportunity to bring out messianic or Christocentric approaches to interpreting the Prophets, but he does not do so in areas where it would be an overstatement.

Considering the pedagogical strengths of this book mentioned above, the main critique Tully's work suffers from is, ironically, pedagogical. Tully seems to be more bent on answering the questions he creates for the text than creating space for the texts read in Christian communities to raise questions for readers, unintentionally implying that his Protestant reading of the Prophets is the reading of the Prophets. There is an overall lack of engagement with global and historic voices, something that could have been leveraged quite easily given the use of prophetic literature in early church theologizing and sermons. This lack of inclusion of the early church also silences any mention of the different ordering of the Book of the Twelve in the LXX; though somewhat of an open question, scholars who see the Twelve as a singular unit do agree that this different order in the first six books (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah in the LXX vs. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah in the MT) changes the theological thrust of the Twelve, something that would leave out innumerable "reception history" dialogue partners from modern scholarship and the early church, since the LXX was overwhelmingly the text they used while engaging "Hebrew scripture." Put succinctly: Tully's pedagogical decision to distill what "Christian scripture" is (i.e. the Protestant canon) dictates the questions addressed herein, at points to the detriment of a holistic approach to issues in interpretation.

Another critique should be noted. Tully does at times go out of his way to "modernize" aspects of societal sin and injustice, particularly around the issue of sexual and gender expression. Though dressed in polite language, this book does harbor a "traditionalist" bent that may leave a bad impression on queer Christians and their allies. It is striking that Tully foists

this approach to this issue upon the text; prophetic literature obviously has much to say about infidelity through the literary foil of sexual expression, but this corpus is relatively silent about the “specifics” of sexual ethics. By comparison, however, social injustice perpetrated through economic systems and the unrighteous individuals within them is a topic the Prophets speak to through both literary foil and specific examples. Even with these critiques, Tully’s *Reading the Prophets* would be a welcomed addition to introductions to prophetic literature at private, undergraduate Christian institutions, or even adult Sunday School classes for local congregations.



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