

or ancient texts, I have often been troubled by popular deconstructions of the Scriptures, proving, for example, that Paul didn't write Paul's epistles. *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi* was my first experience with scholarly literature from the relevant fields. Even though I was impressed with the detailed information from ancient sources, I was astonished at the lack of rigor, the abundance of contradictory claims, and the profound absence of a consensus. I used to assume that skeptics of the Scriptures had what a scientist would call a valid argument behind their claims. Not anymore.

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John B. Cobb, Jr. *Jesus' Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. xxiv + 157 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1506405704. \$22.99.

In this book John Cobb urges Christians to follow Jesus in their thinking about and relationship to God. These have too often differed from those of Jesus, according to Cobb. It is not Jesus' Abba, but rather a deviation, that is objectionable to secular moderns. In fact, the modern world actually needs Abba. Thus, "it is time for thoughtful Christians to free themselves from acquiescence to the late modern worldview" and to embrace the "biblical worldview in general . . . the worldview of Jesus and Paul in particular," albeit in updated form (pp. xxi, 155).

Cobb begins with his reconstruction of the historical Jesus, which is similar to the Jesus Seminar's. Jesus was no apocalyptic preacher but rather a social reformer who proclaimed the already present kingdom of God (or "divine commonwealth") in an itinerant ministry involving healings, exorcisms, and charismatic gifts. Jesus' Abba was loving, compassionate, "intimate and tender" (p. 11), inclusive, and opposed to social injustices. Jesus' message was countercultural in its challenging of existing societal institutions and its call for total devotion to and trust in Abba.

Next, Cobb traces how he believes Jesus' Abba was historically lost in western consciousness. Paul faithfully transmitted Jesus' vision of Abba with *pistis Christou*—meaning "Christ's faithfulness," not "faith in Christ"—but concomitantly made the divine commonwealth more otherworldly than countercultural. In the Middle Ages, mediators like the church, the saints, and Mary took Abba's place while God became an "all-male Trinity that had evolved a long way from the experience and teaching of Jesus" (p. 38). A key moment was when modern Cartesian dualism objectified the natural world as a vacuous actuality devoid of subjectivity. When Darwin firmly placed man within nature there was opportunity to see subjectivity in all of reality but most opted to see man as just one more

object to be studied scientifically and understood in a reductively materialistic way.

Subjectivity is a main theme of the book, and Cobb's tour de force for subjectivity based on the primacy of experience comes next. All experience is selective and interpreted, which implies a subject. Our immediate experiences of subjective freedom and real possibilities contradict modern materialistic determinism, which Cobb shows to be internally inconsistent. He likewise argues for the correspondence theory of truth over the coherence theory of truth, which contradicts the way people actually live: "Modern thought profoundly conflicts with common sense" (p. 69). Abba, says Cobb, is necessary for the past to be real and efficacious in the present, as well as for real possibilities graded according to value, which morality requires.

In opposition to the modern exclusion of God from causal explanations, Cobb argues for the necessity of God as a causal subject in the world. Cobb undercuts the modern assumption that subjects cannot be causal factors and, then, in a way reminiscent of the classical theistic proofs for God's existence, argues that only God as subject explains otherwise inexplicable aspects of the world. This he does by evincing evidence from contemporary science and individual experience.

From the question of God's credibility Cobb moves to that of God's desirability. In Christian interactions with other religious traditions—or "wisdom traditions"—what historically became the dominant Christian view of God, not Jesus' Abba, has been intellectually objectionable and practically detrimental. Rejecting both Christian exclusivism and soteriological pluralism, Cobb espouses "deep pluralism." Abba is compatible with the key beliefs and intuitions of major wisdom traditions but Christian followers of Abba can also learn from other wisdom traditions.

Abba is also desirable for addressing the world's problems today. Biblical historical consciousness coupled with the almighty Lord of traditional Christian belief has issued in tribalism, exceptionalism, violence, and genocide. Abba's power lies in persuasion, liberation, and empowerment, not coercive omnipotence and exhaustive divine sovereignty. Abba can remedy communal, societal, economic, and ecological problems. Abba is the only real hope for the future.

Cobb's book raises many questions. One general question regards the degree to which Cobb's vision of Jesus' Abba is biblically and historically grounded versus the degree to which it is a presentation of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy. From among the contested reconstructions of the historical Jesus, Cobb presents one that is very much at home in Protestant liberalism. Cobb sees little apocalyptic in the New Testament (p. 18) even though Ernst Käsemann once remarked that apocalyptic is

the mother of Christian theology.

Similarly, one may wonder at Cobb's repeated and strenuous criticism of the modern worldview when his own vision is so heavily informed by modern assumptions and sentiments. The prominence of "subjectivity" is telling: Jürgen Moltmann once argued that the transition from "substance" to "subjectivity" as the primary category of being is a hallmark of modernity.

These and other more particular questions notwithstanding, there is much that commends this book. Cobb evidences a sophisticated command of a number of disciplines from modern biblical scholarship to physical science to the social sciences. He adeptly translates abstruse points into terms laymen can easily understand and in an enjoyable style. Importantly, Cobb makes a plausible case for God to secular moderns on their own terms—a notable strength of process theology. The book would serve well as an introduction to contemporary liberal Protestant thought in an academic or ecclesial context and may even be helpful for those struggling with the viability of faith today.

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Keith T. Marriner. *Following the Lamb: The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. xv + 274 pp. Paperback. ISBN 13: 978-1498237390. \$35.00.

Keith T. Marriner serves as Executive Editor of One Accord Resources and is an adjunct professor at the School of Christian Ministries at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia. *Following the Lamb: The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation* is Marriner's Doctor of Education dissertation at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, written under the direction of David R. Beck. Reacting to a scholarly neglect of the topic of discipleship in the Apocalypse, Marriner seeks to address this theme through biblical and theological analysis (p. 8).

Three questions in particular serve as the focus of his research: (1) What forms of discipleship existed in the ancient world? (2) How is the theme of discipleship developed in the Gospel of John according to current research? and (3) How is the theme of discipleship developed in the book of Revelation? Addressing these questions, Marriner employs a qualitative content analysis methodology from the area of social scientific research. He follows the example of others who apply content analysis to the field of biblical studies (e.g., Liroy, Bazar, Ray, Hudgins), seeing it as capable of producing fruitful results. This methodology, which consists

of a systematic analysis of texts, includes the use of a coding frame with accompanying categories or topics that assists in identifying the theme of discipleship in Revelation. Marriner establishes his coding frame by employing both inductive and deductive approaches. The qualitative content analysis approach allows him to move beyond manifest content to latent content. The result is a thoroughly biblical and insightful examination of discipleship in the Apocalypse.

Marriner divides his writing into five chapters. In chapter one, he recognizes the lack of studies in biblical scholarship, Christian education literature, and spiritual formation literature on discipleship in Revelation. While New Testament scholars such as Fiorenza, Aune, and Stuckenbruck do examine the topic (pp. 2–4), their works are limited in scope. In addition, most literature related to Christian education and spiritual formation ignores discipleship in the Apocalypse since authors do not believe the writing contributes to our understanding of educational ministry (p. 4).

In chapter two, Marriner examines the forms of discipleship in the ancient world, including the New Testament. Greco-Roman and Jewish writings present a disciple as a student of a (human) teacher. While the student-teacher model is not completely absent in the Old Testament, more prominent is the notion that the Lord serves as one's teacher (p. 27). Discipleship in the Gospels and Acts by and large refers to one committed to Jesus' teaching, mission, and authority, among other features (p. 45). Discipleship in the New Testament Epistles is often portrayed as imitating Jesus (p. 46). Insights gleaned from this chapter, which concentrates especially on terminology, provide helpful information about discipleship that one may compare with the Apocalypse's presentation.

Chapter three consists of a review of recent works (1970s-present) on discipleship in the Fourth Gospel. Marriner also formulates a coding frame, employed in chapter four in his examination of discipleship in Revelation. More specifically, from the Johannine literature examined in chapter three, themes emerge which Marriner applies to his study of the motif in the Apocalypse in chapter four (e.g., union with Christ, belief in Jesus for salvation, membership and election of the people of God, bearing witness to Jesus, keeping and obeying Jesus'/God's commands, consequences of following Jesus, marks of discipleship, distinction between Jesus' disciples and non-disciples, and Jesus as the model for his disciples). However, some may question the emphasis Marriner gives to the call narrative in John 1:35–51, its importance notwithstanding, which he labels as "paradigmatic" (p. 73).

The final portion of the book (chapter five) provides a summary and synthesis of his research with specific suggestions as to how Revelation's