Blackwell, Ben C., and R. L. Hatchett. *Engaging Theology: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 304 pp. Hardcover. USD 34.99.

Engaging Theology is an introductory textbook that grounds the treatment of standard systematic topics in the wider context of life. The book aims to provide a relevant introduction to Christian theology, presenting ecumenical views of Christian thought and practice (15). Each chapter begins with a brief historical situation in which a doctrine arose or played an essential role, discusses key elements of the doctrine, identifies current theological challenges to the doctrine, and suggests a proper understanding and integration of orthodox theology in the face of these challenges (20).

How do we do theology? Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth spoke of their work as encountering God. Aquinas championed the argument that theology integrates with what one may learn elsewhere and does not contradict it. If our study in theology and study in physics come to different conclusions, our theology is wrong or our physics is wrong, or maybe both. One of Barth's famous arguments is that "God is the subject of theology" and as humans, we encounter God "through faith and not [as] an object of study" (30–31). Scholars commonly consider these views to be opposite. Aquinas built upon the foundation provided by reason, whereas Barth saw such effort as dangerous and insisted upon relying on God's revelation. The authors try to nuance this tension suggesting that reason and faith were designed not to conquer the truths of God but to protect God's mystery. God is both finite and mysterious. He is neither bound by nature nor absent from it (47).

Chapter three is about the doctrine of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A dispute over the nature of Jesus began when Arius contested Alexander, who presented Jesus in exalted terms. At the first Council in Nicaea (325 CE), Arius argued that the Father alone was eternal, beyond suffering, changeless, and unoriginated, not the Son. The council responded with a knockout term: *homoousion*, a Greek word meaning "of the same nature, out of the same stuff." The council corrected Arius at every turn and eventually argued that the Son is one hundred percent God (54). The controversy continued for more than four decades. In time, a compromise term—*homoiousion,* "of a similar nature"—was proposed. Athanasius the Bishop was not willing to approve the term; instead, he sought to protect the status of the Son and the unity of God (55). At the first Council of Constantinople (381 CE), the Cappadocians clarified the terms *ousia* as referring to God's substance and *hypostasis* as referring to the identity of the Father. This shed light on the interpretation of the Trinity (61). After the seventeenth-century Enlightenment, Deism became a real problem. Deists view God as a creator who is distant from his creation after setting it in motion, which dismantles the Trinitarian aspect of God. Frederick Schleiermacher and Karl

Barth pioneered the Trinitarian revival (66). Not all Christian traditions accept the Trinitarian view.

Chapter four is about the doctrine of the revelation of God. Revelation is a doctrine that considers how God unveiled the truth about himself through general acts of creation, special saving acts, and writing (77). Irenaeus, a great apologist in the early church, countered the Gnostic argument that a sophisticated elite would ignore the doctrine of a good creation. Irenaeus explained that the Son and the Spirit were God's hands at work in creation; and that though the original creation was corrupted by sin, its goodness could still be seen, and its corruption would be made right (79). Ancient interpreters held the Bible as God's inspired book. This view was accepted by the Protestant Reformation. However, those thoroughly committed to the Enlightenment denied the Bible as an inspired book. Using the historical-critical method, they associated the Bible with human authors's intentions.

Chapter five analyzes God and the world. The basic story of the Bible is summarized as creation, fall, and new creation. God cares for this world and works toward restoring his creation (103). Gnostics denied that God created the world as good in the first place, upholding the premise that the spirit is good and the material body is bad (104). Both spirit and matter come from God, who is both holy and loving. The problem of evil and theodicy are traditionally considered in light of the biblical narrative rather than as philosophical quandaries. Fundamental to the narrative is the idea that Satan and his demonic minions actively perpetuate evil (111). Augustine and Irenaeus showed great wisdom in demonstrating God's victory over evil as unfolding in history and centered on the Son.

Chapter six deals with Jesus Christ as the incarnate Messiah. Cyril contended against the subordinationist Gnostic view that the Son was created a lesser god. He became concerned about careless explanations of Jesus's identity from the teachers in Antioch, who taught that the divine and human natures of Jesus were distinct (122). Cyril condemned Nestorius's divided person of Jesus at the Council of Ephesus (431 CE). Contemporary people tend to consider Jesus more human than divine. Arius and his followers promoted subordinationism, while Docetism, associated with Gnosticism, argued that Christ only seemed to be human (130). Apollinarianism affirmed that Jesus was fully divine and had a human body but not a human soul. Though the focus can easily shift toward philosophy with all the talk about the natures and persons of Christ, the primary focus of the biblical narrative shows that Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Messiah who shares the nature of the Father and became fully human (136).

Chapter seven discusses the Holy Spirit. The biblical terms for Spirit, *ruach* (Hebrew) and *pneuma* (Greek), have flexibility and can refer to the divine Spirit, human spirit, wind, or breath. The Hebrew Bible presented the Holy Spirit as God's action rather than as a person distinct from the Father.

However, there are hints of personal distinction in certain passages (Isa 48:16; 63:10–14) in which the Spirit is sent and can be grieved (148). The presence of the Holy Spirit is eschatological, bringing creation toward new creation. The Holy Spirit played a significant role in the development of churches in the NT period (150). Irenaeus incorporated the Spirit deeply in his theology, with Christ the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of God. According to the authors, a challenge to orthodox pneumatology were the ideas of the Montanists who emphasized the present work of the Spirit with the gift of prophecy and refused the Spirit's past work in the Bible. Later, Gregory of Nazianzus specified the Spirit's solidarity with the Father, which was reworked by the Council of Constantinople (381 CE). Augustine in particular focused on love and described the Trinity as a tripersonal relationship (152). The Reformers Luther and Calvin noted the Spirit's role in sanctification and regeneration. Although much Christian theology tends to focus on the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is just as integral to the identity of God and the narrative of Scripture.

The next chapter is on humanity and sin, and it focuses on theological anthropology. The most vital affirmation about human identity is that humans were made in the image of God. Pelagius emphasized individual free will and independent human agency. "We sin because of our own choices as we follow bad models, not because of innate corruption." This position was rejected because it makes grace for salvation helpful but unnecessary. Augustine affirmed that all humans, due to our family connection to Adam, are corrupted by sin and personally liable for this sin. He emphasized a form of determinism where external agency is at work (175–177). The Greek patristic theologians held a binary opposition between Pelagius and Augustine. They viewed that what our parents do is not our fault, but it is our problem. This view accords easily with the modernist impulse toward individual freedom. Likewise, the Enlightenment rejected the idea of inherited sin and held to a generic naturalism (179). The biblical solution to this tension, according to the authors, is that humans need to accept Jesus as their Savior, thus becoming new creatures. Complete submission and obedience to God's word will overcome the natural propensity to sin (e.g., 2 Cor 5:17).

Chapter nine is on salvation and focuses on individual salvation and the eschatological holistic restoration. The authors direct their attention on the Pelagian versus Augustinian views on soteriology. While the first viewed faith as something individuals could develop by simply breaking away from bad examples and making tough decisions to reform their lives, the latter understood faith as direct divine intervention in the minds of those who would recover from sinful habits (190–191). The authors agree with Augustine's solution.

Chapter ten is about the church. The holistic framework of God building his church, as some Christians often articulated, began with the calling of

Abram and continued in the rest of the Bible with Abraham's family. With the coming of Jesus, the focus for the people of God shifted to other surrounding nations. Then the outpouring of the Holy Spirit set the basis for the NT churches. As the church began to flourish, ethnic boundaries became a fundamental concern (222–223). The early Christian believers were continually challenged to respond to new circumstances and events. One such event was the great schism between Eastern and Western Christianity due to the linguistic division between the Greek churches in the East and the Latin churches in the West (225). The Reformation then divided the Western churches. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were noted Reformers. Their efforts to reform the church were seen as socially dangerous and were met with brutal persecution from Catholics and other Protestants. The church was broken into three confessions: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. Though the church's history is mostly one of division, there have been shifts toward unity. One such was the "Joint Declaration" in 1999, aided by Vatican II (226–227).

Chapter eleven is about eschatology. The whole scope of the Bible is eschatological because salvation is a process that will culminate in a final resolution in the future (243). The holistic framework integrates with the creation-fall-new creation progression of biblical theology. The renewal of creation began with the Mosaic covenant, which primarily focused on conditions: obey and be saved, disobey and perish (246). Many of the eschatological texts in the HB arise from social, economic, military, and religious oppression that had human and demonic origins. God showing up to restore justice is seen as a blessing for the righteous and judgment for the unrighteous (251). The timing of eschatology is described as "already and not yet." The "already" means that God shows up for the first time through Christ and the Spirit. And the "not yet" expresses that Christians still face oppression, struggle, and death (254–255).

In conclusion, *Engaging Theology* incorporates discussion of significant historical events, doctrinal exposition, theological relevance, and spiritual bearings. It is complex yet comprehensive. Though the topics do not proceed in sequential order, the main doctrinal issues and their relevance are set out clearly. The authors also point out various views and practices of world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and so forth related to the doctrines discussed in each chapter. Why would the authors do this? The reason is that theology today is faced with increasing amounts of religious and theological pluralism. Thus, by referring to other religions, the authors differentiate their beliefs from Christian theology and show why these ideas or doctrines matter. *Engaging Theology* is an excellent summary of Christian doctrines that engages with other worldviews and their essential approaches on spiritual formation.

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