

dependence on reliable sources makes the book historically trustworthy and reveals the careful historical research that produced it.

Since most of these stories have been overlooked by previous historical works, readers will be struck by the important and significant positions filled by women during the first years of the Adventist Church in South America. In many cases, current ecclesiastical policies prevent women from occupying these positions today, which signals a contemporary lack of understanding of the essential role that women play in the mission and leadership of the Adventist church. Despite the great significance of this book, a couple of points should be mentioned.

The current edition is a revised and expanded version of a book published in Spanish in 2012 by the same University Press. Chapters one, two, three, and twelve were not present in the first Spanish edition. The remaining chapters were slightly revised and updated. The decision to publish a new edition in English provides a wider international audience for these stories. Nonetheless, in some cases, the translation is guilty of awkwardness caused by an overly literal translation. Perhaps a more flexible translation could have rendered better results. Further details on the geographical or historical background of some places and institutions could have been beneficial for readers lacking knowledge of South American Adventist territory and history. Another point worth mentioning is the title of ch 2 (“Introduction”) which may be misleading for inattentive readers. Although the title matches the content of the chapter, which provides a general outline for the book, it is unusual for a second chapter. Perhaps would have been better to merge chapters one and two.

Despite the minor issues that were mentioned, I highly recommend this book. The author vividly describes the daily struggles and victories of these warriors for Christ in their tireless fight to spread the Adventist message in unreached lands. It is informative and inspiring at the same time. Concluding, I must say that this book is a must-read for anyone interested in a more profound and inclusive understanding of the beginnings of the Adventist movement in South America as reflected in the lives of some of its more outstanding female pioneers. Missiologists will also find valuable information in the study of female involvement in Christian missions.

Universidad Adventista del Plata, Entre Rios, Argentina      ERIC E. RICHTER

Thiessen, Matthew. *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020. xii + 241 pp. Hardcover. USD 27.99.

This review is an abridged form of an invited review paper presented in a Synoptic Gospels and Ritual in the Biblical World joint session of the Society of Biblical Literature on December 9, 2020.

Thiessen's assessment of the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus's approach to ritual impurity convincingly cuts through the fat of centuries of Christian misrepresentation. It contributes to countering anti-Semitism by showing an important way in which Jesus maintained, rather than repudiated, his Jewish roots in the Hebrew Bible. Following a brief introduction, seven chapters of *Jesus and the Forces of Death* discuss (1) holy, pure, profane, and impure categories in the Bible; (2) purity and purification in Jesus's family and early years; (3) Jesus healing impure skin disease (*lepra*), and (4) an impure genital discharge; (5) raising the dead (impure corpses) to life, (6) exorcising impure demons; and finally (7) healing on the Sabbath. A conclusion is followed by an appendix on Jesus's approach to the dietary laws; a bibliography; and indexes of authors, scriptures and ancient writings, and subjects.

Thiessen's analyses of the relevant New Testament texts are grounded in a thorough understanding of their backgrounds in the Israelite ritual impurity system as prescribed in the Pentateuch. His study is strengthened and enriched by references to a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, not only in and relating to the Old and New Testaments, but also ancient Near Eastern, Dead Sea Scrolls, classical, and rabbinic sources. Especially helpful and impressive is the detailed way in which he corrects the common misunderstanding that biblical *lepra* (Hebrew *šara'at*) is the same as modern leprosy, i.e. Hansen's disease (43–51). Hyam Maccoby's *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), cited by Thiessen, quite precisely identifies the common denominator among the Israelite physical ritual impurities as the birth-to-death cycle of mortality (60). Thus, Thiessen is on target when he observes: "What is holy must be the antithesis of death and mortality: life" (17). This concept is foundational to his convincing explanations of positive ways in which Jesus interacted with impurities by healing sources of impurity, thereby restoring life by divine holy power. Biblical passages such as Gen 3 and Rom 5:12 and 6:23 indicate that the cycle of mortality, which generates physical ritual impurities, originated from sinful actions by the first humans. So it is not surprising that both physical conditions and sins, i.e., moral faults, could be regarded as "impure" in the Bible and also in the ancient Near East. Thiessen points out that Jesus's ministry did not abolish the ritual system, which was compassionate in that it protected people from negative consequences of bringing impurities in contact with holy things. Rather, Jesus overcame the sources of impurity themselves, thereby pointing to a future restoration from sin and mortality that would render the ritual system unnecessary (72, 180–185).

Thiessen uses the term "ritual impurity" only concerning physical impurities, but it would seem more clear and precise to call them "physical ritual impurities." As I explained elsewhere ("Purification Offerings and Paradoxical Pollution of the Holy," in *Writing a Commentary on Leviticus: Hermeneutics – Methodology – Themes*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart and Thomas

Hieke, *FRLANT* 276 [Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019], 121–122), this is because defilements from some moral faults could also be removed by Israelite rituals, as in Lev 6:20 (Eng. v. 27) when a purification offering removes defilement resulting from a violation of a divine commandment and in 16:21–22, 26 when sins carried by Azazel's goat cause impurity. Thiessen observes that sometimes ritual and moral impurity “bleed into each other. When a person does not remove a ritual impurity using the prescribed method at the prescribed time, it can lead to moral impurity—sin. Consequently, I think it helps to map these two categories in a way that reflects that these impurities form a spectrum and are not always mutually exclusive” (13). It is true that these categories of impurity are closely related, as especially shown by the fact that purification offerings remedy both categories. However, failure to follow a divine instruction regarding impurity on time is like failure to follow a divine command regarding anything else; it is a moral fault (e.g. Lev 5:2–3; 7: 20–21; Num 19:13, 20), so I do not see how the two categories of physical ritual impurity and moral impurity overlap or form a spectrum.

Regarding postpartum ritual impurity, Thiessen makes an excellent case for the probable implicit impurity of the baby as well as the mother in Lev 12 (30–33). He applies this background to Luke 2:22, suggesting that the purification of baby Jesus, along with Mary, was completed through sacrifices at the temple, following the instruction in Lev 12:8 for a mother who cannot afford a lamb (Luke 2:24). This raises a question regarding the nature of Christ: If he had to be purified, does this mean that he was susceptible to physical ritual impurity, even though he was the holy “Son of God” from birth, according to Luke 1:35? Or did Jesus undergo ritual purification as he underwent baptism, which he did not need for religious conversion, in order “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15 NRSV) as an example for others who needed it?

Thiessen observes that priestly writings do not refer to demonic impurity (14, 123–124). However, Lev 19:31, in the so-called “Holiness Code,” commands: “Do not turn to the spirits of the dead and do not seek familiar spirits to become unclean by them” (NET Bible). Here these spirits are not identified as demonic, but they are occult entities causing impurity that is akin to demonic impurity in the New Testament.

Thiessen finds that “Jesus rescues people and restores them to wholeness of life during holy time, the Sabbath,” (173) which “serves as a foretaste of all that the kingdom will bring” (176). This makes good sense in light of the function of the seventh-day Sabbath to commemorate God's ideal Creation (Exod 20:11; 31:17; cf. Gen 2:2–3), which is to be restored in God's coming kingdom (e.g. Rev 21–22).

Thiessen points out regarding Peter's vision in Acts 10: “this vision, as Luke painstakingly makes clear, has nothing to do with a change in the Jewish dietary system ...” (195). Supporting this interpretation, we can add that in

verse 15, “it is the extrabiblical ‘common’ category that is to be regarded as ‘clean’ here (with ESV); the biblical ‘impure’ category is unaffected” (see Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* [Baker, 2017], 357). On the “common” category, see Colin House, “Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of Κοινός/Κοινῶν in Acts 10 and 11,” *AUSS* 21 [1983]: 143–153).

Thiessen suggests regarding Mark 7:19b, which is commonly mistranslated to say that Jesus thereby declared all foods clean: “it is conceivable that the point here is that food goes to the stomach and then to the bowels (and ultimately latrine) and that this process purges or purifies the body of all foods” (193, n. 26). Indeed, this seems to be the best interpretation (Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 356). Eike Mueller has demonstrated that in Mark 7 Jesus did not terminate the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” meats, but he opposed extrabiblical traditions that went beyond the biblical requirements (“Cleansing the Common: A Narrative-Intertextual Study of Mark 7:1–23” [PhD diss., Andrews University, 2015]). Thiessen finds that the pentateuchal prohibitions against eating “unclean/unfit” species of animals (Lev 11; Deut 14) do not concern ritual impurity (188). So should Christians keep these laws today? Nothing in the New Testament abrogates the basic distinctions between “clean” and “unclean” animal species, which were known in some form to Noah, long before the formation of the Israelite nation (Gen 7:2–3, 8–9; 8:20). Therefore, it would seem that these distinctions still apply to the dietary practices of non-Jews (Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 352–358).

Thiessen concludes that the hope, expressed by prophets such as Isaiah and Daniel, that God will someday overcome human mortality “implies that the ritual impurity inevitably endured by mortal people will one day come to an end, making the ritual purity laws unnecessary” (182). Indeed, modern Christians often incur ritual impurities because we continue to be mortal, but does Thiessen mean to say that the ritual purity laws are necessary for us in the sense that we should be observing them today? If so, how is this possible, given that we cannot offer sacrifices of purification at an authorized and functioning temple of God on earth? Would it not be more accurate to say that we are all ritually impure and it no longer matters because there is no danger that we can contact *sancta* on earth in an impure state? After all, the only temple for Christians is in heaven, according to the book of Hebrews.

In Thiessen’s conclusion, he agrees with Christine Hayes regarding the divinely created future ideal condition of human beings that is prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. These prophets predict that God will write His law on the hearts of his people (Jer 31:33; 38:33 LXX) and will give them a new heart and put his Spirit within them so that they will obey his laws (Ezek 36:25–27). Thiessen (181 n.8) quotes this comment by Christine Hayes: “Insofar as Jeremiah and Ezekiel assume that perfect Torah observance will require a future redesign of human nature and elimination of moral freedom

that only God can effect, they reinforce the general biblical narrative—perfect Torah obedience is neither expected nor required of human beings as they are” (*What’s Divine about Divine Law: Early Perspectives* [Princeton University Press, 2015], 49).

Is this what the prophets predict? As Gregory A. Boyd has emphasized, without freedom of choice it is impossible to love (Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* [IVP Academic, 2001], 50–84). According to Jesus, love is the essence of God’s law (Matt 22:37–40). So how could elimination of moral freedom, which would end love, result in obedience to God’s law? It appears that Jeremiah and Ezekiel are saying that God will enable the right choices of his people to serve him, rather than making moral robots out of them. If people with free choice can’t obey God, it is difficult to explain the exhortation of Moses when he told the Israelites that his command to keep the Lord’s commandments and statutes “is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach . . . No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it” (Deut 30:11–14 NJPS).

Andrews University

Roy E. Gane

Tonstad, Sigve K. *Revelation. Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019. 398 pp. Softcover. USD 35.00.

*Revelation* by Sigve Tonstad is the refreshingly original, thought-provoking, consensus challenging, and boldly out-of-the-ordinary commentary on the Apocalypse. This newest addition to the Paideia commentaries will challenge readers to reframe their perception of the book of Revelation. Built on ancient backgrounds and conversant with a modern scholarship, this commentary centers on a theological reading of the text and the extraction of practical applications for contemporary readers. Sigve Tonstad is a research professor at Loma Linda University and a well-established scholar with numerous publications on theodicy, ecological hermeneutics, and biblical ethics. In this commentary, he offers a unique non-violent, non-punitive view of God and the judgment, the view which challenges the status quo of the majority of interpretations.

Similar to other commentaries on Revelation, the author offers essential introductory material where he sets the focus of the commentary and provides interpretive lenses. Besides touching common introductory questions, the hermeneutical approaches (preterist, historicist, futurist), and relations between Roman history and Revelation’s visions, the author emphasizes the book as a revelation: the open door, the exposé, the ultimate means which unmask the works of the father of all lies, the devil. The book