

Jan Muis, *The Implicit Theology of the Lord's Prayer: A Biblical and Theological Investigation*

(Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), pp. xxii + 411. \$135.00

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Translated from the Dutch by Allan J. Janssen[†], this study addresses the question, 'What does Christian talk about God mean and how can we understand the content of this talk?' (p. ix). Proceeding 'from the companionship with God as it is configured from praying the Lord's Prayer' (p. xiii), Jan Muis intends 'to systematically explicate and reflect on the Christian concept of God' (p. 13) 'in such a way that believers as well as nonbelievers can follow the train of thought' (p. xi). Thanks to the author's lucid reasoning, they can if they have been well trained theologically.

The book is divided into two parts, 'Christian Talk' (pp. 19–103) and 'About God' (pp. 105–359), framed by a prologue ('The God Question,' pp. 1–18) and an epilogue (pp. 361–2). Muis' starting-point is that of a believing theologian, differentiating himself from both an unbeliever, who rejects God's reality and activity, and a philosopher, for whom the question of God's existence precedes, instead of follows, the experience of faith.

'Christian Talk' is subdivided into three chapters. The first, dedicated to 'Structure', parses speech about God (originating in biblical speech), speech addressed to God (pre-supposing theistic belief) and God's speech (considered prevenient, eliciting human response, and for Christians centralised in Jesus Christ). Chapter 2, 'Talk about God in Faith', considers human longing for and trust in God, the character of faith convictions, their warrant and certainty, and faith as relational knowledge. 'Faith convictions are implied in trustful companionship with God' (p. 52). In chapter 4 Christian talk about God is grounded in God's personal address to believers through the Holy Spirit: the triune God's revelatory self-disclosure in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Epistemologically, 'Every argument for a truth criterion is reasoning in a circle' (p. 88). Yet 'we can go too far in our talk about God and say more than what is possible on the basis of revelation and faith' (p. 91).

Part II, 'About God', delineates the language of Christian faith. Two chapters take up 'Biblical Names for God' – Father, YHWH, King, Creator – and God's divinity, personhood, relations and emotions before investigating what Muis reckons as God's fundamental attributes, implied in the Lord's Prayer: love, holiness, justice, power and eternity. These concepts coincide with the two testaments' presentations of God's companionship with Israel and universal love through Christ. Muis further analyses such extrabiblical concepts as God's real existence and our variegated conceptions of reality. The book's epilogue is doxological: 'The Creator is the overflowing and inexhaustible source of all love, holiness, and justice, of all goodness, beauty, and truth. ... Believing in God is living with him[,] trusting that our longings for life, love, holiness, and justice will be perfectly fulfilled by God himself in eternal communion with him' (pp. 361–2).

The adjective 'implicit' in this book's title should be taken seriously. While Muis occasionally nods to the Lord's Prayer 'as the starting point and guide in the search'

for 'the core of the Christian language of faith' and its 'concept of God' (p. 33; cf. pp. 90, 164, 210, 227), Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4 are registered only four times in the index and are never subjected to exegesis. The 'second table' of the Lord's Prayer – petitions for bread, forgiveness and deliverance from evil – is virtually ignored, even though all tally with the author's reflections on God's gifts of life, love, justice and repulsion of evil. The core of Muis' proffered concept is actually 1 John 4:8b, 'God is love', from which all other divine attributes fan out and are coordinated. This set of exegetical decisions sometimes carries the author into awkward positions, when the Bible's 'multi-form' speech (p. 24) does not obviously conform with his conceptual core. The most glaring example is found in 1 Samuel 15: 'texts in which God commands the extermination of entire peoples never have the same weight as the texts on God's love' (p. 234), 'in which there is no place for coercion or violence' (p. 297). A subtler specimen is Exodus 3:14, where Muis identifies YHWH as 'the triune God' (p. 141) who may be predicated as Father, King and Creator, and thus the source of 'basic biblical statements and grammatical rules of Christian talk about God' (p. 157). Such may or may not be accepted by Christians as the implicit theology of the call of Moses. It is odd that Muis does not correlate divine holiness, 'God as the Most High [who] is always already and perfectly himself' (p. 202), with YHWH, the One whose name Jesus taught his disciples to hallow.

If the complexity of biblical speech about God resists systematic reconciliation, we have Professor Muis, not to fault, but rather to thank for courageously engaging the witnesses of both testaments, their traditional extrapolations and their impact on Christian experience. Classical church dogmatics seems an endangered species. That which grapples with the church's scripture is even rarer. (Biblical exegetes who dare travel in the opposite direction are all but nonexistent.) Concentrating on the most recondite of subjects, the Christian doctrine of God, Muis has harvested the mature fruit of a lifetime's rumination on theology past and present, philosophical hermeneutics and biblical interpretation. From many he has learned; by none is he intimidated. Among this book's most refreshing features is its humility: self-critically framing sound questions, weighing alternatives and searching for the best answers, which are always provisional. 'Our conception of God's attributes always lags behind the full and simple reality of God. It is no more than an approach to God. God himself is always greater' (p. 161).

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Brendan Byrne, *Paul and the Economy of Salvation: Reading from the Perspective of the Last Judgment*

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In recent Pauline scholarship several studies have been offered addressing Paul's remarks about the final judgement. Various strands of scholarship have been troubled