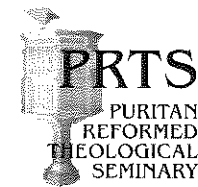


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representative, but readers are directed to Samuel Renihan's work *God Without Passions, a Reader*⁵ as a helpful companion to this brief historical survey. Moving into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond, we see where the modifications started to occur. At Princeton, Charles Hodge and later B. B. Warfield introduced new perspectives on the doctrine of God. The modifications of more recent authors such as Robert Reymond, Bruce Ware, Rob Lister, John Frame, and K. Scott Oliphint are also introduced.

Parts 4 and 5 deal with systematic and confessional theology, respectively. Here the importance of divine impassibility is asserted and demonstrated in its connection to the family of attributes related to God's transcendence—attributes which stand or fall with it: immutability, eternity, infinity, aseity, and simplicity. The views of Lister and Oliphint in particular are responded to in this section, and misunderstandings of impassibility are corrected as the nature of divine "affections" are considered. Just as immutability is not immobility, so impassibility is not impassivity or inertia. Rennie focuses in particular on God's love, which is properly an immutable perfection in God not a changeable affection as in us. The exposition of the doctrine of God's love here provides a basis for the pastoral reflection and application later in the book. An essential section on impassibility and Christology sets the doctrine in the context of Chalcedonian definition of the Person of Christ and the *Communicatio Idiomatum*: The impassible God suffers in Christ, according to His human nature, for the sins of the world.

Parts 6 and 7 bring out some pastoral implications of the divine impassibility and draw conclusions on the doctrine in a series of affirmations and denials which are not only a wonderful summary of theology but could serve as a manual to devotion and doxology. Two book reviews are included as appendices: Charles Rennie's review of K. Scott Oliphint's *God with Us* and James Dolezal's review of Rob Lister's *God is Impassible and Impassioned*.

Confessing the Impassible God is an excellent and necessary contribution to contemporary theological literature and discussion on the doctrine of God. It does what it sets out to do by ably explaining and defending the doctrine of divine impassibility in its biblical,

5. Samuel Renihan, *God Without Passions: A Reader* (Palmdale, Calif: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2015).

historical and confessional context. The church at large is in debt to the contributors and editors for undertaking this work, but one fears many will fail to appreciate its significance. In the modern climate, there is a sad tendency to see discussion of this issue as an elaborate exercise in splitting theological hairs. It is not that. Theologians from the Patristic to the Post-Reformation era knew this. Furthermore, contemporary opponents of impassibility such as Nicholas Wolterstorff know this: "Once you pull on the thread of impassibility, a lot of other threads come along with it. Aseity, for example.... one also has to give up immutability and eternity. If God really responds, God is not metaphysically immutable and, if not metaphysically immutable, not eternal."⁶ The authors of *Confessing the Impassible God* agree on this point, and readers should come away convinced that while one may reject the doctrine of divine impassibility, one cannot do so while claiming to hold to the classical doctrine of Christian theism, or strictly to those confessions that assert God is "without body, parts, or passions." This book deserves to become a standard text in seminary libraries and pastors' bookshelves in years to come.

—Gavin Beers

John D. Currid. *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 160 pp. Paperback.

John D. Currid is the Carl McMurray Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, as well as a Presbyterian minister. Currid's *Against the Gods* provides a popular-level introduction for comparing religious texts from the ancient Near East (ANE) and the Hebrew Old Testament (OT). Currid's central thesis is that the Old Testament does not demonstrate a naïve literary dependence upon parallel ANE literature. Rather, it exercises a vibrant polemical theology meant to exalt the superiority of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, and the religion of the people of Israel over the false gods and false religions of the surrounding nations.

6. N. P. Wolterstorff, "Does God Suffer?" *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (1999): 47. Cited in Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Exeter: Paternoster, 2001), 75–78.

Against the Gods begins with two introductory chapters that provide a brief history of ancient Near Eastern Studies (chapter 1) and an introduction to what Currid calls “polemical theology” (chapter 2). The remaining chapters present an analysis of various parallels between Old Testament and ANE literature; each chapter argues for an interpretation along the lines of polemical theology. The parallels in these chapters are as follows: Genesis 1 and ANE Creation Accounts like the Enuma Elish (Chapter 3); Genesis 6–9 and ANE Flood Accounts like the Sumerian Flood Story and the Epic of Gilgamesh (Chapter 4); Genesis 39 and the Egyptian “Tale of Two Brothers” (Chapter 5); the birth of Moses and the Sumero-Akkadian Legend of Sargon (Chapter 6); the flight of Moses and the Egyptian “Story of Sinuhe” (Chapter 7); the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 3 and the Egyptian “Book of the Heavenly Cow”⁷ (Chapter 8); the rod of Moses in the Exodus narrative and its background in Egyptian culture (Chapter 9); the parting of the Red Sea and the Egyptian Westcar Papyrus (“King Cheops and the Magician”) (Chapter 10); and finally the Old Testament and various Canaanite motifs (Chapter 11).

The opening chapter provides a helpful historical overview of the study of ANE literature and its relationship to the study of the Old Testament. Research in the field began with the first archeological discoveries of ANE materials (1788–1872). This led to a “period of suspicion” (1873–1905), which resulted in many modern historical-critical scholars assuming that the Hebrew texts were dependent on the earlier pagan texts. The “New Horizons” period (1906–1940) was spawned by the ongoing discoveries at places like Nuzi and Mari and the expansion of the field of ANE studies apart from its relationship to biblical texts. Currid describes the present age as one of “synthesis” (1945–present) in which “modern scholarship commonly views biblical history as invention and propaganda” (22). He ends this chapter by suggesting that some evangelical OT scholars (e.g., Peter Enns and John Walton) have gone too far when they “emphasize the similarities and parallels between ancient Near Eastern literature and biblical writings,” but “they do not recognize, to any degree, the foundational differences between the two” (23). Thus, Currid is attempting to

7. Currid argues for this parallel as a kind of polemics in reverse, with the Egyptians mimicking the Hebrew “deification formula ‘I am that I am.’ By doing so the Egyptians were attempting to vanquish and mock the Hebrew God” (109).

offer a corrective to those who emphasize synthesis between the Old Testament and ANE literature, rather than distinction and contrast.

Currid’s alternative to the synthesis thesis is the aforementioned “polemical theology” as outlined in chapter 2 (25–32). He offers this initial definition:

Polemical theology is the use by biblical writers of the thought forms and stories that were common in ancient Near Eastern culture, while filling them with radically new meaning. The Biblical authors take well-known expressions and motifs from the ancient Near Eastern milieu and apply them to the person and work of Yahweh and not to other gods of the ancient world. Polemical theology rejects any encroachment of false gods into orthodox belief; there is an absolute intolerance of polytheism. Polemical theology is monotheistic to the very core (25).

According to Currid, the OT writers did not merely borrow from the pagan myths and sanitize them by removing mention of the gods and substituting Yahweh, but they often intentionally drew upon these myths in order to repudiate them and to declare the superiority of Yahweh. In his opening discussion of the creation account in Genesis 1, for example, Currid concludes by noting that it stands in stark contrast to “dark mythological polytheism” (46). This refrain is essentially repeated throughout the succeeding examples of the following chapters. In fact, one criticism of Currid’s analysis is that it is fairly repetitive. The argument becomes redundant. One reviewer suggested that the book reads like a good article that has been somewhat forcibly expanded into a book.

Despite this repetition, in the end I believe that Currid’s book fills an important void. It provides students and pastors with a non-technical, popular-level introduction to the study of various ANE parallels with biblical literature, which some modern historical-critical scholars have used to downgrade the unique nature and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the book’s conclusion, the author concedes that polemical theology “does not answer every question about the relationship of the Old Testament to ancient Near Eastern literature and life” (141). Yet he also adds:

At times, however, polemical theology can serve as a solid and reliable interpretive lens by which one can properly see the significance of a parallel. In addition, and of utmost importance,

is the truth that the biblical writers often employed polemical theology as an instrument to underscore the uniqueness of the Hebrew worldview in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the universe and how it operates. In this day and age, when a considerable number of scholars seek to diminish the originality and uniqueness of the Old Testament, this is no small thing (141).

Indeed, Currid's thesis is a needed corrective to those—including some evangelical scholars—who have too readily adapted a "synthesis" framework. Perhaps the most important lingering question which remains is whether or not conservative evangelicals can make any use of mainstream historical-critical methodology (whether ANE studies, source criticism, form criticism, literary criticism, etc.) and not be tainted by it in the end.

—Jeffrey T. Riddle

Karl Giberson. *Saving the Original Sinner: How Christians Have Used the Bible's First Man to Oppress, Inspire, and Make Sense of the World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2015. 240pp. Paperback.

There is a long history of the rise and demise of scholars. Gifted, bright, and erudite, but gradually chafing at the constraints of divine revelation and ecclesial confession—some intellectual stars begin to wander. From Pelagius to Charles Augustus Briggs and beyond, they rise from within orthodoxy, only to exit its margins.

Karl Giberson's *Saving the Original Sinner* is a classic example of controversial writing by a departing academic. Described as a "former evangelical," Giberson taught for twenty-seven years at Eastern Nazarene College before moving (under pressure) to teach science and religion at Stonehill College.

Giberson's prologue casts academics who challenge the existence of a historical Adam as victims. Citing Galileo and Isaac La Peyrère's sufferings at the hands of "heresy hunters," he reminisces:

In midwinter 2011 as I started on this book, another scholar, this time an American Calvinist named John Schneider, was summoned by heresy hunters and interrogated for the same beliefs

that had threatened La Peyrère. The heresy was the status of the biblical Adam (ix).

The introduction is at times poignant. Reflecting on a visit to the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, Giberson recounts seeing "wholesome, loving Christian families like mine had been," wondering whether "these young people would have faith crises in college, as I did?" (2). He muses that faith in a heaven, "is a flickering message of hope to me, holding out the possibility that I may once again see my mother, who remains daily in my thoughts despite having passed away years ago" (4). These reflections are a healthy reminder that those who disagree with us also suffer. Controversy ought not dim our compassion.

Caricaturing Truth

While Giberson includes a personal narrative of his academic suffering, he also provides a scathing, sustained criticism of creationism, biblical inerrancy, belief in a historic Adam and Eve, the doctrine of the fall, and original sin. Particularly anathema to Giberson is the idea that presuppositions drive the reading of evidence in origins, so that "if you start by rejecting God's infallible wisdom in the Bible and instead put your faith in fallible human reason, you end up with evolution, the big bang, despair, moral relativism, and eternity in hell" (5). Giberson's gloves are off: "the oft-repeated claim about starting assumptions is both wrong and offensive. It's a cheap debating trick. Like most Christians who no longer believe in Adam and Eve, I did not come to that belief by rejecting the Bible and then forcing whatever changes followed from that as though being anti-Bible was a reliable way to generate falsehoods. I came to it by trying to reconcile science with that Bible" (6).

Giberson's claims here are caricatures: few evangelicals believe that individuals commonly experience a sudden, wholesale exchange of foundational intellectual commitments, and then crisply set about reassessing reality. Even in sanctification and its implications for understanding, changes often take place over a lifetime. The same is true in declension. Nonetheless, even slow shifts in basic commitments have profound implications for our understanding of reality. Giberson's own narrative arguably presents such a story of change in both foundational beliefs and understanding of "the evidence." His