

Reviews



GOD OF THE LIVING: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, by Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, translated by Mark Biddle. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011. Pp. 620. \$59.95 (cloth).

God of the Living is an ambitious venture by two prestigious German biblical scholars: Reinhard Feldmeier (Professor of NT at the Georg-August University of Göttingen) and Hermann Spieckermann (Professor of OT at the same institution). Their project is theology proper, a biblical “doctrine of God” as set forth in the OT and NT. At the heart of *God of the Living* is this claim: “The nature of the God of the Christian Bible becomes evident in his intention to relate to human beings, for whom God creates life freed from guilt, life not unto death, but life from God and unto God, assured participation in his life” (1). Believers “have experienced life as an act of God’s liberating recognition and desire to remain in this bond out of love—lifelong and in the confidence that, for his part, as the ‘God of the Living,’ God will maintain this bond even in death” (1). Biblical theology, they claim, is in this sense “life science” (1).

Feldmeier and Spieckermann, however, are not simply interested in describing the God of the Bible. For them, knowing God and being known by God (“reciprocal knowledge,” 6) are not matters of information, they are matters of faith; as Colossians says, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge [are] hidden” (Col 2:3). They argue that “a biblical doctrine of God [their project’s

stated goal] makes the God of the Christian Bible its theme with the objective not just of presenting biblical concepts of God in a plausible arrangement, but of facilitating knowledge of God in the sense of a *fides quaerens intellectum* by teaching the beliefs (*fides quae creditur*) indispensable for the act of believing (*fides qua creditur*)” (3). Their book seeks to do what Scripture itself does: relate knowledge of God that leads to “the experience of God” (4). At least in principle, then, their book attempts to do what all good biblical teaching and preaching do: bring the reader/hearer into a revelatory, relational encounter with the living God.

As German biblical scholars who participate fully in traditional interpretive strategies, Feldmeier and Spieckermann go about their task in a distinctly “historical” mode: “The doctrine of God presented here is defined by the convictions that appropriate understanding of the voices of the biblical witnesses without scholarship in the history of literature and religion is deficient and that the appreciation of its binding character for a given moment is not sustainable without carefully reconstructing history and without exploring the logic of the biblical understanding of God” (8). More polemically put: “Other paths to understanding, if they wish to avoid the path trod here, must be based solely on intuitively obscuring the difference between past and present or on claims that one possesses the Spirit. Both paths have limited authority but underestimate the pertinent distinction between divine word and human word and, furthermore, by repress-

ing theological discourse, stand in danger of failing to distinguish the Spirit from the spirits" (8). This last quote leaves me hoping for a more sophisticated engagement with the mountains of recent scholarship in the area of hermeneutics, much of which would call into question whether *any* interpretive approach, despite its best intentions, can proceed without "obscuring the difference between past and present" (8).

From their distinctly historical method, Feldmeier and Spieckermann launch into a two-part exegetical tour de force. Their analyses of texts are insightful, dense, occasionally granular, but, more often than not, rich and rewarding. Part 1 ("Foundation") focuses on God's character: "The Name and the Names," "From Lord God to Father God," "The One as the Unifier," "The Loving One," etc. Part 2 (obscurely titled, "Development") reads like a list of loosely related themes in biblical theology: "Word and Creation," "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," "Hiddenness and Wrath," "Suffering and Lament," etc. For Christian leaders, I would commend the following chapters: 4 ("The Loving One"), 11 ("Hiddenness and Wrath"), 12 ("Suffering and Lament"), and 13 ("Transience and Death"). Among these selections, chapter 4 is particularly significant. It takes an exegetical sledgehammer to the notion that the God of the OT is a God of wrath and the God of the NT is a God of love. For church leaders who continue to be troubled by this ancient caricature, chapter 4 will prove insightful. The other chapters are highlighted because they display the exceptional theological and exegetical acumen of the authors. It would be impossible to summarize these chapters in any meaningful way, given their density. My suggestion: Dig in, but slowly and deliberately.

Given the authors' emphasis on the God of the living, whose commitments to life

extend beyond the grave (see especially chapter 12, "Transience and Death," along with the conclusion), a significant opportunity was missed to engage the recent work of Jon Levenson and Kevin Madigan, whose insightful books on resurrection were published several years before *God of the Living* (Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* [Yale University Press, 2006]; Levenson and Madigan, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* [Yale University Press, 2008]). As far as I can tell, Levenson's book is cited only once and in a footnote (479 note 18). These omissions speak to a broader neglect of English-language scholarship, which has led the way in recent decades in the area of OT theology. The issue here I suspect is not language ability but a growing trans-Atlantic methodological divide that seems to grow in severity on a yearly basis.

So what does all of this mean for pastors and church leaders? A few things: This book belongs in the "continuing education" section of the church leader's personal library, but probably not in the general church library. The book assumes knowledge of biblical and theological languages (especially Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) and often engages in very detailed exegesis of biblical texts that might frustrate lay readers. The reader, moreover, should plan to spend significant time with this book. It is over 500 pages and requires a high level of engagement. Riches await the reader who chooses to dedicate this kind of time to this book, however. Despite the minor criticisms above, *God of the Living* is a profound volume, worthy of careful study.

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ENGAGING THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION, by Matthew Levering. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. Pp. 363. \$44.99 (cloth).

This book is a first-rate treatment of the basic theme of divine revelation, what it means, and how it has come down to us today. Persist, reread if you must, and do not miss the supplementary material in the footnotes (often covering one-half to two-thirds of the page). This is a remarkable piece of work by a professor of theology at Mundelein Seminary. It casts a wide net to include scholars/clergy from a variety of theological persuasions, and discusses at length samples of writings from these various viewpoints. The author's own statement will give an insight into the author's purpose: "This book has its source in my urgent desire to know our Creator, infinite life and love, the one who sustains us and gives us eternal life with him, for which I am eager" (xi). It is both a testimonial and an investigation into the doctrine of revelation.

A focal query faces us: How did the God of Israel sustain the progress of revelation by "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16)—a fellowship described by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:19? Levering opens up and responds to this issue in this book of eight chapters. The first aspect is the theme of "mission" (that of Christ and the Holy Spirit). These missions unite Christ Jesus, the church, the Holy Spirit, and all believers. He expounds and interacts with three theologians to develop the idea of the mission of the church: Thomas Aquinas, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Christopher Wright. He concludes that revelation "enables us to see that revelation, while being the action of the Triune God, cannot be understood outside the participation and mediation of the Church" (56).

His second theme is liturgy, in which he lays emphasis upon the eucharistic liturgy

(lit., the work of the people) as "the primary place in which the Church participates in and interprets the revelation of God" (59). He presents in clear fashion the work of three theologians: John Webster, Alexander Schmemmann, and Joseph Ratzinger. It follows that it is preeminently in the eucharistic liturgy "that we hear Scripture as it is truly meant by God to be heard" (85).

Chapter 3 concerns the theme of priesthood, which Levering relates to the appointment of successors to the apostles by the laying on of hands (1 Tim 1:6), to whom they imparted their own ministry "of teaching authority" (87). He appeals to two noted scholars, John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes. After sketching their views on the rivalries that arose, our author traces this problem from the NT onward, and shows how Jesus and his apostles tried to address this issue. He shows how Jesus instituted the sharing of eucharistic mercy as the mission of the apostles. The church is charged with the "ministry of reconciliation."

Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with "the gospel" (i.e., What is it?) and tradition. For the former, Levering's appeal is to Scot McKnight and Thomas Aquinas on Paul's gospel in the Epistle to the Romans. The basic issue is whether the church has been able to further and to faithfully interpret the gospel. Tradition is the mode the church employs to transmit "the word of God" that was entrusted to the apostles. And tradition is closely related to Scripture because the church hands on the sacred writings entrusted to the apostles by Jesus Christ. After a lengthy critical discourse on Thomas Tilley's *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (with which he has considerable disagreement), Levering takes up two critical themes that are of wide interest.

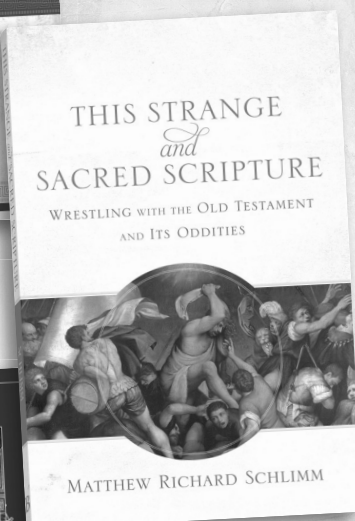
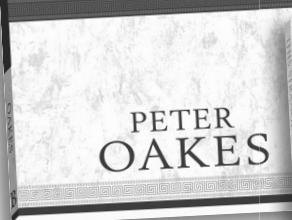
In chapter 6, entitled "Development," he sets out three steps of study. First, what does

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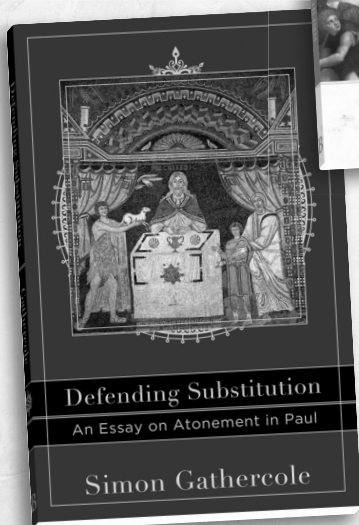


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the Roman Catholic document *Dei Verbum* say about the doctrinal developments that occur in the transmission of divine revelation? Second, he presents an instance of how thinking about doctrinal development can fail theologically. Third, there is an examination of the works of Lewis Ayres and Khaled Anastolios relating to doctrinal development. (This examination tries to demonstrate that John T. Noonan's approach, which includes the idea of doctrinal development, is inadequate.) The basic issue here is the sense of development in Trinitarian doctrine—especially in the centuries leading to the great fourth-century Nicene creed, and following.

Chapter 7, entitled "Inspiration," is a detailed examination of the issue of the nature of Scripture. Is it God's word to humans, or is it humans' word about God? How do the ideas of divine revelation relate to the historical study of the biblical text? These and many other issues plague our thinking. Levering appeals to writers of various points of view (including important references in the lengthy footnotes). He gives major attention to the writings of Origen and Augustine. Under the heading "The Twofold Meaning of History," he refers to both typological interpretation and to the issue of the question of the historical accuracy of biblical passages. Scholars of varying positions, such as David Carr, Dale Allison, and Michael Fishbane are included in the mix. Levering refuses to divide Scripture into "inerrant and errant" or "inspired and uninspired" parts. "Scripture as a whole, and the whole of it, including every single part, mediates divine revelation truthfully" (249).

In a concluding chapter 9, Levering points up the evident conflict throughout history of the cultural and theological issues at stake between Judaism and Hellenism. In large measure this would be illustrated in the

Pauline literature and the writings of the Fathers. But it is critical to retain the balance that Paul retains, and to see the Scriptures as God's message to humanity.

Levering has given us a wide-ranging and profound discussion of the theme of divine revelation. Read, study, ponder it to your intellectual and spiritual benefit. It not alone gives a helpful survey of various Christian positions—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant (both liberal and evangelical)—but probes the mind and theological sensitivities of the reader.

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CHRISTIFICATION: A LUTHERAN APPROACH TO THEOSIS, by Jordan Cooper. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014. Pp. 132. \$13.60 (paper).

In the flurry of scholarly activity surrounding the Finnish school of Luther studies, intense debate ensued regarding the relation between faith and union with Christ in Luther's writings. Jordan Cooper—a Lutheran pastor and a doctoral student at the London School of Theology—has entered this conversation, suggesting that the Lutheran tradition itself has the conceptual resources by which to understand justification in terms of *theosis*.

The argument begins with a general definition of *theosis*, in which he draws primarily on contemporary Orthodox sources to guide his reading of the patristic and medieval theologians of the Christian east. Cooper hypothesizes what language of "becoming God" might mean in a Western context in which divinization plays a less significant role than it does in an Eastern one. Of particular concern to Cooper is to distinguish two different kinds of *theosis*: one in which the

goal of *theosis* is the assumption of the entire cosmos into the divine nature, and another in which the incarnation configures individual salvation as divinization. Cooper identifies this incarnational version of *theosis* with the earlier patristic tradition of Irenaeus and Athanasius. It is this kind of “Christification” that Cooper sees as fundamentally compatible with Lutheran theology.

From this vantage, Cooper launches an interpretation of Lutheran soteriology in light of this incarnational version of *theosis*. Rather than covering already well-documented terrain in Luther’s non-confessional works, Cooper attempts to show that the Lutheran tradition actually has its own account of *theosis*, a case he makes through an appeal to Luther’s writings included in the Book of Concord, Melancthon’s *Apology*, the *Formula of Concord*, and the scholastic tradition. Perhaps most unique is Cooper’s

argument that the forgiveness of sins cannot occur apart from ontological union with Christ—an interesting claim given the predominantly legal connotations of the Pauline doctrine of justification.

Chapter 3 involves a general discussion of biblical texts supporting a theotic account of salvation. Of particular significance for Cooper’s case is 2 Pet 1:4, in which the author suggests that in salvation, Christians “become participants of the divine nature” (NRSV). Additionally, Cooper does a significant amount of work with the Pauline corpus to substantiate his claim. The research of Michael Gorman on salvation and union with God in Paul has clearly influenced his reading of the relevant texts, evidenced by his construal of Paul’s “Christ-mysticism” in a theotic rather than a relational sense.

Having established that *theosis* can be defended from a scriptural standpoint, Co-

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per's fourth chapter explores similar features of early patristic texts. Utilizing the available writings of Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Athanasius, Cooper highlights the early development of the aforementioned incarnational approach to deification that arose in the centuries following the writing of the New Testament. This form of *theosis* prioritizes the incarnation as fundamentally paradigmatic for the divinization of humanity in Christ. Generally speaking, this construal centralizes the role of the church, the sacraments, and the divine economy rather than the mystical pathway of ascent.

Cooper's final chapter articulates a later patristic development in the doctrine of *theosis* that incorporates Neoplatonic philosophical categories into the description of human participation in the divine. The progenitor of this approach, for Cooper, is Pseudo-Dionysius, whose mystical theology of participation degrades the incarnational and economic dimensions of deification, emphasizing instead contemplation and asceticism as integral in the process of divinizing the human. In a terse conclusion to the book, Cooper compares and contrasts Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox approaches to mystical union or *theosis*, suggesting that typically Western (legal) and typically Eastern (participationist) approaches are not mutually exclusive.

This text is brief, running at only about 125 pages of argument. Regardless, Cooper is able to partially develop some interesting ideas, especially regarding the distinction between an earlier incarnational and a later mystical approach to *theosis*. In this sense, the text is helpful. However, the book is also deficient for a couple of reasons.

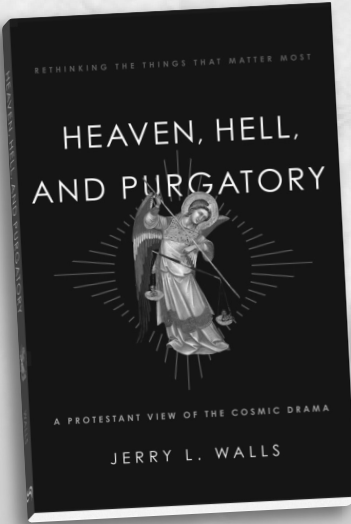
Much of Cooper's work is underdeveloped; his use of texts often appears to be little more than the repetition of quotes with min-

imal elaboration. A longer, more detailed appraisal of the primary sources would more fully develop the argument. Another weakness is the book's thesis. At times, it is difficult to discern what Cooper is actually arguing, especially regarding his own version of *theosis*. He simultaneously tries to defend a forensic account of justification but at the same time maintain that ontological union forms the basis of God's declaration of righteousness, an aporia he leaves unresolved. To confuse matters further, Cooper also deploys the language of mystical union, a category from Lutheran orthodoxy's *ordo salutis*. However, vocabulary of mystical union is not construed in the original sources as the basis of justification. So it remains unclear precisely how mystical union constitutes the Lutheran analog of Orthodoxy's *theosis*.

Christification also suffers from some editorial problems. Greek terms and other non-English forms are incorrectly formatted throughout the text, and occasional typos remain. Various other errata include misspelled names. The text critic and biblical scholar Michael W. Holmes is entered in the bibliography as "Holms," for example. These problems aside, *Christification* represents another interesting attempt to incorporate ontological union as a feature of the doctrine of justification in Lutheran theology.

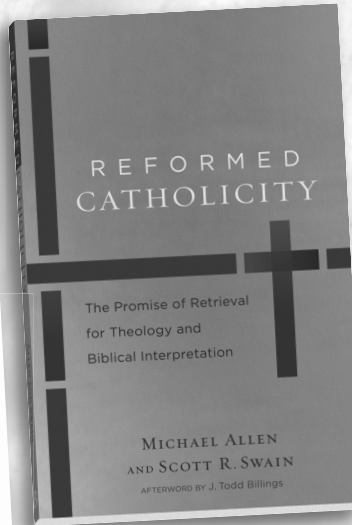
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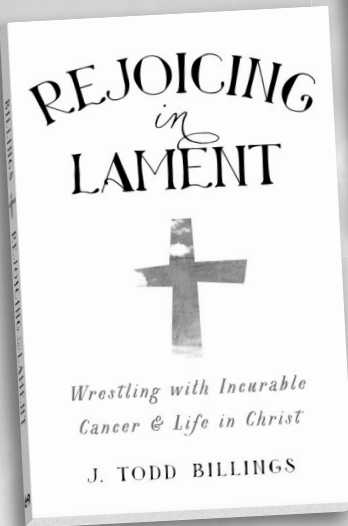
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**CLOUD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE:
NEGATIVE THEOLOGY AND
PLANETARY ENTANGLEMENT,**

by Catherine Keller. Columbia University Press, 2014. Pp. 394 (paper).

Let's start with one of the more important considerations. Of all the authors writing theology in English today, Catherine Keller must be ranked as perhaps the best and most innovative prose stylist. Her command of the language is incredible, and to such a degree that it might be said that Keller's contribution to constructive theology is as much in her use of language as it is in her proposal of concepts or analysis of the tradition.

For this reason, if for no other (and there are plenty of other great reasons), I recommend you read this book, then delve back into Keller's earlier works, especially her work on Revelation (*Apocalypse Now and Then*), and her most recent work on process theology (*On the Mystery* and *The Face of the Deep*).

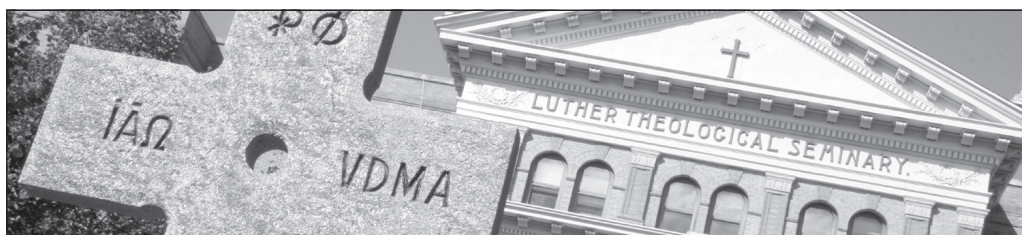
Keller is patently a process theologian, deeply influenced by Whitehead, but what makes her unique among process theologians is the creative and grounded approach she takes to such theology, engaging, as she does in this wonderful book, contemporary physics, transcendentalist poetry, medieval theology, and contemporary philosophical work in relational theology. Just listing these entanglements gives some indication of the breadth and depth of the work, but it is never inaccessible. *Cloud of the Impossible* expects much of its readers, but it is far from "impossible" to read.

If nothing else, what one takes away from the book is the extent to which the "cloud" itself stands as a symbol and image in Christian tradition. I certainly had not considered it as intentionally as other dominant motifs in Scripture like temple, Torah, body, baptism, or meal, and yet the more one looks at

the breadth of the tradition, from the cloud that went before the Israelites to the famous anonymous spiritual work *Cloud of Unknowing*, it becomes apparent that clouds are not a minor motif in Christian thought, but rather a dominant motif frequently overlooked. Dig a bit deeper, and one discovers that clouds played a central role in the theology of such eminent theologians as Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Gregory of Nyssa. For some reason, our vision of clouds has been clouded. Part of Keller's task in this work is simply to draw our attention to what had always already been there.

Additionally, because climate change is a core ethical issue in Keller's theology, the entangled relationship between clouds and climate comes forward. Clouds and climate change permeate the book. Towards this end, Keller makes frequent epigraphic use of lyrics from the enigmatic environmental indie band *Cloud Cult*—and to good effect. The epigraphs in the book sent me to Spotify for a re-listen to the albums, and they are splendid explorations in musical form of the theology developed in Keller's work.

Keller herself does an excellent job of describing the book's overall agenda. "The task before us will be to stage a series of encounters between the relational and the apophatic, or, to paraphrase, between the nonseparable and the unknowable. Many of these encounters will take place as readings of nontheistic texts, requiring little God-talk. But the series will nonetheless unfold chapter by chapter as the pulses and queries of a theology constructing itself even now" (6). This sentence lines out the agenda. Another sentence, nearby, illustrates her prose: "*The Cloud of the Impossible* hopes to demonstrate, billowingly, that these relations that materialize as selves and as collectives, the relations that crowd, that differ and



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matter, come also apophatically entangled in and as *theology*. For at a certain point the darkness—just where it turns theological, beyond all light supremacism—begins to glow: ‘in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence’” (8).

The book begins at Sinai, with a consideration of Shekinah, God’s presence as cloud and dwelling. Keller emphasizes that the unnameable name of God draws out the basic oscillation she is seeking to enact between enfolding and unfolding, saying and unsaying, possibilizing and making impossible.

Part 2 of the book shifts from Nicholas of Cusa and the Shekinah to a look at scientific, philosophical, and poetic explications of ontological entanglement. She makes splendid use of the quantum phenomenon described by Einstein as “spooky action at a distance.” She also engages the philosopher most responsible for bringing Whiteheadian philosophy into complicated conversation with post-structuralist philosophy and psychoanalysis—Deleuze.

After a brief and wonderful journey through Walt Whitman, Keller then proceeds to outline a theo-political mutual implicating of planetary entanglement in our ecological crisis with a constructive apophatic theology of love. This is a fascinating concluding proposal, because what it implies is that possibility itself, *posse ipsum*, may be precisely what love is, what Keller then terms an amorous cosmo-politics.

If I have one quibble with the book, it is her use of Nicholas of Cusa. As a constructive theologian, she seems to have built Cusa into that which she already needs to propose what she is proposing, rather than taking Cusa for what and who he is. But this is nothing that ultimately takes away from her theological proposal. In some senses, it will strengthen future readings of Cusa, because theologians of Cusa will have to, as Keller

proposes, say and unsay in order to say more clearly how his theology differs from her interpretation of it.

What remains is what Keller has become known for, surprising sentences that knock the top of the head. Here is one, worth the price of the book: “After all, still, the God question. With one last gasp of theological authority, let me therefore say unto you—that for which God is a nickname cares not whether you believe in God. Doesn’t give a damn. Isn’t in the damning business. What matters, what might matter endlessly, is what we earth-dwellers now together embody. Not what we say *about* God but how we *do* God” (306). That’ll preach, if you dare, but you’ll get entangled in it, literally. Which is the point.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO GERMAN PIETISM: PROTESTANT RENEWAL AT THE DAWN OF MODERN EUROPE, by Douglas H. Shantz. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. xvii + 490 pp. \$35.00 (paper).

If you truly wish to understand the roots of American Christianity, you need to understand two seventeenth-century movements: the English reformation and German pietism. The first movement seems obvious to us, as the origins of American religion are based in England. But equally important to American religion is German pietism. Not only is this movement primarily responsible for many of the American religious traditions (Lutheranism, German and Dutch Reform, Moravians, later Anabaptists and radical pietists), but German pietism had a

direct influence on many of the English traditions that came to America. Just to mention two (of many): John Wesley was deeply influenced by the Moravians, and the American Puritan leader Cotton Mather had extensive contacts with the German pietists at Halle. If you look, the links between the two movements are all over the place. Books on the seventeenth-century English reformation are quite common. But we have a real lack of current works in English on German pietism; this is a real problem for two reasons, first, because there has been recently a strong surge of scholarship on the topic in German, and second, because most English-language readers have a severely distorted view of pietism.

What most people think they know about pietism is actually ahistorical caricature, usually based on personal animus against the pietists. A good deal of the earlier schol-

arship on pietism originated in nineteenth-century Germany, by theologians running full-speed away from their religious backgrounds. Their judgments have been repeated and recycled by later historians (who should know better), and have moved by repetition into the “received wisdom” of numerous writers, many of whom were also in full rebellion against what they supposed to be their own pietistic upbringing. Pietists have long been dismissed or reviled in popular culture (think of movies like *Babette’s Feast* or *Chocolat*) as being repressed, unbendingly moralistic, hypocritical, or lacking any sense of fun or joy. Pietism has been charged with the origins of many different modern religious movements, from Fundamentalism on the one hand, to modern religious Liberalism on the other (I am not sure how it could be responsible for both!). In short, pietism has often been seen



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as a “whipping boy,” the root of whatever various writers think is wrong with contemporary Christianity.

These views are generally based on personal bias, rather than anything approaching scholarship. Fortunately, we now have in English a fine, well-balanced introduction to German pietism, and one that is well grounded in the latest continental scholarship on the subject. Douglas Shantz (University of Calgary) has written a wonderful and insightful book on German pietism that does full justice both to the essence of the movement itself and to the varied forms into which the movement diverged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This work is carefully researched and written, and puts to rest many of the tired old stereotypes about pietism that were repeated because of bias or lazy “scholarship.” Here we have a full and judicious study of German pietism itself; Shantz is no apologist, but a careful scholar of the subject, illuminating the total spectrum of this movement, and suggesting its continuing influence in the modern world.

In his first part, Shantz examines the roots of pietism from late-medieval religious thought, through the Reformation, and into seventeenth-century Germany, showing both the influences that brought pietism about and its general continuity with many of the aspects of the Protestant Reformation. It is no longer possible to caricature pietism as a “distortion” of the “pure Protestantism” of the sixteenth century, as many have done. The second part of this work is a careful study of the immediate origins of German pietism, from the work of Spener in the late seventeenth century, to the institutionalization of pietism in the Halle institutions under August Francke and his son Gotthilf. The third part of the book examines various themes about German pietism: the radical German pietists in North America, pietism

and gender, pietism and the Bible, and the spread of Christianity through pietist missions to Asia and America. Many of these chapters also dispel earlier stereotypes, and rightfully credit pietism as the chief agent of the spread of Protestant Christianity from Europe to the rest of the world. Finally, in part 4, Shantz thoughtfully reflects on the influence that pietism has had on modernity.

If this was all that Shantz has accomplished, it would be more than enough. But in a series of extensive appendices, he gives us quite a bit more. The book includes an expansive section of primary materials from the German pietists themselves, documents that are very helpful to understanding the subject. The book also includes copious notes, bibliographies, suggestions for further reading, and a very helpful and detailed index.

You ought to read this book. Not only will it correct loads of bad and biased information, it will provide you with a full and nuanced understanding of the subject. And it will certainly give you a deeper understanding of contemporary Protestant Christianity, not only in North America, but around the world.

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SCIENCE, SCRIPTURE, AND SAME-SEX LOVE, by Michael B. Regele. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014. Pp. 298. \$16.90 (paper).

The church and same-sex love? For many, this is a settled issue—one way or the other. Minds have been made up. Some have voted with their feet, and in different directions. Moreover, if current trends continue, the legality of same-sex marriage in the

United States will soon be guaranteed nationwide, with or without the concurrence of the churches. Whether this is morally good or bad is not the primary concern of the courts, but it remains properly an issue for Christian people.

For Michael Regele, the issue is personal. An evangelical Christian with a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture, Regele was forced to think more deeply about the place of same-sex love when his daughter announced that she was a lesbian. Not continuing to love and respect his daughter was not an option (true for many of us upon hearing similar words from a beloved family member). Instead, Regele decided to wrestle much more deeply with biblical texts, theological considerations, and scientific developments.

The result is this book. The author lays his cards on the table at the outset (16–17), anticipating his concluding construction of a “Theology of Inclusion” (chapter 8); but he carefully moves through biblical, traditional, and scientific arguments along the way, inviting the reader to accompany him by his clarity of thought and accessible writing, while recognizing that not all will agree. This will be a very valuable book for individuals and congregations for whom the internal and public debate continues. Its several charts, graphs, and summaries will aid discussion.

Regele begins with his personal story and then moves to a chapter on creation theology. He follows this with three chapters on the prevailing scientific understandings of same-sex attraction (which he calls a “game changer”) and the significant questions and changes in “cultural tide” that arise from this perspective. These chapters provide an accessible introduction to these important issues, something that many biblical and theological studies do not address.

Only then does the author turn to careful consideration of Old Testament and New Testament texts on same-sex behavior, which leads him to the conclusion, shared by many others including this reviewer, that “the Bible is silent on the forms of committed same-sex relationships that are the center of the modern discussion” (186). At the same time, he insists that “the Bible is exceedingly clear about the dehumanizing effects of turning sexual pleasures and their pursuits into gods, regardless of the kinds of sexual expression—gay or straight” (*ibid.*).

This leads Regele to his construction of a “theology of inclusion,” his dealing with the question of a “moral line” (he believes there still is one), including the place of “natural law” in philosophy and theology, especially important for the Roman Catholic tradition. His theology of inclusion is especially important, I believe, because when push comes to shove, Jesus and the Bible, in their central message, are going to favor the path of inclusion. There may be times when drawing lines is necessary, but Jesus is clear about “who is my neighbor” and about the stance of the believer over against “strangers and outcasts.”

In a final chapter, Regele asks about where we go from here. The book is all the more valuable because, while his own position is clear, Regele is never merely dismissive of those who see things differently. He states, “I cannot support actions by those whom I agree with on the homosexuality issue when they engage in exclusion of those whose conscience cannot let them embrace my position on the LGBT issue. Nor can I support actions by those who oppose my position when they seek to sideline or exclude those who advocate for full inclusion” (257).

Finally, “The true mark of who is the center of one’s life is how we respond individually and collectively to difficult situations.

And this is certainly the case when we are addressing the issue of homosexuality. When either side resorts to name calling, derision, or disrespect, this side is not following the way of Jesus, and the result is the breakup of the fellowship of God's people and the failure to live in the world as ambassadors of Jesus, the Messiah" (258–259).

It is certainly possible to present a respectful and respectable biblical and theological case for both "sides" of this issue. I know this because I have been asked to do so often by conferences and congregations. Not infrequently, after the presentation, folks from both sides have independently come

forward to thank me because, as they said, despite my attempt to be neutral, they "could tell" that I was actually "on their side." For this and other reasons (primarily because I regard neither the gospel nor the authority of Scripture to be at stake in this matter, no matter how important it is), I will continue to argue that the question should not—indeed, dare not—be church dividing. Others, of course, will disagree with me on this. Regele's book might help us remain in conversation.

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