

REVIEWS

C. Ben Mitchell and D. Joy Riley. *Christian Bioethics: A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals and Families*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014. 224 pp. (paperback) \$19.54.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament.

As a professor who periodically teaches an elective course on Biblical Ethics at The Master's Seminary and speaks about it in various countries, I am always looking for helpful resources dealing with ethics. Ben Mitchell has served in pastoral roles and now works primarily in the realm of philosophy and ethics. Joy Riley is an internal medicine physician who focuses on bio-medical issues.

They clearly state their starting points at the outset (4–5). First, they share a commitment to a Christian worldview. Rather than being relativists, they see all truth (deserving of that designation) as God's truth, found in God's Word and concretely demonstrated in the life of Jesus. Second, they are both committed to historic orthodoxy (as in the Apostles' Creed). In addition, they view science and faith, medicine and theology, as friends, not enemies. Finally, they believe that answers are available to many of the thorny ethical issues we confront in life.

After introducing the subject of Christian bioethics, they divide their treatment into three categories: taking life, making life, and remaking/faking life. Each chapter has five sections: some concrete modern example that deals with some of the issues considered in the chapter, questions for reflection, discussion, conclusion, and additional resources (generally four articles or books). The discussion section, the bulk of each chapter, involves each author asking probing questions of their co-author, drawing on their unique training and life experience.

They begin their section on Christian bioethics by demonstrating how far most of the medical universities and professionals have strayed from some kind of adherence to the Hippocratic Oath, which forbids a physician from intentionally ending a patient's life through active means. Developments in philosophy, medicine, and ethics have contributed to this change of direction.

The next chapter addresses the way the Bible relates to complicated ethical issues. After summarizing a handful of approaches (Bible as Law Code, Bible as Universal Principle, and Bible as Community Narrative), they offer their preferred approach: the Bible as Canonical Revelation of Divine Commands and Christian Virtues. They argue that the Bible is divine revelation and contains clear commands and godly examples that can guide a person in facing life issues. They correctly point out

the need to interpret passages in light of their genre and context. They suggest that although Scripture is primary and authoritative, experience can be a source for wisdom and guidance. They wrap up this chapter by providing a helpful and clear process for ethical decision making with many helpful suggestions (41–42).

The next section, “Taking Life,” covers related issues at both ends of life: abortion and euthanasia. In chapter three, after summarizing the modern practice and legal parameters for medical or surgical abortions, the authors provide a helpful biblical foundation for human life. They start with Jesus, whose life began at conception. According to Luke 1:39–42, shortly after Jesus’ conception, Mary’s cousin Elizabeth’s unborn baby (John the Baptist) leaped in her womb when Mary (who recently began carrying Jesus in her womb) entered the room. They also refer to various OT passages that point to life from conception, in the uterus (Gen 2:7; Pss 90:3; 103:14). They also develop the significance of man being made in God’s image (Gen 1:27; 9:1–6). They emphasize that being made in God’s image signifies a status enjoyed by mankind rather than a function given to mankind (55). In response, I would argue that the image of God includes both concepts. God made mankind to serve as His image-bearers (“as His image”) as well as making them “according to His likeness.” The authors also provide a helpful development of Exod 21:22–25 and Ps 139:13–16. At the end of this chapter, they provide a helpful list of practical ways for people to live out their beliefs (pro-life) about abortion.

Chapter four (“Human Dignity and Dying”) addresses the complicated issue of euthanasia and related end of life questions. The authors begin by describing death and what people generally need when dying. They devote several pages to pain and suffering, common factors that cause people to consider ending their lives. Among other things, they point out that pain and suffering are the result of human sin and may have redemptive purposes. They cite C. S. Lewis (82) who called suffering “God’s megaphone,” calling us to depend on the Creator God in the midst of difficulties. Drawing on their list of what a person needs when dying, they give them fuller attention, referring to these facets as having biblical basis: relieving suffering, being nourished, being clean, being comfortable, and being able to die well. Through this discussion, they offer tangible ways people can render loving care for loved ones facing death. They also distinguish between physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia (voluntary, nonvoluntary, and involuntary). After giving various examples of abuse of the freedom people have in countries or states with legally allowed, active euthanasia practices, they offer some ways to prepare ourselves for dying.

Due to space limitations, I will spend less time summarizing the last two sections of the book. Part Three, “Making Life,” considers various kinds of assisted reproduction technologies, organ donation and transplantation, as well as cloning and human/animal hybrids. After explaining different kinds of fertility treatments, they point out three primary guidelines: the sanctity of every human life, the primacy of family in the Bible, and the recognition of God’s role in this realm of life. Reproduction technologies that involve causing the death of fertilized eggs or take reproduction outside the family unit must be avoided. After addressing some of the complexities of organ donation and transplantation, which are not intrinsically wrong, the authors recommend caution and careful consideration of the issues involved. The great demand for healthy organs has caused certain medical facilities to more quickly

pronounce the death of the patient to facilitate the successful removal of a usable organ. With regard to cloning, the authors call for an absolute ban of all human cloning.

Part Four, “Remaking/Faking Life,” concerns more recent human efforts to prevent aging and extend life indefinitely. The authors offer a number of examples of current efforts to extend life. Although it is not wrong for us to seek medical attention to correct a medical dilemma, we must not view death and aging as a disease to be conquered.

In their conclusion (“Preserving Our Humanity in a Biotech Century”), the authors express the need for humanity over efficiency, hope over hopelessness, and humility over hubris. In light of the increasing departure of the medical world away from the Hippocratic Oath, the authors plead for more Christ followers to enter the medical world to practice medicine in a Christ-like fashion.

This short volume (just under 200 pages) offers a lot of solid and helpful advice in the controversial realm of bioethics. The authors consistently take positions that are solidly grounded on God’s Word. A couple of areas of concern deserve brief mention. First, with regard to euthanasia, they refer to nourishment as something a person needs in the dying process. Unfortunately, they offer no advice or insight concerning the question of pulling out feeding tubes or withholding nutrition as a means to facilitating death. Second, in their discussion of physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia, they offer no real biblical guidelines to assist the person facing this dilemma. It appears that they are opposed to physician-assisted suicide and active euthanasia, but some more explicit statement would have added clarity. Third, in their summary of their view of the role the Bible should play in a person’s ethical decision-making, they refer to Aramaic as one of the languages of the New Testament (33) when it actually is one of the Old Testament languages. Fourth, in that same chapter they affirm that “some commands under the old covenant must be reinterpreted in light of the new covenant” (33). Rather than reinterpreting those Mosaic covenant laws, it would be better to refer to finding a normative principle that might exist in those laws, since both the Old and New covenants stem from the character of God.

As a whole, this volume provides a valuable contribution to a reader’s understanding of the issues related to bioethics and offers several helpful and biblical observations of those issues. It offers a nice mix of medical, philosophical, and biblical input along with engaging discussion between a trained doctor and a person trained for ministry as well as ethical issues.

Joshua Muravchik. *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel*. New York: Encounter Books, 2014. 281 pp. (hardbound) \$25.99.

Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition.

In *Making David into Goliath*, Joshua Muravchik begins by noting in 2009, a United Nations’ investigatory commission accused Israel of “crimes against humanity” with its latest (at that time) war in Gaza. Noting the vast difference between the

almost universal favorable world opinion at the end of World War II, versus the overwhelming hatred of Israel, there had to be some kind of reason. Muravchik offers the following explanation:

On the surface, there were two explanations. First, the Arab cause, reactionary, overtly homicidal in its objectives, and expressed in bluster, had been replaced by the far more sympathetic and “progressive” Palestinian cause. Instead of proclaiming openly their determination to deny the Jews a state, Israel’s enemies now accused the Jews of denying that same right to another people, the Palestinians.

Second, Israel no longer seemed endangered (x).

Muravchik further concludes:

Another factor, which may have been the most important of all in isolating Israel, made it easier to justify yielding to the power of the numbers, the threats, and the diplomatic pressures; this was an ideological transformation that saw the rise of a new paradigm of progressive thought that Arab and Muslim advocates helped to develop. It involved multiculturalism or race-consciousness in which the struggle of the third world against the West, or of “people of color” against the white man, replaced the older Marxist model of proletariat versus bourgeoisie as the moral drama of world history. In this paradigm, the Arabs, notwithstanding their superiority in resources and numbers, nor their regressive social and political practices, nor their recent alignment with the fascist powers, now, in the guise of the Palestinians, assumed a place among the forces of virtue and progress while the Israelis were consigned to the ranks of villains and reactionaries (xii).

Once the entire global left bought into this paradigm, distribution of such a doctrine was easy to expound:

Championed by the left’s networks and organizations and intellectuals, a Palestinian state became a kind of Holy Grail to enlighten opinion, even while almost no one gave a fig for the aspirations of the Kurds or Tibetans or numerous other bereft peoples (xiii).

Making David into Goliath contains eleven chapters and presents a quite logical rationale: (1) “When Israel Was Admired (Almost) All Around,” (2) “The Arab Cause Becomes Palestinian and (and Progressive),” (3) “The Uses of Terrorism,” (4) “The Power of Oil,” (5) “The Arabs Take Over the United Nations,” (6) “Europe’s Socialists Go Third World,” (7) “Edward Said Conquers Academia for Palestine,” (8) “Israel Shows a Less Endearing Face,” (9) “Israel Spawns Its Own Adversary Culture,” (10) “On the Wrong Side of the Left’s New Paradigm,” (11) “Israel in the Dock,” plus the conclusion “Israel Imperiled.” Copious endnotes display a very wide use of substantiating sources.

Making David into Goliath is not a Christian book, nor a Jewish theology book. It is more of a historical book and does an excellent job tracing the incredible change of worldview for so many people over such a relatively short time. Also, *Making*

David into Goliath is not blindly pro-Israel in everything national Israel does. In chapters 8 (“Israel Shows a Less Endearing Face,”) and 9 (“Israel Spawns Its Own Adversary Culture”), Muravchik documents quite well some of national Israel’s failures that give further fodder to those who oppose them.

I do recommend *Making David into Goliath* for those who want to follow the historical trail from national Israel’s becoming a nation in 1948 up to the present time. As mentioned, although *Making David into Goliath* is not a Christian book, I cannot help but read this as a Christian. It is one of those books that after you read it, so much of what is going on in the world or on the news makes so much sense. This virtual worldwide hatred (with a few exceptions) of Israel will not diminish in and of itself; far deeper powers are at work. If these are “the last of the last days,” and if the Tribulation is in the relatively near future, it sure shows how the worldwide stage is set for one who will come and make “a firm covenant with the many” (Dan 9:24–27), and thus set the countdown for the Lord’s return.

Jon Balsarak. *John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 208 pp. (hardcover) \$76.50.

Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Czech Bible Institute (Czech Republic)

Jon Balsarak is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Bristol. He specializes in the history of early modern Europe, with specific attention given to France. He has written numerous articles on these themes as well as works such as *Establishing the Remnant Church in France* (Brill, 2011) and *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Springer, 2006).

Balsarak lays out the purpose of his book straight away: “This study will explore prophecy as discussed in the Western Christian tradition, but will content itself with identifying broad streams of thought and placing Calvin within them in order to help elucidate his thinking and his self-awareness” (2). The author also claims to break ground in two significant ways: (1) to expose Calvin’s sense of prophetic awareness that drove his authoritarian stance; and (2) to show that Calvin worked toward reform and violent revolution in France.

Upon outlining his work, Balsarak discusses Calvin’s teaching on prophecy. Based upon Calvin’s writings, the author concludes that Calvin’s views on prophecy are confused, but can be used to prove that Calvin believed that the prophets who existed in the Old Testament (OT), who told the future, most likely did not exist in his time. However, Calvin did believe that prophets existed in his time in a New Testament (NT) sense in that their function was simply to interpret the Bible. The OT and NT variances are exemplified in Calvin’s statement, “‘Christ and his gospel have put an end to all the former prophecies and to all the oracles of God,’ but in ‘the Christian Church today prophecy is almost nothing except a correct understanding of the scriptures and a singular ability in explaining them well’” (10). Calvin’s ambivalence about OT style prophets in his day is seen in his *Institutes* where he describes prophets as “those who excelled by special revelation; none such now exist or they

are less manifest” (IV.3.4). In light of Calvin’s understanding of prophecy in his day, the author claims, “like a number of his contemporaries, Calvin saw himself as a prophet raised up by God to reform the church through authoritative scriptural interpretation and application” (13).

Giving a context for Calvin’s understanding of a prophet, Balsarak provides a helpful chapter on the different understandings of “prophet” throughout church history. Prophecy in early and medieval Western Christendom existed in two traditions. Tradition 1 focused on prophecy as supernatural knowledge about the future, and was championed by figures such as Augustine and Gregory the Great, both of whom believed that the gift ceased by their time. Tradition 2 understands the NT prophet as one who authoritatively interprets the Scripture, and was promoted by men such as Chrysostom and Ambrosiaster. As distinguished from doctors in the church, men such as Luther and Calvin believed that knowledge of Greek and Hebrew characterized the prophet of their time. Traditions 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive throughout the early and medieval periods, however, and were often combined (*duo prophetarum genera*) by men such as Lombard and Aquinas, who believed that Tradition 1 was still active in some capacity.

Moving into the Reformation period, Balsarak claims that while Calvin likely believed Tradition 1 was inoperative in his day, he did merge the two traditions and viewed himself as “a scripture-interpreting prophet-reformer” (32) or “covenant prosecutor” (57). In an age that mirrored the time of the OT prophets, the Reformers saw themselves as condemning ungodly kings, covenant-breaking priests, and calling hard-hearted people to repentance. This view was not only held by Calvin, but also by other significant reformers such as Zwingli, Bullinger, Bibliander, and Pelican. In his comments on 1 Cor 14:3, Bullinger writes that prophecy in the text does not signify “the prediction of the future but the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures” (56). Additionally, Zwingli’s humanistic small group was even called the *Prophezei*.

Of concern in Balsarak’s treatment thus far is immoderate statements such as his claim that the Reformers thought that “what they bring forth in their exegesis is nothing less than the word of God itself, as if God opened the clouds and spoke. There is a purity to their expositions which contains nothing human” (62). There is no warrant given for such a claim, and the author goes on to say that Calvin had “an implied sense of infallibility” and that we see “him alluding to, rather than explicitly confessing, his prophetic authority” (66, 97). Other unsubstantiated claims are that “no one in Calvin’s judgment . . . articulated right doctrine in the way that he himself had done,” and “Calvin believed himself to be right and possibly infallible in matters related to doctrine” (99, 101, cf. 183). It is difficult to posit this considering that Calvin revised and altered his own *Institutes* many times and confessed his weaknesses on his deathbed.

Building upon the foundation that Calvin viewed himself as a Tradition 2 prophet, the author attempts to prove that Calvin trained prophets in Geneva for religious war in France. Balsarak claims, “Calvin’s fundamental conviction in relation to his vocation was that he had been set ‘over nations and kingdoms to tear down and destroy, to build and to plant’ or, as he indicated in his lecture on Jeremiah 1:10, ‘to reduce the world to order’” (13). Furthermore, “it is the argument of these chapters that the war which commenced in the spring of 1562 represented the culmination of

years of preparation by Calvin” (104). The means by which Calvin did this, according to Balsarak, was through his lectures to his students. Balsarak states that Calvin pushed France to war by raising tensions through his provocations (113); that he tried to convince pastors to despise the king of France with “unrelentingly strident, aggressive, and hateful [words] against them” (155); and that he altered his exegesis to serve insurrection (142). In these talks by Calvin, the author argues, in “his work for France, [Calvin] pursued an expansionist, insurrectionist reforming agenda which blended the religious, political, and social towards the end of making France Protestant at all levels of society” (15).

Conceding that the evidence is “impressive and convincing” that “Calvin was generally opposed to individuals rising up of their own accord against the king,” Balsarak writes that Calvin did appear to be open to working through the magistrates to enact change (16 fn. 46, 16, cf. 103). The influential figures upon which Calvin set his hopes were Antoine of Navarre and Louis of Condé, and they would be supported by the Huguenots. To the point, the author states, “I believe Calvin’s aim in sending ministers into France was, ultimately, focused upon preparing the Huguenots for the possibility of war within France” (114).

While Balsarak overstates his case, the evidence he raises, such as Beza and Calvin’s attempts to raise money for troops to aid Antoine of Navarre, require explanation (123). Because of his ecclesiology, it is likely that Calvin thought of himself as a Tradition 2 prophet that spoke with authority. While a majority of instances of Calvin’s discussion on war should be interpreted as spiritual war, it is likely that physical war was a possibility. That said, an alternative that Balsarak does not entertain is that Calvin envisioned reform in France as had been realized in Geneva. In other words, reform and revolution would be led by Protestant magistrates; it would be bloodless, and Reformed cities would be defended from Catholic attack by Protestant armies (such as Bern in the case of Geneva).

While Balsarak’s book is confined to a narrow topic, it is a thought-provoking treatment of Calvin’s view of prophecy and war. It is well-researched and the bibliography contains a wealth of resources. However, on too many occasions the author makes claims without sufficient evidence, does not explore all interpretive options for Calvin’s words (often there was no consideration that “war” or “fight” could be interpreted in a spiritual sense, even when Calvin explicitly states that the Christian is “armed by [God’s] sacred teaching . . .” [171]), and is somewhat anachronistic when discussing Calvin’s language. While this book will be of interest to specialists in the life of Calvin, it will likely not be compelling reading to a general audience.