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Review of Know Your God: The
Doctrine of God in the Pentateuch by
Linleigh J. Roberts

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Know Your God: The Doctrine of God in the Pentateuch. By Linleigh J. Roberts. Darlington, England: Evangelical, 2005, 320 pp., \$ 15.99, paper.

Like Christian in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Linleigh J. Roberts carries a burden. In contrast to Christian, his weighty burden does not consist of his own sin and guilt but a desire to see revival in God's church, which he believes will only come about when the Bible's foundational doctrines are restored in the teaching and practice of the body of Christ. First and foremost among those bedrock beliefs is the doctrine of God, upon which the author claims with great justification the other foundational doctrines rest and from which they flow. With academic credentials from Moody Bible Institute, Columbia International University, and Covenant Theological Seminary, and a lifetime of experience in a world-wide teaching ministry, the author served as director of Biblical Foundations International, an organization which seeks to disseminate the Bible's foundational doctrines from a distinctly Reformed perspective through materials and seminars directed toward the laypersons in the pew and the pastor-shepherds whom God has privileged to guide his flock in theological matters.

As the subtitle (*The Doctrine of God in the Pentateuch*) suggests and the contents of the work reveal, *Know Your God* is an exercise in the application of classical dogmatic theological method—in the Reformed mold—to the Pentateuch. It is unabashedly confessional from the beginning, which, depending on a reader's particular theological persuasion, is both a strength and a weakness of the book.

In his introduction Roberts lays the blame for the loss of vibrant belief in the biblical God at the feet of Enlightenment thinking that flowered when the fires of the Reformation had decayed into Protestant scholasticism and culminated with Darwinian evolution's influence on liberal theology. Once liberal theology rejected the Bible as the objective truth about God and redefined Scripture as merely man's speculation about God, it lost contact with the God of the Bible. Curiously enough, the author views the Reformation as a rediscovery of the doctrine of God as much as a rediscovery of the primacy of Scripture and the recovery of faith to a proper soteriology.

Not surprisingly, Roberts structures his book in five main parts that explore the doctrine of God in each of the five books of Moses, plus an introduction and conclusion. Each chapter explores a major divine attribute as illuminated in the language of Reformed theology, which the author finds particularly revealed in the Pentateuchal material under examination. In Roberts's view, the best theological statement of the classic doctrine of God resides in the Westminster *Shorter Catechism* which states, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth" (p. 46).

The critical question of why we need to know God is raised and answered in the introduction. In a philosophical sense, Roberts proposes that if God is the "unifying, integrating factor in the universe" (p. 12), the very meaning and purpose of created humanity's existence must logically center on knowing him. But, the bulk of the reasons for knowing the Lord are directed towards the church. The church must know God in order to love him as he commands, to worship him in an acceptable way, to fulfill its purpose of glorifying him forever, to pray effectively, to stand firm in the midst of persecution, to accomplish Christ's missionary mandate, and to provide theological answers to humanity's deepest problems. In short, there is a practical urgency to knowing God that impacts the spiritual health of Christ's body. It is the church, one presumes, that will disseminate the knowledge of God to the world.

The initial eleven chapters of Genesis do double duty in Roberts's outline. The chapters function first of all as God's introduction to his Word, a not uncommon understanding among interpreters whether in terms of Genesis, the Pentateuch, or the entire Bible. These chapters delineate the magnitude of man's sin problem and need for redemption by detailing sin's tragic results and God's promised intervention. The rest of the Bible from Genesis 12 to Revelation presents God's solution to humanity's cosmic dilemma. Readers will recognize Roberts's Reformed perspective when he discusses God's sovereign election of the lineage of promise. Those of a more Arminian persuasion may disagree with the author's Calvinistic perspective. Turning to the book of Exodus and the great redemption, the author highlights the evidence of God's power. His omnipotence is seen in his judgment on the Egyptians, in the redemption in the Passover and at the Red Sea, in the terrifying revelation of his law at Sinai, and in his guiding presence as he dwells among his people in the tabernacle. At the center and heart of the Pentateuch lies the Leviticus which reveals the holiness of God. Roberts describes the theological essence of the book as an answer to the question of how sinful man is to have fellowship with a holy, righteous God who requires the standard of perfection as revealed in his holy law. The topic is dealt with under three headings titled "The Barrier," "The Basis," and "The Blessing" of communion with God. For the author, Numbers typifies the post-redemption dealings of God with his people and it details God's characteristic goodness and severity as he directs and teaches Israel in the midst of their wilderness wanderings. God's goodness and severity stand out in the biblical narrative as it stresses (1) the importance of leadership, order, and discipline for living the life of faith; (2) the necessity of faith and obedience on the way; and (3) the lessons learned of the serious challenges to faith represented in the rebellion of Korah and the way of Balaam. In essence, Numbers tells God's people that they can trust their Lord in every circumstance in life because of his goodness. The heart of Deuteronomy recalls the faithfulness of God in keeping his covenant, in instructing his people, and in warning of future dangers lying in wait for them. God's track record of faithfulness to his people assures them that he will keep his promises in the future. In response, they are to obey his Word and pass on his precepts to future generations, lest their unfaithfulness lead to judgment.

Chapter 18 summarizes Roberts's outline of the doctrine of God in the Pentateuch by returning to the question which he raised in his introduction on the relevance of the doctrine of God for the church. The knowledge of God's character unveiled in the Pentateuch should affect worship, prayer, missions, evangelism, and children's education, and it should impact life lived on a daily basis. For example, in light of the sovereign, omnipotent, holy, faithful, good God revealed in the Pentateuch, should not the prayers of the saints focus on God's greatness and glory instead of beginning with self-centered personal desires and needs? Again, the decisions regarding the education of children should be founded on the biblical premise of the fear of the Lord reflect a Christian worldview.

All in all, *Know Your God* is a delightful read. Roberts excels at translating the sometimes obtuse language of theology into prose understandable to his intended lay audience. He hits the bull's eye on the pastoral target as well by designing his chapters and sections in a way that each can be easily converted to a sermon series on this crucial doctrine. Doubtless, many will be quick to criticize the work for either rejecting outright the historical-critical method and/or importing dogmatic categories into the interpretation of the OT Torah. But, this reviewer will not be one of them, although the book can be criticized on several levels (e.g. his inclusion of and defense of the Trinity in the Pentateuch and his chapter on Christ in the Pentateuch seem

almost afterthoughts in the structure of the book). On a minor personal note, Roberts's fondness for Matthew Henry's admittedly fine commentary is bothersome, since it is a constant battle to get seminary students to move beyond such works in their graduate research. Such criticisms aside, whether "confessional academics" are wont to admit it or not, at the end of the day one ultimate goal of their scholarly interpretation should be to make it applicable to the believing community, which generally means first the community of faith within one's own confessional context. Only in this way can confessional academics once again produce theology that occupies its rightful place as "handmaiden to the church." Linleigh Roberts has done this in an effective way. Whatever the weaknesses of his method as enumerated above, he has closed the loop and produced a fine work of value to both the laity and pastoral leadership within Reformed circles and the broader evangelical community.

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C. S. Lewis Remembered: Collected Reflections of Students, Friends, and Colleagues. Edited by Harry Lee Poe and Rebecca Whitten Poe. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006, 270 pages, \$18.99, paper.

With the publishing phenomenon surrounding C. S. Lewis and his legacy, and with this attachment showing little sign of slacking, it comes as no wonder that we have yet another volume dealing with Lewis. While several dreadnought-class titles of research and editing have arrived in recent years, including Justin Phillips's magnificent and much-needed *C. S. Lewis at the BBC* (2002) and Walter Hooper's triumphant and definitive three volumes of *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (2004–2006), *C. S. Lewis Remembered* focuses on its subject in his roles, or guises, as teacher, friend, and colleague, with the primary emphasis on Lewis as pedagogue. Following such sturdy precursors as *Light on C. S. Lewis* (1965), *C. S. Lewis: Speaker and Teacher* (1971), *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table* (1979), and *We Remember C. S. Lewis* (2001), this latest volume adds to our grasp of the Lewis persona from a personal vantage point, that of his students' reminiscences.

The nature of this volume is such that Lewis himself would probably have discouraged its publication. For Lewis, the appropriate method to study an author came in reading, analyzing, and combing his works—writings—as literature rather than in examining personality, prejudices, relationships with others, and sundry attributes. But the public, encompassing the Christian reader, does not appear able to resist the temptation to peek at various foibles, strengths, patterns, and styles of life itself, craving biography or biographical sketches, without end it seems, of the rich, famous, and, more frequently, the notorious.

The Poes, Harry and Rebecca—father and daughter—the general editors, present us with a variety of essays and recollections in this volume. They commence with two notable heavyweights, the late Owen Barfield, a long-time Lewis friend and confidant, and Walter Hooper, probably the leading authority on Lewis and editor of his posthumous works. Neither of these presentations sparkles, as they provide nothing new. For example, Barfield, capable of revealing much concerning the personal side of Lewis, appears to demur in a transcription of an interview, and Hooper rehashes old, familiar themes—and not necessarily connected—such as Lewis's writing and speaking styles, his expansive charity, home life at the Kilns, and the composition of his correspondence, "one of the richest mines of his writings" (p. 47). While these first two chapters introduce us to Lewis "the man" (pp. 25–54), they



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