

contribution to this Christian teaching. A few observations stand out in my mind. First, the book begins too abruptly without a good introduction, a shortcoming that is recurring in the lack of introduction for some chapters. Likely this is caused by the fact that this book was written in response to the request of the publisher of the first larger volume. The book's premise is the publisher's request for a smaller book and the preface is written in relationship to the larger book. It would be hard for those who have not read the first volume to understand much of the preface. This book needs to be more self-sustaining and self-contained. Thus, naturally, any reader of this *Shorter Guide* who wants to dig deeper into what the author presents is invited to pick up the earlier publication. Nonetheless, a strength of this book is Thiselton's drawing from information already published in many of his prior works. *A Shorter Guide* becomes a capstone to his publishing career.

As already mentioned in my summary of part three, this book offers a good dialogue with Pentecostal authors. This I consider to be one of the best contributions of this book. Frank Macchia, a Pentecostal scholar who is regularly referred to in the book, praised it as a "wonderful book on the Holy Spirit" and esteems it as "concise yet expansive in its range of issues and its choice of dialogue patterns" (back cover).

Theologians, pastors, and lay leaders will appreciate this work for its conciseness and engagement with the most relevant biblical and theological material on the Holy Spirit.

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Tonstad, Sigve K. *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 476 pp. Softcover, US\$43.20.

Not many books are philosophically profound, thoroughly researched, rigorously argued, elegantly written, and personally moving. But Sigve Tonstad's recent offering, *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense*, displays all these qualities. It deals with what has always been a central—if not *the* central—issue in philosophy of religion, namely, the problem of evil. It painstakingly develops a perspective that, while it is not widely shared among contemporary philosophers, rests on sophisticated biblical interpretations and illuminating appeals to a wide range of literature, from the apologetics of Origen, an early Christian thinker, to the novels of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Mark Twain. In the urgency of its tone and the sweeping landscape it traverses, not to mention the explanation it offers, Tonstad's discussion bears comparison to some of the most admirable treatments of the topic in recent years, such as Eleanore Stump's magisterial tome, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*.

How are we to make sense of suffering—not just the day-to-day inconveniences we encounter or even the inevitable losses we all experience—but horrific events, such as the Holocaust? To be specific, how can we ever reconcile the occurrence of such events with the idea of a divine reality whose central characteristic is love? These are the questions this book addresses.

The prologue sets a somber tone, describing the deportation of hundreds of Jews from Oslo, Norway, in 1942, to their subsequent extermination in Auschwitz. It is clear from the very beginning that Tonstad, like Marilyn McCord Adams, wants to tackle the problem of evil in its most perplexing form, namely, the occurrence of “horrendous evils,” evils that defy all conventional “theodicies,” or philosophical explanations. Such evils, Tonstad argues, require nothing less than a perspective that takes full account of the demonic. Only the existence of the devil, namely, Satan and Lucifer—God’s powerful antagonist and leader of a host of fallen angels—provides an adequate explanation for the scope and intensity of human suffering. It is he, not God, who is to blame for all the misery that afflicts us.

The actual source of our suffering is not that easy to see, however, because God’s arch-enemy is also an arch-deceiver, the “father of lies,” as the Bible portrays him. Besides defying God’s authority and inflicting misery on God’s creatures, Lucifer’s rebellion also involves generating suspicion about God’s goodness.

In order to respond to this challenge effectively, it would not be enough for God simply to eliminate His enemies. God must expose the falsity of Satan’s charges, and this takes time. But the evidence is there. Properly interpreted, the Bible provides abundant and eminently rational evidence that God is worthy of our trust and that God’s enemies have not told the truth about God. “The God of sense” makes sense, as the record of God’s dealings with human beings throughout biblical history demonstrates.

In spite of the biblical testimony to the God of sense, and an appreciation of the devil’s significance among early Christian thinkers like Origen, later developments eclipsed both of these themes. The figure of the devil became less vivid in the thinking of theologians, and instead of appreciating the evidence that supports faith in God, they emphasized God’s inscrutability and God’s power. In time, the idea that we should yield to God’s authority, whether we understand God’s ways or not, resulted in the elevation of human authority—ecclesiastical and political—as something not to be questioned.

To summarize Tonstad’s account, the elevation of unquestioned authority and the fading of the idea of the devil paved the way, over the long course of history, for something like the Holocaust. Christians became willing to accept authority, whether or not it made sense, even when it authorized things that were horrible. Had Christians retained a vivid sense of the demonic, he strongly suggests, and insisted on rational evidence to support their views of God—and anyone supposedly acting in God’s stead—they might have recognized and resisted the evil that Naziism represented.

As Tonstad interprets it, the central theme of biblical history is the long process by which God incrementally reveals God’s true character, exposes the falsity of Satan’s charges, and inspires creaturely loyalty. Because God places great value on human freedom, God never resorts to coercion. “Absence of divine intervention,” says Tonstad, “and intervention by unexpected means are the pieces by which the Bible brings to view what I call a *God of Sense*” (xx). Still, surprising as they may be at first, God’s ways do make

sense. There is common ground, indeed, an “overlap” between the values of God and humanity (257). And these values provide a basis for an intelligent appreciation of God’s character and render fully rational a decision to respond to God with loyalty and love. The priority of revelation to obedience is a persistent theme of Tonstad’s proposal (cf. 162).

To support this conclusion, Tonstad carefully considers a variety of biblical narratives, and his treatment of history’s most famous sufferer is particularly illustrative. Contrary to many interpretations, he maintains that God does provide Job with an explanation for his suffering—one consistent with the frame story, in which God and Satan confront each other. So, when God speaks from the whirlwind, it is not to cow Job into submission, but to reveal the source of his suffering. Satan is at work in the world, and he, not God, is the one afflicting Job. In subsequent chapters, Tonstad argues that God’s archenemy plays a central role in the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ life and provides an indispensable backdrop to the theology of the Apostle Paul.

Tonstad saves the most dramatic phase of his discussion for the concluding section of the book, where he examines the last book in the Bible. As he describes it, Revelation brings to a powerful, indeed breathtaking, culmination the various portrayals of God in previous portions of the canon. And here the theme of “divine transparency” emerges with striking clarity. In Revelation’s account of God’s climactic encounter with cosmic rebellion, we are presented with “a spectacular feat of divine persuasion” (365), a feat that reaches its climax, not in the ultimate restoration of the universe to its primeval beauty, but in the spectacle of the slaughtered Lamb that evokes heaven’s silence.

Tonstad’s insistence on the rational basis of God’s relation to creation emerges in assertions like this: “On the one hand . . . , we have a God who is committed to transparency. On the other hand, we see creatures endowed with the ability to understand” (368). And to enable them to understand, God allows Satan to reveal himself and thereby expose who/what it is that lies behind the “horrendous realities” that pervade human history. Ultimately, the devil’s activity ends in self-destruction. And God’s nonuse of force emerges in striking contrast to the violence perpetrated by God’s supreme enemy. God earns the admiration, the worship, of the heavenly council with a vivid display of the divine character. “The last book of the Bible reveals a God of sense and a God whose ways are seen to make sense” (403).

“For the rough contours of the book,” Tonstad states in his Acknowledgments, “I owe the most to the late A. Graham Maxwell” (xi). And those familiar with Maxwell’s thought will find a good deal in the book that reminds them of him. (Maxwell was for many years a professor of religion at Loma Linda University, where Tonstad attended medical school.) Maxwell was fond of saying, “God is not the person his enemies say he is,” and in a way this statement adumbrates the central themes of Tonstad’s opus: *God has enemies*, and *God responds by telling the truth about himself*. Maxwell was also fond of quoting this statement of Ellen White’s, “God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith.” God’s true character is the central issue in the cosmic conflict that occupies Tonstad, and

the conflict is finally resolved when God's creatures accept the evidence that love stands behind all that God says and does and the falsity of the devil's charges is fully exposed.

Memorable theological proposals generate serious questions, and I found myself asking a number as I read. One concerns Tonstad's insistence that faith is reasonable, that trust in God makes eminent sense. For others, faith is indeed reasonable, but only up to a point; it is not completely transparent to reason and is accurately described as surpassing reason. To be sure, finding evidence to support one's beliefs can make an important contribution to a responsible religious commitment, but, to some extent, faith involves a trust that goes beyond the evidence that reason provides. Otherwise, it seems, faith would become a product of reason, a human achievement rather than a divine gift. I wonder if Tonstad's own argument that "narrative logic" is superior to "philosophical logic" comes close to conceding this point (48–49).

In his emphasis on cosmic conflict, Tonstad also offers a provocative reading of early Christian thought. According to standard accounts, the major doctrinal threat during the church's formative years came from inadequate conceptions of Christ and the greatest theological accomplishment of the early church was the development christological orthodoxy. As Tonstad sees it, however, these concerns represent an unfortunate contraction from the bigger story that earlier Christians, like Origen, had to tell—one that involved Lucifer's rebellion and the superiority of freedom to power in resolving the cosmic conflict. When theologians focused their attention on matters such as personal salvation and doctrines like the trinity and the nature of Christ, he argues, they were in effect developing "a more detailed picture within a much smaller frame" (52). For some, this comparison underestimates the achievements of the Councils of Nicea (325 CE) and Chalcedon (451 CE). Emil Brunner's assessment is representative. "Had Arius conquered," he states, "it would have been all over with the Christian Church" (*Dogmatics*, 1:239).

One of the most impressive features of Tonstad's project is the remarkable range of scholarly and literary material he considers in developing his "luciferous theodicy," to use Stephen T. Davis's expression. But given the immense number of works he cites, some sources are strangely missing. I wonder why he does not refer to the epic poetry that provides one of the most vivid portraits of Satan in all literature, namely, *Paradise Lost*. But John Milton's name appears in neither the indices nor the twenty-five-page bibliography.

Another name curiously missing from Tonstad's discussion is that of Gregory A. Boyd, a contemporary theologian who develops a cosmic conflict theodicy in two substantial books—*God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (InterVarsity, 1997) and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (InterVarsity, 2001). Boyd argues that the devil and other fallen angels are actively involved in the world, bringing suffering and pain to the earth's inhabitants in a variety of ways, including disease and natural disasters. Boyd sees the demonic at work in the turbulent history of the planet, in cataclysmic natural phenomena, as well as in animal and

human suffering. Moreover, as Boyd construes it, this conflict also involves violent struggles between good and bad angels. (A text he often cites in this connection is Dan 10:13, where an angel attributes his/her delay in answering Daniel's prayer to what appears to be demonic interference.)

Boyd's description of cosmic conflict touches on an important issue for a theodicy like Tonstad's. If there are powerful personal forces at work in the world who inflict pain and suffering on living beings, just how do we identify them, or where do we locate them? At what level(s) of existence or experience do they operate? Are they somehow responsible for volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, tornadoes? Are they active in the production of harmful biological forms, such as HIV, and the Ebola and Zika viruses? On the other hand, if we think of them largely in connection with moral evils, such as the Holocaust, as Tonstad does, just how do these evil personages go about exploiting human thoughts and emotions?

For some people, the concept that there could be a real conflict between God and Satan will raise questions. How, for example, could a superior intelligence, indeed the highest of created beings, possibly think of himself as a plausible rival to God? If God brought the universe into being, and God's power sustains all that exists, moment by moment, Lucifer must have realized that God could, in an instant, completely annihilate him. So, what did he hope to gain by contesting God's supremacy? We may also wonder how other intelligent beings could be susceptible to Lucifer's wiles. What was deficient about their powers of perception? Did they not realize that there was no possibility of deposing God? That God's infinite resourcefulness would ultimately bring their rebellion to naught?

In this connection, I suspect that the crucial question was not whether the creatures would submit to God's superior power, but whether or not they would offer God heartfelt love and loyalty. So, it was not God's supremacy that Lucifer brought into question, but God's character—not God's power, but God's trustworthiness. Was God really the person God claimed to be?

Putting things this way raises further questions of its own, however, questions concerning the a priori assumptions on which any claim to know something ultimately rests, or as some refer to them, the "transcendentals" of human knowledge. The thesis of Tonstad's discussion is that God's true nature emerges in spite of the prevarications of God's archenemy through a long series of revelatory events, and it finally becomes clear to careful thinkers that God is indeed the person God claims to be, Someone worthy of unstinting love and devotion.

If we reflect carefully on the activity of knowing, however, there appears to be something peculiar about the idea that we acquire the confidence that God is trustworthy through a process of rational inquiry. According to philosophers such as Bernard Lonergan (see *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 1970), every claim to know something expresses a fundamental epistemic confidence that our minds afford us a reliable grasp of reality. But if God is by definition the source of all that is, the One whose power upholds everything that counts as evidence and the operations of our minds as well, then every

claim to know something implicitly expresses an underlying confidence in God. We cannot avoid assuming that God is trustworthy to begin with.

Some readers will also find Tonstad's objections to Augustine's reflections on evil puzzling. He admits that the great theologian did not dispense with the notion of a cosmic conflict, but in his view the story, as Augustine tells it, has been "bleached" of its earlier power (50), and Augustine's concept of evil as a privation of the good is seriously deficient (356). For many, however, Augustine's reflections on evil are enormously helpful, and in some ways they actually support Tonstad's central concern. There is no question, as Tonstad argues, that evil confronts us as a powerful, virtually palpable force, as the very figure of the devil suggests. But Augustine's insight is not that evil is less than horrible, but that, strictly speaking, it has no positive ontological status. By itself, evil is literally nothing, no-thing. The point is that evil is never "by itself." It "exists" only as the corruption of something essentially good. But if evil is parasitic on the good, then the greater the original good, the greater the potential for evil. This fits nicely with the concept that the supreme personification of evil is nothing other than the highest created being, Lucifer, the archangel, whose magnificent original qualities are bent to serve perfidious ends. If anything, such a view of evil, and of God's archenemy, would seem to bolster, rather than detract from, Tonstad's theodicy.

Whatever the questions that *God of Sense* raises, I doubt that they detract from Tonstad's accomplishment. Indeed, when viewed alongside the dramatic scope of his undertaking, and the beauty of its presentation, such questions may amount to nothing more than quibbles. After all, a grand narrative does not stoop to answer questions; it transcends them. And that, in essence, is what *God of Sense* provides: not a sustained argument, not an exercise in discursive reasoning—however admirable the author's forensic skills may be—but a powerful narrative, a multifaceted story of the greatest Love in the universe relentlessly pursuing the objects of its affection until they—we—can no longer wonder, or can only wonder, that we are cared for in ways that can only be imagined, but never adequately conceived. It is no wonder that Tonstad finds the climax of the cosmic story he so eloquently portrays in the stunned silence of the heavenly court.

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Vanhoozer, Kevin J., and Daniel J. Treier. *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 301 pp. Softcover, US\$26.00.

Theology and the Mirror of Scripture is the first volume in the *Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture* promoting constructive, creative evangelical engagement between Scripture, doctrine, and traditions. The authors and also editors for these *Studies*—Kevin J. Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical School; and Daniel J. Treier, Blanchard Professor of Theology at Wheaton College—provide a