

BOOK REVIEWS

Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the Greek New Testament, by Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 253 pp. \$34.99.

For a “dead language,” Koine Greek is getting a lot of attention. Current research and discussion is occupied mainly with linguistic issues, many of which hold promise of informing exegesis and interpretation of the New Testament. Yet, many students, pastors, and even some teachers and scholars do not appear to have fully benefited from the recent advances in the conversation. The world of linguistic studies is notoriously difficult to break into. Not every serious student, and certainly not every pastor, can simply pull up stakes and relocate to study under one of the shining lights of NT Greek linguistics. Yet anyone peering into this world of potential insights realizes he needs a guide, at least at the beginning of the journey. Enter Con Campbell’s latest book, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the Greek New Testament*.

Campbell is no outsider when it comes to advances in NT Greek studies. Those who have been following the developing conversation about verbal aspect, in particular, recognize him as a key player and major contributor. Campbell’s book provides an accessible way for serious students of NT Greek to become better acquainted with cutting-edge research in Greek language and linguistics. And as Campbell points out, becoming acquainted with these discussions is important for two reasons. First, “genuine advances in Greek linguistics can lead to new insights into text” (23). Second, “advances in Greek linguistics can correct long-held errors” (23).

Campbell opens with a selective historical survey of advances in the study of Greek, followed by a chapter providing a concise treatment of linguistic theory and its connection to the study of the NT. Readers who desire another perspective or who want to come to a more comprehensive grasp of the linguistic field and its development may have to dig deeper, but Campbell’s book provides a point of entry and a sufficient introduction for understanding linguistic concepts that he references throughout the book.

In chapter 3, Campbell discusses lexical semantics and lexicography. This chapter, heavily dependent on Moisés Silva’s landmark publication, *Biblical Words & Their Meaning*, provides a concise overview of lexical semantics, covering symbol-sense-referent, synonymy, context, lexical choice, lexical fields, ambiguity, and implications of lexical semantics. Campbell then moves to a discussion of NT lexicography (heavily dependent on John Lee’s 2003 monograph *A History of New Testament*

Lexicography). Campbell highlights the difficulties facing those who attempt accurate NT lexicography. Then, drawing heavily on Lee, he discusses the methodological problems afflicting NT lexicography and offers a way forward for those studying NT words: use the best available resources, but do not rely on them as infallible guides.

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to key voices in NT Greek studies who reject “deponency” as a valid category for Greek verbs. Every first-year student of Greek has to deal with this category of verbs he or she is told is middle/passive in form but active in meaning. But the most recent research suggests that this categorization is faulty. A robust understanding of the Greek middle voice (a feature of the Greek verb system that has no English parallel) eliminates the need for the category of deponency. Although Campbell points out there are difficulties yet to be resolved, he provides a helpful introduction to the conversation and makes a convincing case that the developing consensus is a move in the right direction. Campbell lays out three steps to move forward: (1) understand the middle voice; (2) develop voice-lexeme sophistication; and (3) develop ways to teach Greek without the category of deponency (102–3).

Chapter 5 offers a helpful, brief introduction to verbal aspect theory. Campbell defines verbal aspect, sketches the history of Greek verbal aspect studies, addresses the controversy about whether Greek-tense forms grammaticalize temporal reference, and introduces the ongoing controversy over the aspectual value of the perfect tense-form. He considers exegetical applications of verbal aspect theory (discussing, for instance, how aspect interacts with *Aktionsart* and how aspect reveals narrative structure). He also addresses unresolved issues (such as the aspectual value of the perfect and the aspectual nature of the future) and highlights areas that require further attention (for instance, the number of aspects, whether the tense forms grammaticalize temporal reference, and whether the future tense form communicates any aspect). Campbell’s perspective (which does not allow for the existence of the stative aspect) no doubt colors his approach to this chapter, but he attempts to be fair with other viewpoints as well. His perspective as a key contributor to the ongoing development of NT Greek aspect studies increases the value of this chapter.

Chapter 6 “explore[s] the exegetical implications of individual authors’ Greek style (idiolect) and the type of literature contained in the New Testament (register)” (134). Campbell lays out the distinction between “writing style” and idiolect, noting that an individual author may adopt a different writing style depending on the situation, but that idiolect “is more of a permanent pattern of language use, regardless of occasion or, indeed, regardless of style” (135). The chapter includes a brief treatment of genre and a discussion of register, which Campbell defines as “a configuration of meanings that is associating with a particular [social] situation” (142). Campbell leans on his strengths by discussing aspectual patterns across the Synoptics in relation to idiolect and register. However, he closes the chapter by pointing out that “verbal aspect is but

one area of investigation when it comes to idiolect, genre, and register” and calls for further research involving other parts of speech besides verbs (146).

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on discourse analysis, a rapidly developing field with promise to yield significant exegetical results. Campbell explains: “Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding how units of text relate to one another in order to create the theme, message, and structure” (148–49). According to Campbell, “the simplest way to think of discourse analysis is that it deals with text beyond the level of the sentence” (149). Chapter 7 overviews the four major schools of discourse analysis (drawing on a 1995 essay by Stanley Porter) and explains M. A. K. Halliday’s approach, focusing, as Halliday does, on cohesion. While commending the strengths of the approach, Campbell also notes some criticisms and the fact that no one to date has “mapped” Halliday’s theory to NT Greek specifically. Chapter 8 explains and evaluates Stephen Levinsohn’s and Steven Runge’s approaches to discourse analysis. While Campbell offers a few concerns and criticisms, he finds Levinsohn’s *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek* to be a valuable and significant contribution. Similarly, Campbell finds much value in Runge’s *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament* but finds some shortcomings as well. Campbell believes that Halliday has a robust theory without application to Greek, while Levinsohn and Runge, although eclectic in their approach and “more focused on the level of the clause and sentence,” provide excellent help identifying and discussing discourse features in Greek (190). Overall, Campbell argues, the insights of all three scholars may be brought to bear “in a complementary manner” (191). These two chapters demonstrate Campbell’s impressive ability to summarize and evaluate a large body of complicated material for his readers. The chapters by no means exhaust the topic of discourse analysis in NT Greek, but do provide much that is helpful to readers seeking better acquaintance with this rapidly developing area of study.

In chapter 9, Campbell demonstrates that the traditional Erasmian pronunciation is incorrect for Koine Greek and discusses papyrological evidence for how first-century Greek may have been pronounced, arguing that “the evidence strongly suggests that a pronunciation that is essentially the same as that of modern Greek today was in place by the time the New Testament was written” (200). Although some have argued for Erasmian pronunciation on purely pedagogical grounds, Campbell recommends using a more accurate pronunciation (Modern, or Buth’s similar Reconstructed Koine scheme), or, if need be, adopting a compromise by teaching students both Erasmian pronunciation and one of the more modern pronunciations.

Campbell rounds out his book with a highly practical chapter focused on teaching and learning Greek. Providing fresh ideas for traditional Greek pedagogy, discussing the value and potential of immersion methods, and suggesting strategies for retention, Campbell offers counsel that teachers and students of Greek would do well to consider.

Campbell does not set out to provide maximum-depth treatment on every topic. Nor should this book be viewed as itself a major scholarly advance in the study of Greek. Readers expecting this text to read like a technical journal article are going to be disappointed. Such an approach would work against the author's goals in writing, and much of this book's value lies precisely in its (relative) accessibility. Campbell demonstrates a remarkable ability to take a large body of material, introduce some of the critical questions at stake, narrow his focus to a few key voices in the conversation, and provide clear and concise summaries of key works coming from those voices. Recommended readings at the end of each chapter provide a way for the reader to keep going. Readers who are inspired to move beyond Campbell's book to engage with more detailed treatments of the topics may someday come to disagree with his particular treatment of one or more issue, but even if they do, they will appreciate this resource for giving them a solid start on their journey.

Timothy A. Hughes

The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets, by Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr. and Gary E. Yates. Nashville: B&H, 2016. xix + 360 pp. \$34.99.

Al Fuhr and Gary Yates, Old Testament professors at Liberty University School of Divinity, have produced an accessible overview and brief commentary on the biblical books collectively known as "The Twelve" or the Minor Prophets. While their endnotes and discussion of important terms point to a knowledge of the original Hebrew text, the work is easy to follow and by no means technical. Thus they have met and even surpassed their aim of producing an aid for personal study of the Scriptures.

The first few chapters deal with the historical and literary features that these 12 documents hold in common. The authors set the stage by sketching a history of the centuries during which the prophets served. Then they introduce the prophets themselves as spokesmen for the covenant Lord. Finally they introduce the reader to Hebrew poetry and survey common categories of word play and figures of speech.

Despite the title, *The Message of the Twelve* does not spend much time considering the message of the Book of the Twelve as a whole. In that sense the common designation "minor prophets" found in the subtitle is more appropriate to the content. In chapter 4, however, Fuhr and Yates do acknowledge evidence that "The Twelve" is a single, intentionally ordered, compilation within the Hebrew canon. This evidence helps them tentatively conclude that Joel's early placement in the collection is not chronological but thematic and literary (90), but they draw few other substantive conclusions from the literary unity of this section of Scripture.

From here the authors take time in the remaining chapters to draw out the message of each individual prophet and conclude with theology and application. Within this commentary section, the authors concentrate on helping the Christian reader understand the significance of structural devices, figures of speech, cultural customs, and opaque cultural references. For instance, in commenting on Joel, a callout box quotes a National Geographic article on the immensity and destructive appetite of locust swarms (94). Thus they seek to show that these oracles belong in the world of history and fact, not in the imagination of the biblical authors.

Once they have helped their readers see the original context, they are in a better position to guide them to the significance of the message for today. Each chapter of the book devotes several paragraphs to contemplating ways in which the message of the book may be personally relevant, that is, how the reader should respond. Limited as they are by culture and time, these applications can only travel so far, and at times they feel somewhat parochial or trite. Generally, however, they are provocative paragraphs, and altogether fitting for a work of this kind.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is the interpretive approach of the authors. The authority of the Scriptures as inspired documents is clear. They believe that the documents as we have them are the product of literary design, taking the oral words of the prophets and faithfully representing them in writing (27–29).

Their hermeneutical method is relatively straightforward, consistently centering on authorial intent established by the objective features of the text. When this hermeneutical lens is focused on the book of Zechariah, for example, the authors discern an expectation for the restoration of national Israel in the eschaton (286–99). When the same principles are applied to Haggai, a millennial temple is evident (260–62). From this vantage point, the messianic import of various texts throughout this section of the canon is also patent (23–24).

While the hermeneutical consistency of the authors is to be commended, the theological consistency of the work as a whole leaves something to be desired. For instance, the authors' understanding of the interplay between God's sovereignty and human choice does not appear to be consistent. At times, it seems that they desire to give the decisive role to human will. For instance, the Lord's response to the repentance of the Ninevites in Jonah is seen as an example in which the Lord, who "has exhaustive knowledge of all future possibilities," nevertheless "bases his resolution of a particular situation on the choices and decisions people make in response to his initiatives" (177). Similarly in Haggai the authors comment on the choice of the people to rebuild the temple, "The Lord 'stirring' the hearts of the people...reflects how divine sovereignty and human response cooperate in accomplishing the Lord's purposes. The Lord does not manipulate Israel's response to the prophetic word, but he does reward their choice to obey with enablement to carry out their good intentions" (260). However, in Zechariah, the Lord himself makes the decisive move: "The Lord would ultimately save his

people by acting in sovereign grace to change their hearts—they would mourn over their rejection of him that had culminated in the crucifixion of their Messiah (Zech 12:10)” (300). Putting these comments together, it appears that sometimes God decides to take charge, but other times he is content to allow humans to settle the matter.

That said, the book as a whole has much to commend it. The historical and grammatical explanations will take the general believing reader a step beyond his study Bibles, but they will not lose him in the details. The book would also be appropriate for a college-level course. In addition pastors may find the application sections for each prophet helpful, especially if they are serving in a suburban American context. While those looking for technical discussions will need to look elsewhere, the book serves its purposes well.

Jeremy Pittsley

Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year, by Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. xx + 595 pp. \$40.00.

Preaching Christ from Psalms is the fifth and final volume in this series on preaching expository Christian sermons from the OT. Sidney Greidanus is professor emeritus of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. This is not a commentary on the whole book of Psalms, but rather a surprisingly substantive “how-to” manual for preaching selected Psalms. It thoroughly integrates theory and practice.

The introductory section helpfully summarizes key literary and theological elements that provide the exegetical and theological basis for preaching from the Psalms. Greidanus did not choose the easiest psalms, but instead selected 20 of the harder (i.e., generally non-royal, non-messianic) psalms as representative “case studies” (Pss 1; 2; 8; 22; 23; 29; 32; 47; 51; 72; 72:8–11; 80; 95; 96; 100; 104; 118; 118:10–24; 121; 122; 130; 146). These are arranged in liturgical (rather than canonical) order according to the schedule of the *Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)*. Because two of these Psalms are included twice for different liturgical seasons, Greidanus writes a second chapter for the second use of them. Since there are 500+ pages for the body of this book, that results in over 22 pages (on average) for each sermon!

Greidanus has developed a very helpful tool for pastors who seek to preach “the whole counsel of God.” The author carefully walks the reader through each of the multiple steps of sermon preparation for each Psalm. Always, he mentions the reason *why* one might or might not make a given choice, and then immediately moves on to *how* such a choice applies to the present text. Combined with good footnotes showing research based in solid commentaries, this enables the preacher to make informed choices at each step of the process.

Each chapter has a similar format. Each chapter begins with a brief overview of why the text was selected for the *RCL* and whether or not that needs to be adapted in order to preach the message of the psalm. Then come the text and context; literary interpretation, devices and structure; theocentric interpretation; textual theme and goal; ways to preach Christ; sermon theme, goal, and need; and a well-developed exposition. Special note should be made of the excellent ideas for service planning, including the worship service (“liturgy”), Scripture reading, and PowerPoint; and a closing prayer and song. By working through each of the sections, the text and theological message are not only studied from a number of angles, the reader also sees how to integrate the sermon into the whole service. The work is of a consistently high quality, so that this writer’s impression is that even if one does not like something for a particular psalm, there remain other options and material that can still be usefully employed by a preacher.

Readers may initially react to the title of this volume with skepticism. Is it proper to preach biblical prayers? Even more importantly, can *expository* sermons on the Psalms include *Christ*, since that seems to be something of an oxymoron? Greidanus faces these questions head-on at the beginning of the book. The total answer is the rest of the book, but the keys are first of all the theocentric theme of each psalm, followed by seven (sometimes overlapping) methods that Greidanus believes allow one to legitimately move from the OT to Christ in the NT. These include redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, NT references, and contrast. (These are treated at length in Greidanus’s *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*, Eerdmans, 1999.) Thus, for Greidanus, it is not a matter of putting Christ *into* a psalm, but of preaching the text and its theological message, and then moving to appropriate connecting points in the NT where Christ *is* found. Usually, only a couple of these methods apply to any given Psalm. Greidanus explains these options, and then further develops the best one in the sermon exposition. Overall, this reviewer concluded that Greidanus generally exercised good judgment working through issues while staying true to the meaning of the text.

As far as hermeneutics and theology go, dispensationalists will notice that occasionally the Church is identified with Israel, that Christ is mentioned as ruling his kingdom *now*, and that an amillennial interpretation of eschatology is adopted. Though these differences are present, they do not predominate, and preachers should be able to adapt the interpretation as they see fit. Greidanus has moved the discussion so far away from such things as allegorizing that one will be making *theological* distinctions rather than basic *expository* ones.

To what should this book be compared? If compared to books geared to “the busy pastor,” this is much more than a “quick and dirty” manual. It is indeed a time-saver, but it is far superior, since it has greater depth and material here than would be needed for that kind of approach. It does not include a lot of attention-getting stories, but it does

have some. One might compare this book's method to Kaiser's *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. Both are helpful. Greidanus, however, had more time to develop the breadth of approaches necessary to preach a wide variety of OT genres. It is little wonder, then, that an endorsement by Kaiser graces the cover of Greidanus's earlier, foundational work on preaching Christ (mentioned above).

This volume can be used as a stand-alone resource or (in conjunction with a good commentary or two) to preach additional psalms. It includes several helpful appendices: a list of the steps for sermon preparation, various possible arrangements for sermon series, and several model sermons.

Overall, this reviewer was pleased with the volume. It sticks to its topic, develops it well, and gives clear options. Bottom line: this book will be helpful for pastors who want to begin or to develop further their ability to preach robust and engaging *expository* Christian sermons from the Psalms.

Stephen L. Huebscher

Death in Second-Century Christian Thought: The Meaning of Death in Earliest Christianity, by Jeremiah Mutie. Eugene: Pickwick, 2015. xvi + 228 pp. \$23.20.

Jeremiah Mutie has served in adjunct positions at both Liberty University and Beulah Heights University, and is now a Professor of Bible and Theology at Southern California Seminary. This volume, which examines the topic of death in second-century Christianity, is a reworking of his Ph.D. dissertation from Dallas Theological Seminary. Previous scholars have tended to emphasize either the radical uniqueness of early Christian views of death or the similarities between second-century Christian thought and parallel perspectives within the broader culture of the time. Mutie strikes a middle path by arguing that "there are significant conceptual similarities" as well as "significant conceptual differences" (x). He posits neither a "total continuation" nor a "total contrast" (16). "This study proposes that these similarities and differences can be accounted for on the principle of a critical adaptation, modification, and the utilization of existing views on death to present a Christian view of death in light of the level of revelation held by second-century believers" (x).

The book's introduction traces the concepts of death in Old Testament materials, the Greco-Roman milieu, and New Testament texts (18). Mutie concludes that the Old Testament documents lack the clarity of an overtly systematized approach to death and personal eschatology (31). Moreover, he finds it "impossible to talk about a single concept of death in Greek philosophy" (32). For instance, the Platonic notion of death "underwent development over the centuries prior to its interaction

with Christianity” (34). While Mutie does trace a continuation of thought between the New Testament materials and the later patristic sources, he maintains that a “fully developed doctrine of the intermediate state” only appeared with Irenaeus of Lyons (136, 148). It would be interesting, in this regard, to interact more fully with the claims of Charles Hill, who portrays Irenaeus’s views of the intermediate state (“a subterranean waiting in the interim between death and resurrection”) as *the* interpretive key to understanding the chiliastic stream of early Christianity (somewhat of a theological outlier, in Hill’s view).

Mutie’s stated methodology focuses upon “the key passages in the writings of second-century Christians” along with “historical and theological analyses of the key terminology and metaphors for death during this time” (18). Perhaps an examination of pagan assessments of the Christian view of death (as found in the primary sources of Marcus Aurelius and Galen) would have added further contour to the study. In addition, the volume may have profited from investigations of other evidences beyond textual discussions, such as a fuller linkage between the theological understanding of death and the practice of baptism (as a representation of union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection).

Mutie’s analysis highlights the nature of second-century Christian conceptions of death and the intermediate state as works in progress. Early Christian authors spoke of death using differing metaphors, such as “sleep,” “sacrifice,” and attainment” (20). The Greek notion of a “noble death,” as epitomized in the courageous demise of Socrates and mediated through the Maccabean martyrs, affected early Christian martyrologies (38–39). Nevertheless, even though the deaths of Greco-Roman heroes and Christian martyrs were sometimes narrated using similar terminology, the descriptions “don’t necessarily mean the same thing” (39). For example, while Ignatius of Antioch utilized the terminology and metaphors of his cultural environment, he adapted and modified them in order to “emphasize a distinctively Christian view of death” (10). In particular, Christians viewed death as an enemy whose guaranteed defeat was achieved by the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ (52–53).

Several facets of Mutie’s work will interest a broad range of readers. He highlights both the primitive acceptance of the *descensus Christi*, and the early Christian custom of inhumation (as opposed to cremation). “But as far as second-century Christians are concerned, any opportunity to preserve the body intact is a better option than other methods of disposal since it encourages respect for the dead and emphasizes their belief that the soul is alive as well” (181–82). In fact, Mutie argues that the cultural shift away from cremation toward inhumation “was the result of the changing view of death resulting from the teachings of Christianity” (157). He maintains that early Christians employed *κοιμᾶσθαι* as a metaphor for death rather than as a reference to soul-sleep, and he analyzes the spiritualized, realized eschatology found in Valentinianism. This reviewer especially enjoyed the fascinating descriptions of funerary customs found in the fourth chapter, which covered “Treatment of the

Dead in the Second Century.”

Unfortunately, over seventy typographical and similar errors mar the volume and should be corrected in any future edition. As a sampling of these copious slips, spelling mistakes occur in English (“unparalleled” for “unparalled” on p. 138), French (“Chrésiennes” for “Chrétienues” on p. 201), German (“Christendum” for “Christentum” on p. 104), Greek (ἄπουσία for ἀπουσία on p. 112), and Latin (*De resurrectionae* for *De resurrectione* on p. 178). The errors affect both ancient names (“Dominitian” for “Domitian” on p. 96), modern names (“Catolyn Osiek” for “Carolyn Osiek” on p. 225), and place names (“Lewinston” for “Lewiston” on p. 211). In a few cases, spelling mistakes completely convolute sentences, such as the insertion of “morning” for “mourning” on p. 182; “there” for “three” on p. 166; and “factitious” for “factious” on p. 56. Pages 125 and 177 contain jumbled phrases that simply confound the reader. On page 88, Mutie cites “Philippians 2:27,” while intending “Philippians 1:27.” Page 140 incorrectly refers to L. W. (Leslie William) Barnard as “she.” The index includes a few uncorrected queries meant to catch an editor’s attention (218, 222–23), as well as resource entries that belong in the bibliography (220–21).

The addition of argumentation to buttress various assertions would have strengthened the study, as when Mutie states without specific support that “the weight of the evidence” favors the Athenagoran attribution of *On the Resurrection of the Dead* (145). Indeed, such a conclusion can be rationally maintained, but a delineated rationale is missing. Similarly, Mutie claims that the authenticity of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is “settled” (187), overlooking the recent scholarship of Candida Moss. Nevertheless, his main point is sufficiently substantiated, that second-century Christian texts “critically adapt, modify, and utilize existing views of death to offer a distinctively Christian view of death that is both occasional as well as commensurate with the degree of revelation that they have” (53). *Death in Second-Century Christian Thought* opens new windows of inquiry into a fascinating and under-investigated field that possesses pastoral and existential as well as theological and historical significance. It is a welcome and worthy addition to the study of second-century Christianity.

Paul Hartog

The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation, by Rod Dreher. New York: Sentinel, 2017. 272 pp. \$25.00.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Rod Dreher’s much anticipated book, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, is how unremarkable his proposal really is. Yet it is a profoundly necessary correction for an American Christianity that has lost its biblical moorings and become just as secular as the culture

around it. Dreher, senior editor at *The American Conservative*, does not argue, as some critics claim, that Christians should completely withdraw from the culture and cloister themselves off into monastic communities. Even Russell Moore misses the point in his endorsement on the back cover (“I’m more missionary than monastery, but...”). Dreher’s proposal is not contrary to robust evangelism; it is fundamentally essential to the success of the mission Christ gave the church to make disciples of all nations. He argues that in order for our mission to be effective in a post-Christian nation, Christians “have to return to the roots of our faith, both in thought and in practice.” This thesis is unremarkable because what Dreher proposes is really no more radical than what the New Testament teaches as biblical Christianity. As he notes, his argument is as simple as the idea that “we are going to have to be the church, without compromise, no matter what it costs” (3).

The title of Dreher’s proposal comes from the sixth-century son of a governmental official who, upon finding Rome to be in decadent ruin, determined that the best way to conserve Christianity in the face of such collapse was to separate himself from the corruption of the city and establish a monastic community. Dreher compares the barbaric condition of Rome in Benedict’s time to the reality of a post-Christian West. “We in the modern West,” Dreher observes, “are living under barbarism, though we do not recognize it” (17). In an impressively succinct narrative in chapter 2, Dreher traces the fall of Western civilization from the dominance of Christian metaphysical realism in the thirteenth century to purely secular nominalism that flowered into the Enlightenment and ultimately resulted in the Sexual Revolution of the twentieth century.

Yet the book is not as much a critique of Western Civilization as it is an indictment of Western *Christianity*. Instead of recognizing and resisting the increasing secularization of the West, Christians succumbed to it, having placed “unwarranted confidence in the health of our religious institutions.” Dreher offers his proposal, not just because the culture is so bad, but because Western Christianity is so bad. He continues, “The changes that have overtaken the West in modern times have revolutionized everything, even the church, which no longer forms souls but caters to selves” (9). He observes that most professing Christians in America have identified their Christianity with being American and have adopted what was more accurately described by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in 2005 as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

In order to “be the church” and thus be effective lights in a dark world, Dreher believes that Western Christianity needs to recover essential Christian beliefs and practices that have been lost. Again, this does not mean shrinking from evangelistic responsibility; on the contrary, Dreher suggests that “the best witness Christians can offer to a post-Christian America is simply to be the church, as fiercely and creatively a minority as we can manage” (101). On the other hand, if in the name of evangelism “churches function as secular entertainment centers with religious morals slapped on top,” we will have lost any true witness whatsoever. He rightly observes, “The sad truth is, when the world sees

us, it often fails to see anything different from nonbelievers. Christians often talk about ‘reaching the culture’ without realizing that, having no distinct Christian culture of their own, they have been co-opted by the secular culture they wish to evangelize” (102). Dreher states the reality clearly: “A church that looks and talks and sounds just like the world has no reason to exist” (121).

This is where Benedict can help. As part of establishing monastic communities, Benedict developed a Rule (a book of instructions for the community) that would help monks obey the biblical directive to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim 4:7). Dreher is clear: the goal of the Rule is not salvation by works, but rather, “it is a proven strategy for living the Gospel in an intensely Christian way. It is an instruction manual for how to form one’s life around the service of Jesus Christ, within a strong community” (53). It is not so much about salvation as it is about sanctification. In other words, it is a manual for how to be the church.

Dreher does not believe that most Christians are called to monastic life like Benedict or that they should necessarily abide by all of the regulations in his Rule. Instead, “our calling is to seek holiness in more ordinary conditions” (72). Nevertheless, Dreher extracts the core principles of the Benedictine Rule that he believes Western Christians need to recover in order to fulfill our mission. These principles, which he fully explains in chapter 3, are order, prayer, work, asceticism, stability, community, hospitality, and balance. The particular applications of these principles may be more or less unique to the Benedictine communities, but the principles themselves are simply what it means to be a New Testament Christian.

The rest of the book includes specific ways Dreher believes these principles can be applied to Western Christianity. He advocates for a “new kind of Christian politics” (ch. 4) that does not ultimately trust in the political system to effect change, but rather recognizes that change will occur only as Christians intentionally separate themselves from the corruption of the culture and instead actively invest in building distinctly Christian structures and communities. The solution is to look inward before we can effectively look outward; it is to rediscover the past including liturgical practices, which form the church, and church discipline, which protects the true purity of the church (ch. 5). These will help us recover true beauty and morality, which themselves are the best apology for Christianity and are thereby potently evangelistic. Some of the other Christian “structures” Dreher discusses include the family (ch. 6), education (ch. 7), vocation (ch. 8), sexuality (ch. 9), and technology (ch. 10). He provides many practical suggestions for how Christians can live out these principles in each of these areas; most of them are exactly right and very helpful. I especially valued what he said about corporate worship, the family, and the need for classical Christian education.

Both Dreher’s assessment of the current situation and the solutions he proposes are sound, insightful, and essentially biblical. Nothing of the core of what he suggests is necessarily Benedictine—it is profoundly

Christian. As a Baptist I don't agree with a few of the specific practical suggestions he proposes (although I agree with most of them), and I am a bit uneasy with the implications of the kind of cross-denominational cooperation he recommends without careful articulation of important doctrinal distinctions. However, it is actually as a conservative Baptist that I find Dreher's central ideas so refreshing and necessary. The principles in *The Benedict Option* are essentially the same core ideas espoused by conservative Christianity: orthopathy, transcendent beauty, holiness, reverent worship, and community. If we want to be effective missionaries in the unbelieving culture—and we should; it is the mission Christ gave us—then we need to first recover what it means to be Christian. This is the heart of the Benedict Option.

Scott Aniol

The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society, by John Fea. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 356 pp. \$29.95.

The American Bible Society (ABS) enjoyed its 200th anniversary in 2016. As part of its commemoration, they recruited noted historian John Fea to write a history of their organization. Fea is Professor of American History and Chair of the History Department at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. His prior books include *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation*, *Why Study History?* and *Confessing History* (which he edited with Jay Green and Eric Miller). *The Bible Cause* tells the fascinating story of how the ABS has consistently interacted with American history for the last two hundred years.

Two hundred years is a long time and brings much change with it, which Fea chronicles. Yet despite the change that comes with time Fea argues that the ABS has consistently held two central ideas: first, the belief “that the Bible, as the word of God, offers a message of salvation for humankind and thus must be distributed as widely as possible in a language and form that people will understand” (3); and second, the ABS has a self-diagnosed mandate “to build a Christian civilization in the United States and, eventually, around the world” (3). Fea also sees four further aspects that are central to the story: “The American Bible Society has always been a Christian organization that is interdenominational in scope;” “The American Bible Society has always sought to work from a position of religious and cultural power in the United States;” “The American Bible Society has always been at the forefront of innovation, both in American Christianity and the nation as a whole;” and “The American Bible Society has struggled over the years to define its organizational identity” (6). The result has been that the ABS “has been inseparable from the American experience” (7).

In its founding in New York City in May 1816, the ABS saw itself as an antidote to irreligious impulses in America. Those present at its

founding included Nathaniel Taylor, Gardiner Spring, Jedidiah Morse, Lyman Beecher, and even James Fenimore Cooper. The connection of the ABS to high-profile Americans continued throughout its history as men such as Francis Scott Key, John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, Harry S Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Billy Graham have all been involved with or endorsed the ABS.

It is impossible to list every event that Fea addresses in his book, but several are worth mentioning. Fea traces how the ABS met various challenges such as the Civil War, immigration, reconstruction, the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, segregation, depression, and world wars. Fea also gives illuminating histories of when the ABS pushed hard, but ultimately failed, to provide a Bible for every American. Several chapters also detail when the ABS worked outside the United States in places like the Levant, Mexico, China, and Asia. In its early days, the ABS was interdenominational but strongly anti-Catholic. This sentiment changed in the middle of the twentieth century as the ecumenical movement gained steam. The ABS largely agreed with the ministry of the World Council of Churches and was a major player in the founding of the United Bible Society in the 1940s. The ABS had a long-standing policy that they were in the business of distributing Bibles “without comment” and their participation in the larger ecumenical movement did not change this. However, Fea recognizes the “practical kind of ecumenism” (218) that their participation entailed. Another fascinating era in the history of the ABS was the debates surrounding Bible translation theory that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Good News for Modern Man* translation of the New Testament that the ABS published in 1966 was a lightning rod for English speaking Christians.

In all, Fea convincingly shows that the history of the ABS parallels the history of America. The ABS consistently aligned with the segment of American Christianity that was at the center of cultural influence at the time. Following the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy the ABS worked with the mainline denominations. This began to change in the middle of the twentieth century. And when evangelicals exploded on to the cultural scene in the 1970s the ABS worked more closely with them.

Institutional histories are not always the liveliest of reads, but Fea breaks the trend. Though it does have some dry parts, the book rarely gets bogged down in tedious details but instead connects to larger themes in American church history. The book is sympathetic of the ABS largely, I presume, because the author appreciates much of its history. Fea notes in the introduction that he was given full academic freedom but this does not stop him from being critical at certain points, such as how the ABS was implicitly compliant with segregation. In its storytelling, connection to larger themes of American church history, choice of emphases, and general tenor, the book is a success.

The ABS has for two hundred years had a simple goal: to put the Bible into as many hands as possible. This was based on the belief that the Bible is powerful and can change people if they read it (though Fea shows that for many the Bible functioned merely as an amulet). *The*

Bible Cause shows that even a simple task, such as distributing Bibles, is necessarily tied to larger theological and political idea. How that played out in the ABS makes this book worth reading. How the book connects to larger historical themes is masterful. In Fea's capable hands, *The Bible Cause* is an illuminating walking tour of the last two hundred years of American church history.

Matthew C. Shrader

American Colonial History: Clashing Cultures and Faiths, by Thomas S. Kidd. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 329 pp. \$20.00.

Astonishing changes took place on the continent of North America between the years 1492 and 1763. Prior to Columbus a state of constant social, religious, and cultural flux existed. European presence was nearly nil and multitudes of Native American tribes were spread from the Pacific to the Atlantic. By the time the Seven Years War ended, Britain had laid claim to the most strategic parts of colonial America. European settlements were spread from California to Connecticut. So much had changed that enough American colonists felt they could liberate themselves from their European rule. How the continent came to this point is the subject of Thomas Kidd's *American Colonial History*. Kidd completed his Ph.D. under George Marsden at Notre Dame and is distinguished professor of history at Baylor University. He is a prolific author whose previous works include *Baptists in America* (with Barry Hankins), *George Whitefield, God of Liberty*, and *The Great Awakening*.

This book primarily serves as a textbook and gives a general history, yet it still makes an argument. Kidd sees the themes of *religion* and *conflict* as pervasive throughout American colonial history. The underlying thesis is that when people came together in the New World conflict was inevitable. And, within the historical era studied, religion dwelt at the center of the conflict. Kidd explains that "many in early America interpreted their interactions with their rivals, including violence and enslavement, through the lens of religion and spiritual beliefs" (xi). Kidd continues by saying he hopes his readers "will come away with a distinct sense of how pervasive religion was in colonial America, and of the varied functions that religion served in the era, functions that were variously inspiring and appalling" (xii).

Kidd spends chapter one describing the pre-1492 North American world. Europeans brought stability (eventually) to the region, but they also brought disease and radically different social, political, and religious ideals. Chapter two discusses the Spanish reach in Mexico, Texas, and across into California. Chapter three chronicles the French work that took place mostly in Canada. Both the Spanish and the French found a foothold in these areas, but it came at great cost to themselves and to Native Americans. Chapters four through seven explain the colonies

from New England to the Colonial South and the Caribbean. Kidd shows in these chapters that though the English were not the only European colonizers in these areas, they were the strongest. Continual conflict existed between Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans and religion again played a central role in making sense of all that was happening.

Chapter eight details the contributions of Africans to this history. African slaves were the major (though not only) work force. The North had them, but their concentration grew the farther South one went. Chapter nine recounts how the Glorious Revolution in England (and a burgeoning consumer culture) brought stability. The colonies became more engrained into English life while also growing more independent. Chapter ten presents the Great Awakening and how it helped create a public stage for democratic notions in religion and culture. Chapters eleven and twelve bring to life the understudied areas of the Anglo-American backcountry and the early American West. Tensions that existed in Europe, both religious and political, were present in these areas and were often exacerbated by complex relations with Native Americans.

Conflict grew until the fulcrum point of the Seven Years' War, which is covered in chapter thirteen. When the British won, they gained control of much of North America. Native Americans had less trust for (and were likewise trusted less by) the British. The Seven Years' War, the Great Awakening, and British political overreach like the 1765 Stamp Act all significantly influenced those colonists who would push for independence. According to Kidd, this shows that in colonial North America the major themes were "the salience of religion, the impulse of empire, and the ubiquity of conflict between different peoples and cultures" (297). In sum, "Colonial American history forms a dizzying kaleidoscope of cultures, faiths, and tragic clashes of incompatible powers" (297).

For those interested in the history of Christianity in America, a great strength of the book is not only that it gives some of the early colonial religious history but also that it lays open various influences that fed the stream of Christianity in the early United States. The Protestant and Roman Catholic rivalry, the Puritans, the Great Awakening, and the democratic impulse are a few of the important religious moments that have had long influence. And there are other important lessons that can be learned from this book. For instance, Kidd amply demonstrates that many of the same people who came for opportunities and fought hard for them, could also deny them to others. The bravery and love of the many missionary martyrs provide yet further lessons for the reader.

The book certainly has the textbook feel but it also contains the readability that is a trademark of Kidd. Each chapter makes broad points about the significance of what is happening but each chapter also includes illustrative anecdotes. Helpfully, each chapter concludes with multiple excerpts from primary source material. These excerpts help to draw the reader into the past and hear how people such as Columbus, de Soto, William Penn, George Whitefield, and numerous Native

Americans all understood what they were living through. If the reader is looking for a textbook to bolster his understanding of the settling and birth of the United States, or for a good historical read, *American Colonial History* is highly recommended. However, those looking for a religious survey should take note that the book does not focus singularly on the religious side of things. But Kidd is correct when he posits the ubiquity of religion—a point that conversely suggests the importance of secular history for American religious history.

Matthew C. Shrader

He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God, by Michael J. Vlach. Silverton, OR: Lampion Press. 638 pp. \$39.95.

If one wishes to really grasp the big picture of the Bible, one has to understand four areas of doctrine: salvation, dispensationalism, the Biblical covenants, and the kingdom of God. Michael Vlach's new book, *He Will Reign Forever*, is an excellent volume to get started in understanding the covenants and the kingdom.

Vlach embraces a holistic view of the kingdom, showing how Scripture from Genesis through Revelation explains God's unified program of restoring and even surpassing the glory of Eden. He argues that Eden's glory was lost after the fall of mankind into sin, resulting in an abridged ability to rule as vice-regent over God's creation. Vlach offers a specific emphasis on the heavenly state as the eternal continuation of the kingdom program that began with Adam and culminates the ages of history in the millennium.

He Will Reign Forever is akin to an expansion and update of Alva J. McClain's *Greatness of the Kingdom* (originally published in 1959). It is somewhat longer than McClain's work, but of substantially the same view on the kingdom. For example, Vlach concurs with McClain on the need for a ruler, a realm (subjects and territory), and an effective regnal function for a kingdom to be a valid kingdom. He also seems to agree with McClain's re-offer of the kingdom in Acts 3.

The outline of the book is clear and straightforward. Vlach introduces God's kingdom program, then walks the reader through every relevant section of the Old Testament in canonical order, then each portion of the New Testament, and then addresses four theological issues as they relate the kingdom program.

Vlach's theological stance is conservative, dispensational, and pre-millennial. He is quite consistent in interpreting the Scripture according to its plain meaning. Vlach describes his view of the kingdom as a "new creation" model (11–16). This model states that the kingdom will be like our present existence but much improved, and eternal life, in turn, is a completely perfect extension of the kingdom into eternity. The perfection will mean there are no negative qualities associated with the

eternal state—like sin, death, disease, corruption, violence, natural disasters, etc. The new creation model also emphasizes that eternal life will be physical, with a material new earth, physical bodies, as well as an international society with nations living at perfect harmony with one another. Weighing against the “new creation” terminology is the fact that Vlach understands the new heavens and earth to be restored, not created-from-scratch. Thus, his view might be better called a “complete restoration model.”

He Will Reign Forever is not written in a polemical style. It is a positive presentation of the doctrine of the kingdom of God throughout Scripture. However, Vlach critiques replacement theology, inaugurated eschatology, amillennialism, and progressive dispensationalism at the appropriate points throughout the work. He brings not just a select few biblical texts to the table to support his case, but many.

Christians who have “spiritualized” the Old Testament promises would do very well to ponder the massive amount of biblical data that Vlach marshals to demonstrate that God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled literally—including promises regarding Israel and its land, Israel’s national government, and Israel’s relationship with other nations in the coming ages. Vlach’s book impresses the reader with how the New Testament and Old Testament harmonize straightforwardly and perfectly in this regard. He also displays how the Old Testament in itself is tightly unified around the themes of covenant blessing and cursing, and how those work out in the kingdom program.

Vlach also makes a compelling case that there must be an intermediate kingdom between the present age and the eternal state, simply because the Bible describes multiple co-existing conditions that don’t fit either now or eternity. Conditions such as international harmony, a Messianic reign over the world from Jerusalem, a substantial lifting of the curse (but not an elimination of it), the presence of death but with increased lifespans, the Messiah’s settling of disputes between nations, the punishment of nations that don’t come up to Jerusalem to worship, and the effects of aging on the human body all point to a period of time that is quite different from both the church age and from the perfection of eternity. Vlach adds to this a good discussion of the primary millennial texts like Revelation 20 and Isaiah 65, but his case does not rest on just a few texts.

Vlach seems a bit inconsistent with his literal hermeneutical principle when he identifies David as the Messiah (Ezekiel 34:23–24, pp. 198–99) and Zerubbabel the same way (Haggai 2:20–23, p. 237). He does not explain how the alternative view cannot work—that these could be actually resurrected King David and Zerubbabel reigning in the future kingdom alongside of the Messiah. Vlach is spot on when he criticizes “already/not yet” formulations as often being vague (570). He clearly identifies his position, but does not seem willing to drop the already/not yet terminology entirely.

Vlach’s book is thought-provoking, comprehensive, well-organized, and clearly written. With just over 50 pages of bibliography and indices,

this volume will prove to be a valuable reference work for students of the Kingdom. It is a “must read” on the subject.

Matthew A. Postiff