

the gift, which is not always a slaughtered animal) from the human realm to the divine. In doing so, 'communication takes place between the offeror and the divine' (p. 7). Shauf intends to disrupt what he sees as an unfortunate 'evolutionary' perspective amongst past scholarship where sacrifice is an activity for primitive cultures when compared to more modern ones (p. 10). Instead, he argues that the essence of sacrifice is congruent with more contemporary religious expressions. In the biblical text sacrifice serves as the means for Jews to participate in their covenantal relationship with God and provides an interpretive framework through which early Christians made sense of Christ's life, death and resurrection. This framework unites the various chapters of Shauf's work, and the reader will walk away from this book with a renewed sense that the right relationship with God lies at the heart of biblical sacrifice.

With this emphasis in mind, however, it is somewhat surprising that, in the book's concluding chapter, Shauf suggests that sacrifice is 'necessary' only in the sense that the intention and meaning behind sacrifice are necessary. As such, he strongly implies that Christ's death is only appropriate because of the cultural framework in first-century Jewish theology. This conclusion appears to come directly from a presumed understanding of Christian (specifically low-church Protestant) worship and ecclesiology. Since Christian worship no longer engages sacrifice in a communal way – as was the core of the Jewish understanding – there must not be any ontological significance to these activities. I wonder, however, if Shauf's opinion on these matters would change if he engaged with a sacrificial understanding of the eucharist. I anticipate that connecting contemporary liturgical practices to those of ancient sacrificial acts may give more hope for seeing sacrifice as inherently efficacious and more strongly congruent with Christian worship than Shauf maintains.

Nonetheless, even with some of these disappointing moments, Shauf's work is well worth the read. It will prove beneficial to both the undergraduate student and professional researcher alike. Indeed, I would affirm that this work is one of the best resources of its kind published to date, and I have already recommended it to several colleagues. Shauf is able to bring to life a realm of study often missed (or thought to be too dull to engage), and by exploring its implications in such a readable manner, his work will no doubt bring this topic into greater clarity for both the biblical scholar and the theologian.

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## David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), pp. xii + 484. \$52.99

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'The writing of this book has taken twenty years since its conception ... The overwhelming experience during these twenty years has been of the extraordinary

abundance of meaning in John' (p. 433). Not words with which David Ford prefaced his commentary on John but rather his epilogue to this deep engagement with – in his words – 'the culminating Christian scriptural text' (p. 444). It is the fruit of extended conversations, teaching in different settings, studying the commentaries through the ages, prayer and worship in the life of the church, encounter with Christ, retirement (of sorts), bereavement, friendship, family life and an ongoing process of reading and rereading that led to writing and rewriting until, at least for publication of this work, he was able to say his own, 'It is finished' (John 19:30).

The epilogue tells the personal story of living with John and reading and writing about John. It is the best place to begin this book about John's Gospel. Or is this work better called a *commentary* on John? If it is essentially a *book* on John, is it a primarily a scholarly book written for the head, or is it more of a spiritual text aimed at the heart? Is it a form of biblical theology that grapples with the great themes of John, or is it more interested in the literary impact of John rather than its doctrinal content? If it is a commentary, then what sort of commentary is it, given that says nothing of substance about the authorship of John until the final pages, and seems little interested in the sort of technical questions that often preoccupy commentators?

David Ford has given us a work on John that defies the usual categories. It is a commentary, dealing with John chapter by chapter, and often verse by verse; but it is focused on some simple, overriding theological questions: *who is Jesus* and *what does it mean to follow him*? It is certainly scholarly, but it is light on the debates of the academy, and that will be frustrating for some. It is theological, and penetratingly so in parts, but it does not attempt to be a work of systematic theology that uses John to resolve the theological dilemmas raised by the Fourth Gospel.

This is a work that deserves to be judged on its own terms: by whether it reads (and rereads) John well, reading John through John and with the synoptics (which Ford argues – and demonstrates – that John knew), and reading John with the Epistles and the Septuagint; by whether it helps the reader understand Jesus better and to do so as John understands Jesus – as love and light and life, one with the Father, sent through the Spirit; by whether it brings the reader into an encounter with the living Jesus, learning to love and follow him; by whether it entices the reader to read John in its wholeness and then to reread John, again and again. On all these counts I found the book to be a success. I read it as David Ford read John – slowly and, in an unintended but generative way, in tune with at least some of the seasons of the year.

I wanted to see what help it would give the preacher, and to know whether I should commend it to other preachers whom the lectionaries of the churches require to spend a good deal of time with John. Again, it was not a disappointment, and the most recent group to whom I suggested they buy a copy was a group of women and men on day the before their ordination. Living with John through the pages of Ford's commentary, rereading John not only a chapter at a time but, as Ford suggests, rereading chapters of John (especially the first chapter) alongside the chapter under consideration, has been good for this particular preacher and, I hope, for those who have heard me preach. I have seldom quoted the commentary itself, but I have attended better to the interwovenness of John, its theological layering, and I have focused more clearly on the *who* and *where* questions of John – who is Jesus and where is he to be found; who is the disciple and where is the disciple to be found?

Perhaps (and in line with the last words of John's Gospel itself) there have been moments when I have wondered about what is not there in this book, and why. Where are the versions, the discourses and the analyses that have been discarded

when the Ford felt they did not serve his aim? Where are the ‘workings out’ that felt a distraction to the author but would have been fascinating to student and colleague? It is possible that some will appear in different forms in the future and possible, too, that we have some of them already in the six books that David Ford wrote alongside this one. But, like John’s Gospel, our eyes should be less on what was not written or what we wish had been written, and more on what will be written in the testimony of the church by those who – with the help of this commentary – will go on reading John and testifying to Jesus because of John.

The legacy of the commentary will also be seen in further study of John and of the community in which this gospel was formed. For my part, the commentary made me want to know more about that community, which claimed to know well the authorial source of the Gospel, the one who knew what it was to be loved by Christ, and especially among them, Mary, whom that disciple took to his home. The style of John repeatedly reflecting on ‘grace upon grace’ seems like the way of the mother who, according to Luke, pondered so much in her heart. Her place among the witnesses and testifiers seems seldom considered among the commentators, and it is only just alluded to here.

Other readers will have different questions raised in their minds by this book, and many others will have stirrings in their souls which will take them on new journeys of enquiry, theological and spiritual. All of that is to be welcomed as evidence of what Ford calls the ‘continual theological questioning’ (p. 209) provoked by John, the ‘potentially limitless’ (p. 213) capacity of John to generate reflection on the deepest realities of Christian faith. The test of those enquiries, and the writings and sermons they provoke, will be whether they maintain the same sort of discipline to search out the ‘deep plain sense’ (p. 389) of John to which this commentary commits itself, so that John’s readers and hearers, students and scholars, will find themselves saying of the one around whom this majestic text is constructed, ‘It is the Lord’, and will hear him say, ‘Follow me’ (John 21:7, 22).

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## Jessica Wai-Fong Wong, *Disordered: The Holy Icons and Racial Myths*

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In the face of the horrific killing of George Floyd – an African American man at the hands of a white police officer – public protests exploded across the United States. In this historically significant wave of America’s racial reckoning, many raise important yet often-unspoken questions. How are Black bodies perceived? Why are Black bodies seen as inherently threatening? How does the image of whiteness come to communicate what is civilised, virtuous and pure, while the image of blackness communicates uncivilised, barbaric and perverse? In *Disordered: The Holy Icons and Racial Myths*, Jessica