

uneven criticism, the rebuttal section is rather refreshing, as the authors sincerely attempt to engage the others while honoring them as fellow believers.

I began reading this text hailing from a traditional dispensationalism perspective, and after reading I remain convinced my systematic view is the most faithful to Scripture. Horton's chapter utilized arguments that can only be identified as conjecture. Though he is no doubt a respectable scholar, he appears to rely much on the historical general respect of Covenant Theology and does not convincingly defend key areas where he makes great claims that significantly differ from the other views. One point that stands out is an illustration he makes to argue that Adam and Eve are clear examples of the covenant of works because they were called to found a holy priesthood from their Edenic capital in which Genesis 1 serves as a preamble to the treaty with Yahweh, the great king. Horton's chapter masterfully explains his view, but it did not convincingly defend key differing arguments like paedobaptism, the unification of Israel and the church, and the existence of the three theological covenants of CT.

Wellum and Bock both aspire to an admirable goal, aiming to bridge the gap between covenantal and dispensational theologies. However, their nuances end up coming across as compromises rather than improvements upon both the end-of-the-spectrum views. Similarly, while the editors do a fair job introducing all four perspectives, they both hold to the progressive covenantalism view. The careful reader can detect certain biases in their chapters as well. Though Snoeberger's presentation and defense of traditional dispensationalism is rather personalized, it remains faithful to the key tenets of traditional dispensationalism. The only real issue I took with Snoeberger is that he wrote from the defensive much of the time. Nevertheless, Horton, Wellum, and Bock have not successfully persuaded me toward their viewpoint and Snoeberger engages with the conversation in a way that keeps me convinced that traditional dispensationalism is the most faithful theological system.

Those looking for an engaging skirmish amongst systematic theologians may likely remain disappointed. However, for readers who are seeking a highly academic work that provides a forum for experts from different perspectives, this text will deliver.

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Dispensational Hermeneutics: Interpretation Principles that Guide Dispensationalism's Understanding of the Bible's Storyline, by Michael J. Vlach. Cary, NC: Theological Studies Press, 2023. 111 pp. \$29.95.

Michael J. Vlach (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) served on The Master's Seminary faculty from 2006–2021. In 2021, he

accepted the position of Professor of Theology at Shepherds Theological Seminary (Cary, NC). As an author of nearly a dozen books, perhaps the two best known are: *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (B&H, 2010) and *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Lampion, 2017).

While *Dispensational Hermeneutics* is a slim volume of 111 pages, it is in no way a “lightweight.” In these six brief chapters, Vlach provides, on the one hand, a stout defense of dispensational hermeneutics, and on the other hand, a powerful punch to non-dispensational interpretive claims.

Chapter 1 lays out six “key elements” of the Bible’s storyline (as per dispensationalism). These are (1) The Necessity and Centrality of a Mediatorial Earthly Kingdom of God; (2) Focus on the Biblical Covenants and All Their Dimensions; (3) Continuing Significance of Ethnic/National Israel; (4) Distinction between Israel and the Church; (5) Continuing Significance of Geo-Political Nations; and (6) Premillennialism.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 function essentially as an apologetic for dispensational hermeneutics. Over the span of these chapters, Vlach covers the following ten hermeneutical principles of dispensationalism:

1. Consistent Use of Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutics to All Scripture.
2. Consistent Contextual Interpretation of Old Testament (OT) Prophecies.
3. Passage Priority: The Meaning of Any Bible Passage Is Found in That Passage.
4. OT Prophecies Not Repeated in the New Testament (NT) Remain Relevant.
5. OT Eschatology Expectations are reaffirmed in the NT.
6. Progress of Revelation Does Not Cancel or Transform Unconditional Promises.
7. Fulfillments Occur with the Two Comings of Jesus.
8. Partial Fulfillment of OT Prophecies.
9. Jesus as Means of Fulfillment of the OT.
10. Types, Yes! Typological Interpretation, No!

Vlach’s “passage priority” stands in contrast to the non-dispensational “NT priority.” The latter views the church or Jesus as in some way fulfilling (or redefining, reinterpreting, transforming, etc.) OT prophecies. After correctly pointing this out as a fundamentally flawed practice, he explains “passage priority”: “[*Later Scriptures*] do not transform or change the meaning of earlier passages.... [*Dispensationalism*] asserts that the meaning of any passage of Scripture is found in that passage wherever it is found in the Bible” (37, italics original).

In chapters 5 and 6, after presenting seven principles of non-dispensational hermeneutics, Vlach offers a compelling “Dispensational Response” for each one. Those seven principles are:

1. NT Priority over the OT (78–81)
2. Non-Literal Fulfillment of OT Prophecies (81–83)

3. Spiritualization (83–85)
4. Typological Interpretation (86–91)
5. Storyline Change Language (95–109)
6. Jesus as “Fulfillment” Means Transforming OT Expectations (100–105)
7. Emphasis on First Coming Fulfillment (105–9)

Dispensational Hermeneutics is a book with many strengths and very few weaknesses. As for the latter, they are all minor. First was Vlach’s choice of wording on page 17 in his discussion of the key element of dispensationalism’s storyline. He describes the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants as having been “inaugurated.” Although true, this reviewer wishes he had used a different term than “inaugurated.” That is because some argue that the Davidic covenant has already been inaugurated. That is, they say that the throne Jesus is putatively sitting on in heaven today is a spiritualized Davidic throne. This unnecessarily introduces confusion to those who are still trying to sift their way through some of these fine distinctions.

The second weakness is a lengthy redundant citation (129 words) with only seven intervening pages (81–82 and 90) — yet both making essentially the same point. This is highly surprising given that concise writing is one of Vlach’s strengths. Perhaps this was an editorial oversight, which, in turn, leads to the third weakness considered next.

The publisher is Theological Studies Press (TSP). It was difficult to find any information about this publisher (no geographic location available, nor a mission statement, etc.). Moreover, it appears TSP has published a total of seven books. Since those books are all authored by Michael J. Vlach, it appears that this is a self-published book. Self-publishing is certainly a viable option these days, but there are also built-in weaknesses with it. One of those is copyediting errors, of which there are more than a few.

As for strengths, there are many. Vlach has identified in a very manageable way both the ten key elements of dispensational hermeneutics (see above) and the seven chief errors of non-dispensational hermeneutics. All seven are worthy of comment, but space allows for only two. The first is Vlach’s apologetic against “Typological hermeneutics.” Vlach rightly points out that since the Bible uses “types” it is right to recognize them as types but it is not right to resort to *typological interpretation*, since that leads to a compromise of the grammatical-historical method. Even more dangerous is the non-dispensationalist’s appeal to the “Christocentric” interpretive method which urges the interpreter to see Christ in every Bible passage, whether the context supports it or not. After offering three strong affirmations that a dispensational hermeneutic is the proper way to see Christ’s person and work and keep him central, he then proposes that the more appropriate term should be *Christotelic*. He writes: “Dispensationalism is Christotelic since it believes the correct use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics will lead to seeing the importance of Jesus to all aspects of creation and history” (69).

We could highlight much more in Vlach’s book that is worthy of

commendation. Suffice it to say here that this book should be a required text for any hermeneutics course either at the undergraduate or graduate level. Pastors and teachers who find themselves confused over the swirl of distinctions between Reformed Theology and Dispensational Theology should prioritize this book as a “must read” sooner rather than later.

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Three in One: Analogies for the Trinity, by William David Spencer. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022. 242 pp. \$15.99.

William Spencer is a Presbyterian minister who serves as the Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Theology and the Arts at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Spencer is a church planter, long-time professor, and prolific author who primarily writes in the areas of egalitarianism, theology, urban culture, and aesthetics. The premise of this work was born from the marriage of two desires. The first is a concern to shore up orthodox trinitarianism within evangelicalism against the tightening grip of trinitarian eternal functional subordination. The second is a desire to forge “a biblical understanding of the Trinity in correspondence with the Scriptures and primal creeds of the Church” (10). These desires produce a work that evaluates the “meanings inherent to both the images and also the explanations of these images” (14) regularly used by Christians in understanding trinitarianism. Spencer discovers that, although trinitarian images and analogies “can convey truth about God,” the church must take great pains to “avoid the historical errors that have clouded and misrepresented God’s nature” (14). Examining these historical errors, along with their creedal foils, frees the Church to employ metaphors, symbols, and images about the triune God, without being enslaved to their misappropriation and applications. This is the tension in which Spencer thrives.

Chapters 2 and 3 ask if Christians should even use images and metaphors to describe the Trinity, and if so, what should be the guide? The answer is a cautious yet resounding, yes! Establishing the inviolable uniqueness and otherness of God is the foundation upon which one should build an understanding of the Trinity. Simultaneously and paradoxically, however, the cornerstone of the doctrine is also a firm belief that God has clearly and truthfully revealed himself, particularly in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. These two realities force Christians into imagining God through metaphor while relying on Scripture for method. Scripture demonstrates that Jesus as the master teacher employed multiple forms of linguistic and artistic imagery (e.g., hyperbole, synecdoche, fishing, farming, drama, etc.) in revealing God.

In chapters 4 and 5, Spencer finally delves into the meat of his book and explores the historic and biblical use of light as divine imagery.