

Sending entails the *words of God* in messages of various sorts as well as the *works of God*, all through agents on mission. God is the King of all creation; therefore, he administers both directly and through agency. But God working through agency may sound weaker than his direct action. Maybe it does not sound like the same kind or degree of causality. But are these two forms of providential acts so different? Is God any less providential working through agency? Certainly, both are purposeful. If God's providence includes natural possesses as Piper argues, then human, angelic, or other forms of agency may be equally providential.

Crucially, Joseph is God's agent on mission in the narrative. Neither God nor Joseph ever explain the wonder of God's "sending providence," to use Piper's terms. Joseph says to his brothers, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, *for God sent me before you to preserve life*" (Gen 45:4–5). Does this earlier verse clarify what Joseph means when he says, "you meant it for evil but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20)? For this reason, the author can say in summary: "In spite of real human agency at almost every turn, God is treated as the one who brings Israel's history to pass. Therefore we can speak of a purpose of God's providence in Israel's history" (77), whether through human or other agency and mission.

The book's 725 pages including appendices, might seem daunting, but the author's pastoral, often sermonic style makes the book very readable. Providence is a challenging topic. But the author makes the topic accessible for those willing to read and think carefully. This reader highly recommends the book to those who want to wrestle with the certainties as well as the mysteries of God's providence.

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The Trinity and the Bible: On Theological Interpretation, by Scott R. Swain. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 131 pp. \$19.99.

Over the past decade and a half, Scott Swain has contributed fruitfully on both an academic and a popular level to the ongoing renaissance of Trinitarian studies. Prior to this recovery, Swain likens the hermeneutical condition of Trinitarian studies to a brain injury in which the patient is able to recognize features but not faces. Features of Trinitarian orthodoxy continued to be affirmed but without the categories and interpretive practices in which they made sense. This collection of essays seeks to do its part toward a cure for this disease.

The five essays which make up the heart of this book are not new; all were published elsewhere over the course of the past several years. Hence, each essay stands on its own. A list of their titles will give the reader a sense of the territory they cover. Chapter 2 is "The Bible and

the Trinity in Recent Thought,” and chapter 3 is “B. B. Warfield and the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” a fascinating interaction with the weaknesses and strengths of Warfield’s 1915 *ISBE* article on the Trinity. The following three chapters focus more on exegesis and theology: chapter 4 is “God’s Lordly Son: Mark 12:35-37 and Trinitarian Christology;” chapter 5 is “Heirs through God: Galatians 4:4-7 and the Doctrine of the Trinity;” and chapter 6 is “To Him Who Sits on the Throne and to the Lamb: Hymning God’s Triune Name in Revelation 4-5.”

Despite the independence of these essays, Swain describes in his introduction what they have in common: “Interest in ontological (as opposed to merely ethical or soteriological) dimensions of biblical monotheism, the conviction that ‘relation’ provides the most meaningful category for identifying the persons of the Trinity, impatience with the modern divide (sometimes exacerbated by proponents of theological interpretation of Scripture) between historical biblical criticism and the history of biblical interpretation, and dissatisfaction with modern ways of distinguishing immanent and economic Trinity” (3). From this, one can see why the subtitle of the book is “on theological interpretation.”

Swain’s concern is that interpreters of Scripture take seriously not only that the Bible reveals the Trinity but also that the Bible is the product of the Trinity. He expresses this conviction in the first essay: “We cannot fully appreciate how ‘the Trinity is in the Bible’ without observing how ‘the Bible is in the Trinity.’ While the Bible is the cognitive principle of the Trinity, the supreme source from which our knowledge of the Trinity is drawn, the Trinity is the ontological principle of the Bible. The Trinity is not simply one of the things about which the Bible speaks. The Trinity is the speaker from whom the Bible and all things proceed” (9). He helpfully explains that the Bible does not merely provide raw data from which we create our own synthesis of information called “the doctrine of the Trinity.” Instead, historic Trinitarian dogma represents the church learning the biblical grammar of the Trinity. “What we have in the Bible is well-formed Trinitarian discourse: primary, normative, fluent. More specifically, we have the Triune God’s self-naming in the form of the Spirit-inspired prophetic and apostolic testimony to that self-naming.” Therefore, the liturgy, creeds, and proclamation of the church “follow the divine Word” (15-16).

The book concludes with a previously unpublished chapter on “seven axioms on the Trinity, the Bible, and theological interpretation.” The concern of this chapter is to weld together evidence built up in the previous essays into a coherent, overarching view of theological interpretation. While modern theological criticism considered Trinitarian doctrine to be a late development of NT themes rather than anything taught directly in the NT, “Theological interpretation of Scripture represents a conversion from this perspective. Theological interpretation of Scripture rests on the conviction that the Trinity precedes, not just biblical interpretation, but the Bible itself” (121). The seven axioms Swain provides would make for a wonderful theological debate, since their ramifications are manifold. In order to read them, the reader will simply

have to get the book. But the purpose for setting forth these axioms, not to mention all theological reasoning, is not merely debate, but the knowledge of God. Swain concludes on just this note. Theological interpretation of Scripture both “prepares us for the vision of the Triune God” and “enables us to participate in this happy vision in advance” (131).

In sum, this is not a book which teaches the rudiments of Trinitarian doctrine. For that kind of a book, one could consult Swain’s *The Trinity: An Introduction*. Rather, this is a book which calls for and attempts to exemplify faith seeking understanding, exegesis and theology done in the mode of doxology. While it might not be the first book one would consult on theological interpretation of Scripture or on the doctrine of the Trinity, this book does make a worthy contribution to the contemporary Trinitarian renaissance. More than anything, it is an encouraging book about such a deep topic, for it models for us the joyful sanctification of reason that occurs when we recognize that the Bible is the word of the Triune God.

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What about Evil? A Defense of God’s Sovereign Glory, by Scott Christensen. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020. xix + 544 pp. \$39.99.

In 2016, Scott Christensen published *What about Free Will?*, a defense of compatibilism. The present volume builds on that work. Advocates of compatibilism must explain how God can simultaneously be fully sovereign, even over evil acts, without himself being guilty of sin. Christensen, having defended compatibilism broadly, now turns to the problem of evil more specifically. His ambition is a full-orbed theodicy: an explanation of God’s reasons for ordaining a world in which sin—and redemption—exist.

Christensen has offered compatibilist Christians a very valuable book. The first three chapters define and establish the problem of evil. Chapter 4 summarizes the task of giving an answer to the problem, distinguishing a defense from theodicy. Chapters 5 and 6 analyze and demonstrate the inadequacies (both biblical and logical) of the free will and greater-good defenses.

Chapter 7 is a concise summary of the biblical case for compatibilism. Chapters 8 and 9 probe more deeply into the objections to compatibilism, arguing that evil cannot be understood as existing outside God’s sovereignty and that God’s sovereignty does not erase human moral responsibility. Chapters 10 and 11 begin Christensen’s response to evil. The Christian answer to evil is not an abstract truth, a mere proposition that completes a satisfying syllogism. Rather, the Christian response is unavoidably a narrative—the one true narrative.