

namely Muslims on the island of Mindanao. The inclusion of such voices would have enhanced the editors' aim of cultivating conversations of faith for a truly global vision of how communities of Jesus' followers are engaging God's shalom of reconciliation and transformation for the common good. Let the conversation broaden and grow.

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Christian Smith. *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012.

Evangelical sociologist Christian Smith is committed to the Bible as authoritative and divinely inspired, but argues that the biblicism of contemporary evangelicalism is untenable and should be replaced by a more faithful and life-giving way of reading scripture. Smith defines biblicism as a constellation of ten convictions: the Bible contains God's inerrant words; represents the totality of God's communication to humanity; covers all issues relevant to Christian life; is easily understood; is best read literally; can be understood without reference to church creeds, traditions, or hermeneutical frameworks; exhibits internal harmony; is universally applicable over time; covers all matters of Christian belief and practice; constitutes a handbook of inerrant teaching on matters of science, economics, health, politics, and even romance (4-5).

By marshaling evidence from books and statements of faith from websites of Christian organizations and seminaries, Smith seeks to demonstrate the pervasiveness of biblicism within evangelicalism. Like other reviewers, I wonder about Smith's definition. Certainly some evangelicals display the simplistic biblicism that he outlines, but others interpret the Bible in much more thoughtful and nuanced ways than those reflected by his definition.

The author argues that biblicism is untenable and inconsistent because

it cannot deliver on its promises. If the Bible is inerrant, harmonious, easily understandable, and universally applicable, then evangelicals should agree on matters of faith and doctrine. In reality, evangelicalism displays “pervasive interpretive pluralism,” with biblicists disagreeing on almost every matter of doctrine and practice. According to Smith, this pluralism is rooted in the diversity that characterizes the Bible itself. Biblicism is intellectually dishonest because it denies this pluralism and operates differently in practice than in theory. While claiming to base interpretations on the entire witness of the Bible, biblicists actually encounter a plethora of materials that cannot be configured into a totally coherent system of doctrine, and so they develop interpretive paradigms of what the Bible says. Materials that don’t fit are routinely ignored or artificially forced into the paradigm. Texts left over from one paradigm may become central to another. Hence, some biblicists are pacifists, others just-war advocates.

Part one of the book, “The Impossibility of Biblicism,” concludes by identifying other weaknesses such as ignoring biblical teachings and texts without explanation, arbitrarily determining that some biblical practices are culturally relative and no longer binding, an inability to handle racist and other difficult passages, and arbitrarily marshaling biblical texts to justify pre-existing practices and beliefs.

Part two, “Toward a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture,” opens with the book’s most helpful chapter. Smith advocates a Christocentric hermeneutic that will feel familiar to readers from the Anabaptist tradition. Because Jesus Christ is both the center and goal of scripture, we must read every part in light of the good news of how God is redeeming the world through Christ. We should interpret every text and consider every topic, biblical and contemporary, through the logic of the gospel. What makes scripture authoritative is not inerrant propositions but its testimony to God’s saving work through Christ. My appreciative quibble is that the author’s description of the Bible sidelines the Old Testament somewhat, and does not quite capture how the New Testament consistently links Jesus to God’s prior saving activity on Israel’s behalf. Perhaps the Bible’s center is God’s redeeming work in the story of Israel and the world that reaches a highpoint and fulfillment in Christ, a description that encourages Christians to embrace more fully God’s saving activity in the Old Testament.

Smith's Christocentric hermeneutic allows Christians to acknowledge and deal with the Bible's plurality, incompleteness, and problematic texts. We can abandon biblical practices not consistent with the logic of the gospel. We can develop a biblical affirmation such as our oneness in Christ into a full-blown anti-slavery stance that New Testament writers did not yet understand as the logic of the gospel.

I applaud Smith's suggestions for how to read the Bible as good news. However, the interpretive pluralism which he sees as discrediting biblicism also afflicts Christocentric hermeneutics, which is no more likely than biblicism to find agreement on infant versus believer's baptism, atonement theories, church structure, worship, or pacifism versus just war.

*The Bible Made Impossible* will be most appealing to readers recovering from a biblicist (as defined by Smith) way of interpreting scripture. Such readers will have their misgivings about biblicism validated and will be guided towards a more life-giving, intellectually honest, and truly evangelical way of reading the Bible.

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Jens Zimmerman. *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012.

*Incarnational Humanism* is a spirited defense of classical Christian theology as the best ground for a humanist philosophy of culture by Jens Zimmerman, Canada Research Chair of Interpretation, Religion, and Culture at Trinity Western University. Zimmerman sees the doctrine of the incarnation as the key to elevating the status of humanity in the ancient world and anchoring human dignity, solidarity, and social responsibility today.

In the first half of the book, the author acknowledges that early Christian thinkers were influenced by Platonic philosophy but argues