

J. Todd Billings. *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018. (215 pp.) ISBN: 9780802862334

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Remembrance, Communion, and Hope is J. Todd Billings' latest offering in pastoral theology, and it begins "with a wager: that a renewed theology and practice of the Lord's Supper can be an instrument for congregations to develop a deeper, more multifaceted sense of the gospel itself" (p. 1). The culmination of ten years' study, the book invites the church to the table where, nourished by the bread and the wine (the "instruments" of God's grace), believers experience and are transformed by their embodied union with Christ by the Spirit, participating in the life of God and in fellowship with one another. This is theology written in and for the church. As in previous publications like his *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life* (Brazos Press, 2015), Billings is bringing the best of biblical exegesis and the Reformed tradition to bear on the life of the church. The book is divided into three parts that lengthen incrementally: part one narrates functional theologies of the Lord's Supper as observed in typical worship services; part two articulates a confessionally Reformed and ecumenically-oriented account of the Lord's Supper; and part three, comprising half the book, develops a constructive vision of a renewed practice of the Lord's Supper in the church. Billings argues that the Lord's Supper, as an act of remembrance, communion, and hope, is where embodied union with Christ is nourished.

In part one, he highlights the functional theologies that currently frame our practice of the Lord's Supper, observing that for most churches, both evangelical and mainline, the primary meaning is a mental remembrance of the cross. This examination is primarily anecdotal, centred on narrated "snapshots" of Sunday morning services that show forth the ontological reality (or lack thereof) in our practices of the Supper (pp. 14-15). Billings' narration resonates at least for this reader, but the study would be well served by formal sociological investigation to thicken the observations (evidently there is a gap in the literature here). Believing cerebral penitence for sin to be a limited experience of the Supper, Billings invites us to reflect first on the nature of being human (ch. 2: "Embodied Perception and Delight in Christ"). Drawing on James K. A. Smith, he argues that humans are affective and habitual beings, perhaps even more than we are conscious thinkers. This leads him to an emphasis "embodiment" he sustains throughout the book: that our practice of the Lord's Supper ought to be sensorial, engaging the affections together with the mind. Billings upholds the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Scottish Reformed tradition of Holy Fairs as a prime example of embodied worship, which he contrasts with nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of revivalism and rationalism. He argues that these latter movements served to displace embodied sacramental praxis for "an intellectualistic form of memorialism and a human-centered revivalism" (p. 56).

Having diagnosed these functional theologies, in part two Billings sifts his way through Reformed theologies of the Supper, expressing preference for a Genevan "strand" of the tradition (p. 68). His third chapter proposes a series of doctrinal theses to summarise Reformed confessions about the Lord's Supper,

while chapter four (the most abstract section of the book) discusses early Reformation theological engagement with philosophical debates about nominalism and univocalism along the lines of Aquinas and Scotus. Non-philosophically minded readers will struggle with the first half of this chapter. The discussion resolves in his turn to Calvin and the doctrine of union with Christ, whose articulation of this doctrine has long fuelled Billings' work (see for example his first book, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford, 2007)). This doctrine is the ontological reality through which all relationships are framed, so that united to Christ, believers are drawn into fellowship with one another as his body, and into the life of the Trinity. Billings speaks of the Lord's Supper as the site of our being united to Christ. Calvin extends this to "the end of the gospel,' which is 'to render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may so speak, to deify us'" (p. 98, quoting John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*). To this reader, this represents the high-point of the book's theological proposal for the Lord's Supper: that our partaking in the bread and the wine is, by the Spirit, in some sense an ontological partaking in the Son's communion with his Father, best described as deification. Yet it remains unclear whether Billings owns such language for himself: all reference to deification is restricted to quotes from Calvin, and though his constructive proposal in the book's final chapter comes close, he appears to distance himself from articulating deification as the fruit of our union, served by the Supper. Is Billings theosis-shy? And if so, why?

Part three makes a constructive proposal for how the Lord's Supper is God's instrument "for reshaping his adopted people into Christ's image by the power of the Spirit" (p. 107). Following the book's title, chapters five to seven explore the Supper in its connection with the past (remembrance), present (communion), and future (hope), each framed by union with Christ. These explorations are biblically rich, effortlessly integrating exegesis and dogmatics (his examinations of 1 Corinthians 5-6 and 10-11, and John 6 are especially nuanced). They are also oriented towards application, with a textured snapshot of a well-curated worship service, centred on the Supper, closing out each chapter. Billings weaves responses to important practical issues into the discussion, such as arguing for an open table to baptised Christians regardless of denomination (p. 151), coupled with the necessity of church discipline and "temporarily 'fencing' members from the table" (p. 152-53). He also discusses the implications of the Supper for multicultural congregations (p. 180). Other concerns could do with more engagement, such as the validity of private celebration of the Supper (what are the implications for weddings and hospital visits?), and the connection of the Supper with baptism. Billings argues communicants must "display age-appropriate faith" (p. 155), yet continues to affirm paedobaptism. With appreciation for Billings' Reformed convictions, this Baptist reader finds the connection left tenuous in his work: should it not be either paedobaptism and paedocommunion, or believer's baptism and believer's communion? (I further submit that locating the Supper in the sacrament of gathering would further renew the church's theology and practice of the Supper, but that would make for a Baptist contribution to the conversation).

Overall, Billings has succeeded in whetting the appetite for the nourishment the Spirit offers in body and blood of Christ. This book is grounded and inspiring and deserves to be embraced by those who serve at the table. On a personal note, this book so inspired me as a pastor that our next preaching series will be

on the Lord's Supper, leading towards a weekly celebration of the Supper: Billings has won his wager! I look forward to what he has next in his line of pastoral theology.

Andrew Root. *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018. (xv + 292 pp.) ISBN: 9781506446745

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American theologian Andrew Root undertakes no small task in this work as he attempts to produce a resource that will equip youth pastors and others who minister to young people with the means to help those young people understand and interpret the findings of modern science theologically. Root's work on this subject was funded by a John Templeton Foundation grant, "Science for Youth Ministry," and he is an excellent choice of author for this subject given his previous works on youth ministry, the implications of secularism for the church, and his strong grasp of various themes in systematic theology.

One of Root's primary challenges in producing this work is the need for him to write it at an appropriate reading level. While his bibliography in this book is impressive, Root admits early on that much of what has been written about the relationship between religion and science falls prey to a common problem: "these conversations often begin at a philosophical altitude that makes the air too thin to breathe, scrambling our minds in confusion" (p. 5). Root wants to produce a work that equips ministers, whilst still referring to the best insights of contemporary authors on this subject.

One way that Root goes about doing this is by situating the key topics of this book within an unfolding narrative about a fictional youth pastor, "Jared," and some of the young people he is working with. Jared is pastor to three young people who pose difficult questions about the relationship between their Christian faith and the scientific. "Aly" is the first of these young people, and she wonders how faith can still be a viable option in the modern world, given the impressive accomplishments and substantial explanatory power that modern science possesses. This then creates space for Root to draw an important distinction between "scientific findings and theories," and "the comprehensive social practice of science" wherein "science" becomes a byword for an all-encompassing worldview that excludes any talk of God. Critiquing the latter of these, Root then goes on to discuss ways in which Christian faith and scientific findings and theories can interrelate. Finally, he returns to the narrative. Aly is experiencing a deep grief, having lost her sister to cancer, and returns to church to be ministered to by Jared and his family. Here Root neatly integrates his overall point, that "while faith and the scientific overlap in their epistemic goals ... Christian faith also seeks something different, something it appeared the scientific was unable or unwilling to search for.... Faith seeks the face, the deep and beautiful mind, of God and neighbour" (p. 112). Root, via his fictional account of Aly and Jared's experience, puts it to us that faith, rooted in the search for the "personal," can hold its own in the face of any overarching worldview that some might offer in the name of "science."