

typology, thus indicating that he is also of royal lineage (48-50), then traces the imagery's Christological use. David's explanation of why he was qualified to face Goliath was far more than a recounting of some dramatic incidents in his shepherding experience.

One major theme that Niehaus does not deal with is that of creation. It would be interesting to see how he would apply his model, especially to the Christological aspects of creation.

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Peterson, Eugene H. *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 302 pp. Hardcover, \$24.00.

Practice Resurrection is the fifth book in Eugene H. Peterson's five-volume series on spiritual theology, a capstone accomplishment in his writing vocation. Among contemporary writers on spirituality, Peterson towers high with his insistent focus on the work of the Triune God. His books are an antidote to spirituality books that focus primarily on detailed instructions on how to seek God.

Peterson's stature as a major writer on Christian spirituality has grown out of his twenty-nine years as Pastor of the Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland, his fifteen years as Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the more than thirty books he has written on the Christian life. He is best known as the translator of *The Message*, a popular paraphrase of the Bible.

Practice Resurrection is based on Ephesians. His many years of teaching the book of Ephesians in the church and college settings have added to his understanding and equipped him to write this new book. The strange title, *Practice Resurrection*, brings to mind the common expression "practice the spiritual disciplines." However, it is unlikely that Peterson intends that connection. This book, like his other books on spirituality, emphasizes God's work, not ours. Far be it from Peterson to focus on human activity; his theme is always on the activity and grace of God.

The phrase "practice resurrection" comes from the poet Wendell Berry, and Peterson understands it to mean to "grow up in Christ" (70). "When we practice resurrection, we keep company with Jesus, alive and present, who knows where we are going better than we do, which is always 'from glory to glory'" (8). Sooner or later anyone serious about growing up in Christ will have to confront and be confronted by the church, a reality that leads him to Ephesians. Peterson's reflection on Ephesians and the church, however, is not a sales pitch, enticing the reader with visions of what the church can do for him or what she can do for the church. He rejects the church as a "humanly managed popular provider of religious goods and services" (28).

His long pastoral experience showed him the messiness of congregations—the bickering, the sinning, the brokenness. Instead, he sees the church as “a congregation of embarrassingly ordinary people in and through whom God chooses to be present to the world” (28).

Why should we embrace the church? “The short answer is,” Peterson says, “because the Holy Spirit formed it to be a colony of heaven in the country of death” (12). To him, the church is a miracle conceived by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Ephesians does not address “liturgy, mission, and polity” (14). Instead it is “a revelation of the church we never see. It shows us the healthy soil and root system of all the operations of the Trinity out of which the church that we *do* see grows” (14, emphasis original). Ephesians reveals the “essence that is behind the appearances: God’s will, Christ’s presence, the Holy Spirit’s work” (15). This placement of all action on God rather than on human beings is quintessential Peterson.

Peterson builds his exegesis of Paul’s notoriously complicated opening in Eph 1:3-14 by organizing it around seven verbs describing God’s action: God blessed, chose, destined, bestowed, lavished, made known, and will gather up. “God starts everything. Everything” (67). We thus live in a world “characterized by the grace of God” (93).

What, then, is the human role in growth? Peterson coined the term “acquired passivity” to explain. “It is not what we do; it is what we participate in. But we cannot participate apart from a willed passivity, entering into and giving ourselves up to what is previous to us, the presence and action of God in Christ that is other than us. Such passivity does not come easy to us. It must be acquired” (95).

Acquired passivity does not reject the work of the individual, but rather requires a nuanced understanding in which all human work is preceded by God’s work. Peterson points out that Paul links grace and works in Eph 2:8-10: “It is by *grace* you have been saved . . . we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do *good works*.” He illustrates this point by reviewing the days of creation, noting that God’s work on each day is a “sheer gift” to humans (101). His “acquired passivity” appears to be a way of living that is centered on God. When we live with the recognition that God has provided our new life in Christ, we participate with him in all of our work. Thus he rejects self-created spirituality, made by people who “go off by themselves and develop a Rube Goldberg religious contraption out of God-fragments or God-rumors picked up in back alleys, flea markets, and talk shows.” Nor does he think much of people who “set themselves up as freelance connoisseurs of transcendence, searching out experiences of ecstasy, taking photographs of sunsets, collecting books and music that inspire” (168).

In *Practice Resurrection*, while Peterson works his way through Ephesians chapter by chapter, he looks at only a few verses in each chapter. He needs only

one key text to write pages of conversational prose, illustrating outstanding ideas with common observations and juxtaposing refined wording with a few favorite idioms such as “get in on it,” “will have none of it,” and “get used to it.” Every few pages he offers a sentence that is so well crafted in thought and style that the reader feels compelled to mark it or save it in some way.

Peterson’s artistry with the English language has most likely grown out of his wide reading in literary classics. For example, he once spent six hours a week for seven months reading the corpus of Dostoevsky, pursuing some of it more than once. He quotes novelists and poets more often than theologians. This is not to suggest that human writers take precedence over Scripture. Peterson knows Scripture, even in its original languages. He simply bypasses the language of theologians (cf. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 49). In *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 165) he writes: “when a zeal for Holy Scripture and a zeal for common language collide, sparks fly.” Indeed, the sparks fly in *Practice Resurrection*.

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Thuesen, Peter J. *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 288 pp. Hardcover, \$29.95.

The notion of predestination—the idea that God foreordains one’s eternal destiny—is one of the most controversial doctrines in the history of Christianity. This helpful overview, written by Peter Thuesen, a Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, examines the presuppositions behind the controversy.

Thuesen begins by proposing that “A strict doctrine of absolute predestination can make God’s sovereign will seem as arbitrary and cruel as a tornado. . . . Yet for those who find assurance that God has foreordained them to heavenly bliss, absolute predestination can be the sweetest of all doctrines.” As a consequence, predestination “elicits strong reaction” (3). Thuesen breaks new ground on this topic by arguing that there has never been a reigning orthodoxy in American religion. Most of the literature on predestination is Protestant or confessional, at best. He thus seeks to break new ground by contextualizing it within American religious thought.

American religious debate demonstrates the deep influence of Augustinian anthropology. “Few Christians have denied predestination outright,” but frame it in terms of whether God elects people conditionally or unconditionally. Thus predestination is a part of a package of issues, including matters of the existence of a literal hell, the authority of the Bible, and the extent of God’s providential involvement, that serve as the “proverbial elephant in the living room of American denominationalism” (6). Instead of framing the