footnotes in the book) from a charismatic (22) is a secondary citation and is not even used to support one of the three distinctives. At least the afterword by Aniol gives the reader some explanation of Protestant worship which may be used as a comparison against the Pentecostal worship style described in chapters 1–4.

De Bruyn's second thesis is entirely unsubstantiated. Other than asserting his point, he gives no support, especially when he claims that charismatic worship approaches are "widely shared and practiced in non-charismatic" churches (41). In fact, his personal observations (41–43) are his *only* support. Why should the reader believe that "most evangelical churches today worship like charismatics" (57)? We need some warrant to accept this argument. Furthermore, even if non-charismatic churches worship like Pentecostals (a point unproven), De Bruyn would have us believe that these churches will soon be suffering from doctrinal decline. Could he provide even one current example of this occurrence? Sadly, no evidence is forthcoming.

This book did not fulfill my expectations because it seemed like an opinion looking for facts but finding none to support it. I am unaware of other books seeking to make a similar argument, but if the reader is interested in good books on worship generally, consider these instead: *Biblical Foundations of Corporate Worship* (Scott Aniol), *Christ-Centered Worship* (Bryan Chapell), and *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth).

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Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically, by Kevin Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. 424 pp. $39.99.

Kevin Vanhoozer's work in hermeneutics has spanned several decades, and this book is a culmination of those previous efforts. His bibliography lists twenty of his own previous publications, including twelve journal articles and eight books either written or co-written by him. This should not imply, however, that he is simply repeating himself. His reading in the field of hermeneutics is expansive, and he shows minute familiarity with a vast array of sources directly related to or overlapping in some way the whole field of Bible interpretation. Reading Vanhoozer gives one exposure to many thinkers one might never think to consult, and he interacts with the scholarship of biblical interpretation at a deep and profound level. His purpose is to show how the church—and he means *church* in the broadest possible way—has always been committed to reading the Bible in a unique way, i.e., theologically. The church has done this with respect to the very words of Scripture, i.e., without fanciful, non-sensical interpretations. Because such an approach binds all

genuinely Christian interpreters together, it is a *mere Christian* hermeneutic, borrowing the *mere* language from C. S. Lewis, who derived it from Richard Baxter, both of whom celebrated a "mere Christianity" that would unite Christians rather than dividing them over nonessentials.

Vanhoozer sees ditches on two sides of the road. On the one hand, he repeatedly warns against uncontrolled allegorizing, taking flights of fancy in interpretation. On the other hand—and, perhaps, as a greater priority for him—he fears surface readings of the biblical text that ignore or overlook the divine authorship. Reading with an "immanent frame" that sees only the human author's intention and what the human author *could have intended* given his historical context, Vanhoozer argues, results in thin interpretation that runs contrary to what Bible readers throughout the centuries have discerned within biblical texts, especially Old Testament texts. He insists at numerous points (Vanhoozer's style involves a lot of repetition, but, given the complexity of his ideas, this reviewer generally appreciated the reiterations) that a proper interpretation of a biblical text always finds what is there (he claims to reject eisegesis: "Modern biblical scholars are rightly protective of the literal sense, alert to the ever-present danger of reading one's biases and beliefs back into the text" [273]). But this must include what is there "below" the surface of the text. That is, it finds meaning intended by the divine author that may or may not have been intended by the human author.

How does one find this deeper meaning? The key that unlocks—and, according to the fundamental claim of *mere* hermeneutics, has *always* unlocked—biblical interpretation is the person of Christ. Citing Luke 24:27 at three different junctures, Vanhoozer is confident that Christ can and must be found "in all the Scriptures." Theological interpretation, then, has two primary significations: interpretation that does full justice to the divine source of Scripture—dual authorship, with priority given to the divine Author—and interpretation that finds its hermeneutical key in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the central subject of the entire revelation.

On these points, patristic, medieval, Reformation, and Puritan interpreters find common ground, Vanhoozer avers. Only when Enlightenment criticism began to erode this confidence in the divine authorship of Scripture and thus its fundamental unity did interpreters, both liberal and conservative, begin to interpret with immanent frames of reference and thus forfeit the rich insights of theological (i.e., Christological) interpretation.

In fairness to Vanhoozer, his primary target appears to be liberal interpreters who, disbelieving in prophecy or any level of divine intentionality in the text, treat the Scriptures as solely human documents. When he criticizes interpreters who treat grammar as though it can be the sole determiner of the meaning of a text (45), presumably he has liberal exegetes in view. Nevertheless, conservatives who employ a grammatical-historical hermeneutic also come under fire because their "immanent frame" does not allow for the kind of theological connections

that Vanhoozer thinks are warranted both by the divine authorship of Scripture and the history of devout interpretation.

What is surprising is how Vanhoozer frames his own approach to Christological interpretation. He argues for *transfigural* interpretation. In doing so, he claims and tries to establish that the Transfiguration was not merely a salvific event in Christ's life and ministry but was also an event with profound hermeneutical significance. Christ's glory was veiled in human flesh. Interpreted at the merely human level, observers would have missed what was most important about him. But appearing on the Mount with Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah, representing the Prophets, he shined with his divine glory. From this event Vanhoozer draws five theses to create an "interpretive framework" (266–70):

1. "The transfiguration has hermeneutical significance, helping us understand not only the identity of Jesus but also what it means to read the Bible literally and theologically."
2. "The transfiguration suggests an analogy (*analogia corporis*) between the human body of Christ and the letter of the biblical text, a correspondence grounded in their both being divine accommodations of the one living and active Word of God."
3. "Transfiguration does not change but, rather, glorifies the literal meaning."
4. "Transfigural interpretation is a distinctly Christian approach to reading and therefore belongs to special rather than general hermeneutics" (here, Vanhoozer argues that reading the Bible like any other literature blinds one to the distinct and most important features of the text).
5. "Transfigural interpretation is from faith to faith, requiring readers to have the "eyes of their hearts" enlightened by the Spirit (Eph 1:18)."

This section concludes with a hermeneutical key: "*Choose the reading that most glorifies God and that most promotes the light of Christ in the life of the reader*" (270, italics his).

Vanhoozer then links the Transfiguration with Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3, in which he contrasts the glory of the law with the glory of the New Covenant and uses the word *transfigure* to speak of the transformation of individual believers as they see Christ in the Word. He argues that Paul's discussion also has hermeneutical significance, links directly to Christ's Transfiguration, and proves that reading the letter will always miss the underlying meaning of the Spirit. Readers must be transfigured also if they are going to grasp the theological meaning of a biblical text. Secular readings will always have immanent frames of reference and fail to make the Spirit-intended connections that lead every text to Christ, or, better, show that Christ is embedded in every text.

What to make of all this? At one level, this reviewer found suspect several of the specific exegeses underlying the argument. Despite the extraordinary sophistication of the argumentation—well beyond what a short review could reveal or this particular reviewer could manage to

explain—I am not convinced that the Transfiguration is intended to teach hermeneutics, that Paul makes a hermeneutical claim—rather than a dispensational and soteriological claim—when he contrasts law and spirit in 2 Corinthians 3, or that Paul's use of *transform* in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is alluding to the Transfiguration at all. These building blocks appear crucial to the fundamental metaphor of ascending the mountain of interpretation and having each text transfigured by divining the real "literal" meaning below the text, which is Christological, rather than the surface meaning, which is "literalistic." Vanhoozer insists that his method finds the literal meaning in contrast to surface readings that find "literalistic" meanings (114, 191, 203–4, 266). He seems to mean by "literal" meaning what the divine author, the Holy Spirit, literally intended to say. This is, without doubt, a redefinition of what opponents of theological interpretation regard as genuinely "literal" meaning.

More broadly, how is one to know if a specific "Christological" interpretation of a text is finding the true, deeper meaning intended by the Spirit or is an allegorical flight of fancy? The answer, again couched in sophisticated rhetoric, seems to be that the interpretation was found by Spirit-indwelt interpreters throughout the history of the church. They had been transfigured by the text and, therefore, were able to see Christ where less spiritual interpreters see only literalistic meaning. A *mere Christian hermeneutic* is an interpretive approach that godly expositors—like Ambrose or Augustine or Bernard or Luther or Owen—have used to discern Christ. Using modern grammatical-historical techniques to argue that Christ is not actually present in a biblical text misses the true connection the Spirit wants us to discern. Instead, we need a "grammatical-eschatological" exegesis that sees where texts are headed (for a definition, see p. 409).

This reviewer belongs to a theological tradition—dispensationalism—that is very serious about literal readings of Old Testament texts. Do we find Christ in the law and the prophets? Absolutely. The human authors talk about Messiah; sacrifices and prophetic ministry were incomplete and pointed beyond themselves. But we want to be able to discover these truths using the normal methods of interpretation accessible to all people. We take the human authorship very seriously, and we do not think the Bible should be turned into theological code accessible only to those equipped with the key. We recognize, of course, that the natural man will not receive saving truth without the Spirit's illumination, but we believe a natural man can understand the text of Scripture, if he studies it closely and carefully, just as he can understand Donne, Shakespeare, or Hemingway. Indeed, if we elevate a "special hermeneutic" that treats Scripture at the level of interpretation as unique, how do we determine what rules govern it? We grant, of course, special hermeneutics in the traditional sense of handling poetry, prophecy, and narrative, for instance, with tools appropriate to the different genre. Yet Vanhoozer seems to say he is following the lead of the apostles in how they treat Old Testament texts. But he must know that many interpreters deny that the apostles find deeper meanings in those texts. Many think the

apostles read the Old Testament the way any person reads any text and discovered meaning accessible to any reader (with, again, saving significance illuminated to believers by the Spirit).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, dispensationalists discover that many of the teachings of theological traditions we reject—such as the equation of Israel and the Church and the saving efficacy of the sacraments—arise from theological interpretations of texts that literally—in our view—point in other directions. And we reject these views even though we are aware that they are majority positions throughout church history. The absolute authority and sole sufficiency of Scripture means for us that no amount of historical "weight" can push us off what appears to be the literal meaning of a text. The attractiveness of Vanhoozer's interpretive grid, as well as most other theological or spiritual interpretive systems, is their Christological focus. Dispensationalists are delighted to find Christ wherever the Old Testament consciously points to him. Because, however, we believe the overarching message of the Bible centers on the glory of God, with redemption being a key facet but by no means the only facet of that theme, we do not think every text need be tied to Christology to find its intended message. Indeed, we believe Christ is most glorified when he is found in texts literally intended to point to him.

Vanhoozer's book is filled with fascinating discussion, interaction with a vast array of interpreters across history, and a very interesting attempt to defend theological interpretation. Nevertheless, this reviewer does not believe dispensationalists will find it persuasive.

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The Good Gift of Weakness: God's Strength Made Perfect in the Story of Redemption, by Eric M. Schumacher. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2024. 272 pp. $15.00.

Eric Schumacher is an author, podcaster, songwriter, and pastor who has served in pastoral ministry for over two decades. He is also currently the pastoral ministry director for the Baptist Convention of Iowa. Among his publications, he is the co-author of *Worthy* (2020) and *Jesus and Gender* (2022) and the sole author of *Ours* (2024) and *My Last Name* (2021).

What is weakness? If weakness is a gift, what kind of gift is it? The author defines weakness as "the inability to act or produce an effect. In short, a weak person is one who cannot do things or make things happen. That's us—weak" (15). The author goes beyond the contextual treatment of words for weakness in Scripture to treat the broader theme or concept of weakness. A near synonym for weakness the author uses frequently is *dependency* and related terms such as *vulnerability*. He frequently describes weakness as the way God provides for and protects his