

desirous of supplementing his or her devotional regimen, this book will prove insightful, edifying, and informative.

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The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach, by Bruce Riley Ashford and Craig G. Bartholomew. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 448 pp. \$50.00.

Craig Bartholomew and Bruce Riley Ashford, both of the Kirby Laing Center for Public Theology in Cambridge (until recently affiliated with Tyndale House), have produced a remarkable book of theology, *The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach*. What is most remarkable about this work—its major strength, and something that cannot be emphasized enough—is its frequent, detailed scriptural exegesis. If this book is anything, it is a model for theological method. The authors write: “Our aim here is to do theology in deep engagement with Scripture.... This is exceptionally hard work, and readers will often find detailed exegesis in subsections.... Scripture, and not our or any other tradition, has final authority when it comes to theology” (x).

This, however, means hard work for readers, too. The book is not a model of beautiful prose, and it will likely be inaccessible to anyone who lacks seminary training. The writing is clear and workmanlike (not quite including the Barth quotes, which are often abstruse), but it uses untransliterated Hebrew and Greek and is frequently broken up by paragraph-length quotations from other works. Many subsections in smaller type also break up the text, to the point that the book feels like a seriatim collection of exegetical and theological insights rather than a journey from question to answer. The arguments of each chapter can be difficult to uncover, buried as they are under (fascinating) points whose relationships to the chapter’s respective theses sometimes become obscure.

The overall shape of the viewpoint the authors are advancing is not obscure, however, because it has been well explicated by other thinkers, going back at least to Kuyper himself (and including Herman Bavinck, Albert Wolters, and now even Andy Crouch).

The appeal of Kuyperianism has risen at a somewhat ironic time in the West, a time when prospects for Christian cultural transformation are lower than they have ever been. And yet this is precisely the time when a rigorous, biblical, Calvinistic doctrine of creation is called for. The more secularism pushes Christianity to the margins in Western and particularly U.S. culture, the more tempting it is for Christians to reach for natural law arguments in the public square. This is not necessarily wrong—but it can go wrong (as Van Tilian presuppositionalism has also taught us). It takes a good Calvinist to know that depravity is total

and that while the goodness of creation extends everywhere, so do the effects of the fall. God speaks eloquently and forcefully to mankind through creation about his own eternal power and divine nature, but people suppress that truth. A biblical doctrine of creation will and must listen to God's voice in creation, and it must look at that general revelation in nature through the lenses of the special revelation in Scripture. But it must also contend with the resistance of people who do not wish to see divine norms in creation, who deny that there is a "telos of the cosmos" (88). As the authors of *The Doctrine of Creation* write, "There is no neutral ground in the creation, and the darkened heart needs to be illuminated by the gospel in order for one's eyes to be opened to see what is all around one" (23).

Ashford and Bartholomew work very hard to open already illumined eyes to more truth that the creation—interpreted in light of Scripture—has to teach. Chapter 4, to choose only one example, demonstrates through insightful exegesis of several passages, especially certain psalms, that it is better to speak of God as "Almighty"—of a God who actually rules over all his creation—than to speak of a "god" of artificial philosophical categories such as "omnipotence," the potential-to-do-anything. Chapter 9 plumbs various passages and, ultimately, the whole story of Scripture to advance key Kuyperian doctrines such as common grace and sphere sovereignty. Chapter 10 carefully and biblically distinguishes creation and providence. Chapter 12 spells out timely implications of a biblical doctrine of creation for philosophy, food, time, the self, and science.

That last area raises this reviewer's own most serious disagreement with an otherwise impressive book: the authors of *The Doctrine of Creation* spend surprisingly little time on the creation-evolution debate. Positively speaking—and this is a gargantuan positive—they show that there is far more to the doctrine of creation than the question of when it happened. They write: "Our goal is the development of a constructive, biblical doctrine of creation, and in our view a next step would be deep engagement with science" (xi). But what is less clear is what cracks may occur in their entire theological edifice—indeed, in the whole creation-fall-redemption story of Scripture—if Adam and Eve were not specially created by God and if death occurred before the fall. The authors quote Bavinck twice as calling death "an alien intruder" within God's creation (102, 261), but they never explain how animal death could occur in a "very good" world. They write a lengthy book on creation and provide a lengthy Scripture index—and yet make no reference to the famous passage in Isaiah 11 describing the conversion of carnivores to herbivores in the new creation. This same theme occurs in Isaiah 65 and in Romans 8, passages they reference briefly but whose implications for the *timing* of creation they do not discuss.

Ashford and Bartholomew have written a book that has no "competitors" of which this reviewer is aware. Few books combine technical-commentary levels of exegesis (of both testaments!) with theological

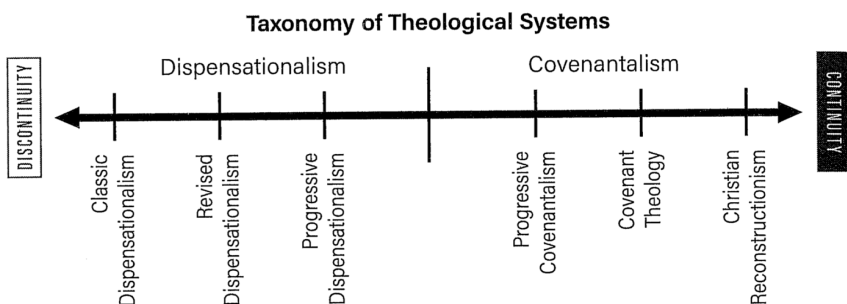
synthesis and a significant dash of historical theology and intellectual history. There is much to gain from these two wise and learned men, and it is to be hoped that they will work together on future book projects. This reviewer wonders, however, how long a Kuyperian doctrine of creation can last when built on the literary framework approach to Genesis 1. The day shall declare it.

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Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies, by Benjamin L. Merkle. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. 288 pp. \$25.99.

Not long ago, one was presented with a binary choice of theological systems—dispensationalism or covenant theology. Over the last few decades, however, the number of systems has multiplied. While it is true that each system still falls on either the covenantal or the dispensational side (primarily on the question of the future of national Israel), the details of each system have become more nuanced and complex. For this reason, Benjamin Merkle's new book *Discontinuity to Continuity* is a needed primer on the current state of theological systems.

The name of the book highlights the direction of the volume. Beginning with theological systems that stress the discontinuity of Scripture, Merkle then moves step by step towards theological systems that stress continuity. The following image, which is used throughout the text, displays the six theological systems organized according to their place on the scale of continuity.



One of the greatest strengths of the volume is its meticulous organization. Merkle asks the same four questions, along with sub-questions, of each theological system. This makes it easy to compare the individual systems. The following outline indicates the questions and sub-questions asked of each system: