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Review: Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Hospitality

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This is not to say, however, that this study provides the final solution and puts the long debate to rest. In this study, several methodological problems remain unresolved. Most of the Jewish texts surveyed can be broadly classified as apocalyptic writings, an observation that leads to several related issues. First, it remains unclear whether the term "mysticism" should be applied to such writings when numerous other central apocalyptic motifs are missing in later *Merkabah* mysticism. Second, the relationship between texts and community practices also needs to be clarified. Should we assume that the community behind such apocalyptic writings did in fact practice "heavenly ascents" in ways that were described in these writings? Third, focusing primarily on these literary works perhaps detracts attention from other ancient non-literary material.

In distinguishing his study from previous works on the Colossian heresy, Smith suggests that most "studies on the Colossian philosophy have focused heavily on background material" (p. 17). Throughout this study, Smith repeatedly asserts that one should not ignore the "primacy of the [Colossian] text" (p. 16). It is surprising, therefore, to see Smith beginning with an analysis of such "background" texts and only then proceeding to "test the thesis that the Colossian error arose from a Jewish mystical movement that focused on heavenly ascents" (p. 74). In light of the emphasis on the primacy of the Colossian text, it might have been more appropriate to begin with Colossians and then to see whether the "Colossian error" that emerges from such an examination of the text can indeed be identified as comparable to another system of thought in the contemporary literature.

Finally, Smith asserts that the mysticism behind the "Colossian error" is to be considered "within Judaism" (p. 33), and "it is not necessary to look beyond Judaism to find the identity of the errorists" (p. 38). While this would certainly set Smith's work apart from others that see the "Colossian error" as the product of Jewish syncretism, or even peculiar local forms of Hellenistic Judaism, it is unclear what the author means by "within Judaism." Smith suggests that the recognition of the "diversity" of Second Temple Judaism "has raised doubts about whether there needs to be a second background to the [Colossian] philosophy" (p. 33). Some would argue, however, that such diversity points precisely to the presence of foreign influences in Second Temple Judaism. "Within Judaism" would therefore become a problematic category unless clearly defined. Moreover, Smith later admits that "[a]lthough the background of the Colossian error was clearly Judaism, it was also affected by Hellenism and even Paganism" (p. 143). Yet what is the significance then of asserting that the "Colossian error" must fall within the boundaries of Judaism?

It should be noted, however, that Smith never claims to provide the final word for this long debate on the nature of the Colossian heresy. Nevertheless, no further study on the Colossian text in general and the Colossian heresy in particular can afford to ignore this detailed and careful study.

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Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Hospitality. By W. David Buschart. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006, 373 pp., $26.00 paper.

David Buschart (Ph.D., Drew University), is Reformed in theology, a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), and ironically teaches theology and historical studies at Denver Seminary, a Conservative Baptist Association school that annually requires all faculty to sign a statement of faith that includes belief in believer's baptism

by immersion. He spent years researching this volume detailing the beliefs of eight Protestant traditions: Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed, Anglican, Baptist, Wesleyan, Dispensational, and Pentecostal.

As the subtitle indicates, Buschart seeks to be hospitable, irenic, and kind in his presentation of the views of these disparate Protestant belief systems. To this end, his quotes and citations come primarily from those within the various groups themselves or from those favorable to a particular theology. He normally omits critiquing the different viewpoints, counting on his readers' discernment to safeguard them from error and confusion, although in his Epilogue he uncharacteristically states, "Dispensational theology has too often promoted what I consider to be an unhealthy disjuncture within the people of God" (p. 280). Nearly every chapter contains a helpful one or two-page timeline chart diagramming key movements in the history of the particular Protestant stream being presented.

Buschart follows a delightful pattern in introducing each chapter. First, two or three double-spaced quotes appear in italics. The initial quote from a "Motto on a T-shirt," reads, "*I'm a plain simple Christian.*" Some quotes are from well-known confessions, others are scriptural texts, but most are taken from within the circle of the writers and thinkers of the particular tradition being introduced. Second, Buschart recounts an interesting vignette from his childhood, college, or adult life showing his contact with the group under discussion. Next comes the substance of each chapter, divided into three sections: (1) Context, which covers historical and ecclesiastical background; (2) Approach, which treats theological and hermeneutical method; and (3) Conclusion, which summarizes the findings. This threefold approach demonstrates the coherence found in each tradition's beliefs.

The final section of each chapter, "For Further Study," briefly lists important bibliographies, reference works, survey resources, primary sources, and more recent and even current "explorations." The layout of the entire volume is reader-friendly.

Buschart notes that over the past five centuries, eight traditions have influenced Protestants, and these he chooses to explore. He also encourages readers to make an effort to understand Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianities. While some decry the apparent division that differences within Protestantism evidence, Buschart wisely contrasts this with the uniformity and conformity found and demanded in a cult. Instead, the various shades of belief among Protestant groups show a vibrancy of thinking. Though varied in some emphases, each tradition seeks to ground its belief system squarely in the Word of God. Nevertheless, Buschart holds "the humble recognition that all traditions of Christianity contain an admixture of truth and error, of wisdom and weakness" (p. 28), even though each makes vital, unique, and enriching contributions to the body of Christ.

Buschart's first exposition, Lutheranism, he calls "A Gospel of Grace," because, "For Luther, the gospel was the offer of justification by grace through faith alone" (p. 33). The historical synopsis interestingly mentions the major players in early Lutheran history—Luther, Melanchthon, and Chemnitz. He centers on some of the intramural Lutheran controversies and the formation of their recognized writings and authoritative confessions: Luther's *Small Catechism*, the *Augsburg Confession*, along with *The Book of Concord* (also known as *Concordia*). Buschart briefly carries the history of Lutherans up to the present day, even detailing the movement in America with the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods (WELS and LCMS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). He explains various mergers and the founding of some Lutheran seminaries such as Gettysburg Seminary (1826) and Concordia Seminary (1839). Surprisingly, Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul is omitted.

Theologically as well as hermeneutically, Buschart points out, Lutherans begin with their confessions. This is so because they believe them to contain "a true and

unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God" (p. 44). Lutherans hold to a very literal understanding of Scripture; belief in the "real presence" of Christ in the Lord's Supper is a result of this. Indeed, the dominical statement "This is my body" was interpreted so literally that the Roman Catholic Church, adhering to transubstantiation, was not critical of Luther on this point. But Lutherans also desire proper application of the truth of Scripture. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith without works of the law constitutes their primal doctrinal belief. This major distinctive judges all other doctrines.

Buschart discusses the Lutheran belief that baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace, summarizing the idea in these words: "Because baptism is the means of grace through which God saves, it should not be withheld from infants" (p. 52). His conclusion is that Lutherans strongly believe that "salvation for lost humankind is pure gift, the gracious gift of salvation by faith. This gospel of grace is at the heart of the belief and the practices of the Lutheran tradition" (p. 55).

Buschart next treats Anabaptist theology, which he subtitles "Faith for Radical Community." In recounting Anabaptist historical developments, Buschart underscores that the Anabaptists arose with the spiritual awakening sparked by Luther and others. However, their distinctive was "they believed that baptism is to be administered to people who have heard, understood and affirmed the gospel, and who are, as a result, committed to living a new life in Christ. Infants are incapable of such acts and decisions, and therefore they are not fit for baptism" (p. 61). Buschart mentions the roles of Hubmaier, Reublin, Sattler, Mantz, Blaurock, Denk, Hut, Müntzer, Karlstadt, and others, but the striking element is that very few have surviving writings, primarily because most were martyred before they could produce theological works. Recounted also are the migrations of Anabaptists to America and the diverse groups that spring from that tradition today, including various strains of Hutterites, Amish, Mennonites, and Brethren.

Anabaptist theology, writes Buschart, "is rooted most fundamentally not in intellect, but in life" (p. 71), although the "Bible constitutes the stated norm for Anabaptist theological formulation" (p. 72). However, interpretation is to be carried out in the community, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and must be characterized by obedience. The NT is given priority over the OT, especially in the light of the principle of Christocentricity. The result is a NT-based "noncreedal approach to following Christ" that includes human free will, engagement in sacrificial service toward all, and non-violence. Part of the Anabaptist concept of community translates into separation, as seen most notably with the Amish. The nonviolence aspect can be observed in the martyrdoms of many early Anabaptist leaders. But as Buschart carefully observes, "nonresistance is not to be equated with noninvolvement" (p. 81), because the Anabaptist traditions seek to serve others.

Buschart's third Protestant tradition is Reformed theology, which he titles, "To the Glory of God and God Alone." Mentioned in the early history of this movement are Calvin, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Farel, Bucer, Bullinger, Knox and, of course, Arminius. The story spans France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and England before moving to America. The backgrounds of the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, various "united" churches, and movements with "Reformed" in their names are recounted.

Regarding theological and hermeneutical method, Buschart writes, "In accord with the goal of bringing glory to God, a genuinely Reformed method of theology is one in which Scripture is the uniquely supreme source and authority, for Scripture provides as no other source can the divine self-revelation of God" (p. 99). Though the Reformed communions have doctrinal statements such as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, these "have only a provisional, temporary, relative authority" (p. 100). Experience is rejected as a source of, or a guiding, theological norm. Reformed theology is Word-based

and soteriologically oriented. Key theological beliefs are the sovereignty of God and the grace of God, with a distinction made between common grace and saving grace.

The fourth Protestant tradition Buschart covers is Anglican theology, which he titles "The Spirit of a *Via Media*." The concept is that of a middle approach—neither Roman (Catholic) nor patterned after Wittenberg or Geneva. There are Catholic practices, but with a Reformed flavor; the Anglican Communion is rooted in antiquity, but free of corrupt influences. Important historical forces were the production of the *King James Version* and *The Book of Common Prayer*. Historically, Anglicans spread from England to America; indeed, "Two-thirds of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence were Episcopalians" (p. 121). Strangely, however, the chart on Anglicans only traces the movement in England and America and does not illustrate their growth into Africa and other parts of the world where their influence is quite strong.

Anglicans considered themselves to be rooted in both the Word of God and tradition. Buschart's key descriptive words are "Episcopal," "liturgical," and "tolerant." *Episcopal* underscores the essential nature of church government. Furthermore, Anglican liturgy is their way of doing theology. With regard to the final terms, Anglicanism seeks to include, not exclude, embracing ambiguity as part of inclusion. Some interesting Anglican conclusions are that infants should be baptized "in keeping with the analogy between circumcision in the Old Covenant and baptism in the New Covenant" (p. 141), and that the sacrament of the Lord's Table "is efficacious regardless of the spiritual state of the recipient" (p. 142).

Buschart's fifth tradition is Baptist theology, which he calls "Freedom for Immediacy." By this he means that Baptists believe one can be "immediately, directly related to God through Christ. People experience redemption as a result of God applying his truth directly to the heart and mind of individual persons" (p. 169). He traces Baptist beginnings to those who left the Church of England in the late 1500s, differentiating between General and Particular Baptists and noting several Baptist distinctives—regenerate church membership, self-government of the church, religious freedom, and baptism by immersion. The chart on the Baptist tradition covers two full pages listing nearly twenty modern Baptist groups. On the one hand, Buschart contends that "Baptists are staunchly anticreedal" (p. 158). On the other hand, he notes that Baptists do use confessions such as the London (1677), the Philadelphia (1742), and the New Hampshire Confession (1833). One may strain to see the difference between creeds and confessions, but he notes that confessions "do not have binding authority, nor are they final or unalterable" (p. 160).

Sixth, the Wesleyan tradition is entitled "Grace-Full Holiness and Holy Wholeness" because of the emphasis placed on personal holiness, beginning with John Wesley himself. Great diversity is seen among Wesleyan denominations that include varieties of Methodists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes, and Holiness movements, as well as the Church of God (Anderson) and the Salvation Army. A methodological distinctive is the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The latter three help interpret Scripture, and whatever is not found in Scripture "is not to be made an article of faith" (p. 187). Two characteristic beliefs concern prevenient grace and entire sanctification, the latter being defined as an imparted righteousness and an infusion of divine love.

Included as Buschart's seventh Protestant tradition is Dispensational theology, subtitled "Rightly Dividing the Scriptures." After a presentation of the usual historical precedents, most of the discussion centers on differences between varieties of dispensationalism: traditional, progressive, the Scofield/Chafer school, and ultra-dispensationalism (this latter type is somewhat sidelined). With his Reformed leanings, Buschart seems to favor the progressive element. He notes that dispensationalists interpret Scripture from a plain, normal, grammatical-historical approach, aiming for consistency, and that all branches of dispensationalism differentiate between Israel

and the church and emphasize the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants.

Pentecostal theology is Buschart's eighth and final Protestant tradition. He traces its origins to the Azusa Street revival of 1901, discusses the "oneness" controversy, and notes the 2003 appointment of Ted Haggard, a Pentecostal, to head the National Association of Evangelicals. Amazingly, over "320 Pentecostal denominations and church groups exist in the United States" (p. 237). Pentecostals differ on whether there are two or three distinct works of grace in the believer, counting conversion, the removal of sin, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Buschart says that Pentecostals emphasize experience and "that in Pentecostal theology experience is looked to as an authoritative source" (p. 242).

In his concluding chapter, Buschart calls for believers to "live in harmony and, at the same time, to recognize and celebrate diversity" (p. 255). "Individually and collectively, [Christians are to] eagerly recognize, respect, encourage, learn from, and work with sisters and brothers in Christ by virtue of their shared redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ" (p. 260). The goal of Christian hospitality (recall Buschart's subtitle) is to serve others in the body of Christ, respecting them for who they are and thus maintaining proper boundaries. It is "a unity that embraces incarnated particularities" (p. 267). Strangers deserve an embrace, and we can embrace others because we also have received the grace of God. On this point, Buschart has an insightful discussion of the risks and rewards of Christians being hospitable towards fellow believers. The reward is that the world will take note "when Christians incarnate love and acceptance by embracing each other across boundaries of difference" (p. 275).

On the whole, Buschart's work is well researched, well written, fully documented, well structured, insightful, irenic, informative, and interesting to read. It portrays each tradition accurately and helps readers understand their theological neighbors. However, some confusion is introduced when Buschart alludes to the liberalism and unbelief in most Protestant traditions yet classifies the entire tradition as "Christian." In a carefully worded statement, he says, "Christians who are Baptist or Pentecostal, Wesleyan or Reformed, Lutheran or Dispensational, Anglican or Anabaptist, are all members of God's church in this world *by virtue of being reconciled to God in Jesus Christ*" (emphasis mine, p. 274). But the charts show all kinds of liberal denominations as part of these traditions, and the careful words disappear three pages later where Buschart refers to "Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians." Too often, I am afraid, Buschart uses the word "Christian" without its precise theological definition. This can lead to breaking down and crossing over boundaries in an unbiblical manner. Still, this book should be read, especially by those who teach theology and wish to better understand their subject matter.

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Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges. Edited by Bruce L. McCormack. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 277 pp., $24.99 paper.

This work is a collection of papers that were presented at the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference in the summer of 2003. They have been edited and revised to varying degrees in order to be made available to a wider readership. As the editor states in the preface, no effort was made toward a uniformity of viewpoint on the issues raised, and the result is an immensely helpful and sane treatment of the historical, theological, and biblical issues involved in current discussions of Paul and justification. As is well