

To give him leave to toil;  
 And see his lordly fellow-worm  
 The poor petition spurn,  
 Unmindful tho' a weeping wife  
 And helpless offspring mourn.  
 If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave—  
 By Nature's law design'd—  
 Why was an independent wish  
 E'er planted in my mind?  
 If not, why am I subject to  
 His cruelty, or scorn?  
 Or why has Man the will and pow'r  
 To make his fellow mourn?  
 Yet let not this too much, my son,  
 Disturb thy youthful breast:  
 This partial view of human-kind  
 Is surely not the last!  
 The poor, oppressed, honest man,  
 Had never, sure, been born,  
 Had there not been some recompense  
 To comfort those that mourn!

Some one hundred years later, Ellen White would echo Burns's sentiments, stating: "The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin." "We need," she pressed, "more Christlike sympathy; not merely sympathy for those who appear to us to be faultless, but sympathy for poor, suffering, struggling souls, who are often overtaken in fault, sinning and repenting, tempted and discouraged. We are to go to our fellow-men, touched, like our merciful High Priest, with the feeling of their infirmities" (*Gospel Workers*, 140).

Skinner's *A Crime So Monstrous* should be required reading for all Christians.

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Thiselton, Anthony C. *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 325 pp. Hardcover, \$30.00.

Thiselton's *1 Corinthians* is a rich reservoir of sermonic ideas and spiritual insights. This remarkable commentary confronts the reader, page after page, with powerful and fresh insights. This commentary, however, is more than simply a welcome resource for the clergy and lay leaders. It is a rich resource of reflection and thought for seasoned exegetes as well, especially for those looking to engage the spiritual side of Scripture. The book is a short work, especially if one excludes from consideration the large blocks of primary text and the "Possible Reflection" sections. In the brief space allotted to exegesis and commentary, Thiselton offers masterful and insightful synopses of scholarly debates as well as an expert reading of the text. As the title suggests, this commentary is in a way a shorter version of his much longer *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), but, as the author freely admits (xiv), it is not simply an abridged version of the older one.

The introduction (1-27) offers a brief historical and archaeological sketch of ancient Corinth. The central thesis of this section is that Corinth, the strategic point from which Paul launched his missionary forays into Greece (294), was pluralistic and materialistic, like our own postmodern society. Thiselton discusses 1 Cor 1-4 (29-81) under three key points: the gospel, the cross, and the Holy Spirit. Thiselton writes: "The 'gospel power' is defined in terms of the cross, and is mediated through the effective agency of the Holy Spirit" (51). Thiselton defines the word "spiritual" in terms of the Holy Spirit. He writes: "'Spiritual' is what pertains to the Holy Spirit" (57). He also notes that the concept of grace found in these chapters is consistent with that in Romans (37, 49, 74).

The next section, 1 Cor 5-6, argues that the church is a community of those who are a new creation of Christ and that Christian morality is behavior that comports with this new reality. In this connection, Thiselton makes an intriguing suggestion that the occurrences of the term "body" in chapters 5-6 denote the public nature of Christian existence. The next section, 1 Cor 7:1-11:1, discusses the "gray areas" of faith requiring "pastoral sensitivity" (100). In 1 Cor 7, Paul enjoins marriage as a lifelong commitment, free from coercion and anxiety, and characterized by freedom, mutuality, and respect. Thiselton understands chapters 8-10 as a discussion of the delicate relationship between knowledge and love. In this context, he makes a number of noteworthy observations. Among these is the notion that Paul conceived of knowledge as a complex and incomplete entity. Also remarkable is the notion that the typology of Israel's wilderness wandering in chapter 10 needs to be understood paradigmatically as a study of sinful human desires. Finally, there is the notion that the correctness of Christian behavior is determined by whether it advances one's own interest or the interest of others and the cause of Christ. These suggestions deserve further careful consideration. Thiselton's compact but compelling reading of 7:1-11:1 is breathtaking both for its depth and expertise.

The section on 1 Cor 11:2-14:40 is entitled "Mutual Respect in Matters of Public Worship." True to this heading, the central theme of this section is mutual respect. Commenting on 11:2-16, Thiselton argues that mutual respect arises from authentic gender differentiation without domination. In this section, Thiselton offers a novel reading of the difficult phrase "on account of the angels" in v. 10. He argues that it is an allusion to the angels in Isa 6:2 who covered themselves in "reverence and respect" (176). Moreover, Thiselton notes that the key problem in Corinth with regard to the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) was the exploitation of economic disparity in the community. The wealthy members of the church treated the less fortunate members of the church as second-class citizens during the Eucharist. The sections on 12:4-11 and 12:27-31 (particularly 197-205 and 212-216) offer a comprehensive and practical survey of Paul's catalogue of spiritual gifts and offices in 12:27-31. Every pastor should carefully study these pages.

Thiselton's exposition of 1 Cor 13 appears to be the climax not only of the commentary on 11:1-14:40, but also his entire commentary. Thiselton

describes chapter 13 as a “rhapsodic” piece (233) that bridges chapters 12 and 14 and brings together themes from both chapters. Love is that which engenders respect for one another and mutes one’s self-centeredness. Thiselton’s exposition of love as an eternal reality (229-234), as opposed to the ephemeral nature of knowledge, deserves careful reading. Chapter 14 is approached from three perspectives: intelligibility, belonging, and order. Paul’s discomfort with tongues, according to Thiselton, was that they were not intelligible, facilitated exclusion, and created chaos. Thiselton argues that 14:33b-36 is a genuine part of the letter.

The section on chapter 15 opens with the assertion that belief in the resurrection facilitates “coherent thinking” on the Christian faith. The reason is that the resurrection of Christ is a “major premise” of the faith, on the one hand, and the belief in the final resurrection from the dead was an inalienable part of the concept of salvation in the primitive church, on the other. The belief in resurrection also affirms the infinite power of God, his “infinite resourcefulness” (277). In the remainder of this section, Thiselton asserts, among other things, that the resurrected body is capable of interacting with and representing the new reality of the risen Christ. He writes: “The resurrection body is capable of assuming various forms in accordance with its environment” (284). Thiselton appears to imply that the experience of resurrection is partly a present experience.

The section on chapter 16 argues that the exhortations in this chapter are a summation of Paul’s concerns expressed throughout the letter. In particular, Thiselton stresses the importance of solidarity and love in the community.

This commentary is a delightful mixture of exegesis and reflection. One often wonders, however, how Thiselton arrived at his pithy insights from exegesis. For example, on p. 116, he defines *ananke* in 7:26 as “pressures, or those forces that close in upon us, tighten their grip, and force us into unchosen paths.” Or on p. 152, presumption (cf. 10:9) is defined as “the confident, complacent assumption that God will protect his people and not let them go” (152). Nothing in this commentary or in the longer *1 Corinthians* gives any inkling as to the process of exegesis that was used to capture these insights. Instead, one gets the feeling that they are probably a result of Thiselton’s own “responsible rational reflection” (117). To fully appreciate the reflective depth of this short commentary, those who can read Greek are advised to read the translations in this commentary side by side with the Greek NT.

One also wonders whether, in the introduction, Thiselton has not construed too close a parallel between Paul’s Corinth and our postmodern world. Ancient Corinth may have been a pluralistic city, but it was a pagan territory unexposed to Christianity. The developed countries where most postmodern individuals reside today are not only places of pluralism and materialism, but also places that have been profoundly disillusioned by centuries of Christian abuse, especially by the epic failures of Christianity in the two world wars and their aftermaths.

Furthermore, Thiselton needs to clarify how he is able to distinguish between personal spirituality and the work of the Holy Spirit. For example,

Thiselton reads 12:1-31 in light of Paul's critique of "the spiritual" in 2:6-16 and 3:1-4 (191-192), and argues that the spiritual, or *charismata*, is what results through the agency of the Holy Spirit rather than from personal spirituality. He writes: "[P]*neumatikos* denotes *what pertains to the Holy Spirit, not 'human spirituality'*" (192; italics original). Yet Thiselton's interpretation of chapter 12 decisively favors the personal or psychological dimension of human spirituality. For example, he defines "faith" in v. 9 as "a settled disposition of robust confidence in God that raises the spirit and morale of fellow Christian" (199). The words *disposition*, *spirit*, and *morale* in this sentence clearly connote the psychological dimension of spirituality.

Finally, the "Possible Reflection" section that follows each of the exegetical sections sometimes tends to repeat what was stated in the commentary sections and wearies the reader. In addition, questions are often of a rhetorical nature, requiring either a "yes" or a "no" answer. For example, on p. 59, Thiselton asks, "Is there a danger in using the word 'spirituality' in an overly vague, free-floating sense rather than in a more direct relation to Christ and the Holy Spirit?" The expected answer is yes. As the author admits (xiv), these sections are the weakest part of the commentary.

These minor concerns do not detract from the fact that the commentary is full of powerful, seminal insights. Nearly every verse, indeed, every phrase of the letter is expounded with weighty insights not only about the text, but our time. Thiselton introduces the reader to the key issues debated in Pauline scholarship concerning the Corinthian letters. He does it, however, with elegance and sensitivity to expose the reader to the issues relevant to spiritual reflection and preaching, which is the chief aim of the book. The beauty of Thiselton's commentary lies in its ambiguity. The reader cannot always be sure whether Thiselton is commenting on the text or our time. For example, while commenting on 1:4-7, he writes: "Christian faith finds its focus not in ideas or systems, but in the person of Christ in whom God meets us." In the repeated mentions of Christ in these verses, Thiselton reads a call for a faith that centers on the person of Christ rather than a set of ideas. This is as much about our modern society as 1 Cor 1:4-7, a rebuke on our time that is becoming increasingly impersonal. The commentary boldly traverses the boundary between exegesis and reflection.

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Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006. 581 pp. Hardcover, \$38.00.

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