

## BOOK REVIEWS

R. B. Jamieson and Tyler Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xxv+289pp. Paperback. \$29.99

Delightfully, there are a growing number of excellent books on the Trinity and Christology from Protestant authors. Recovering classical Trinitarian ideas—which modern conceptions of personhood, subordination, will, and other ideas have often obscured—such authors have reconnected modern Protestant theology to catholic Christianity. Yet one gap in this process has been possessing a manual for Bible reading, exegesis, and teaching guided and governed by proper Trinitarian and Christological distinctions. Making the blessed sight of God in heaven (beatific vision) its aim, this outstanding volume goes a long way towards reading the entire Bible well in light of the completed canon of Scripture. Through seven Trinitarian and Christological principles, and ten resultant rules, Jamieson and Wittman give readers a sound path along which to walk as they learn to look for God in Scripture largely through the person and work of Christ.

Bracketed by an introduction and conclusion, this book's ten chapters divide along two lines. Part one establishes a "methodological preamble to the book," paving the way for the remainder of the book in three chapters. Constituting the work's primary focus, chapters four through nine (part two) outline a "four-part structure" in terms of "biblical pressure" towards the Trinity and Christology, "theological grammar" drawn from Scripture, "the rule or rules" directing us how to read Scripture, and "exegetical application of the rule(s) illustrating what the book's principles look like in practice (xxiv). Among the four chapters establishing exegetical rules, two are Trinitarian and two are Christological (xxv). Chapter ten recapitulates the preceding ones, filtering the material through careful exegesis of John 5:17–30, which is an excellent test case for letting Trinitarian and Christological rules guide readers through an otherwise difficult passage. The authors' two conclusions to chapter ten fittingly bring all the material to a resolution. First, "theology is exegesis, and exegesis is inescapably theological" (233). This means that exegesis must not only grapple with the grammar and settings of texts, but with what those texts teach about God and everything else as related to God, being sensitive to the entire canon of Scripture. Second, "exegesis requires intellectual ascesis" (233). While sounding obtuse at first glance, the authors mean that interpreting Scripture requires self-denial, humility, and purifying the mind by the Spirit in submission to the text. The bottom line is that

“Beholding Christ by faith requires that we hear and obey Christ’s teaching” (235). In solid Augustinian fashion, the first chapter presses readers to read Scripture seeking to enjoy God’s glory in Christ through faith. As such, the beatific vision, or being blessed by seeing God’s glory in heaven, drives the material (4–11). The conclusion ends on the same note, directing readers to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The appendix summarizes seven principles of Trinitarian and Christological exegesis, with ten resultant rules of interpretation, the first three of these grounding the final seven.

The virtues of this book are almost too numerous to note adequately. Using a range of ancient and modern sources, the authors exemplify both responsible and careful exegesis in conversation with catholic Christian theology. Their sound judgment embodies both precise theology, classical Trinitarian and Christological ideas, and sensitivities to biblical texts in their contexts. The scope of the rules aims at comprehensiveness as well, as when they state, “One of the main goals of this book is to provide categories in which everything Scripture says about Christ can find a fitting place” (179). They succeed well in giving readers the conceptual tools that they need to make sense out of the entire canon of Scripture. Summarizing their ten rules for Trinitarian and Christological interpretation perhaps best illustrates the value of the book. First, we should read every part of the Bible in light of the whole, using the analogy of faith. Second, we should recognize how the grammar and syntax of Scripture presupposes “a larger theological vision” (239). Third, we should read biblical descriptions about God in a way that is fitting to the entire biblical description of God. Fourth, Scripture sometimes assigns things common to all three divine persons and at others what is proper to each divine person. Fifth, all three divine persons act in every work of God. Sixth, Scripture sometimes appropriates actions of the whole Trinity to one particular person, reflecting who that person is in eternal divine relations. Seventh, Christ is one person who is a single acting subject, though he has two natures. Eighth, the names and acts of either of Christ’s natures are ascribed to his one person (by reason of the so-called “communication of idioms;” 240). Ninth, following Augustine, Scripture assigns things properly divine to Christ (“form of God”) and properly human to Christ (“form of a servant”), which requires “partitive exegesis” (241). Tenth, the Son being from the Father and the Spirit being from the Father and the Son points to their eternal “relations of origin” (241). The relevant chapters explain, illustrate, and apply each of the rules (from seven principles) in a theologically robust and biblically satisfying manner. Demonstrating all ten rules through John 5:17-30 brilliantly shows how the authors have given us exactly the tools we need to make sense of what Scripture

says about God and Christ.

A couple of things could strengthen this work further. Despite this reviewer's summary above, the relatively long and hard to remember form of the seven principles and ten rules of Trinitarian and Christological exegesis can be a bit cumbersome. Readers will notice that all the principles and rules are placed in long paragraph form, making their memory challenging. The final chapter (and appendix) remedies this to an extent with its subheadings, listing the rules as the analogy of faith, pedagogical pressures (215), God-fittingness (216), common and proper predication (222), inseparable operations (224), appropriations (225), the unity of Christ's person, the communication of idioms in the one person (227), partitive exegesis (respecting Christ's two natures; 228), and the Son and the Spirit being "from another" (231). Even here, however, readers will discern that these headings require a good bit of explanation. While the longer descriptions of the principles and rules are helpful, placing such statements in briefer more digestible ways would enhance the usefulness of the authors' invaluable counsel.

Another area, which would particularly help in reading the Old Testament, relates to appropriations and missions. Appropriations address why one or more divine persons receive emphasis, even though all three persons act in everything God does. This reviewer is increasingly convinced that appropriations is one of the most useful windows into reading and teaching Scripture in light of the divine persons. One reason is that Scripture, in both testaments, stresses the work of each divine person distinctly and commonly. Learning why one person stands out can serve as a doorway into making broader Trinitarian judgments about biblical texts. Appropriations often lead back to divine missions and order of working, both driving readers back to divine processions, which they reflect. Jamieson and Wittman note succinctly, "appropriations draw our minds toward that which is proper (*ad proprium*) to the persons" (118). Yet they add that this draws our attention to the divine persons in "one small way." However, it appears that in biblical texts appropriations are often the primary way the Spirit directs our attention to the divine persons and their eternal relations. After all, we learn about the Lord, the Servant, and the Spirit in Isaiah's "servant songs" before we arrive at a full-blown New Testament doctrine of the Trinity. Ezekiel highlights the Spirit in his vision of breathing life into the valley of dry bones in chapter 37 because the Spirit, as the third person in the Trinity, perfects and completes God's life giving work. We also read often in the NT of "grace and peace" from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as seemingly off-hand comments such as "your love in the Spirit" (Col. 1:8).

Appropriations start with the work of divine persons, driving us back toward reflection on their order of procession and eternal relations to one another. Appropriations illustrate patterns in Scripture demonstrating that emphases on single divine persons in both testaments are not arbitrary. Additionally, missions, referring primarily to the Son and Spirit's works in redemption, can unintentionally narrow our ability to see the Father working through the Son in the Spirit in the OT. If we restrict knowledge of the eternal relations in God to the missions of the Son and the Spirit in redemption, then we effectively lose the tools we need to identify the divine persons prior to the external missions of the Son and Spirit in the NT. For this reason, Bonaventure enveloped missions under broader category of manifestations to show reasons for the order of God working from the Father, through the Son prior to the incarnation. Thus, while creation does not involve the missions of the Son and the Spirit, it still manifests the order of relations in the Trinity. In fact, the authors introduce missions, but apply the term to creation, which strictly speaking, does not fit the external missions of the Son and the Spirit (198). Most modern Protestant authors have emphasized eternal processions in God, inseparable operations of the divine persons, and the missions of the Son and Spirit in salvation, but few have adequately highlighted the vital importance of appropriations and manifestations, which give us expanded tools to read and preach the divine persons from all of Scripture. In the end, the authors wonderfully give us robust and profound Trinitarian and Christological rules of exegesis. These comments are more supplemental than they are critical.

The church should thank the Lord for authors like Jamieson and Wittman. Among a growing library of excellent books on the Trinity, this one demands a place of priority. It is vital to see how and why Trinitarian and Christological rules for interpreting Scripture rise from Scripture itself. Far from imposing philosophical and theological concepts onto Scripture, the authors show brilliantly how Trinitarian and Christological reasoning resulted from listening to Scripture well. The church has suffered far too long under the pressures of higher-critical exegesis to excise too-theologically sounding interpretations from texts. Jamieson and Wittman rightly remind us that the Bible is inherently and pre-eminently theological in that it aims to reveal to us the glory of the Triune God, through his Son, and to our eternal blessedness.

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