

toleration in medieval thought and then a series of chapters on early modern contexts, including Germany, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, English Catholics and English Protestant dissenters.

Wilken's new map is compelling – amply evidenced, described through his characteristic lucid and mellifluous prose, and likely to stand as the leading account of the origins of religious freedom. It raises at least two questions that are not necessarily Wilken's burden to answer but are worthy of pursuit.

First, if it is a 'simple truth' that religious freedom is an 'inward disposition of the mind and heart', as he declares, why have so many Christian thinkers advocated coercion over the centuries? Even many thinkers who have stressed the free character of faith, including Augustine, Aquinas and the leading early Reformers, also have sanctioned punishing heretics. How is this possible? Wilken alludes to rationales: social stability requires religious uniformity; heresy destroys the spiritual ecology and leads others into confusion. Might these rationales be identified more systematically? And how have arguments for religious freedom sought to refute them?

Second, if religious freedom has Christian origins, as Wilken shows, then can it be rooted robustly in other religions? Several of the thinkers he describes viewed religion as a natural right, one that any person can endorse reasonably. Religious freedom's place in today's major international human rights conventions also points towards a natural universal basis. But what non-theological reasons can ground the principle?

Both questions point to further territory whose exploration Wilken's superb new map encourages.

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## **Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire***

**(Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2019), pp. xv + 220. \$29.95.**

David Johnston

St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, Fife, UK ([djj5@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:djj5@st-andrews.ac.uk))

If scholars were to take a photograph of the landscape of Romans, the rocky outcrop of Romans 1–4 would likely be the dominant feature. Some photographers might adjust the focus to add a little clarity to Romans 5–8, and others might even seek to shift Romans 1–4 out of focus as much as possible. However, Scot McKnight, through his plea to read Romans backwards, refocuses the lens completely. Romans 14–15 is brought to a position of prominence in the landscape and remains the lens through which to read the entirety of Paul's argument. Three themes therefore dominate McKnight's interpretation of Romans: the identity of the 'strong' and the 'weak', the tension between these two groups, and christoformity as the solution to these problems.

The strong and the weak, whose identities are established principally through their depiction in chapters 14 and 15 but are fleshed out throughout the rest of the letter, play

the most significant role in McKnight's interpretation. The strong are predominantly gentile believers who constitute the dominant and therefore privileged group in the Roman churches where a 'non-Torah observance culture had formed' (p. 58). Within this context stand the weak, who are primarily Jewish believers in the tradition of zealotry. Their identities had been shaped by Torah observance, and they 'want to impose Torah on gentile converts' (p. 69). Although the groups differ in terms of ethnicity and theology, the tension between the two – and the problem that Paul addresses – arises from conflicting lived theologies and the resultant issues of power and privilege. In response, Paul argues that the two groups are siblings who should welcome one another. Both the strong and the weak must ultimately modify their theologies to establish a pastoral, lived theology of christoformity. This familial reconciliation has a God-orientation and a body-of-Christ orientation, and it leads to peace in Rome, the centre of the Empire.

The entirety of Romans is therefore addressed to these tensions between the strong and the weak. McKnight, echoing aspects of Origen's interpretation, envisages Paul – in the person and performance of Phoebe – addressing each group in turn. Thus, he argues, for example, that 'Romans 5–8 may well have a different audience than 1–4 and most of 9–11' (p. 141). We can see the strength and the weakness of McKnight's refocused lens in his interpretation of Romans 1–4. Rather than an argument against Second Temple Judaism, these chapters address the problem of the privilege claimed by the Torah-observant weak within the Roman church. McKnight states decisively: 'I don't believe Paul ever addresses Jews in general in Romans; his concern is always with fellow followers of Jesus' (p. 18). The hypocritical figure of the judge in Romans 2 is named as 'the major representative of the Weak' (p. 105), and the difficult passage of Romans 1:18–32 is identified as the speech of the judge: 'Paul puts those words in the Judge's mouth' (p. 105). This speech reproduces 'the stereotypical language of Jewish critique of immoral gentile idolaters' (p. 104) and would be affirmed by the weak, whose words are effectively turned against them in the course of the argument. This reading aligns with Douglas Campbell's, although Paul's opponents play no role in McKnight's interpretation. Indeed, due to McKnight's focus on Christoformity as the solution to the tensions in the Roman church, he concludes that Paul 'is against . . . demanding uniformity on this issue of Torah observance' (p. 23). Nevertheless, there is a clear similarity between McKnight's account of the weak throughout his monograph and the standard scholarly depiction of opponents, particularly within the Apocalyptic Paul school. Pauline theology might benefit from further exploration of this convergence. One might also question whether the recognition that a member of the weak is the speaker of Romans 7 – McKnight identifies the speaker as the judge of Romans 2 – might have led McKnight to do more than reproduce the standard critique of Torah as it relates to Israel that is found in the modern commentary tradition.

Despite the lack of explicit interaction with scholarship, this monograph is not just for the non-specialist. In refocusing the interpretative lens, which he then trains on each section of Romans, McKnight has presented a novel approach that should interest the academy as much as the church. His argument that Romans is an account of pastoral theology in response to a dispute between believers in Rome will have implications not only for the interpretation of the letter but also for understanding Paul's engagement with the old covenant. The identification of the two groups with reference only to this letter raises questions concerning the place of Romans within the broader Pauline biography, and the reader might hope for an even more rigorous account of the weak's theology in distinction to Second Temple Jewish thought. Nevertheless,

*Reading Romans Backwards* presents a readable, coherent and initially persuasive argument that further detailed exegetical work might well support.

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## Joseph K. Gordon, *Divine Scripture in Human Understanding: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Bible*

(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), pp. xiii + 442. \$65.00.

Stephen Fowl

Department of Theology, Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA ([sfowl@loyola.edu](mailto:sfowl@loyola.edu))

For almost thirty years a small but significant number of biblical scholars have in various ways pressed on the standard practices of biblical criticism in order to make room for theologically interested readings of scripture. This is hardly a unified movement. Nevertheless, over this time these scholars have produced a number of monographs, there is now a journal devoted to the theological interpretation of scripture, there are several commentary series supporting such theological readings and there are at least two groups within the Society of Biblical Literature focused on the interrelationships between Christian theology and scriptural interpretation.

Theologians, too, have contributed to these discussions, reflecting their own interests. This volume stands squarely on that side of the discussion. The origins of this work lie in the author's Marquette University Ph.D. dissertation. It has, however, been revised significantly; it does not read like a dissertation.

The volume begins by noting the extraordinary plurality in biblical interpretation among contemporary readers of the Bible, lay, ordained and scholarly. 'Given the cacophony of competing approaches to Scripture, and the seemingly irreconcilable claims the different groups are making of it, is it still possible for contemporary Christians to believe in the inspiration, unity and authority of the Christian Bible?' (p. 7). Gordon's answer to this question is 'yes', but that yes depends on providing a systematic theology of scripture. What follows is his constructive systematic account of the role of scripture, situating scripture within the work of the triune God.

Gordon nominates Henri de Lubac and Bernard Lonergan as his primary interlocutors for this project. For those familiar with the interrelations between scripture and theology, de Lubac is a familiar figure. Lonergan is less so. In my judgement, Gordon's use of Lonergan does not deliver insights that could not have been found elsewhere. This is not to criticise the insights themselves. Nor is it a criticism of Lonergan's stature as a modern theologian. Nevertheless, any number of scholars in Gordon's bibliography who are much more familiar deliver the same insights without the need to introduce readers to Lonergan, too.

Chapters 2–6 are the heart of the book. Many scriptural interpreters argue that some version of the rule of faith is necessary to regulate and order diverse interpretations of