

claim that this was the best of all possible worlds Voltaire regarded as evidently falsified by the Lisbon earthquake. The possibility of environmental catastrophe in a nuclear war or accident presents a similar magnitude of challenge to Grudem's claim.

Elsewhere, it is the issue of freedom on which Grudem majors (91-93). Political moves of which he approves are described as punishing evil and rewarding good (274-275) and endorsed as the collective decisions of the majority of a nation expressed through their elected representatives (343, 395). Those of which he disapproves are measured in terms of loss of freedom (267-268, 285-286). He views political questions too much through the American national commitment to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' rather than the biblical commitment to love one's neighbour.

Thirdly, Grudem does not deploy a consistent hermeneutic. His defence against left-wing and pacifist readings of the Bible is that the biblical love command applies to interpersonal relationships whilst governmental authority bears the sword and has a mandate to carry out God's wrath on wrongdoers (42, 79-82, 189-191). Different principles apply to individuals and to governments. However, when he wishes to denounce the use of taxation to redistribute wealth he equates taxation by government with stealing by an individual (281).

Finally, in this book Grudem rarely engages with other biblical commentators on the verses and themes which he discusses, other than his opponents on the other side of the American political spectrum. The Church Fathers had far more radical things to say about poverty and economics than any contemporary American democrats.

Grudem's book identifies for European Christians the selective readings from the Bible upon which Republican Christians in America rely in support of their positions. However, Grudem has not allowed the biblical perspective on the priorities of relationships, love, justice and mercy to result in a radical critique of the values of his culture and as a result has merely found support in the Bible for positions he had already decided to adopt. A *Politics according to the Bible* worthy of the name would be considerably longer and more nuanced than the 619 pages to which Grudem's book runs.

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God and Being: an Enquiry

George Pattison

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 350 pp.,
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SUMMARY

George Pattison's *God and Being* is an attempt to 'raise anew the question of the meaning of Being' in light of the recent critiques directed towards the standard descriptions of ontology which have gone before within the Christian theological tradition. The book is divided into two parts: three primary chapters setting the terms of the discussion and offering a form of conclusion, between which are sandwiched four chapters exploring the various dimensions of the problem posed by the question of the meaning of Being in the contemporary intellectual milieu. Pattison emphasises the soteriological trajectory of Being, which allows him to introduce the subjective element of questions of ontology. However, this engenders discussion concerning the distance between the subjective self and the presencing of Being within the finite sphere. The central chapters explore issues of temporality, spaciality, language, relations to others, selfhood and embodiment as the different 'dimensions' through which the subjective relationship to Being might be examined. In the concluding section, Pattison offers accounts of possibility, nothingness and language of the gift as fruitful concepts to introduce a subjunctive mood into theological language concerning God and Being.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

George Pattisons *God and Being* [Gott und Sein] stellt einen Versuch dar, 'aufs neue die Frage nach der Bedeutung von Sein' im Licht kürzlich erschienener Kritiken aufzuwerfen, die gegen Standardbeschreibungen von Ontologie vergangener christlicher theologischer Tradition gerichtet sind. Das Werk teilt sich in zwei Bereiche auf: drei Eingangskapitel, welche die Linie der Diskussion vorgeben, und eine Art Schlussfolgerung; dazwischen erörtern vier Kapitel die unterschiedlichen Dimensionen des Problems, das sich durch die Frage nach der Bedeutung von Sein im gegenwärtigen intellektuellen Umfeld ergibt. Pattison betont die soteriologische Ausrichtung von Sein, was ihm ermöglicht, das subjektive Moment der Fragestellung nach Ontologie einzuführen. Dies jedoch stiftet eine Debatte an über die Distanz zwischen dem subjektiven Selbst und der Nahbarkeit von Sein innerhalb des endlichen Bereichs. Die zentralen Kapitel befassen sich mit Themen wie Zeitlichkeit, Räumlichkeit, Sprache, Beziehungen zu anderen, Selbst und Körperlichkeit als unterschiedliche 'Dimensionen', durch welche die persönliche Beziehung zum Sein erforscht werden kann. Im abschließenden Teil berichtet Pattison über Möglichkeit, Nichtigkeit und die Sprache des Geschenkes als fruchtbare Konzepte mit dem Ziel, eine subjektive Atmosphäre innerhalb der theologischen Sprache über Gott und Sein zu schaffen.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet ouvrage intitulé *Dieu et l'Être*, George Pattison « pose de manière nouvelle la question du sens de l'Être » en tenant compte des critiques récentes des formulations ontologiques classiques de la tradition théologique chrétienne. Le livre se compose de deux parties. Trois chapitres principaux présentent les termes de la discussion et offrent une forme de conclusion. Entre ceux-ci viennent s'insérer quatre autres chapitres qui explorent les divers aspects du problème posé par la question du sens de l'Être dans le milieu intellectuel contemporain. Pattison insiste sur la trajectoire sotériologique de l'Être, ce qui lui permet d'introduire un élément subjectif dans le traitement des questions ontologiques. Cela mène cependant à une réflexion sur la distance qui sépare le moi subjectif et la manifestation de la présence de l'Être dans la sphère du monde fini. Les chapitres centraux abordent les questions de la temporalité, de la spatialité, du langage, des relations avec autrui, du rapport à soi et de la corporalité comme autant de perspectives sous lesquelles on peut considérer la relation subjective à l'Être. Dans la dernière section, Pattison propose de prendre les concepts de possibilité et de néant, et le langage du don, comme des moyens fructueux d'introduire une modalité subjonctive dans le langage théologique sur Dieu et l'Être.

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'Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being.' With these words, Heidegger opened his ground-breaking work, *Being and Time*, heralding in an epoch in which versions of ontology became 'weakened' (to use Vattimo's nomenclature), no longer predicated upon the apparently unwieldy or overly-robust accounts of Being which had been largely accepted within the canons of philosophical thought in the West. Crucially, for Christian theology at any rate, such a critique of the concept of Being does not simply meander around the peripheries of intellectual discussion. Instead, it strikes right at the heart of a tradition which has not been subdued in its acceptance of various *à la mode* ontological concepts as accommodating apparatuses in the explication of the relationship between the divine and the universe he created (*homousios*, *perichoresis*, *hypostasis* to name but a few). In this sense, George Pattison's book *God and Being* is his own attempt to 'raise anew the question of the meaning of Being' in light of the recent critiques directed towards the standard descriptions of ontology which have gone before within the Christian theological tradition.

However, and in light of the seriousness with which Pattison approaches this contemporary critique of Being, the book is labelled an *enquiry* 'because it is first and foremost an attempt to pursue a question and even if it doesn't issue in a clear-cut result or even proceed in a definite and uniform direction [Pattison] hopes that the constancy with which the guiding question is kept in view will give it sufficient consistency.' (15) It is not

the case that Pattison is going to simply invert the critiques of 'onto-theology' with a simple restatement of a form of 'onto-theology'; instead, he claims that 'onto-theology is not an enemy to be defeated, but a trait of thinking from which we need... to "step back" so as to come into a free and thoughtful relationship to it' (9). Consequently, this inquisitive trajectory is reflected in the structure of the work which offers three primary chapters (the first, second and seventh) between which are sandwiched a further four chapters which 'are more like "dimensions", i.e. different aspects or modes of one and the same basic phenomenon, the distancing of self and Being' (15). Thus, the problems raised in the first and second chapter are explored through the various 'dimensions' of the following chapters before the final, more substantive final chapter in which Pattison ties together many of the pertinent issues before making a number of tentative suggestions.

The first chapter, therefore, opens with a synopsis of the problems facing the theologian attempting to talk about Being. Pattison commences with a brief explication of the important sotériological trajectory which Being must take within theological discussion. It is not simply the case that the language of Being is utilised from a simply speculative point of interest but, 'even this most abstract formulation [God as Being-Itself] expresses a very recognisable human and religious interest' (17). If God is to truly *be* God then he must be capable of saving us within the reality in which we find ourselves, which is already to make an ontological statement. The remainder of the chapter explores this sotériological path through ancient (Augustine and Aquinas) and modern (Tillich) writers, before accentuating the primary 'mood' of Christian approaches to Being as instances of 'Christian Aristoteleianism' in which the perfect conjunction between 'essence' and 'existence' in the divine allows the foundation for a world in which Being becomes knowable through the tensions inherent between finite existents and their essences. However, Pattison finds such an account of Being unsatisfactorily abstract, preferring an approach more modestly situated within the realm of finitude, relying on the 'presencing' of Being within the conditions of space-time.

This immediately leads him to the second chapter, entitled 'Presence and Distance', in which Pattison, undoubtedly influenced once again by Heidegger, faces up to the inevitable criticism of any account of metaphysics which attempts to operate out of the concept of presence. The introduction of language of 'presence' necessarily entails discussion of exactly what Being comes into presence 'to'. As Pattison puts it: 'We are seeking to clarify the possibility of a presence to Being that might provide a foothold for an analogical knowledge of the saving vision of God.' (56) Despite the carefully selected wording of this quote, the notion of the human subject to whom Being becomes present is slowly being brought under the radar. As the title to the chapter suggests, Pattison takes post-modern critiques

of presence seriously enough to realise the impossibility of a simple presencing of Being. Therefore, by means of discussions of Hegel, Sartre, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, Pattison arrives at the end of the chapter fully aware of the 'distance separating the subjective self from Being' but hopeful of some approach in which 'this distance might indicate a certain relation as well as a certain separation' (102).

The remainder of the book involves the exploration of various dimensions which explicate this subjective distance from but presence to Being. Pattison explores the notions of temporality, spaciality, language, relations to others, selfhood and embodiment as the different 'dimensions' through which the subjective relationship to Being might be explored. Following these chapters, he brings everything together in the final chapter in which he tentatively suggests the ideas of 'possibility', 'nothingness' and the language of 'gift' as fruitful avenues for future theological discussion of the concept of Being. In line with the previous discussion, therefore, Pattison ends with an injunction to the theologian to embrace the optative or subjunctive modes of doing theology as more fitting to the task of the theologian. 'Only so can it both preserve the speaker's awe at the possibility of God's nearness and the freedom of the listener in relation to what is being said.' (321)

The book is, unsurprisingly, a *tour de force* of modern and ancient thinkers. The depth of scholarship and the clarity with which Pattison unfolds the points of importance are highly commendable. Where the book might have been improved is in a greater exposure to a number of theological texts; whilst the philosophical discussion was necessary and helpful, the over-reliance on the philosophical tradition hints at a supposition that the contemporary critiques of Being render much of what the theological world has had to offer on the topic null and void. However, given the Lutheran influences on Hegel, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, the important place of *apophysis* in the work, and the recent theological treatments of divine absence (by scholars such as Alan Lewis, Eberhard Jüngel, Jürgen Moltmann and Rowan Williams), it would appear that the theologian has much to offer contemporary philosophical approaches to the question of the meaning of Being.

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Dieu, l'Homme et la Nature : L'écologie, nouvel opium du peuple ?

Samuele Furfari

Paris : Bourin Editeur, 2010; 307 pp., €22,

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet ouvrage, Samuele Furfari se propose d'évaluer le discours écologique chrétien contemporain. En s'attendant à ce sujet crucial, il montre premièrement la collusion entre le discours de la défense environnementale, les enjeux économiques de la lutte contre le réchauffement climatique, et la politisation de celui-ci. Dans sa partie scientifique, Furfari démontre, avec une expertise bien établie, que le réchauffement climatique anthropogénique (causé par l'activité humaine) est une théorie partielle reflétant plus une position politique que scientifique. L'ouvrage présente cependant certaines faiblesses, notamment dans son analyse théologique et dans son association exclusive du mouvement environnemental à une philosophie de type New Age. Il constitue malgré tout un apport important au débat évangélique contemporain sur le sujet.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Werk macht sich Samuele Furfari daran, die gegenwärtige christliche Debatte über ökologische Themen zu bewerten. Er nimmt dieses entscheidende Thema in Angriff und stellt dabei zuerst ein Zusammenspiel fest zwischen der Debatte um die Verteidigung von Umweltinteressen, den wirtschaftlichen Gegebenheiten im Kampf gegen die Klimaerwärmung und der Politisierung letzterer. Im wissenschaftlichen Teil zeigt Furfari mit exaktem Fachwissen auf, dass die vom Menschen erzeugte Klimaerwärmung zum Teil eine Theorie darstellt, die eher eine politische als eine wissenschaftliche Position widerspiegelt. Jedoch sind dem Werk gewisse Schwächen zuzugeben, besonders bei seiner theologischen Analyse und indem es die Umweltbewegung ausschließlich mit einer New Age Philosophie assoziiert. Dennoch bleibt das Buch ein bedeutender Beitrag zur gegenwärtigen evangelikalen Diskussion über das Thema.

SUMMARY

In this oeuvre, Samuele Furfari sets out to evaluate the contemporary Christian debate about ecological issues. In tackling this crucial subject, he firstly establishes collusion between the discussion on defending the environment, the economic aspects of preventing climate warming, and rendering the latter more and more political. In his analytical section, Furfari deploys his expertise to demonstrate that anthropogenic (man made) climate warming represents in part a theory which reflects a political position rather than a scientific one. Nevertheless, the book reveals certain weaknesses, in particular in its theological analysis and its exclusive association of the environmental movement with a New Age-type philosophy. Yet, the book remains an important contribution to the contemporary evangelical discussion of the topic.