are, might well have left room for more on crucial aspects of Ambrose's substantive handling of justice, courage, glory, humility, temperance, self-denial, contentment, happiness and other themes; the articulation of perfection and mercy deserves a lot more nuance. Certainly, the relevant material in *On Duties* and elsewhere is potentially much richer and subtler than is here adduced. Smith might well usefully also have underscored the links between moral theorising, formation and social image in Ambrose's annexation of Cicero. The treatment of Augustine's ethics – two chapters to Ambrose's three – is clearly limited in its textual and thematic scope, and makes too much of side-issues. It could have been significantly enriched by a conceptual approach less preoccupied with the language of *magnus animus* or greatness as such. At the same time, it manages to push in slightly too many directions at once in reference to modern debates on Augustine's eudaimonism, love ethics or accounts of moral judgement.

An exercise in 'historical theology', the work explores the evolution of an idea (p. 1) yet eschews extended historical narrative (p. 5). It ventures no sustained case in comparison or contrast of its two figures, or on their possible intellectual relationship (p. 16). Nor does it much consider how Ambrose or Augustine – in reframing things theologically as they respectively did – may have influenced Christian teaching on greatness after them. As such, Smith's approach offers important soundings rather than a fully integrated analysis. Perceptive as the interpretation is at many points, the argument at large does not entirely succeed in portraying Ambrose and Augustine as both heirs and contributors to a persistent – and enduringly ramified – moral theme. The book accordingly does not realise its ambition as a theological project: of gesturing towards and critiquing 'the Classical tradition of honor and the competitive pursuit of excellence in modern Western culture' (p. 16). The *fundamental* interests of the research, and the constructive conclusions of the case it might generate on moral theology's relations to ancient philosophy, are never quite pinned down. Still, Smith has made a useful contribution in a complex field. His book will be read with profit by students of Latin patristic ethics and its hinterlands.

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Iain Provan, *Seeking What is Right: The Old Testament and the Good Life*

(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), pp. xii + 488. $49.95.

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Provan's *Seeking What is Right: The Old Testament and the Good Life* – as one might expect – pursues the task its title articulates: namely, discerning how the Old Testament contributes to human flourishing (i.e. 'the good life'). The title does not necessarily prepare readers for its heavy engagement with church history in the pursuit of answering this question. The book is less a book about the Old Testament itself and more a collection of case studies on biblical hermeneutics broadly, though Provan does consistently

highlight the need for Christians (the book's clear audience) to engage the Old Testament as part of any hermeneutical-ethical study.

Provan begins, rightly and helpfully, by addressing the basic question of what exactly 'the good life' is. He defines 'the good life' both in terms of ethical living and human flourishing, and he makes clear that such a life only comes through imitation of and obedience to the God who reveals himself to us – especially in scripture (p. 4). The rest of part I lays out the foundational hermeneutical principles that govern the rest of the book. First, Christian scripture comprises two testaments, and Christians are 'obliged to take the first of these Testaments just as seriously as the second when seeking guidance for life's journey' (p. 28). Second, part of taking the Old Testament seriously involves discerning the continuities and discontinuities between the Israel of the old covenant and the post-Pentecost church. Provan argues that we should understand the biblical narrative as an 'unfolding whole' that moves not only from creation to fall to redemption but also from the descendants of Abraham and Sarah as 'God's primary mission-partner in the world' to a universal church comprising both Jew and Gentile as this divine mission partner (p. 33). Correspondingly, we should understand the Mosaic Torah as serving 'to guide and to preserve ancient Israel in its temporary role as God's primary mission partner in the world in the time before the life, death, and resurrection of Christ' (p. 35). Rightly gleaning guidance from the Torah therefore involves determining what aspects of it are – for example – accommodations for hardness of heart (e.g. divorce), limited illustrations of the good life (e.g. the Ten Commandments) and redundancies in the light of Christ's coming (e.g. circumcision).

The bulk of the book uses the narrative of church history as the occasion to discuss case studies in hermeneutical principles and applications that build on the foundation Provan has established. Each chapter focuses on particular historical moments and corresponding cultural issues arranged in general chronological order. Chapter 4 explores the question of 'imperial Christianity' that arose with Constantine's conversion and the subsequent dominance of Christianity in the West, and chapter 5 builds on this discussion to explore questions of government and politics; skipping ahead, chapter 11 will return to these questions with a focus on religious liberty and types of governments, both of which were burning questions in the turbulent wake of the Protestant Reformation. Chapter 6 treats the First Crusade and Zion theology, and chapter 14 will carry this discussion forward to consider Israel–Palestine relations and the legitimacy of Christian Zionism. Chapter 7 delves into Leviticus 18 and its implications for sexual ethics, with Calvin's Geneva as the chosen case study. Chapter 8 uses the Anabaptist Münster rebellion as an opportunity to discuss the death penalty, and chapter 9 continues in this vein to explore against the backdrop of the English Revolution the possibility of just war. Chapter 10 uses Puritan New England to examine the question of Sabbath. Chapter 12 deals with race and slavery, chapter 13 with the role of women and chapter 15 with environmental ethics.

In the final part of the book, Provan offers some summarising principles and then moves forward to outline his own thought processes and conclusions regarding some of the 'hot button' issues of the twenty-first century. These issues comprise the Christian approach to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, climate change, abortion, physician-assisted suicide and gender and sexuality, and Provan supplements these relatively brief discussions with an appendix containing resources for further study. Underlying these concluding chapters is the assumed identification of Christians as a people in exile who must navigate life with neighbours whose values are often at odds with their own – but whom Christians are called to love and for whom they are to seek good.

Throughout the book, Provan returns again and again to his foundational argument about the ongoing relevance of the Old Testament – properly contextualised within the

larger story of Christian scripture – for ethics, belief and human flourishing. Several refrains emerge, including the need to consider 'the whole biblical Story', the caution that we must 'begin at the beginning' (especially in Genesis 1–2) rather than reading from the New Testament backwards, the difference between description and prescription in narrative and the respective roles of church and state in the application of biblical teaching. While in some cases the discussion leads to particular conclusions about the issue at hand (e.g. slavery is wrong, no biblical warrant exists for viewing women as subordinate to men), more often Provan leads us to particular dilemmas thoughtful Christians must engage in light of scripture's unfolding narrative and the realities of life in a fallen world (e.g. the restraint of violence by way of violence *may* be warranted biblically, but what roles do the state, church and individual Christians have in this restraint?). Provan's purpose is 'to develop a consistent paradigm for interpreting Scripture ethically that will enable us to live the good life *now* – and indeed in the future, when facing moral challenges that we cannot yet envisage' (p. 288).

Provan's intent that this book should, to borrow the idiom he uses, 'teach *how* to fish' rather than simply '*give* fish' to Christian readers is a valuable contribution to the field of Old Testament interpretation and Christian ethics. The book's length (almost 400 pages, excluding notes) and scope (concurrently introductory, interdisciplinary and Old Testament-focused) might be prohibitive with regards to serving as a textbook for more general Old Testament, ethics or church history classes. At the same time, the writing is accessible and the subject matter important. Provan has provided excellent discussion questions at the end of each chapter, and one could easily utilise selections from the book as course readings if one were hesitant to use the whole. One great pedagogical strength of the book is its clear illustration of why and how Christian scripture and its right interpretation matters for life broadly – even for those outside the church. Readers (even Christian readers) will not agree with every conclusion or assumption Provan articulates, particularly regarding the 'hot button' issues with which he concludes the book. Nevertheless, *Seeking What is Right* offers an excellent starting point for thoughtful study and conversation about what 'the good life' God desires for God's people really is.

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Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God Becoming Human: Incarnation in the Christian Bible*

trans. Brian McNeil (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), pp. xix + 457. $79.99.

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This book sets forth one primary claim, namely, that the theological centre of the Christian scriptures is the event whereby God becomes human for the purpose of drawing humans into a loving relationship with the triune God.