others is why, as pacifists, they want to remain identified with such an anti-pacifist stream of Christian faith.

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Peter J. Leithart. *Between Babel and Beast: America and Empires in Biblical Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.

The movement of empire studies over the past several decades has left hardly any discipline untouched, and theology is no exception. Publishers have produced books on Christianity's imperial history, Jesus and empire, Paul and empire, revelation and empire, the prophetic critiques of empire—the list is nearly exhaustive. So, what might Peter J. Leithart's book contribute to the conversation?

To begin, Leithart sees his volume as uniquely positioned in the debates of the left and right in American politics. He denounces the imperial form Christian politics has taken in America (i.e., nationalism), while simultaneously calling America to a truer Christian nationhood—what he calls "God's imperium." That he can position himself both for and against the political right and left has the potential to move particular debates beyond the impasse of partisan politics. But his attempt to play ally and critic to both could also backfire. How his work will be received remains to be seen.

Leithart's project, though highly political, is also thoroughly theological. The author's analysis of American empire is foregrounded by his biblical exposition of the Israelites' deuteronomistic history, especially Genesis. Since Cain, political orders have been built on the sacrifice of others. In Leithart's reading, the tower at Babel is the culmination of a sacrificial, dominant, imperial order, in which a nation attempts to make a single, unified, universal Name and power for itself. Yahweh intervenes, confusing its language and scattering it, effectively dissolving the imperial project. This does not, however, signal that all empires are bad. Such a suggestion, made

by some scholars, is only possible under the assumption that all empires are the same. This is not the case today, nor was it in the Ancient Near East.

Leithart argues that imperial orders are inevitable forms of political organization and are not all "babelic." In contrast to Babel, he shows how God's imperium is found in God's covenant with Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant, the origins of the Israelite people, promises land and seed, the two elements required for the formation of a nation. But God intervenes in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, founding an imperium not on sacrifice (as Cain did) but on faith and covenant relationship. This is extended into the New Testament and fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice for all. Leithart makes the case that while babelic empires are idolatrous, imperial order in and of itself is part of God's working in the world. This analysis is probably his strongest contribution to biblical scholarship.

The author uses this nuanced understanding of imperial orders to criticize contemporary American culture and politics as replicating babelic empire, and to call America back to its proper godly imperium as a Christian nation. Besides his thorough work on the Old Testament, he also suggests that since Jesus' teachings employ explicitly imperial language, it is appropriate to maintain this, while recognizing the drastic differences between babelic empires and God's imperium. Leithart's argument seems sound, but there is a surreptitious lacuna in his contention for America's existence as a legitimate (read: ordained) Christian empire, concerning the nation's historical origins.

While Leithart acknowledges the mistreatment of Native Americans and the savior complex that fueled it, he minimizes the situation in his conclusion that "[o]ur treatment of American Indians remains a dark blot on our history" (109). He seems to think that the error of America lies not in the fact that its very existence is founded on the violent colonization of the land but in some mishaps along the way. Perhaps that accounts for his failure to adequately address the colonial, babelic Christian origins of the American nation. Besides a few pages on the Trail of Tears, the author fails to mention Columbus and the Christian doctrine of discovery supporting conquest of the land, or the massacres of Native peoples led by Chivington and Custer. He may be right that the Abrahamic covenant and Christ marks an end and victory over sacrificial imperial orders and begins God's imperium, but

America is not it. Contrary to popular belief, America was not founded on God's covenant with European settlers (replicating Abraham) but on the sacrificial slaughter of Native peoples (akin to Cain).

If America is a babelic empire, then it must not simply reorganize into God's imperium. Rather, following the deuteronomistic history, the way out of babelic existence is to be scattered by Yahweh—not so much God's imperium as God's decolonization.

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Bruce Ellis Benson, Malinda Elizabeth Berry, and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, eds. *Prophetic Evangelicals: Envisioning a Just and Peaceable Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.

"Prophetic evangelicals are called to lead the church as the *ekklesia* of *shalom* —the discipleship community of equals who bear witness to Christ's just and peaceable kingdom in and for the whole world" (48). The editors of this book use the adjective *prophetic* to describe an emerging identity of Christians who at some point in time self-identified as evangelicals but, given current American political and social contexts, are uneasy with that qualifier alone. "Prophetic" seems to offer a qualifier of evangelical faith that allows people a way of maintaining evangelical identity while also working for issues of peace and justice. The editors have set out to engage conversation, mostly with American academics from a variety backgrounds who have struggled with, or are struggling with, the essence of evangelical identity and their place within such an identity in a polarized context that puts Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxis in tension with each other.

The fundamental question that this book explores is how sound Christian belief informs and shapes sound Christian practice in the context within which a community engages life. As the above quotation states it, prophetic evangelicals are those who define and critique their living in light