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Book Reviews

The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān. Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. *Cambridge Companion to Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 348 pages. Paperback. \$24.99.

The Qur'ān is an illusive book, so a good introduction is practically required in order to make sense of it. The problem is that there are dozens from which to choose, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Recognizing this, Islamic scholars have long expressed the need for a volume that provides essential information on the Qur'ān's history and content along with a summation of developments in the diverse and ever-evolving field of qur'ānic studies. This recent addition to the Cambridge Companion series successfully accomplishes the task.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I covers the Qur'ān's historical background, from the time Muhammad first began to receive revelations until they were recorded and then codified shortly after his death. While the majority of the authors in this volume seem to acquiesce to the traditional account of its origins, competing theories—despite being controversial and dangerous to publish without the protection of a pseudonym—are also given a fair hearing in the chapter "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'ān's Formation" by Harald Motzki.

Part II examines the content of the qur'ānic text as well as its aesthetic value for practicing Muslims. Daniel A. Madigan's "Themes and Topics" provides a brilliant, systematic analysis of its theological motifs. The other two essays in the section are likewise important for making sense of the seemingly incoherent structure of the Qur'ān's 114 sūras and explaining the rationale behind the oft-repeated claim that the Arabic text is a miracle. Part III continues the investigation into the Qur'ān's text, looking at its transmission through the centuries. Beginning with a survey of early manuscript traditions, dating no earlier than the ninth century, its dissemination in various media—from amulets and architectural inscriptions to translations and proliferation on the internet—is explored in detail.

Part IV and Part V look, respectively, at historical and contemporary developments in qur'ānic scholarship and exegesis. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, the book's editor, begins with a survey of the discipline of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (qur'ānic sciences) and the classical Muslim exegetical tradition. This is followed by an excellent examination of the Qur'ān's influence on Arabic philology, rhetoric, and literature as well as Muslim jurisprudence, ethics, theology, and philosophy. Then, after a brief history of western interest in Islam's sacred text, the final three chapters hone in on the various postmodern and political trends in contemporary Muslim interpretations of the Qur'ān.

This book was written primarily for students of Islam, but the authors have also endeavored to benefit those with little or no background with the Qur'ān. Its clear prose, coherent structure, and overall breadth (with sufficient depth) make it required reading for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of Islam.

Adam S. Francisco

***Gospel Motivation: More Than "Jesus Died for My Sins."* By Robert J. Koester. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2006. 191 pages. Paperback. \$13.99.**

Robert Koester serves as an editor at Northwestern Publishing House but has extensive experience as a parish pastor. His pastoral experience is evident everywhere in this book, which is his comprehensive overview of a biblical perspective on Christian living.

It is no secret that Lutherans have long been faulted for being strong on justification but weak on sanctification. It is this "sanctification gap" that Koester seeks to address. He worries that many Lutherans have abandoned the gospel in their zealous search for a practical and dynamic life of sanctification. I think he is right.

The meat of Koester's argument is that far too many eager Lutherans rely improperly on law motivations when the gospel itself is the only true motivation for the sanctified life. To prove his point, he explores ten distinct gospel aspects in as many chapters: God's Love and Forgiveness in Christ; Death and Life; Slavery to Righteousness; True Spirituality; New Creation; How God Views New Creations; The Kingdom; The Sacraments; Eternal Life; and Our Fellowship in Christ. In each chapter he proceeds to show how the pertinent biblical texts themselves unpack the gospel with its clear implications for Christian living. In each case, Koester not only carefully maintains the distinctions between the law and gospel but also preserves their connections.

Koester, while underscoring the importance of dogmatic theology, bemoans the kind of teaching and preaching that does not allow the biblical text to speak in its full richness. He writes, "Many of the beautiful Bible passages we learned in confirmation class, which were set in the context of a doctrinal topic, are actually found in passages that are teaching and encouraging sanctification" (134). One of the main goals of his book, therefore, is to foster a biblical theology that allows each text to speak with its own accent and nuance—a laudable goal. A very helpful index of the biblical texts addressed in the book, though by Koester's own admission weak on Old Testament references, will make it a useful tool for preachers who want to unpack the biblical text in ways that pertain more directly to their hearers' lives.

Koester insists on the centrality of the gospel in his discussion of the sanctified life. Yet he warns that the gospel dare never be viewed merely pragmatically, as though its chief value were its power to produce a new life: "Although we speak of gospel motivation, the gospel is never merely a means to that end. It is the end itself. It is God's gift to us" (12). One would expect a fuller treatment of the sacraments in a book dealing with the sanctified life. He devotes just over five pages to the sacraments. Yet Koester does mention Baptism in many other parts of his book, calling it "the connecting link between Christ and us" (107).

The weakest part of the book lies not in anything Koester says but in what he does not say. Baptism is a good example. While calling it our "connecting link with Christ," he stops short of unpacking a truly christological understanding of the Christian life in which Christ lives in us by Baptism and we live in him by faith. For Koester, the impact of the gospel is chiefly cognitive:

What we need are the facts, just the facts, emblazoned on our hearts and minds. We need to clearly see where we would be headed apart from Christ and where we will be headed with him at the lead. The more we see the contrast between the darkness we were in and the light that now shines on us, the more we will say, "Wow!" and the more we will dedicate our lives to the One who has done such great things for us. (130)

In the very next paragraph, Koester quotes the prayer of St. Paul where he asks that the Ephesians would know the love of Christ "that surpasses knowledge" and that they would be filled with "all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:14-21). Here and in other places in the book, the implications of the real presence of Christ among his people by means of gospel and sacrament are not fully explored. Though he mentions the importance of God-given repentance (141), overall Koester gives short shrift to God's work in sanctification.

Koester does provide many helpful observations on the pervasive malaise that threatens contemporary Lutheranism. For example, he bemoans the aversion to theology prevalent in our time:

So what does it mean to be practical? Sad to say, in the minds of many, practical religion means religion stripped of theology. It means dispensing how-to advice. It means counseling to one's individual, personal, and unique needs, rather than preaching global truths that deal with God's salvation for the whole world and that deal especially with Christians—sin, forgiveness, the new creation, and living lives of love. (139)

He is also critical of what he calls piety's "dark side"—the sort of piety "that puts 'me' at the center" (167)—and he warns against the kind of desire for the growth of the church that is willing to compromise the gospel for the sake of

“practical” religion that bypasses repentance and faith (137–138). All of these criticisms are well taken in view of Lutheranism’s present disarray.

In short, Robert Koester has written a very helpful book. While I would wish for more christological depth in view of Scripture’s claim that Jesus Christ is not merely our righteousness, but our holiness as well (1 Cor 1:20), there is much in this book that is commendable. I am therefore happy to commend it to pastors who would like to enrich their preaching and teaching.

Harold L. Senkbeil

***The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit.* By Craig Van Gelder. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007. 208 pages. Paperback. \$16.99.**

Craig Van Gelder, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Christian Reformed Church, author of numerous books and publications, church consultant, and currently tenured professor of congregational mission at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, is a leading proponent of the “missional church” concept. In this, his most current book, Van Gelder draws a distinction between the missional church, as he defines it, and current mission models such as the “purpose-driven” church and the “emerging” church. The missional church stresses what it is, whereas other models, according to Van Gelder, stress what the church does. Thus, he asserts, the church is “a community created by the Spirit . . . that has a unique nature, or essence, which gives it a unique identity. In light of the church’s nature, the missional conversation then explores what the church does” (15–17). In simple terms, Van Gelder, posits this outline:

The church is:

- The church does what it is.
- The church organizes what it does. (17)

Drawing on some of his earlier work, Van Gelder spends the first two chapters devoting his attention to the Spirit-led formation of the church. Chapters three and four focus on the contextual aspect of missional thinking. In them, Van Gelder summarizes a historical overview of church formation in the American context and draws a distinction between the denominational and corporate American church (in which he would place The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) and the missional church. In general, he would make the claim that because of the European heritage and American experience, American denominations have difficulty with the missional-church paradigm. Chapters five and six delve into the leadership needs of the missional church. Van Gelder uses many charts and graphs to help simplify his thinking so that the principles he lays out can be more easily put into practice. Chapter seven closes the book by outlining the Spirit’s work in the church throughout the

book of Acts, which Van Gelder sees as supporting his thinking regarding the missional church. The book ends with this plea: “let the church be the church—a Spirit-led, missional church that seeks to participate fully in God’s mission in its particular context” (182).

It is evident that Van Gelder is a leading proponent of the missional-church model. He is a master at taking complex thoughts and putting them into simplified and understandable structure. There is much to be learned from his thinking, and he adds valuable information to the church in mission discussion. He is not afraid to tackle the tough questions, such as whether doctrine or mission comes first, and supplies a creative middle-way answer to this and other such queries. While there is much to appreciate about the book, this reviewer, who himself has a mission passion, was concerned that the focus of mission—the redeeming of sinful humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—was not clearly stated. While some of the wording could be interpreted as such, it could also be interpreted as being about a general redeeming of society through the work of Jesus. If this estimation is correct, then this reviewer would not believe that true mission has been accomplished. For this reviewer, passion for mission is not about society coming back to its original created purpose but about all heaven rejoicing over every sinner saved through the power of the gospel. With this being said, Van Gelder opens the door for much inner contemplation about one’s attitude and thinking about mission.

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***Teaching C. S. Lewis: A Handbook for Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts.* By Richard Hill and Lyle Smith. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 170 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.**

For decades, C. S. Lewis has been a popular and highly influential Christian author. Because of the accessibility of his writing, his books are often commended to readers who seek to know more about the Christian faith and have been the topic of reading groups and discussions. This reviewer has frequently been asked for recommendations for study guides and resources. While there are numerous home-grown studies and published materials for a few books, a more comprehensive resource has been lacking.

Teaching C. S. Lewis answers that need with a focused, lay-level study guide. It offers resources for all twelve of Lewis’s published novels (*The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Space Trilogy*, *Till We Have Faces*, and *The Great Divorce*) along with *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Other books, including *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles*, or Lewis’s voluminous essays, are not addressed in this guide.

For each book, the authors provide relevant biographical details for Lewis, followed by plot or chapter summaries, teaching strategies, discussion questions, and a brief bibliography. Focusing on selected themes, they provide an easily adapted starting point for discussion.

The authors are Evangelicals and, like Lewis, they are not theologians but English professors. Thus they have some helpful insights into Lewis's writing, while also sharing some of Lewis's lack of theological precision. For example, while discussing the Trinity, they ask, "how can God be both one person and three persons?" (38). While Lewis also lacked some precision on this topic, in *Mere Christianity* he described "a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being." As Lewis attempted to focus on teachings common to all Christians, so the authors position this book for an ecumenical audience. They note some of Lewis's controversial beliefs, including purgatory, and provide discussion prompts for a leader to address the topic without being too directive of how to address this teaching. Those with a greater theological training will note a preference for the language of free will and a lack of focus on the sacraments (an important topic for Lewis).

Teaching C. S. Lewis is a useful resource for those wanting to lead a discussion of some of Lewis's books. Like all such guides, it is best if used not as a prefabricated curriculum but as a resource to be adapted, contextualized, and used in light of the theological context of the teacher. In this, it is a welcome resource.

Steven Mueller

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***Theology the Lutheran Way.* By Oswald Bayer. Edited and translated by Jeffrey C. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes. Lutheran Quarterly Books. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. 330 pages. Paperback. \$32.00.**

Until his recent retirement, Oswald Bayer served as a professor of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen. *Lutheran Quarterly* has introduced Bayer to the English-speaking world through the publication of many of his articles and his classic short study of justification and sanctification, *Living by Faith* (Eerdmans, 2003). Bayer has a well-deserved reputation as a theologian who uses both Luther and the German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) in developing an approach to systematic theology that is both faithful and fresh. *Theology the Lutheran Way* is a multi-faceted book that testifies to the vitality of Bayer's approach.

Theology the Lutheran Way engages the question "what is theology?" Bayer refuses to settle for a dichotomy between theology as a theoretical science and

a practical discipline. In fact, theology is not something we do. Theology is God's work as he both kills and vivifies the theologian. It is a passive or, better put, receptive enterprise. Here Bayer uses Luther's famous triad *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* to speak of how theologians are made by prayer, meditation, and spiritual attack. Contrasting Luther's method to medieval forms of speculative and contemplative theology as well as Enlightenment models influenced by Kant and Hegel and the existential approaches of Schleiermacher, Bultmann, and Jonas, Bayer argues for a return to Luther's "catechetical systematics" marked by reliance on God's own *promissio*, a bodily word which accomplishes God's purpose. This is one of the magnificent strengths of Bayer's work.

A second significant strength is Bayer's treatment of the "Divine Service and Theology." Bayer correctly identifies "the distinction between faith and theology is an invention of modernity" (83). Luther's theology guards us against this deforming distinction while providing a place for necessary academic disciplines but disciplines set within a liturgical spirituality. Thus for Bayer, theology has its genesis in the divine service and leads back to the divine service. For Bayer, liturgical theology is not anthropological analysis or ritual commentary, but rather the divine service has to do with promise and faith, God giving and our receiving. His discussions of the church as an "order of creation," the externality of the word, the distinction between gift and sacrifice, and "the day of rest" as receptivity are essential for anyone attempting to articulate a Lutheran theology of worship. This is, however, more than a theology of worship or a theology about worship. Bayer writes,

If the divine service has this universal dimension that we have demonstrated, then theology, understood in the narrower sense as a disciplined way of thinking, cannot go beyond it. It can never outstrip it, nor even catch up with it. *Theology begins with and ends with the divine service.* As a disciplined way of thinking, it is closely connected to faith, which comes from hearing (Rom. 10:17). Faith loves God not only with all one's heart, but also with every power and vitality, including the mind (Mark 12:30). Broadly speaking, theology is identical with faith. (93)

Bayer is at home in the world of philosophy and he is apt at handling the conceptualities of this world. Yet he does not build a system in conformity with any of these metaphysical paradigms of knowing and doing, but following Hamann (and Luther before him) Bayer asserts that theology's grammar is the language of Holy Scripture. Hence for Schleiermacher faith creates the word, but for Luther the word creates faith.

Theology the Lutheran Way is one of the most promising contributions of our day to the study of theology. By and large, the new curriculum at Concordia Theological Seminary is reflective of the thesis of Bayer's book even though our faculty did not have access to it when the curriculum was being designed.

All of our first year students are working with Bayer's exposition of *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* as part of the field education plenary lectures. Pastors would do well to work through this book individually or in circuit pastoral conferences. To that end, Mark Mattes has provided a very helpful introduction to Bayer's work in "Theology the Lutheran Way: A Synopsis and Glossary" in the Reformation 2007 issue of *Logia*.

John T. Pless

Books Received

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- Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*. Current Issues in Theology 4. Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 344 Pages. Hardcover. \$85.00. Paperback. \$31.99.
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