Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780830844838

Daniel J. Cameron
The Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Il, USA.

I realized recently that at any one time I attempt to do multiple things at once. While reading a book I have music playing and my dog wants me to play. Then I get a phone call from my brother, after which I realise I have ten notifications on my phone to check. Doing this, I fall into the endless scrolling void we call social media. Before I know it, an hour has passed, and I have completely forgotten all I was reading to begin and I have to start over. All of these distractions affect my ability to focus and complete the work I want to accomplish. It is fair to say that we live in a distracted age. This constant distraction may have more negative effects than we realise. This is the topic of Assistant Professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University Alan Noble's recent book *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age*. In it he explores "what it means to live in a secular age and how this compounds the effects of distraction to create a deep and largely unacknowledged barrier to belief for most people" (p. 7). Noble's book is structured in two parts. At 189 pages it is brief and easy to read.

Part one, entitled "A Distracted, Secular Age" provides a helpful diagnosis of a prevalent problem in our culture, the problem of distraction. This age of distraction has affected our ways of communicating about issues concerning our faith. Noble argues that our past models of communicating our faith are no longer as effective, as they assumed a listener who was "active, attentive, and aware of the costs of believing" (p. 25). This distraction affects our ability to communicate by making it (1) "easier to ignore contradictions and flaws in our beliefs, (2) we are less likely to devote time to introspection, and (3) conversations about faith can be easily perceived as just another exercise in superficial identity formation" (p. 25). Our Christian faith becomes simply another thing vying for our time and attention. It is this combination of distraction and the prominence of the "secular age" that work together to create what he calls the "buffered self." By this he means "the criteria for belief shifts from external ideals to internal ones" (p. 40). This creates an understanding of the world that is self-sufficient (the immanent frame) and makes belief in a God who is involved to be difficult and even unnecessary. Thus, "our witness must work to disrupt the normative experience of life in a closed immanent frame" (p. 58). Noble closes Part one arguing that our distracted secular society has "scrambled" us. It has turned our belief into "frail, fragmented, and incoherent" systems (p. 61). He asks if this is indeed true then how can we find meaning and fullness in this kind of world? Meaning must come from something outside of us. It isn't just a personal preference. Thus, we must seek to be a "disruptive witness" which throws the whole individual, distracted, secular age into tumult and provides a new and real way of finding meaning.

Like a good doctor, once a diagnosis is given, a prescription is provided. Noble offers a prescription to this secular, distracted age in Part two, entitled "Bearing a Disruptive Witness." He begins by describing practices that ensure we have agency and are not simply a product of our culture. Practices

include Sabbath rest, saying grace, and time for silence. If we are to bear a disruptive witness we must adopt a new movement which involves "a shift in ends from ourselves to a transcendent God, and then letting that shift shape us in every aspect of our lives" (p. 90). Chapter 5 explores the outworking of this shift through "Disruptive Church Practices." The practices of the church speak to our desire for belonging and meaning and interrupt the distraction and aid in the movement of focus from ourselves back to God. Chapter 6 is clearly written by an English professor. In it, Noble explores what it looks like for us to engage in culture in such a way that we can disrupt the distraction and use culture in order to point people to the goodness of God. He argues "Our calling is not to invent allusions to God in our lives but to reveal and affirm the ones that are already, necessarily there" (p. 171).

I applaud Dr. Noble's work in this book. He does a wonderful job alerting us to something that is wrong in our culture and provides a helpful way for us to think about how we are to do our job as Jesus' witnesses within this secular culture. Due to his heavy reliance on James K. A. Smith and Charles Taylor, though, it felt at times as though I was reading them and not him. Overall this is a commendable work that can help people to be more effective witnesses in our distracted 21st century culture.

Brian J. Wright, *Communal Reading In The Time Of Jesus: A Window Into Early Christian Reading Practices.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. (293 pp.) ISBN: 9781506432502

Julia Van Den Brink
Laidlaw College, Auckland

Brian J. Wright's *Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus* sets out to explore the communal reading practices of the first century, focusing particularly on the writings of the New Testament. Wright begins in his first chapter by outlining the lack of previous scholarship on both the practice of communal reading among early Christians and how such practices impact the shape of the texts that were read. In this volume, he is looking in particular for historical evidence that communal reading events took place in a range of different geographical locations throughout and beyond the Roman Empire to lay the foundations for further study into the impacts these events and their traditions would have had on the context that produced the New Testament and the early church.

In chapter 2, Wright begins by justifying his choice of "*communal* reading event" over "*public* reading event." He notes that "*communal* is to be preferred because it both highlights the social aspect of reading and defines the reading event as one in which two or more people are involved. In other words, 'communal reading' can be public or private, but not individualistic" (p. 12, italics in original). This distinction removes an individual silently reading from the picture. He goes on to outline the extent of his study with its focus primarily on the literary evidence and defines some of the key Latin and Greek terms found in first-century literature that refer to communal reading events.

In the next two chapters, Wright turns to how the context of the first century would have supported the widespread proliferation of communal reading events. In chapter 3, he discusses the