

areas of cultural activity, and specifically from violence (195-98, 279-88). This strategy is represented throughout the volume by John Howard Yoder and the Anabaptist tradition, although Stackhouse recognizes that not all Anabaptists follow this line (24). Actually, he says he is writing to surpass both withdrawal and “take-over” options (5-6), but defeating the latter is not integral to his argument. Yoder is the major target because his is “the most attractive and provocative alternative” to the author’s own model (310). For readers of this journal, the engagement with Yoder is probably the book’s most interesting feature. It is an exemplar of the parasitic dependence on a distorted reading of Yoder that too often characterizes Christian Realism.

Stackhouse seems to have read very little of Yoder’s work, and most of his comments are restricted to isolated quotations from *The Priestly Kingdom*. From this scant textual basis Yoder is accused of reducing scripture to the gospels (192, n16); holding an immanent eschatology (276); failing to discuss the possibility of Christians wielding political power (276, n9); advocating cultural “withdrawal” (278-79); “abandoning” the world (281, n19); and refusing to give examples of successful nonviolent action (286). For anyone familiar with the scope of Yoder’s writings, this portrayal is libelous. But without it Stackhouse lacks a *raison d’être* for his denial of the radical imitation of Christ. By equating radical discipleship with irresponsible withdrawal, he can present his option as responsible engagement. If pacifism can be responsible and engaged, then his argument founders. The new Realism is the same as the old. Long live Realism.

*Jamie Pitts*, PhD candidate, New College, University of Edinburgh

Miroslav Volf. *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

In this collection of essays on theological interpretation of Scripture, Miroslav Volf expresses his conviction that it is the Bible that ultimately serves as the wellspring of theology, its source of life and vigor. As a biblical scholar by training, I do not always find it easy to understand what theologians do with

the Bible. Indeed, although ostensibly governed by interpretation of the selfsame text, our two disciplines approach that text with quite different sets of assumptions. Volf recognizes this, and begins with an attempt to explain his own practice of “theological readings of biblical texts.”

Theological readings, Volf explains, differ from the exegeses of (historical-critical) biblical scholars in insisting on the Bible’s contemporary relevance as the primary site of God’s self-revelation. This does not mean, he is quick to add, that those who undertake such readings neglect historical considerations; rather, they insist that, as Scripture, this text is not *merely* historical. It speaks also to us.

The final four chapters of this volume, all of which were published or presented on previous occasions, are case studies, a series of efforts by Volf to exemplify such theological engagement with Scripture. Chapter 3, which treats 1 Peter, will likely be of particular interest to those in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. For Volf, 1 Peter attests not to a Troeltschian sect that defines itself over against dominant society but to a community characterized by “soft difference” from its contemporaries – a community of aliens and sojourners, to be sure, but one that respects, engages, and invites its neighbors rather than vilifying them.

Chapter 4 addresses the relationship of the church to “the world,” now in dialogue with the Gospel of John. Volf takes issue with the common reading according to which John is a starkly dualistic text characterized by rigid oppositions between darkness and light, etc. In fact, John cannot be considered dualistic, the author asserts, since the “oppositional dualities” the text establishes are ultimately overcome by God’s love of “the world” and the Word’s becoming flesh. For Volf, the “peculiar kind of exclusivism” (113) attested by the Fourth Gospel is at once more credible and, given its “utterly loving attitude toward the world” (121), more authentically respectful of difference than the facile pluralism championed in much modern thought.

In chapter 5, Volf seeks to articulate the meaning of the Christian conviction that “God is love” in the context of Muslim-Christian dialogue. In contrast to the previous two chapters, this is not so much a theological reading of 1 John as a theological reflection sponsored by certain of the epistle’s themes. Similarly, the final chapter provides a reflection on modern economic life that engages the ruminations of Ecclesiastes on human

insatiability and the futility of economic “progress.”

These are thoughtful pieces, and Volf arrives at some compelling theological conclusions. I am not convinced, however, that these conclusions derive from his reading of the texts with which he interacts. It may be a time-honored theological tradition to find the Trinity in the assertion that “God is love” (“If love is an essential attribute of God independent of the existence of everything that is not God, how could God be love if God were not . . . somehow also differentiated in God’s own being?” [138]), but I wonder why this particular instance of theological reasoning with the text is deemed legitimate while others are excluded. (Why, for example, can one not infer, as Volf’s Muslim interlocutors are wont to do [134], that Jesus is the “offspring” of the Father from the common biblical assertion that he is the Son of God?)

What we have here and throughout the book, I think, is a rule of faith operating as an undisclosed hermeneutical principle. Thus, when Volf foreshortens his initial methodological discussion by stating that theological reading of Scripture is an art, not a science (4), a cynical reader might suggest that his art consists of finding ways to align Scripture with orthodoxy.

Given that only the first chapter was newly written for this collection, it is not surprising that the book is somewhat disjointed. (Chapter 2, reprising Volf’s conception of the relationship between practices and beliefs, feels particularly out of place.) Thus, the work as a whole lacks both the coherence and the depth of methodological reflection that would make it a significant contribution to the hermeneutical discussion to which its subtitle alludes.

*Ryan S. Schellenberg*, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Fresno Pacific University, Fresno, California