

Article Review

David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp. 1092. \$79.95.

Keywords: anthropology, creation, human, post-liberal, reconciliation, redemption.

Without doubt, David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (henceforth, *EE*) is one of the most significant and important contributions to the field of theology from this generation of theologians. The two-volume work of over a thousand pages (really one volume bound into two books because of its size) is Kelsey's *magnum opus*, and arises from more than three decades of study and thought. It addresses directly and (properly) theologically central issues relating to humanity in relation to God and to creation ('all that is not God'). This book has arisen within a theological setting of conversations with other members of the 'Yale school' (Hans Frei and George Lindbeck). Yet, there is a sense in which this book surpasses what that school of thought has offered thus far, not by beginning on an altogether different theological path, but by journeying further, and bringing what that theological approach has to offer to bear on one doctrinal locus in a way which the other key proponents of post-liberal theology have not yet done: Kelsey moves from discussing a theological method to using that theological method more fully and directly than has previously been the case in relation to the theological content of a single theological issue.

It is difficult to think of any comparable work in any area of theology in terms of both depth and scope in recent years; it is also difficult to think of any single work on theological anthropology throughout the history of Christian thought which engages with the singular topic so thoroughly and comprehensively. I cannot imagine any subsequent book on this topic which would not engage in detail with Kelsey's work, and this is surely testimony to its significance. *EE* is not just a book which is interesting for those holding the same post-liberal concerns as the author and his interlocutors, but a book which will need to be read by students of all theological persuasions. It is surely now the standard primary text on theological anthropology.

Kelsey's *EE* is hardly, however, an easy read. One feels after one reading that it is necessary to go through the two volumes all over again, and it is difficult to imagine those outside the professional world of theology having the patience with the book that it requires and deserves. This is

not necessarily a critique, though I do think that the inclusion of a biblical index would enable the book to be of more immediate use to preachers and pastors. The book is written with close attention to detail, and conceptual ideas are expounded carefully and with very specific use of language. Kelsey even employs two types of chapters in different print. While arising within the school of narrative theology, one cannot but sense that Kelsey is primarily a visual and conceptual thinker, who maps his thought patterns in distinct and careful ways. Kelsey creates his own technical vocabulary to provide the apparatus with which to guide the reader through his thought: 'quotidian', 'circumambiance' and 'proximate contexts' are among the terms that one learns, and which are defined throughout the book. Nevertheless, the demands made on the reader are reflective of the demanding thinking that Kelsey has engaged in throughout the writing of the book.

Given the length, breadth of coverage and precision of *EE*, it is almost impossible in the space available here to even begin to do justice to the work. Certainly, it is not possible to offer a précis of each chapter,¹ or to offer critique on the details of the argument. One imagines that, given Kelsey's years of thought on the topic, he would be more than able to respond robustly to such critiques anyway.² Instead, this article will outline the premises and conclusions of *EE*, and the three canonical narratives that Kelsey presents, relating some of the themes discussed within them. The review will then simply point to some discussion points, offered as probes and questions to Professor Kelsey, more than as any systematic attempt at critique. Kelsey states that his own work is offered in 'the hypothetical mode' (p. 9), and the mood of this review should be understood similarly.

Structure and arrangement of themes

Kelsey's *EE* is arranged so as to present a theological anthropology which understands human existence, as the title of the book suggests, as 'eccentric'. By this, Kelsey means that it is an existence which is 'centred outside itself in the triune God in regard to its being, value, destiny, identity, and proper existential orientations to its ultimate and proximate contexts' (p. 893). However, this understanding of human existence is presented to the reader in the form of three irreducible narratives which Kelsey identifies within the canon of scripture. The reason for addressing these three narratives is that the act of reducing the narratives to any one single

¹ There is already a wealth of literature that has summarised and reflected on Kelsey's book. See e.g. *Modern Theology* 27/1 (2011).

² Cf. David Kelsey, 'Response to the Symposium on Eccentric Existence', *Modern Theology* 27/1 (2011), pp. 77–80.

conflated narrative 'will misleadingly harmonize very different claims about God, oversimplifying and domesticating the rough edges and wildness of the One with whom we have to do and to whom we seek to respond appropriately' (p. 470). By retaining the integrity of the three separate and distinct narratives, Kelsey believes it is possible to give a canonical response to the 'who', 'what' and 'how' questions of humanity without subsuming any one question into the others; just as he believes that it is necessary to retain these three narratives to prevent the subsuming of any one of the narratives of creation, consummation and reconciliation into the others (p. 476).

In part because of the significance of this move, Kelsey spends over 150 pages on theological prolegomena. Given his desire to present a genuinely *theological* account, Kelsey's introductory section also contains extended reflection over two chapters on theology proper, reflecting on the doctrine of God in relation to all that is not God. Kelsey is concerned in this to treat anthropology as a locus in its own right (p. 81), but he suggests that to offer a *theological* account of anthropology demands that such anthropological claims must be made in relation to the Christian understanding of God: 'what makes anthropological claims Christianly theological is that the selection of their contents, and the way that they are framed, are normed by claims about God relating to us, when God is understood in a Trinitarian way' (p. 66).

Furthermore, the centrality of scripture in Kelsey's theology leads him to need to explain what he means by canonical scripture – 'the set of texts with which ecclesial communities ought to live in the practices that make up their common life' (p. 150). The need to return to methodological questions is felt throughout the book, and Kelsey spends a long time justifying the moves he makes. Kelsey seeks to write what he terms a 'systematically unsystematic secondary theology' (p. 45). The very concept of 'secondary theology' in relation to the canon gains full explanation towards the middle of the book (in chapter 12B). Kelsey sees secondary theology as a discipline involving careful attention to 'the complex web of systematic relations' between the different theological loci, organised into some form of overall conceptual structure (p. 476). However, even here, he wishes to move away from the common practice in secondary theology of engaging in binary construals of Christian theology (nature–grace, or law–gospel), and towards a 'triplex' approach (as is innate to his own structure). This structure is not simply a narration of three separate and unconnected narratives. Instead, argues Kelsey:

The three poles of the proposed overall conceptual structure of secondary theology are interrelated in complex and definite ways that can be charted.

The triplex structure requires that proposals belonging with any one pole be explicitly formulated in ways that make clear what its systematic relations are, not only to those belonging to the same pole, but also to those belonging to each of the other two poles. (p. 477)

It is this approach which marks the formal content of the book throughout, and it is this triplex form (the triple helix) to which Kelsey returns at the end of the book in a series of theological codas on what has preceded in the book. However, before moving to describe these three interrelated narratives, it is necessary to identify a little more closely the 'systematic relations' belonging to these poles, as according to Kelsey they are asymmetrical. For him, the second and third strands (consummation and reconciliation) are interwoven with each other, and only then entwined around the first strand (creation). Kelsey understands this as being reflective of God's *perichoretic* life (pp. 121–2): the triune God relates to creation in distinct and interrelated ways which arise from the *taxis* of relationships which exists in God's own immanent *perichoretic* life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is this which provides the unitary key to the triply conceived whole.

Part one of *EE*, 'Created: living on Borrowed Breath', concerns the way in which God relates creatively to humanity, as a primary response to the anthropological question 'What are we?' As the One who creates, God, according to Kelsey, grounds our reality, giving it value and sustaining its well-being. Considering what it means for human being to be creatures of God, and what theological and practical difference this means for anthropology, Kelsey considers the ultimate context into which we are born. He takes the bold move of exploring this theme primarily in dialogue with the Wisdom literature in the Bible rather than with the Genesis account (a move he justifies in one of his 'B' level chapters). True to his trinitarian approach, Kelsey expounds the ultimate context into which humans are born by considering what it means for the Father to create through the Son in the power of the Spirit. From this ultimate context, Kelsey moves to consider the proximate contexts into which humans are born, considering (again in dialogue with the Wisdom literature) what it means to speak of 'the creation'. In discussing this, Kelsey introduces the reader to the concept of thinking of the lived world as 'the quotidian',³ which he explains as 'the every day finite realities of all sorts – animal, vegetable, and mineral – in the routine networks that are constituted by their ordinary interactions' (p. 190). In the chapter on proximate contexts, Kelsey takes seriously the given-ness and everyday reality and diversity of the creation (quotidian) in which humans live and of which

³ Interestingly, this is also an idea which is developed in Latino/a theology.

humans are a part. This also involves the practices in which human creatures interact with non-human creatures, and an explanation of the dangers of anthropocentrism: humans are called to act wisely for the well-being of the proximate settings in which they dwell. These reflections are buttressed and supported by a chapter of theological reflection on the book of Proverbs. Having set this wider context, Kelsey moves in chapter 6 to address more directly the question of what humans are. He constructs his answer to this question around a theological meditation on Job 10, considering what it means to be and to have a living body. For Kelsey, Job 10 offers two accounts of the narrative of Job's creation – Job as being a living body and as being given a living body. These two approaches are reflected in two chapters of Kelsey's book, the first of which stresses the implications of the distinction between these two accounts of Job's creation, and the second of which stresses the intertwining of the two accounts. This second consideration takes place against a background of the two Genesis creation accounts. From here, Kelsey moves on to discuss faith, which he explains as 'flourishing on borrowed breath' (p. 309). The flourishing of a personal body comes through wise practices within quotidian proximate contexts for the sake of those contexts in response in faith to God. For Kelsey, it is in that faith 'that personal bodies flourish as the glory of God' (p. 310). These themes are developed in a chapter on 'doxological gratitude', which is considered the appropriate responsive attitude of the faithful person to God's relating creatively to all that is not God: 'the most apt characterization of faithful persons' attitude to their proximate contexts is reverent and awed doxological gratitude for hospitable generosity of God's gift of those [proximate] contexts' (p. 338). In this chapter, Kelsey explores the question of the 'I' in relation to God and to other creatures from the perspective of the way in which human flourishing affects our understanding of both who we are and how we are to be. The B-level chapter that follows this is in some ways one of Kelsey's most remarkable and bold. Rejecting the modern conception of 'person' (following Welker, Frei and Schwöbel), Kelsey considers various models of understanding basic personal identity, and concludes that the best way to consider this is as 'unsubstitutable' (p. 387). Kelsey then embarks on a fierce critique of what he terms 'abstract individualism' in contrast to 'concrete individualism' (pp. 387–401). The final two chapters of the first part of the book address sin (in the plural and singular) as inappropriate responding to God's creative relation to creation.⁴

⁴ Space has determined that I cannot attend to Kelsey's understanding of sins and sin in detail. The reader is, however, directed to Joy Ann McDougall, 'A Trinitarian Grammar of Sin', *Modern Theology* 27/1 (2011), pp. 55–71, for a detailed engagement with this.

Part two of *EE* concerns God's relation to creation as the one who draws humanity into eschatological consumption, seeking to give the chief answer to the question 'How are we to be?' This narration of the second strand of the three irreducible canonical narratives of scripture focuses on the 'the Spirit sent by the Father with the Son', which is considered to be the 'pattern in the way the three "persons" perichoretically draw humankind to eschatological consumption' (p. 443). It is the blessing of this final consumption which is considered, in the second narrative strand, to be the ultimate context of humanity. Kelsey unpacks this context, however, by attending to both its goal and God's drawing of humanity to that goal. The mode by which God relates to humanity in drawing it to eschatological consummation is understood as 'circumambient' (p. 443). Circumambience is a preferred descriptor because the Spirit 'works in and through the practices that constitute the enveloping always-already-there context of personal bodies' lives, [so] it is for that reason also intimately present to such persons' most interior changes' (p. 445). As the One who is both 'environing and intimately interior' (p. 445), the Spirit's relation to humanity is better understood as being one of circumambience than of simply being described as being 'within' humanity. Following a discussion of the relationship of the canon of scripture to secondary theology, the book moves from exploring the ultimate context of humanity in relation to this second narrative strand, to the proximate context of humanity, described as 'living on borrowed time'. Here, Kelsey considers what it means for creatures both to have and be their own space and time. Against this background, Kelsey explores in a further chapter what the appropriate response is to God's relating to humanity in this way. Paralleling the chapter in part one on faith, there is a chapter on hope as an appropriate response to God's relation to humanity as the Spirit sent by the Father with the Son, drawing humans and our proximate contexts into eschatological blessings. Crucially, this hope is to be grounded in the Holy Spirit (eccentrically for human beings), and not in any human optimism; but it is this joyous hopefulness which provides the condition for human eschatological flourishing in borrowed time – 'how' we are to be. This joyous hopefulness in turn has effects on the questions of 'who' and 'what' we are as humans, themes which are explored in relation to the 'borrowed time' motif in a further chapter. Kelsey then examines themes in relation to resurrected bodies and some 'theological loose ends' in a B-level chapter, before moving on to consider sins and sin in the final chapters of the section.

Having addressed the creative and consuming relation of the triune God to humanity, the third section of *EE* considers God's reconciling work in relation to humanity as the major answer to the question 'Who are we?'

In this, God relates to all that is not God by seeking to reconcile it to God 'when it is estranged from God with self-destructive consequences' (p. 607). The perichoretic relation that Kelsey explores in this reconciling work of God is the formulation 'the Son sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit' (p. 617). This is considered the ultimate context for humanity, as God actively seeks to reconcile all that is estranged from him, by means of his *agape* which is concretely known and demonstrated in the incarnation. In considering this, Kelsey is careful not to collapse the distinct ways in which he believes God relates to humanity – in terms of reconciling and in terms of eschatological blessing. Kelsey once again, in this section of the book, moves from considering the ultimate context of humanity to considering its proximate contexts. About the latter, he proposes the following:

Given that Jesus is both part of our proximate contexts and one among us within our proximate contexts, then, because of the complexity of who Jesus is, our proximate contexts are defined by the following correspondingly complex ambiguity: they are estranging contexts reconciled. As the proximate contexts within which we live out our lives, they are living deaths within which we nonetheless truly live and flourish by another's death. (p. 626)

Kelsey explores christological claims in relation to the narratives (and in the case of John's Gospel, anecdotes) of the gospels, as stories are the best way to render someone's unsubstitutable personal identity (p. 636). These claims are then substantiated in a B-level chapter in relation to a detailed engagement with the narrative logics of the gospels. The chapters in the preceding sections on faith and hope are triadically completed by a chapter in this section on love. Love is considered the appropriate response of human creatures, to whom the triune God relates in reconciling. This theme is considered in relation to New Testament teachings on 'in Christ' as well as on *agape*. Two further chapters arise from this chapter on love, seeking to draw out the 'how' question implications in relation to human practices. Kelsey stresses here the two distinct enactments of 'love to God' (with helpful considerations on prayer) and 'love as neighbour', which is understood as a participation in the triune God's love for us. These different forms of human love are expounded with close attention to the Sermon on the Mount (and Kelsey draws explicitly from the interpretation of Matthew by Ulrich Luz). Following a consideration of freedom (in a very different key to the discussions of love which precede it), once again Kelsey offers two chapters on sins and sin, in relation to inappropriate human responses to God's reconciling love.

The conclusion of *EE* is based on three extended codas – one on the A-level chapters; one on the B-level chapters; and one on ‘Eccentric Existence as Imaging the Image of God’. These seek to draw together the themes discussed within the book in order to explain what it means for human existence to be eccentric. The first of these codas introduces the idea of the triple helix structure in relation to the *imago Dei*, which Kelsey believes ‘can serve to exhibit how the three parts of this anthropology work together as a whole to render a single theocentric picture of human eccentric existence’ (p. 896). His reasoning for thinking of the parts of the book in this way is given as follows:

The three parts of this project wind around one another in a triple helix, comment on what each other say about the *imago*, sharpen it, complexify it, and deepen it in an open-ended way that resists every drive to systematize human existence, which is ‘mystery’ in part just because it is not ‘a system’. (p. 900)

The second coda offers a range of possibilities regarding the biblical material on the *imago Dei* and Jesus’ identification with it. The book closes with the final coda which advocates that human beings do not bear the image of God themselves, but instead ‘image the image of God’ (p. 1009), once again employing the triple helix structure to unpack its meaning.

A systematically unsystematic ‘big’ book

One cannot help but be impressed (perhaps even intimidated) by the sheer scale of the project of *EE*. Mirroring Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the two-volume work with three distinct but interlinked parts is not only an extremely serious contribution to theological anthropology but also a deep challenge to theology more generally. It is a good thing for theology that ‘big books’ are once more being written. In an age in which there are various institutional and (in the case of certain countries)⁵ governmental pressures to measure academic success in terms of narrowly defined outputs through a given period of time, it is a mark of the resilience of members of the theological community that they have resisted short-termism, and are still able to produce work with the kind of scope that Kelsey’s *EE* displays. In this enterprise, Kelsey is not alone. One needs only think of the systematic theologies in progress from people such as John Webster in Aberdeen and Sarah Coakley in Cambridge to become aware of the return to major works

⁵ I am thinking here of the British system of a Research Excellence Framework, which demands that academics produce a minimum number of particularly defined outputs in a particular period (around five years).

in English-speaking theology. It remains to be seen how these works will unfold. However, one imagines that Kelsey's work is likely to be different to the others – not least because Kelsey is determined that what is offered is not systematic theology.

The all too brief tour of the sections of Kelsey's book offered above should already give some indication of the 'tightness' of the structure within which he explores his themes. Not only are the three sections arranged around the themes of creation, consummation and reconciliation, and narrated in relation to the three irreducible trinitarian narratives found in scripture, but each section's structure also mirrors the other two. Each begins with humanity's ultimate context and moves from that to humanity's proximate contexts. Each deals respectively with faith, hope and love, and each engages with questions of what, who and how we are human. The three sections also offer final comments on sins (plural) followed by sin (singular). Furthermore, one finds three chapters of introduction as well as three codas at the end of the book, the codas themselves engaging with the level A and B chapters before offering a final comment. This tightness of structure arises out of high-level conceptual thinking, which is orientated towards offering a 'systematically unsystematic' thought experiment. For all of the systematic features of the structure, Kelsey is concerned that '[a]n account of the logic of Christian anthropological beliefs aiming to exhibit them as a "system" may turn out itself to be a systematically distorted account of human being' (p. 45). This seems apt for theological anthropology perhaps above all doctrinal loci, and gives the theology found within *EE* its particular flavour. But, more significantly, in Kelsey's account the unsystematic aspect of the work arises out of his deep engagement with the Bible: 'One formal consequence of that way of construing the wholeness of canonical Christian Holy Scripture is that the array of claims made in theological anthropology cannot be ordered into a single systematic structure' (p. 897). However, one might wonder whether the three inseparable narratives found in his work are by virtue of their inseparability and their interrelation as 'triple helices' any less systematic on account of their interconnected threeness: this threeness is in some ways a 'single systematic structure'.⁶ One can feel this especially in the codas, in which Kelsey offers a reinterpreted understanding of the *imago Dei* 'to exhibit how the three parts of this anthropology work together as a

⁶ Some people have questioned whether the separate narratives are too distinct in Kelsey. See e.g. David F. Ford, 'The What, How and Who of Humanity before God: Theological Anthropology and the Bible in the Twenty-first Century', *Modern Theology* 27/1 (2011), p. 45. However, I am not sure that this is quite the case by the time one reaches the end of *EE*, esp. when one gets to Kelsey's rendering of the *imago Dei*.

whole to render a single theocentric picture of human eccentric existence' (p. 896). Indeed, the movement to christocentrism in the codas also points further in this direction (see below).

Nevertheless, there is much that is positive to be said about the very resistance to a certain kind of systematising that Kelsey's *EE* displays. Let me point to just four aspects of this. First, the genuine and detailed engagement with scripture is to be whole-heartedly commended. The engagement not only in B-level chapters in which matters of exegesis and hermeneutics are discussed directly, but also in A-level chapters in which very often conceptual engagements find their ground in biblical reflection, is exemplary. In an age in which there can be a certain closed guild mentality between different groups in the theological community, *EE*'s approach to theology is important both in terms of the specific issues discussed within the book, and in terms of the agenda that this sets for theology which comes after it: biblical engagement of this kind is surely crucially important for all doctrinal loci. That this comes alongside such sophisticated conceptual engagements is all the more impressive. One reviewer recently referred to the work as being comparable to Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine chapel:⁷ both are overwhelming feasts, which relate in different (but connected) ways the various narratives of God's ways with the world in a complex unity. I, too, was struck by this sense (and interestingly the same image) when reading *EE*: there is a high-level (almost visual) conceptual interrelation in the work, and that this is accompanied by deep biblical engagement is a tremendous achievement.

Second, the overt theocentricity of the work presents an anthropology which is genuinely theological; one cannot but have the sense that at the centre of this anthropology is God and reflection on God's relation to humanity. There are obviously various ways in which one could enter into discussion of theological anthropology. Kelsey suggests that 'theocentricity is a major *desideratum*' (p. 29) in undertaking to write one. At no moment throughout the thousand pages of the book does Kelsey ever move away from his aim and desire to discuss anthropology in relation to theology proper. This means that in a work which is about humanity, one cannot but learn much about the nature of God as well.

Third, the engagement with real human life (the 'quotidian') is extremely important. In his engagement with theological anthropology, Kelsey is concerned to work from the basis that 'the real and authentic human being is the ordinary, everyday human person' (p. 204). This is particularly important in terms of the dignity afforded to other human creatures. The movement

⁷ Stephen Plant's review article, 'Christian Ethics as Eccentric Existence: On Relating Anthropology and Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24/3 (2011), pp. 367–78.

away from some idealised notion of 'perfect' humanity helps here, as does a genuinely theocentric account:

Because theocentrically understood human dignity is inherent in our creation in our having been born, it is not a function of the distinctive array of powers and capacities we have by which to respond appropriately to God relating to us creatively. Much less does our dignity consist in our exercise of those capacities and powers in acts of response to God. (p. 278)

Perhaps especially in the complexly secular and pluralist society of which we are a part, such a preparedness to engage with real, everyday humans is important for theological anthropology; and it brings with it important implications (theological and ethical) for engagements with, for example, differently abled humans, and even with issues relating to gender.

Fourth, many theological anthropologies seek to identify what is specific to humanity in contrast to the rest of creation, seeking to articulate what we are not in relation to the rest of the animal kingdom, or to identify something that we uniquely and singularly possess as the essence of theological anthropology. This is not the case with *EE*. There is a direct exploration of this theme in Kelsey's discussion of 'Our Proximate Contexts as Created' (chapter 5A). Non-human creatures are not instrumentalised for the purpose of human creatures in this account. Kelsey wisely notes that non-human creatures 'are not created by God simply for us' (p. 200). He recognises the human as part of the quotidian, rather than seeing the quotidian as merely there for the purposes of the human. Such a sensitive account of humanity in relation to, and as a part of, all creation is wise, and again carries ethical implications to be worked out elsewhere.

Some interrogative, hypothetical and unsystematic probes

Reading a book of the kind that *EE* is cannot but throw up questions. What is offered here is simply a sample of my own thoughts and queries when reading the work. This is not to critique the book in any kind of systematic way (such a process would in and of itself not quite work for this systematically unsystematic work of secondary theology in the hypothetical mode). Instead, it is to commend the book in terms of its capacity to stimulate thought and questions in a range of areas.

One cannot but be struck by the important distinctiveness in unity of the three narratives of creation, consummation and reconciliation. These are arranged in that particular order, reflecting what Kelsey sees as the

assymetrical relationships between the three irreducible narratives. For example, Kelsey writes:

To say that the Spirit 'sent by the Father' draws creatures to eschatological consummation reminds that it is the Father who creates and that, while the relation 'creator of' does not presuppose the relation 'consummator of,' 'consummator of' does necessarily presuppose 'creator of.' The way the story is plotted, the Father sends the Spirit to draw to consummation that which God has (logically, not chronologically) 'already' and independently created. The relation 'consummator of' is asymmetrically related to the relation 'creator of.' God might self-consistently create that which God does not consummate, but God cannot consummate that which God has not even created. In the order of being (though not necessarily in terms of temporal order), 'creator of' is prior to 'consummator of.' (p. 126)

And similarly with regard to reconciliation: 'although God's relating to create is the ontologically prior presupposition of God's relating to reconcile, creating does not necessarily entail reconciling creatures if they become alienated' (p. 129). But is this necessarily true for a determinately theocentric account? Is the suggestion that it makes little or no sense to speak of God as consummator and reconciler if God is not already creator fully adequate? Might one not think that without consummation and reconciliation the image of God that is offered is a God whose engagement with the world is somewhat arbitrary? This might even be the case logically as much as chronologically. Certainly, Kelsey's interrelated ways of telling the three canonical narratives avoids any suggestion of a 'creator god' and a 'redeemer/reconciler god', but I wonder whether placing a sharper demarcation than is perhaps necessary between God's work as creator and God's work as reconciler/redeemer might lead some of Kelsey's readers towards one of the binary models of secondary theology that Kelsey rejects, opening doorways I have little doubt Kelsey would want to close. Not only might one point to recent Barth scholarship in its discussion of Barth's doctrine of election (which perhaps Kelsey views as 'creative theological speculation' with little ground in scripture (p. 471), as he certainly does not discuss it),⁸ but also to the Genesis 1 account,

⁸ See e.g. Bruce McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology', in John Webster (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000); Bruce McCormack, 'Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. Van Driel', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60/1 (2007); and the associated literature around this theme (with the replies from Paul Molnar and George Hunsinger).

which Kelsey places in a secondary position to the Wisdom literature in his discussion of creation. In these, one sees the deep interconnection between creation and consummation: God's acts of creation are acts of judgement (separating day and night, land and sea, and so on) in which God's Spirit hovers over the face of the waters (themes which are picked up in Revelation in the imagery of new creation). Perhaps a more developed engagement with the relation of time to eternity (a theme pointed towards, but not developed in *EE*) might help in making clearer the distinction between logic and time that Kelsey points towards?

Second, in relation to this, it is not always entirely clear which conception of the doctrine of the trinity it is that Kelsey works with. While there are clear structural similarities with Calvin's *Institutes* (as noted), in certain ways the book that *EE* is closest to in structure is Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, volume IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. The three principal parts of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation narrate and reflect upon the story of reconciliation from three narrative perspectives relating to Christ's offices as Priest, King and Prophet. They are also similarly structured to each of the sections of *EE*. While there is internal unity in the particularity of each of these part volumes, there is a strong degree to which the unity of the narratives is found in the volumes of dogmatics which precedes volume IV: the nature of Barth's threefold telling rests on foundations laid elsewhere, perhaps most especially in the doctrine of election and the doctrine of time and eternity. It would be unfair to demand of Kelsey's *EE*, which pertains to only one locus of Christian theology, the same foundational work. But one is left, given Kelsey's insistence on a theocentric account of theological anthropology, desiring a little more from Kelsey in terms of his understanding of the doctrine of God, and particularly of the Trinity. There is a chapter on 'The One who Has to Do with Us' in the introductory section. However, much of this is a narration of the patristic evolution of the doctrine of the Trinity (told in a somewhat pedagogical way). At times it seems that in defining God as 'the communion-in-community of the three perichoretic hypostases freely and in love giving and receiving Godself eternally' (p. 120; cf. p. 168) we might be working with some kind of social trinitarian model (particularly in the way in which perichoresis is defined). Yet Kelsey seems to tell us later in the book that this explicitly is not the case (pp. 1009–10), and he also discusses what he sees to be the Christocentric character of understandings of the Trinity arising out of the Arian controversy. This latter issue comes back to the fore in the codas in which there does seem to be a shift from trinitarian logics more specifically to Christocentric logics, at least cognitively. This in some ways relates to the concern expressed in the point above: the second and third parts of the book are understood to be reflections on narratives about 'the triune

God relating to humankind in the same concrete historical subject, Jesus of Nazareth' (p. 898). This not only once again seems to separate part one from parts two and three (with the effect of one feeling that the Spirit is somehow 'short-changed'), but it does also feel like a shift from directly trinitarian thinking to more directly christological thinking about anthropology. Thus, at the end of the book one desires something distinct but related to the desires that one has at its beginning – a more fully articulated christology: certain themes are elided quickly, and it would be wonderful to have Kelsey unpack them further (for example, the communication of idioms (p. 1011) and Christ's humanity (p. 1016)). It would be useful to know more about the reasoning for this shift in tone from the introduction to the conclusion. Furthermore, one cannot help but think that perhaps an engagement with the doctrine of appropriations might have given further depth to the interrelation of the different parts of *EE* in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Third, I have the sense of a whole host of unanswered questions at the end of reading *EE*. This is once again not to criticise what is present in the book, but to wonder about further areas of reflection. Particularly strongly felt is the lack of any sustained reflection on gender or sexuality. Kelsey does discuss why he has not engaged directly with this (pp. 1014–15), but I wonder whether this ignores issues which really do require consideration in a theological anthropology (one could also list race with them, as Kelsey does). Given the problematic nature of Barth's engagement with issues of gender in his anthropology, there is surely a need for some deep thinking about these issues. Moreover, given that the world-church is engaging in trench warfare over issues relating to sexuality and gender, it would have been of great service to the church to have Kelsey's thoughts on that topic. Perhaps he has decided to take a vow of silence on such a divisive issue? Both of these themes are ones on which there is considerable and direct material in canonical scripture, however. Furthermore, there is no sustained engagement with ecclesiology within the book, and this feels like a real loss in terms of what Kelsey could offer theology.

Such omissions are felt, fourth, in terms of the interlocutors with whom Kelsey engages. The decision not to have footnotes does leave one wondering why Kelsey might have decided to use certain commentators and theologians and not others. One is left wondering what Kelsey would have made of a sustained engagement with Thomas Aquinas or Hans Urs von Balthasar. Furthermore, at points one cannot but feel that the engagement with interlocutors is somewhat one-sided. There are a number of places in which a good deal of Kelsey's work is done by précising another single scholar, such as in chapter 21B with Luz, or in chapter 20B with Reid and Deissmann

on the formula 'in Christ', or with Nygren in relation to love. Obviously, one cannot cover everything, but it might have been helpful to know why certain decisions were made positively to include some interlocutors and negatively to exclude others. One feels the same way with the presentation of the patristic material, and is left wondering why certain fathers are used and not others, and also why certain scholars of the patristic era are discussed and not others (the patristic presentations can also feel somewhat strangely divorced from scripture).⁹ Perhaps such a lack of critical engagement is done in charity to those Kelsey rejects, but given his preparedness to go 'against the tradition' (in his words) at points, it would be interesting to know what he thinks critically about those with whom he chooses not to engage. It would also be interesting to know more overtly how Tillich has influenced the work (it feels as though his thinking is very present in the background).

Finally, I wonder about the voice and mood of Kelsey's theology. It is always hypothetical and somewhat in the subjunctive. But is there a place for the more imperative as well within a work as long as Kelsey's? Others have pointed to their desire for more ethical consideration in the work.¹⁰ But I wonder whether this is connected to Kelsey's desire to deal with real, everyday lived life. At the end of the book I desired to know how I could become more fully human in time. Certainly, there are hints within the book (in relation to the quotidian, and in faith, hope and love), but one wonders what that might be like in the concrete settings of the quotidian of which one is a part, and in which one lives; and what concrete differences Kelsey's account might bring about for the church and those who learn from him.

Without doubt, these are mere tasters of the many, many questions that *EE* will stimulate for successive generations of theologians. This book has already found its place within the canon of great theological texts of the last fifty years (perhaps longer). Its influence will be felt for a long time, not only in terms of the doctrinal locus of theological anthropology, but also in terms of its influence on secondary theology more generally. Indeed, while it is not a book on theological method, the method it embodies and demonstrates may well be the most long-lasting effect of Kelsey's *magnum opus*.

Tom Greggs

King's College, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3UB, UK

t.greggs@abdn.ac.uk

⁹ On Nicene (and pro-Nicene) theology and scripture, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 418–25.

¹⁰ See Plant, 'Christian Ethics as Eccentric Existence'.