

Mark G. McKim, *Christian Theology for a Secular Society: Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock, 2008. (xiii + 512 pp.) [ISBN: 978-1-59752-829-0]

McKim's *Christian Theology for a Secular Society* aims to provide a thoughtful systematic theology that takes the secular context of the West into consideration for its use in mission and ministry. To this end his book is directed to those who wish to engage with Western culture as practitioners rather than as academics. The work overall displays an awareness of the major trends in scholarship, but at times fails to adequately address certain theological issues. The greatest value that McKim's book offers is the pastoral and evangelistic insights to be drawn from theology for ministry within a secular society. He covers the traditional theological subjects including the doctrine of God, creation and sin, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, ethics, and eschatology. Additionally, he introduces the work with three prolegomena chapters which discuss the purpose of theology, the doctrine of revelation as the source of Christian theology, and a discussion on contextualization.

The chapter on contextualization is largely composed of two lists of ideas reflecting on the requirements of being a Christian and on constructing theology for ministry in a secular society. Time is spent outlining the need for contextualization and the concepts of 'the western world' and 'secularism', but this only serves to provide a brief outline of the background against which McKim is working. Unlike the works of theologians such as Lesslie Newbigin and David Wells, McKim does not set out to discuss western culture in terms of its deeper 'plausibility structures' or from sociological data. Instead, he draws on his own pastoral experience to articulate the implications that our present social context has for Christianity.

His discussion on what the secular context means for being Christian (pp. 70-75) presents practical counsel for churches and individuals which may help to guide them towards more effective ministry. This counsel reminds readers that Christians cannot expect to receive societal support, and that the church's role in supporting its members' faith is increasingly important. Additionally, he highlights the vital importance of having an

informed and intelligent faith, and of being able to articulate it in a culture which has little or no prior knowledge of Christian ideas.

McKim's discussion on the significance of secularism for theology (pp. 76-84) provides useful, perhaps imperative thoughts for expressing and defending theological beliefs within a secular society. His suggestions centre on the need for churches to insightfully engage with their communities and present their beliefs in a way that makes sense to them. This must not only be done theoretically, but needs to be built into the way that Christians live and come together as churches, which McKim discusses in his chapters on ethics and ecclesiology.

The necessity to articulate theology for a secular audience is exemplified by McKim throughout the book as he discusses various issues. For example, McKim chooses to ground the value and dignity of every human being in the fact that they are created and loved by God, which he asserts carries a stronger authority and foundation than a vague appeal to 'human values,' as he puts it (pp. 128-129). I believe he could have asserted this more definitively against something more concrete, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A further example is found in his discussion on the doctrine of the Lordship of God. In this he emphasizes the importance of asserting the Lordship of God, since secular culture enshrines individual rights and freedoms. He says: 'If theology is to be contextual, it must not only recognise this problem, but *always* and *forcefully* present this belief with an apologetic concern – in other words, good reasons must *always* be given as to why a secular person must accept God's lordship' (p. 91, emphasis original). To illustrate this point, McKim employs the image of an astronaut who severs herself from her space shuttle in order to gain freedom (p. 92). Such freedom only results in separation from her only source of life. Elaborating on this, he explains that 'genuinely contextual' theology will highlight the impoverishment of freedom from God, and work on ways to articulate biblical ideas without bringing unwanted linguistic baggage (pp. 92-93).

Much of McKim's work draws on a limited number of influential theologians for his discussion partners. Since his aim is to present a

theology for practitioners within a secular culture this partly mitigates the brevity of treatment given to some subjects, since this allows him to simply present a doctrine and then move on to discuss its implications. Fortunately, his theological instincts are sensibly conservative in that he rejects doctrinal positions such as Process Theology, Open Theism, and Annihilationism. However, at times he leaves his work open to serious criticism since he does not defend certain statements as carefully as could be desired. His treatment of difficult theological positions can require more careful expression and defence.

An example of this is found in his connection between 'love' as an intrinsic characteristic of God on the one hand, and 'hell' on the other. In response to the objection to hell commonly drawn from the loving character of God, McKim suggests that hell is an expression of the love of God (pp. 129-30). His logic follows the philosopher and apologist Peter Kreeft, together with theologian Stanley Grenz. The argument is that the love of God will be experienced everywhere and by everyone, and those who refuse to enjoy the love of God will still experience it for all eternity, only for them it will be something incredibly unpleasant. For them, this eternal experience of the loving omnipresence of God will be known as 'hell'. This diverges from more traditional understandings of hell, and McKim fails to defend this against these. Strangely, when he comes to discuss hell in his eschatology chapter he defines it as being *separated* from God's presence, including his loving presence (pp. 470-71). Although the practical intention of his book means its length will be limited, this weakness should be ameliorated by allowing the space to argue for positions that fall outside mainline doctrinal understandings.

Overall this book is well worth reading by those who are interested in articulating Christian theology for churches in a secular society. As a systematic theology it is a little brief, but it maintains sensible traditional doctrinal positions while venturing to suggest how our new cultural context requires a fresh articulation of those positions. The real value of the book lays in its intentional engagement with secular values and objections. McKim offers an encouraging presentation of sound theology for a secular-based church. For

those who are more academically inclined, he also invites further serious thought and practice in contextualization, so that, as his title suggests, we may sing ‘the Lord’s song in a strange land’.

Chris Northcott

Moreland, J.P. *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism*. London SCM Press, 2009. (ix + 210 pp). [ISBN: 978-0-334-04215-0]

J. P. Moreland’s latest book is a wonderful addition to the ever growing polemic against the dominant worldview in secular philosophy today – that of evolutionary naturalism. The title *Recalcitrant Imago Dei* gives away Moreland’s intentions from the start. Recalcitrant means stubborn, or unable to fit in. This book is Moreland’s reminder to the naturalists of their inability to accommodate specific aspects about the human person that are easily reconcilable, even required, within a biblically theistic framework.

The advance of the Christian position particularly deserves applause. With particular reference to the doctrine of *Imago Dei* Moreland unashamedly highlights biblical theism as the primary contender in this debate. This is sadly not the case for some books written by Christian philosophers with similar arguments and intentions.

Elements discussed in this book are human consciousness, free will, rationality, the substantial soul, objective morality, and intrinsic value. With a chapter dedicated to each Moreland consistently shows the inability naturalist have in accommodating these stubborn elements so obviously ingrained in every facet of human life, and consistently promotes biblical theism as the acceptable alternative.

What appealed most notably was Moreland’s argument for human consciousness as a defeater of the naturalist position (this was Moreland’s second chapter and the arguments here reveal his program well). In this chapter Moreland develops his argument