tions where relevant, but the context of each situation, past and present, is critically examined.

This book is the product of many years of classroom teaching on the Biblical Foundation of Mission and everything about it is admirably adapted to this use. Each of the 23 chapters, which are grouped in 6 “Parts,” commences with a focused Introduction and closes with an equally clear concluding Summary. Works cited, either by reference or brief citation, cover the spectrum of significant biblical, theological, and practical studies on mission of the past half century. The indexes are full and helpful.

Reading the whole amounts to a fresh view of both Bible history and critical issues in missions. There are surprises and gems on page after page. Lessons are drawn which lead one to ask why did I not see, or think, of that? Perhaps its greatest contribution is its systematically holistic approach—human history and endeavor is given meaning by the grand story of the divine purpose. Biblical studies and theology, belief and practical application, personal commitment and corporate missionary responsibility, are all held together. It is highly recommended as a seminary classroom text, but also as essential reading for all bible students and missionary-minded persons.

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Each one of us has a worldview that influences our thoughts, decisions, and acts. Even the way we read the Bible is influenced by our worldview. Living in the Western world, influenced by a humanistic worldview that goes back to the Enlightenment, Westerners are in danger of losing sight of the unity of the Bible. As a consequence of the Enlightenment, the Bible is treated as a collection of stories, laws, and poetry that have no connection to each other.

This shattering of the Bible into little pieces is seen even in today’s churches or in their apologetic works. Theologians, evangelists, and preachers look for biblical support for their doctrinal views, and so they pick and choose verses out of their natural context. The Bible is often reduced to propositional statements according to the reader’s preferred theology. In The drama of Scripture, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen have decided to take a step back and rediscover the big picture, the great perspective in which all the elements and pieces of the Bible fit together.
Craig G. Bartholomew is the Chair of the Philosophy Department at Redeemer University College in Ontario, Canada. He has authored *Reading Ecclesiastes*, and is co-editor of the *Dictionary for theological interpretation of Scripture*. Michael W. Goheen teaches religion and theology at the same school and is the author of *As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you*. Both men bring their own expertise to this volume, one as a biblical scholar, the other as a missiologist.

*The drama of Scripture* is structured as a play (hence the title) in six acts, with an interlude. The story starts at creation, then moves to the fall, and then on to Israel’s history. After a short interlude for the intertestamental period, the life of Jesus is presented, then the mission of the church, and finally the restoration of all things. For the authors, “the Bible has the shape of a story” (21).

Other biblical theology books focus on different central themes in the Bible (the covenant, salvation, the blessing, promise and fulfillment, etc.), however, Bartholomew and Goheen choose to join Arthur Glasser and Charles van Engen in looking for the embracing theme of “kingdom of God,” as used in *Announcing the kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). Although the authors survey most of the biblical books in 250 pages—a very bold enterprise, indeed—they also find space to deal with misconceptions in our understanding of the text and even bring new textual and theological insights.

An important concern for the authors, as already mentioned, is to preserve the natural unity of the Bible. In this endeavor, the story line provides a unified and progressively unfolding drama. The result is a coherent Word of God that speaks the same language in spite of the diversity of forms of expression. It is an authoritative Word in spite of the dynamic forward movement of the story that is not yet finished. Only when the Bible is treated as a whole can one understand it correctly. Any attempt to create an imbalance between the Testaments would lead to misunderstandings and doctrines foreign to the Scriptures. Although Bartholomew and Goheen do a wonderful job in emphasizing the progression of the story and continuity of themes, it seems strange that they introduce a different approach for each of the Testaments.

The authors’ first goal is to help the readers understand the “true nature of Scripture” as being God’s story (11). They adopt the paradigm of “grand narrative” used by Leslie Newbigin, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Tom (N. T.) Wright and try to discover the ongoing story behind the biblical text. Bartholomew and Goheen agree that the Bible is the “norm for
faith and life” (21) but they indicate that Scripture directs faith and life only when one’s story becomes part of the biblical story. The key word is involvement.

It comes only naturally that one emphasis of the book is the “centrality of mission within the biblical story” (13). The main contribution of this work to the scholarly world is the look at biblical theology from a mission perspective. The fact that mission is generally missed in the Old Testament comes from Israel’s failure to fulfill her duty. The Bible reader is tempted to lose sight of God’s original plan and the commission to Abraham to become a “blessing for nations,” because of Israel’s egocentrism.

The drama of Scripture corrects this popular view by pointing to God’s unchanging plan to offer his salvation to all peoples. Stories like Esther, Ruth, Naaman, or Jonah make perfect sense if we keep in mind God’s permanent desire to save the nations. Even Israel’s going into exile is excellently pictured in the book as Israel’s failure to fulfill her mission. However, I would have liked to see the “big picture” of mission starting not only from the fall but from God’s missionary character, even before the creation of the world, and moving beyond its restoration.

To define mission only as “restoration” is to limit its real scope as portrayed in the Bible, and as known in theology as Missio Dei. The prophets frequently talk about what is expected to happen after the restoration of “the Day of the Lord” and describe his people bringing glory to him for eternity as being their true and ongoing mission. Last but not least, Bartholomew and Goheen invite the readers to join the drama by making it their own story and becoming part of it. When you join this story, the inevitable effect is that you will share in God’s mission. It is not our mission, but his, not in our name, but in his.

The second stated goal of the authors is to help students articulate a “thoroughly biblical worldview” (11). However, this statement raises many questions. Let me state a few. First, is there a “biblical” worldview? Does the Bible espouse a worldview? Since it was written during a 1600 year time span by tens of authors, how can one be sure they all shared the same worldview? If there is one biblical worldview, why do Bartholomew and Goheen use the two-pronged approach or the two sides of the same coin: “covenant” for the Old Testament and “kingdom of God” for the New?

Second, what about our individual worldview, would it affect in any way what and how we read the Scriptures? All branches of Christianity claim that their view espouses the “biblical” worldview. So
which one is correct? Although I appreciate Bartholomew and Goheen’s effort to recreate the panoramic vision of the biblical story, rediscovering its larger context, I find the above goal to be an overstatement. However, the task of reconstructing biblical theology from a mission perspective has the potential to unite us, in spite of our different worldviews.

Sometimes, in the pursuit for the “biblical” worldview, we forget to check our assumptions as happened in Bartholomew and Goheen’s case. Moved by the strong conviction that humans should be good stewards of the earth and its resources, the authors repeatedly claim that the final goal of God for the earth is not destruction and recreation, but restoration (what about those passages that speak about destruction and recreation at the end of history?). They attribute the same intention to God in the flood story (destruction or restoration?) claiming that he saved not only humans but also the animals because he is the God of the whole creation. The author’s conclusion is that this is an excellent story for kids in Sunday Schools to help them understand the biblical worldview (50). Since most of the kids today are playing with dinosaurs, the question comes naturally: if God is the God of the whole creation, why did he leave the dinosaurs out? Even more hilarious is the rhetorical question, after stating that wine and the craft of making it are good (51): “What would life be without Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Gris, and Merlot?” To such a rhetorical question, the answer is more than obvious: better.

In spite of such occasional humorous inconsistencies, The drama of Scripture presents the reader with a sound perspective and a coherent story. It combines an introductory style to biblical theology with commentary, theological insights, and invitations to engagement. Its style is simple, and it manages to comprehend the biblical story in such a modest number of pages. The book has good Scripture and subject indexes, and the endnotes provide additional interesting and helpful information. It would serve very well as a textbook for college level students, but also for laypeople and theologians who are interested in refreshing their perspective on God’s history and plan for humanity.

For those interested in more than the content of the book, Bartholomew and Goheen have created a website (www.biblicaltheology.ca) where one could find PowerPoint presentations for each chapter, reading schedules for different time-lengths, supplementary reading, and more. I recommend The drama of Scripture as an excellent addition to a missiologist’s or theologian’s library.

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