

Ephraim Radner, *A Time To Keep: Theology, Mortality, And The Shape Of A Human Life*.

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Ephraim Radner has gifted us with a work of depth and wisdom. But though a gift, *A Time to Keep* remains difficult to classify. Radner is impressively interdisciplinary, weaving together insights and scholarship from theology, philosophy, cultural hermeneutics, sociology, and literature. The result is a dense, perceptive, and at times poetic offering in theological anthropology. The chapter titles: “Clocks, Skins, and Mortality” (chapter 1); “How a Life is Measured” (chapter 2); “Death and Filiation” (chapter 3); “The Arc of Life” (chapter 4); “The Vocation of Singleness” (chapter 5); “Working and Eating” (chapter 6) do well at gesturing toward Radner’s concern for a theological treatment of human mortality, finitude, fragility, contingency, and the shape of human living.

Radner conducts a theological investigation into the nature of time, in which one’s embodied creatureliness and narrative in the world form the relational context of human life. It is a feature of many contemporary discussions under which creatureliness lies—gender, sexuality, death, illness, work and vocation, and so on—that these aspects of human life get separated out and analysed apart from one another. One of Radner’s aims is to correct this; to not only treat the aspects of creatureliness, mortality, and finitude together, but to set them in their proper context. This has become all the more difficult since the advent of what Radner calls the “Great Transition,” in which human life has been dramatically changed by cultural, technological, and scientific forces that seek to transcend or overcome proper human creaturehood. In the face of this, Radner proposes a return to the importance of “filiation” (genealogy and family relation), that the temporal and time-filled aspect of human life is the triune God’s gift to reveal himself, and a concern to properly number our days under Christ as the shape of authentic human life.

It is in light of this that Radner treats the charged subjects of marriage, singleness, and sexuality. Radner gives evidence that with the proper theological context and with theological patience the importance of marriage and the goodness of singleness as a vocation can both be maintained. On the matter of sexuality, Radner displays his Scriptural agility in combination with his commitment to treat human existence as a whole cloth, in which one aspect cannot be ripped apart from another. While maintaining an insistence on the church’s historical teaching on “male and female” sexuality, he is able to steer clear of the dualisms and false choices of contemporary discussions. It is, for example, customary for some discussions to label a certain set of Scripture passages as “clobber verses” and then to seek strategies for laying these aside or making them off limits for the discussion. That Radner sets Genesis 2:24 and his theological reading of Leviticus in the holistic context of human creatureliness and mortality effectively subverts this strategy. Many readers may not be convinced by Radner’s argument here, but he has shown that such Scriptures cannot be so easily waved aside and he has moved the conversation along by setting human sexuality within the larger context of the practice of “numbering our days.”

By way of minor critique, three items are worthy of mention. One is a query whether Radner has attempted too much in one go? Each of the chapters could themselves have been books on their own, giving space to flesh out the contours of Radner's reflections on human mortality more fully. Yet the downside to this is that Radner's vision is to treat the various sub-topics together as a whole within the context of human mortality and life. Breaking up the discussion into multiple volumes would then lose the strength and character of *A Time to Keep* itself. Secondly, one may ask if it is a missed opportunity that Radner did not develop more of a sacramental ontology in relation to human life. To be sure, he speaks deeply of the Eucharist and the reality of human existence in Christ. Though the intimations are present, more could (needs to?) be said regarding an ontology of participation in which something like theosis is at once a participation in the triune life of God, as well as a recovering of authentic humanity through participation in the life of Christ (ie, theosis as anthroposis). Finally, specialists in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur should recognize Radner as a kindred spirit and friend. *A Time to Keep* contains a narrative theological quality in respect to human existence, mortality, and finitude that is potentially resonate with the narrative philosophical hermeneutics of Ricoeur. However, though Ricoeur could complement Radner's insights in significant and substantial ways, the inclusion of Ricoeur (beyond his brief mention) would likely also make *A Time to Keep*, in the best ways possible, even more of a challenging and productive read.

In reality these three critiques are minor and should be held loosely. *A Time to Keep* stands up well on its own as a theological reflection on human creaturely life under the triune God in conversation with Scripture, culture, and tradition. Radner has presented us with a work that is equally rigorous and academic, as well as in touch with the heart of human mortality and finitude. Radner's prose requires effort but for the genuinely theologically reflective, patient, and imaginative it will yield fruit for scholar, student, and layman alike.

Malka K. Simkovich, *Discovering Second Temple Literature: The Scriptures and Stories That Shaped Early Judaism*. Philadelphia: JPS, 2018. (xxx + 354 pp.) ISBN: 978-0-8276-1265-5

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Discovering Second Temple Literature is an entry-level survey of the people, places, history, texts and ideas of Jews in the Second Temple period (2TP). It is designed to work as a complement to JPS's *Outside the Bible* (2013). Simkovich, herself an Orthodox Jew (p. xxvi), and holder of the Crown-Ryan Chair of Jewish Studies and director of Catholic-Jewish Studies at the Catholic Theological Union, aims to help both Christians and Jews appreciate this period in Israel's history. She claims that both groups tend to view it as an "in-between stage", defining it, in the case of Jews, by the biblical period and the Rabbinic period, and in the case of Christians, by the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, many Christians do continue to refer to this time in Jewish history as the "intertestamental period", although the dates do not exactly coincide. For Simkovich,