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## Book Reviews

MEANING AND TRUTH IN 2 CORINTHIANS. By Frances Young and David F. Ford. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987. 289 pages. \$15.95.

This volume is distinctive in its approach to understanding 2 Corinthians. It is not a commentary; it is a wide-ranging discussion of New Testament hermeneutics and theology that employs 2 Corinthians to illustrate theory in practice. SPCK originally published this work in its Biblical Foundations in Theology series. The authors, professors of the University of Birmingham in exegesis and systematics, collaborate in this effort to bring about a marriage of disciplines: systematic theology with biblical studies; biblical criticism with ecclesiology; and hermeneutical theory with practical exegesis.

The reader of this study may initially be disillusioned by the lack of a clear and careful movement through the text that is typical of a commentary. However, patience in following the purpose of the authors will be rewarded in several ways. This treatment allows the reader to rethink and evaluate his own interpretative process. Even the basis for perceiving the meaning of words is reviewed. Pastors who often go into a volume to secure specific comment on a particular pericope for preaching may benefit from this broad and reflective approach. The authors combine the results of interpretative methodology and linguistic theory (Gadamer and Ricoeur) with concrete applications to 2 Corinthians of "bridging the hermeneutical gap" and "fusing the two horizons." There is sensitivity to both Hellenistic and Jewish elements of the epistle (e.g., the discussion of rhetorical structure and Paul's use of the Old Testament). This approach yields some fresh conclusions, the most attractive of which is that ". . . Paul's thorn in the flesh was the irritation caused by the interlopers and unfaithful in his churches" (p. 76, cf. *skolops* in Ezekiel 28:24 and Numbers 33:55). Furthermore, while the prominence of an "economy of God" metaphor in 2 Corinthians is overstated, the uncovering of this theme and the stress on the referential importance of metaphor in communicating reality prove valuable.

Certain features of this volume do detract from an unqualified endorsement. First, it is somewhat disjointed in its presentation; there is no clear progression. Secondly, there is an obvious divergence in style and content where the exegete ends and the systematician begins. Thirdly, the theme of the glory of God as found in "the face of Christ" (4:6) is highlighted as central to this epistle, but David Ford's analysis lacks a strong incarnational and revelatory emphasis. The manner with which he speaks of an "encounter" with this face appears to be more Barthian than Pauline. While there are others assertions with which one will disagree,

this treatment certainly stimulates thought and reflection on both 2 Corinthians and hermeneutics.

Charles A. Gieschen  
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**SAMUEL AND THE DEUTERONOMIST.** By Robert Polzin. New York: Harper and Row, 1988. 296 pages. \$38.95.

Not many books can honestly be labelled "revolutionary" (in terms of the history of exegesis), but I think this one can be. This one follows very much in the wake, and in the pattern, set by the author's previous: *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, which is sometimes assumed or to which reference is made. This work applies the same method to I Samuel. It is not easy to find a label for it. The subtitle calls it "A Literary Study," and perhaps that label will serve as well as any. Certainly, the work is a major contribution to the full-scale revolt against what we have known as the "historical-critical method."

Polzin (of Carleton University in Ottawa) is wholistic in procedure, assuming one "author," and he insists on looking at the complete massoretic text as it stands. He is full of scorn for what he calls "excavative" or "genetic" preoccupations with the alleged history of the text, which they then proceed to reconstruct according to its own presuppositions. He is just as scornful of the presumed "redactor," so beloved by traditional critics, which he labels "a code word for the producer of supposed literary incoherence" (p. 260, n. 21, and many similar statements throughout the book).

Polzin is by no means unaware of the many text-critical problems with which especially I Samuel is thought to teem, but even these he is reluctant to concede. (One major exception is 13:1, where something is undeniably wrong with the massoretic text's report of Saul's regnal years). But the famous alleged contradictions in the narrative which underlie most redactional theories (e.g., Samuel's contradictory views about kingship, or Saul's inconsistency in recognizing David) are given plausible literary solutions.

The virtual "rogue's gallery" of major influential critics with which he largely disagrees (McCarter in the *Anchor Bible*, Miller and Roberts on the ark narrative, Noth, Cross, van Seters), while respectful, makes delightful reading for the conservative. In the extensive end-notes (nearly

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fifty pages of small type), he interacts, both positively and negatively, with a host of other relevant writers. His own approach is closer to that of Alter, Fokkelman, and Gunn, and he names the likes of Bakhtin, Berlin, and Sternberg as major mentors.

But he takes care to make plain that his is not a *theologically* motivated conservatism or traditionalism. For example, in evaluating the "canonical criticism" of Childs and Sanders, he criticizes both for their failure to detail "what philosophy of language or discourse-oriented models they use" and explicitly insists that "whereas both scholars write primarily for a community of believers, I write primarily for a community of scholars; the difference is crucial" (p. 230, n. 44). And he distances himself as much as possible from "conservative" (or "dispensational" or "fundamentalistic"—it seems that he does not distinguish) hermeneutics (p. 225, n. 9).

The net result, in my judgment, is a study or near-commentary which a theological conservative can generally use with much more profit and with far less adaptation (or outright rejection) than he can a run-of-the-mill critical study. Both adjustments, and even rejections, will sometimes still seem mandatory. Many times, of course, theological presuppositions will not be relevant to whether the user consents to Polzin's interpretations or not. But often they will be.

For example, the author's "convention of omniscience" (p. 19 and *passim*) will certainly be construed differently. A merely human author's "artful contrivance" (e.g., p. 35) may sometimes be a neutral, or even laudable, insight, but at other times it will be less than clear that the "contrivance" is any more acceptable when coming from a single "author" than from a conglomerate of clumsy or inaccurate writers and editors. Sometimes Polzin appears to me really to "strain at gnats" in trying to wrest what he calls "ideological" meaning from details in the text, and he speaks of "allegory" in a way which, at best, leaves me uncomfortable.

We, of course, will not be able to accept that the Book of Deuteronomy and the "Deuteronomistic History" (Noth's hypothesis, which, at least in outline, Polzin still apparently shares with most other contemporary scholars) come from essentially the same hand. If that is not the case, the idea of a unified "Dt<sup>h</sup>" history (as it is usually abbreviated) can be "baptized," in my judgment.

Polzin arrives at an almost totally negative portrait of Samuel, which scarcely accords with the clear impression left by the text. And hovering

over the entire treatment is Polzin's assumption that the exilic author set out simply to demonstrate that "Israel's romance with kingship" had been misguided from the outset, and that the people must now return to some premonarchical form of governance. Here, almost in spite of himself, he ends up with an uncanny convergence with much other contemporary scholarship. But, from my viewpoint, it is hard to see how such a totally negative judgment on kingship accords either with the totality of "Dt," as it stands, or with the many eschatological-messianic portraits of kingship in the Old Testament (not to speak of the New). Again, in my judgment, the conservative (and that includes the pastor) can use this study with uncommon benefit, but must still keep his guard up.

Horace D. Hummel  
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CHRISTIAN ETHICS: OPTIONS AND ISSUES. By Norman L. Geisler. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989.

Norman Geisler intends this volume to "supersede" his earlier *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* and to "replace" *Christian Ethics: Alternatives and Issues*. Indeed, this new book is an ambitious attempt both to survey various models for ethical deliberation and to provide explicit biblical direction on the major moral questions faced by Christians today. In the main Geisler succeeds, but one cannot offer this endorsement without serious qualification.

Part I, "Ethical Options," explores ethical systems within two main categories, "non-absolutism" and "absolutism." Geisler rejects all instances of the former in antinomianism, situationism, and generalism. He favors the latter category, and he finally opts for "graded" over "unqualified" and "conflicting absolutism."

Succinctly stated, graded absolutism holds that, in cases of unavoidable moral conflict, one is obliged to follow the "higher" moral law, and in doing so we are not held responsible for not keeping the "lower" moral law. Geisler prefers this approach to conflicting absolutism, which he attributes to the Lutheran tradition. According to the "conflicting" model, when real dilemmas are present no alternative is morally blameless, and the only appropriate course is the one God Himself has appointed, namely, confession and absolution. In Geisler's "graded" view, when one does the "greater good," his or her "tragic moral act is guiltless."

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There are several practical problems with Geisler's approach. Can we really determine in every instance what is the greater good or higher moral law? The recognition of real conflicts neither denies the perspicuity of Scripture nor entails ethical skepticism. Furthermore, what validates his important distinction between "exemption," which obtains in graded absolutism, and "exception," which he properly rejects?

More to the point, confessional Lutherans steeped in the work of Luther and Walther will find a major theological flaw here as well: there is finally no place and no real need for law and gospel—for the cross itself—in Geisler's ethic. One is supposed to comb the Bible for a hierarchy of moral rubrics and follow it. To be sure, Geisler would label such a description as a caricature. Yet all appropriate qualifications notwithstanding, it is the core of his position.

Part II, "Ethical Issues," is usually quite helpful. But the course charted in Part I leads to some problems and even some surprises. Abortion to save the life of the mother can be defended, we are told, on the basis of the mother's biblical (Exodus 22:2) right to self-defense. Later, and perhaps most startlingly, the Liberty University professor can find no biblical reason to preclude artificial insemination either by the husband *or* by another donor. This conclusion is not consistent with his otherwise excellent refutation of utilitarian attempts to use another human being to attain one's own ends.

Finally, there is much worth using in this volume. Geisler covers the whole waterfront of vexing issues. He works with the biblical text, and he does so with consistent reverence. He highlights the flaws in competing ethical systems. Nevertheless, in the last analysis the cross and empty tomb of Jesus must pervade moral reflection as well as dogmatic theology; and they cannot do so where the voices of law and gospel are muted, as they are all too often here.

David A. Lumpp  
St. Paul, Minnesota

NARRATIVE AND MORALITY: A THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY. By Paul Nelson. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987.

Theologians and ethicists alike have come to a renewed appreciation of the formative role played by a community's founding narrative or story.

In today's jargon this appreciation is a post-liberal phenomenon, and one which finds George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to church doctrines preferable to the cognitivist assumptions of orthodoxy or the experiential-expressive model of liberalism. Paul Nelson assumes that narrative is indispensable to self-understanding and that the history of moral philosophy is intelligible only when comprehended within such a larger coherent narrative. In short, narrative affords a community a single, commonly acknowledged conceptual framework within which moral themes are an integral component.

Two of Nelson's chief paradigms are Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, the former notable for his philosophical study of narrative and morality, and the latter celebrated for his narrative theological ethics. MacIntyre's refurbished Aristotelianism argues that virtue is fundamental to morality, and virtue in turn depends on a conception of the human *telos* or an account of the meaning and purpose of life. Narratives, at once historically and culturally diverse, provide this account. Hauerwas, more than any of the other Christian writers considered (e.g., James Gustafson, James Childress, Charles Curran), seizes narrative as the vehicle through which virtue and character might be restored to their appropriate places of prominence. Narrative provides the metaphors, categories, and concepts requisite to an overall vision of life. Furthermore, narratives show the "connectedness" of intentional actions (or their lack) and in this way display character.

Nelson correctly notes that narrative is no methodological panacea, nor will it conclusively resolve moral conflicts. While Hauerwas' emphasis on character is a corrective to MacIntyre, neither writer successfully confronts the issue of narrative diversity and its concomitant pluralism. In ethics, a "plurality of readings" easily devolves to relativism. To be sure, none of Nelson's subjects countenances relativism, but such potential liabilities lead him to opt for a combination of narrative-dependent and narrative-independent elements in a concluding anticipation of his own moral theology. The narrative-independent elements, while not diminishing the contributions of one's narrative, provide the basic rules that admit the possibility of moral discourse across communities with competing narrative traditions. (For Nelson, such narrative-independent components are particularly important in forging a coherent social ethic.)

*Narrative and Morality* is not a primer in either narrative theology as a movement or in normative ethics. Nelson does not even broach the perennial moral dilemmas *per se*. Difficult going in places, it is a

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sophisticated and challenging study of how the "resourcement" characteristic of post-liberal writers can help inform theological ethics. Numerous issues still cry for resolution—biblical hermeneutics vis-a-vis an endemic multiplicity of narrative readings, to name the most obvious. Nevertheless, Nelson succeeds in introducing knowledgeable readers to an ethic rooted in the story of creation, fall, redemption, and resurrection.

David A. Lumppp  
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THE BELOVED DISCIPLE: HIS NAME, HIS STORY, HIS THOUGHT. By Vernard Eller. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.

Vernard Eller's *The Beloved Disciple* offers two studies of the Gospel of John. The first of these studies sets out to identify the "Beloved Disciple." The second attempts to delineate the disciple's thought. Both studies share a distinctive audience addressed, methodological procedure used, and results attained.

In this offbeat work, Eller asks that lay readers join him in a Sherlock Holmesian pursuit of the identity of the "Beloved Disciple" and of his chief purpose in writing. Providing the reader with an entry-level introduction to the methods of biblical higher criticism, Eller leads the way on a biblical "whodunit." Along the way, Eller's additional objective is that the reader will also come to a greater understanding of the materials in and constitution of the portraits of Jesus in each of the other canonical gospels.

Eller's strategy is to proceed entirely on the basis of the internal clues provided by the gospels themselves. The entire body of scholarly research, opinion gathering, and debate, therefore, is held at a distance. No references to secondary literature are found. The accessibility of both Eller's data and his argument to the lay reader are thus purposefully and effectively facilitated.

Eller's humor and erudition make for a spirited prose which is both provocative and lucid. His is a pleasant invitation to a bit of biblical sleuthing. The result, however, is a decidedly idiosyncratic work, not only in its approach and conversational style, but also and especially in its judgments concerning both the identity of the "Beloved Disciple" and the question of his alleged sacramentarianism.



Breaking with the custom among reviewers of whodunits who have normally sought to preserve the secret of their final outcome, this reviewer will presume to spoil the mystery of Eller's whodunit and reveal that Eller judges Lazarus to be the "Beloved Disciple" (an unusual, though not unique, conclusion). As far as the "Beloved Disciple's" thought is concerned, Eller finds him not at all interested in a sacramental theology. Indeed, it is Eller's view that "Scripture played no part in Christendom's decision that its baptism and Supper should be called 'sacraments'" (p. 76) and that they should then become matters of "mystery" and of "mystical experience." The term "sacrament," argues Eller, serves only as an accurate description of what the church has made of baptism and the Supper. In reality, he concludes, the church has reversed the biblical priority. "Instead of making such 'worship aids' our means of coming to God in order to recognize Him for who He is . . . , we have perverted them into aesthetic psychological therapies for promoting the self-affirmation and self-enhancement of self-serving peak experiences" (p. 89).

The boldness with which Eller critiques the theories of others and then proceeds with his own is, therefore, both the strength of his work and its ultimate weakness. His arguments, while refreshingly forthright, are at the same time unbalanced in their treatment of the evidence. Still, the reader will garner much in carefully examining the arguments presented in this work. Readers will especially find Eller's critique of those who support an "ecclesiastical mysticism" which "stops addressing God (in order to glorify and hallow His name) and becomes more interested in providing meaningful experience for the worshippers (in order to help them feel good about themselves and go forth as better persons)" (p. 87) both vexing and current.

Bruce Schuchard  
Victor, Iowa

THE MACCABEAN REVOLT: ANATOMY OF A BIBLICAL REVOLUTION. By Daniel J. Harrington. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988.

Those who have read only the brief summaries of intertestamental history commonly found in introductions to New Testament studies will be surprised to discover the difficulty of interpreting the events of the Maccabean period. Matters seem to be so clear: in 167 B.C. Antiochus

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IV Epiphanes desecrated the temple in an attempt to Hellenize the Jews, the Jews revolted under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, and the temple was purified and the Greeks defeated in 164 B.C.

The Maccabean revolution, however, was not as simple as it seems. It lasted twenty-five years, not three, since Seleucid troops held the tower of Jerusalem until 141 B.C. The Maccabean family, moreover, did not begin their revolution until two full years after the persecution had begun. Nor was Judea divided only into two camps, the pious pro-Maccabees and the Hellenizers. There were pious Jews who opposed the Maccabees, as is hinted in 1 Maccabees 2:29-41 and the Qumran Habakkuk commentary. The Maccabees, indeed, seemed to have usurped authority from the legitimate high priestly line of Onias III. Antiochus' enforced Hellenization of the Jews also is puzzling. Why did Antiochus abandon the *laissez faire* policy of the Hellenistic emperors? Could the Greek religion mentioned in 1 and 2 Maccabees possibly be the Syro-Phoenician cult of Baal Shamin, whom the Greeks saw as the Palestinian equivalent of Zeus? Was the persecution Antiochus' idea or that of certain Jewish leaders who (like Reform Judaism of the last century) wanted to modernize Judaism by abolishing embarrassing customs?

Daniel Harrington's *The Maccabean Revolt* is a good introduction for understanding the problems in using the accounts of 1 and 2 Maccabees to answer the questions of modern historians. An annotated bibliography guides the student into current scholarship on the subject. Harrington's excellent study is marred only by a late dating of Daniel, with all the concomitant errors in exegesis. The errors are to be found chiefly in his exegesis of Daniel 2, 7, and 11:36-45; since, however, Daniel 8 and 11:1-35 examine this portion of Judean history, his discussion of Daniel is worth reading, albeit with a critical eye.

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THEOLOGY OF THE REFORMERS. By Timothy George. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1988. \$21.95.

Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School at Stamford University in Alabama (Southern Baptist), has written an excellent introduction to Reformation theology by focusing on four principal figures, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Menno Simons, each of whom, as George reminds us, "stands at the headwaters of a major confessional tradition in the Reformation" (p. 20). Accordingly, his careful analysis of

these individuals is helpful in understanding the various Protestant traditions that still look to these figures as founding fathers as well as understanding their own times since, in each case, their theology struck responsive chords in the hearts of many of their fellow Christians.

After a brief introduction justifying his interest in a theological interpretation of the sixteenth century instead of a social, political, or economic treatment, George gives us a chapter outlining the major themes in late medieval theology and then a chapter apiece on each of his four major figures before concluding with some final thoughts on the "abiding validity of Reformation theology." The heart of the work is, of course, George's analysis of the four reformers. In the case of each, George begins with a biographical sketch explaining how it happened that each reformer broke with Rome and came to a new understanding of the Christian religion. Then George describes the main themes in each man's theology by tying them around a central insight—for Luther *sola fide*, for Zwingli the absolute distinction between the Creator and His creatures, for Calvin the transcendent and self-revealing God, and for Menno the interiorized process of salvation. In each case, the result is a clear, well-organized, and well-written presentation of each reformer's theology. Although George does compare and contrast his four figures, each chapter could very well stand alone as an introduction to the thought of each theologian.

Obviously in a work of this type, an author depends upon the research of others as George's selected bibliography at the end of each chapter and extensive footnotes indicate. However, George does not simply parrot the opinions of others, but instead roots his analysis in the actual works of the reformers and quotes extensively from them in developing his argument. Of course, not everyone will agree with George's conclusions (e.g., that Luther held to "absolute, double predestination," p. 77), but one does have to say that George presents a good *prima facie* case for his opinions that can be dismissed only by returning to the sources themselves. In other words, George's scholarship is excellent.

Many American historians today prefer to analyze the Reformation era from a social or economic perspective, but Timothy George shows us that an intellectual and theological approach is still viable. In fact, his *Theology of the Reformers* reminds us that, however much economic or social circumstances help to explain the Reformation, for the reformers themselves it was theology that really mattered.

Cameron A. MacKenzie