

Spirit in the Christian moral life reveals that however indebted he was to philosophy, he was always first and foremost a theologian.

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Matthew Baker and Mark Mourachian (eds), ***What is the Bible? The Patristic Doctrine of Scripture*** (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016); 224 pp.: 9781506410746, £52.99/\$79.00 (hbk)

Ashley John Moyses and Scott A. Kirkland (eds), ***Correlating Sobornost: Conversations Between Karl Barth and the Russian Orthodox Tradition*** (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2016); 426 pp.: 9781506410753, £52.99/\$79.00 (hbk)

These two books, both collections of essays, represent the latest progress in the great flowering of modern Orthodox theology in two novel ways: the engagement of the Orthodox tradition with modern biblical scholarship and the engagement of Orthodoxy with the epic theology of Karl Barth.

The first book, *What is the Bible?* emerged from a conference of the George Florovsky Orthodox Christian Theological Society at Princeton, initiated by the late Fr Matthew Baker, with additional papers written subsequently for the volume. The book sets out with two principal aims, explored in two parts: firstly, it explores the traditions of interpretation in the Christian East; it moves on to explore modern approaches ‘inspired by the fathers that are also intentionally engaged with contemporary questions in theology, history, science, and philosophy’ (p. xiii). Tight editing, and a clear desire to make these essays accessible to non-specialists, while retaining depth and integrity, renders this a valuable insight into contemporary Orthodoxy’s engagement with the Bible for anyone interested in Orthodoxy, patristics or indeed the increasingly vexed debates about scriptural interpretation and reception.

The first part of this volume investigates well-known and lesser-known fathers. Among some highlights is the book’s first essay by McGuckin, on Origen of Alexandria. McGuckin argues that Origen should be set among the great intellectuals of his day, for he offers an approach ‘truly spectacular in its theoretical grandeur and in its depth of theological mystery’ (p. 19). Also fascinating is Alexis Torrance’s exploration of ‘Voices from the Desert’, an essay exploring the monastic, lived, scriptural theology, of Barsanaphius, John and Dorotheos. Their firmly analogical approach sees Scripture’s sole and vital purpose to lead the believer (*anago* – ‘to lead’), but they warn that reading Scripture without devotion, or worship, might lead a believer away from Christ; they might do better reading the sayings of the desert voices whose monastic lives are shaped by living Scripture, they suggest. More interesting still is what Torrance calls their ‘refracted exegesis’, whereby these same desert voices suggest that the biblical text does not only find meaning in Christ’s life, but in the life of his followers and saints, too.

Thus the saints and their lives ‘as it were “refract” Scripture through Christ and onto the lives of those who follow him’ (p. 78).

The second part enters the gladiatorial forum of scriptural interpretation. I would highlight, in particular, the fascinating chapter on Saint Justin Popović (1894–1979) by Vladimir Cvetković. Popović, a little-known Serbian scholar and saint, who studied in Oxford, interpreted Scripture both personally and subjectively, turning in particular to St Paul as a spiritual, but also a profoundly practical and emotional guide for his day-to-day-life. The final essay by Michael Legaspi emphasizes the need to engage critically with Scripture, accepting it has an ecclesial life: ‘one should hold churchly understandings of the Bible in creative tension with academic criticism’ (p. 183). It is a fitting end to a book that ought to be enjoyed by interested Christians of all traditions, as well as academic biblical and patristic scholars alike, who will find it challenging, and eminently engaging.

Correlating Sobornost, exploring Russian Orthodoxy’s conversation with Karl Barth is a more specific, but no less engaging, book. The book is set out in three main sections: Historical theology; Systematic Theology; Moral and Political Theology. It is introduced with an acute foreword by Rowan Williams, arguing that Barth and Russian Orthodoxy are united by a common interest in the ‘*subject*’ of theology, by which he means the person who is theologically engaged, rather than the subject matter. The collection is united by a discerned commonality between Barth’s robustly Christocentric ecumenism, which abhorred bland tolerance, and the expansive Russian Orthodox notion of *sobornost*, which the volume explores as offering an equally robust and non-reductive approach to ecumenism.

Among an excellent collection of essays, a few stood out for me personally. Valliere’s excellent first essay on conciliarism is pertinent, not least in light of the 2016 Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, discussing as it does how Barth and Orthodoxy might learn each from the other to avoid Orthodoxy’s tendency towards ‘ecclesiocentrism’, or the pitfalls of an overly democratized church order, which drifts too far from the confession of Christ’s lordship – of course, central to Barth’s entire project. It is particularly good to see less well-known writers of the Russian Silver Age explored. Ashley Cocksworth’s fine essay on Berdyaev and Barth outlines their clear disagreements, while pointing to aspects of intellectual convergence, in so doing emphasizing the possibility of further creative and stimulating conversations. Likewise, David Dunn and Joshua Davis bring Bulgakov and Barth into conversation on the ‘Politics of Sophia’, in which they earth what they regard as Barth’s more elevated conceptualism in the divine-humanity and politico-Sophianic thought of Bulgakov. Solovyev, the modern philosopher–theologian of Russian Orthodoxy par excellence, is also brought into dialogue with Barth by Stephen Long and Richard Barry. The creative connections made by Long and Barry while not ignoring the clear points of disagreement, begin a more substantial conversation, and one that touches on political theology and Slavophilism, and brings to the dialogue one of the most interesting theological writers of the Silver Age: Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Both books bear witness to fine editing, and both open up new avenues of conversation. Much more could be said about both books, and hopefully much more will be written by the authors and editors of these two thought-provoking and expansive volumes.

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London

Christopher M. Hays, in collaboration with Brandon Gallaher, Julia S. Konstantinovskiy, Richard J. Ounsworth OP and C. A. Strine, ***When the Son of Man Didn't Come: A Constructive Proposal on the Delay of the Parousia*** (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016); xx + 317 pp.: 9781451465549, \$79.00 (hbk)

The delay of the Parousia has puzzled and challenged Christians for almost two millennia. Was Jesus wrong when he predicted his own return and the end of the world? How did the Church come to terms with the problem? And how should Christians of the twenty-first century interpret his words? This book is the work of a group of young scholars based in Oxford, representing different Christian traditions and disciplines – Old and New Testaments, patristics, and systematic theology – who have tackled the problem collaboratively. Over the course of four years, each presented contributions to the problem, which were then discussed by the group. The consensus which emerged from this discussion was written up by one or more of the group. Unlike other collections of essays on a common theme, therefore, the authors of this book have discussed their contributions with one another and so present a coherent argument.

A brief introductory chapter surveys and rejects some of the solutions to the problem given in the past: Jesus was a failed apocalyptic prophet, who prophesied the imminent end of the world and was wrong; the eschatological material attributed to Jesus is not genuine; his teaching referred to the Son of Man's vindication, not his coming again, and to earthly disasters that took place in the first century, not to the end of the world. The group accepts the tradition that Jesus announced the eschatological consummation, but since the end of the world and the final judgement did not arrive, they are faced with a theological problem.

They begin by looking at the attempts of Old Testament writers to deal with the problem of the non-fulfilment of prophecy. According to Deuteronomy 18.22, a prophet whose words were not fulfilled was a false prophet; this caused problems when some later prophecies about the exile were not fulfilled. One solution was to reinterpret them in the light of subsequent events. Christian attempts to explain the delay of the Parousia are thus part of a long tradition of wrestling with a disparity between prophecies and subsequent historical events. An alternative explanation (Jer. 18.1–10) held that the prophet's words were intended to make the people repent, in the hope that God would change his mind about his intention to destroy them. According to this interpretation, 'a successful prophet is precisely the one