

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

debate in terms of predestination and free will, Thuesen suggests structuring dialogue on predestinarianism and sacramentalism, two pieties that form polar extremes.

*Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 sets the historical stage of the American debates: “The Protestant reformers’ reassertation of Augustine’s strong predestinarianism in the sixteenth century was in large measure a reaction to the perceived abuses of the medieval sacramentalism system.” Protestants developed sophisticated delineations between Calvinism and Arminianism that require technical distinctions (the author provides a helpful “Glossary of Theological Terms” at the end of the book). In chapter 2, he argues that Puritans were “dissidents” who comprised “a persistent sacramental strain”; thus predestination was not an exclusively Protestant doctrine (74). Additionally, the sacramental-predestinarian tension extended across the Protestant-Catholic divide. Thuesen argues for a Puritan discipline he describes as “ecstatic agony,” which he defines as “the constructive pain of ongoing struggle.” The goal was “to experience the exhilarating rush of victory” (69).

Chapter 3 gives an overview of Arminianism and other challenges to absolute predestination in eighteenth-century America. Thuesen places much of the early opposition to the old Puritan synthesis on Anglican missionaries, especially some like John Wesley, who were highly motivated by high-church sacramentalism. The resultant debates created a permanent rift within American evangelicalism, which were further exacerbated during the American Revolution (100-135). The white American male became the “master of his own destiny,” thereby prompting a variety of upstart groups, including Methodists, Campbellites, Stoneites, Mormons, and Adventists.

Old-style European confessionalism did not disappear either. Chapter 5 highlights its revival by immigrant Catholics and Lutherans. These “seemingly strange bedfellows” shared a history of internal strife over predestination and a robust sacramentalism that set them apart, which led to polemics between Catholics and Protestants over purgatory and led up to “a spectacular predestinarian controversy in the 1880s” that continues to affect Lutheran synodical alignments. Chapter 6 brings the debate back to Puritan roots: Presbyterians and Baptists, who continued during the twentieth century to debate predestination.

In the epilogue, Thuesen considers the “other”—the Protestant megachurch, which might lead one to believe that the demise of dogma is complete, especially as contentious a dogma as predestination. Yet in his personal journey toward Rick Warren and the Saddleback Church community, he finds that they continue to dance around predestination even if they don’t use the term. The Augustinian anthropology, in general, continues to pervade American religion. “Many people would rather believe that a wise

God predetermines everything—even unpleasant things—than contemplate the alternative” (12, 214-216).

This intellectual history probes more than an academic problem by highlighting a basic question that haunts the human psyche: Where do we go when we die? Thuesen describes the heart of an answer as “something mystical” (13, 218). Yet mystery, he argues, has been eroded in two ways. Both the weakened hold of *sacramental* mystery over the Christian imagination and the predestinarian controversies have contributed to the decline of *dogmatic* mystery. As a result, the sense of the miraculous, which predestinarians sought to preserve, has been removed.

For those readers already familiar with Thuesen’s previous work, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles Over Translating the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), the reader will not be disappointed with this new work. Well documented and articulate, Thuesen’s contribution challenges both Protestants and Catholics to recognize the “lens” through which each views the otherworldly and to return to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—a mystery before which one trembles and is fascinated.

Seventh-day Adventist scholars in particular would do well to become familiar with this broad overview and contextualization of predestination. Thuesen furthermore highlights Adventist ambiguity over this issue (122-124): William Miller was a Baconian interpreter who believed “in an essentially Arminian election based on divine foreknowledge.” Later Ellen White pushed the reincarnated Adventist movement toward a Wesleyan view of freewill, although, surprisingly for Thuesen, the question of divine indeterminacy in Adventist thought “came to the fore dramatically” through Richard Rice’s *The Openness of God* (1980). Although Adventism definitely leans toward Arminianism—as highlighted by the recent Arminian Conference at Andrews University—there continue to be both polemics toward Calvinism (e.g., the independent ministry of the 1888 Message Study Community) and even, among a few, a residual attraction toward sacramentalism. Understanding this broader debate will only enlighten Adventist struggles.

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