Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition*

(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), pp. xx + 467. $55.00.

Steven Edward Harris

Redeemer University College, Ancaster, ON, Canada (sharris@redeemer.ca)

In the unfolding of his definite project (which he terms sacramental ontology) in *Seeing God*, Hans Boersma turns his attention to eschatology, and the beatific vision in particular. After laying out modern concerns (and misconceptions) regarding the doctrine of beatific vision, Part I addresses early Christian thought. Boersma begins with – oddly enough for a section on early *Christian* thought, though the relevance is clear – a reading of portions of Plato and Plotinus in a Blondelian vein, in which philosophy rightly points the way toward a required fulfilment of human desire and action that it itself cannot provide; the fulfilment arrives only from above, by revelation. Chapter 3 treats Gregory of Nyssa's notion of *epektasis*, the continual stretching-out of desire for vision of God that continues into the eschaton, that in his later works (e.g. *The Life of Moses* and *Homilies on the Song of Songs*) is christologically oriented. Chapter 4 deals with Augustine's varied and highly contested legacy. It is clear here Boersma wants Augustine to have said more than he did about the presence of the divine substance in Old Testament theophanies – and all creation – in order to secure a strongly ontological account of participation. One significant oversight here is *City of God* 22.29–30, surely Augustine's most developed speculations on beatific vision in the final resurrection. This affects later discussions (pp. 346, 422–3; though cf. p. 423, n. 99), in which Boersma's speculations on the resurrection body actually come quite close to Augustine.

In Part II, Boersma turns to medieval thought. Chapter 5 compares Aquinas and Palamas on the disciples' vision of the transfigured Christ, in which Boersma offers an appreciative critique of Aquinas, on Palamite grounds, as insufficiently christological and sacramental. The following chapter provides a fruitful comparison of Symeon the New Theologian and John of the Cross on their respective mysticisms of light and darkness; here again, the latter is adjudged, in a measured way, to be insufficiently sacramental. Chapter 7 again compares two figures, Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa, on the roles of the intellect and will in ascent to the vision of God. Boersma admirably refuses to separate these two faculties, opting not to opt for either intellectualism or voluntarism. Indeed, he puts the pointed question to Bonaventure whether his privileging of desire as overleaping intellect suggests 'there is something in the human person that does not need to undergo the purging of the cross' (p. 217). The final chapter of the section is a compelling treatment of the limitations and failures of language in Dante's *Paradiso*.

Part III enters the post-Reformation period, treating Protestant thought. It begins with a chapter on Calvin, in which Boersma retrieves the Reformer's overlooked teaching on the beatific vision through his biblical commentaries. Chapter 10 presents the striking reflections found in John Donne's poetry and sermons, to which I will return

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930619000553 Published online by Cambridge University Press

below. Next, Chapter 11 compares the christocentric spirituality and theology of the Puritans with the experiential Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper, offering a reading that calls for substantial modification, at least in the Anglophone world, of the received picture of the founder of Dutch neo-Calvinism. The final chapter of the section turns to Jonathan Edwards' remarkable vision of the end and uses it to modify Aquinas' position. Part IV concludes the work with Boersma's own dogmatic reflections on beatific vision under the rubric of divine pedagogy, in which he unpacks some elements in that neglected classical doctrine in new ways.

Throughout the book, Boersma opts for a strong sense of continuity across vision of God in this life, in death and at the end. Nature, scripture, the eucharist, mystical visions and especially Christ – the one mediation that continues in the eschaton due to the hypostatic union – are all 'sacramental' anticipations that are surpassed in the intermediate state and again in the eschaton. The problem here is this seems to make of death not the apostle Paul's 'last enemy' (1 Cor 15:26) but akin to St Francis' 'Sister Death', a friend. This comes to the fore in Boersma's treatment of Donne's early works, especially 'Good Friday, 1613', in which death is antagonistic; Boersma prefers the later sermons where continuity of vision through death is emphasised.

Relatedly, Boersma's strongly continuous rendering of the progressive increase of beatific vision continues to problematise the role of the body, which is cast off in death. Rather than a somatomorphic soul, we might contrast the incompleteness of the separated soul to suggest, following Kuyper (whom Boersma prefers not to follow; see p. 340), that in the intermediate state there is no beatific vision and hope continues until resurrection. There is still communion with Christ, but it is sightless; there is not yet a proper vision of Jesus. The abiding desire for completion by the body would thus be a keenly felt hope. This option would depend on our interpretation of select passages (e.g. Eccl 9:10; Luke 16:19–31; Rev 6:9–11), but I think it at least suggestive.

Finally, Boersma emphasises the risen Christ as the object of the beatific vision. I am sympathetic with such a view; christocentrism is rarely the wrong move in theology. But here there are at least two problems. First, the spectre of christomonism looms: if our vision is of the risen Christ, what of the Father and Spirit? Boersma rightly appeals to John 14:9 here (pp. 409–11), but does not say enough about how the sight of the risen Christ is simultaneously the sight of the other divine persons and, indeed, the whole creation. I suspect this would take him closer to Augustine's *City of God* or, perhaps, the highly speculative conclusion to Robert Jenson's systematics. Second, and more problematically, how does Christ himself participate in the beatific vision in his human nature? Christocentrism in eschatology here threatens christocentrism in anthropology. If the risen Christ *is* humanity's true future, then we must hope for what Christ presently enjoys. But if our future is to gaze on the risen Christ, how is *he* to gaze on himself? It would be wrong to suggest that Christ himself experiences the beatific vision differently than do his followers. Marc Cortez follows Simon Gaine's critique of Edwards (and Boersma) on these same grounds.[1] Again, these are all questions put by someone in agreement with the fundamental aims of the book.

Seeing God is historical theology of the first order. Boersma covers a wide range of figures and interacts with primary and secondary material in a number of languages. The treatments of Calvin and Kuyper will undoubtedly reshape scholarship on those figures. His exposition, drawing on Cusa, Donne and others, of God's loving sight *of*

[1]Marc Cortez, 'The Body and the Beatific Vision', in Marc Cortez, Joshua R. Farris and S. Mark Hamilton (eds), *Being Saved: Explorations in Human Salvation* (London: SCM, 2018), p. 336.

us as what glorifies us is both intellectually and spiritually moving. It is highly recommended for theologians both historical and systematic, and for educated Christians who wonder what that life will be like. Indeed, perhaps the greatest contribution of the book, one which aligns with Boersma's aims, will be to help recover the desire for the vision of God as ultimately satisfying for us who are all too willingly consumed by penultimate things.

doi:10.1017/S0036930619000553

C. Clifton Black, *The Lord's Prayer*

(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2018), pp. xxiv + 373. $40.00.

Ashley Cocksworth

University of Roehampton, London, UK (Ashley.Cocksworth@roehampton.ac.uk)

C. Clifton Black is the Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He has written extensively on the Gospels (especially the Gospel of Mark), on the relation between theology and the Bible and, now in his latest monograph, on the Lord's Prayer – 'the prayer above all prayer', to use Luther's phrase. For all the brevity of the prayer itself, at over 350 pages this ends up being a sizeable volume. These three verses in the Gospel of Luke (or five in Matthew) have a habit of generating extensive commentary. Karl Barth's treatment of the Lord's Prayer hit over 400 pages in the German, and he only reached the second petition. Black gets somewhat further than Barth by providing a full exegesis of each of the petitions of the prayer and, in addition, includes prefatory material and substantive appendixes.

The volume is the latest in Westminster John Knox's 'Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church' series, which focuses on biblical themes and issues (such as miracles, money, and creeds) rather than on individual books of the Bible. Black sticks closely to the aim of the series by seeking to provide a theological resource for the church on the theme of the Lord's Prayer that is at once biblical, homiletical and pastoral. All this is to say *The Lord's Prayer* isn't straightforward biblical commentary. When it shifts into distinctively commentary mode, it is mostly, but not exclusively, historical-critical in its approach. But, as Black explains, his aims in this volume reach beyond any single methodology. He seeks to attend to the 'grand history of the church's reflection' (p. 49) on the Lord's Prayer, and this means interacting with a wide range of sources spanning Origen's *De oratione* in the third century to Joachim Jeremias' *The Lord's Prayer* in the twentieth. His prose is accessible and free from technical jargon, his analysis isn't bogged down with heavy references (though the bibliography at the end of each chapter usefully points to further reading), and he writes in a way which invites connections to the pastoral concerns of Christian ministry. After all, as chapter 10 rightly suggests, the Lord's Prayer has been part of the church's pastoral ministry from the very beginning.