

and must have a real correspondence.” The fallacy here, Blocher concludes, is that the dialectical thinkers “have chosen to extol as strengths what we consider weaknesses” (p. 80). And by their logic, he points out, forgiveness (to take a notable example) winds up not condemning sin, but excusing it, because it advances the good.

Having weighed these Christian solutions in the balance and found them wanting, Blocher turns to Scripture in chapter 4 and draws his own conclusions. He summarizes the Biblical doctrine of evil in three affirmations: “that evil is evil, that the Lord is sovereign, and that God is good, his creation also being good with a similar kind of goodness” (p. 85). It is easy to prove the affirmations from Scripture, he concludes, but “the great difficulty lies in holding all three together” (p. 100). Indeed, philosophically speaking, “there is no rational solution to the problem of evil: the theoretical problem of the origin of evil” (p. 101).

Such an admission, Blocher admits, must seem at first sight a sign of weakness for the Christian faith—but (1) this is the only conclusion supported by Scripture, and (2) the conclusion makes perfect sense at the cross. For Calvary (and only Calvary) exposes the utter “evilness of evil.” Yet the cross also demonstrates the absolute sovereignty of God, by whose “set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23) alone the crucifixion took place at all. And there, too (at the cross), the unadulterated goodness of God shines forth, where perfect love meets perfect holiness. “At the cross,” Blocher concludes, “God turned evil against evil and brought about the practical solution to the problem” (p. 104).

Blocher brings his study to an end (chapter 5, “Evil and the Kingdom”) by asking, in light of the cross where God turned evil against itself, what it means to say that, on the one hand, the kingdom has come and yet, on the other hand, evil has not disappeared. Scripture certainly affirms both presuppositions (and so does experience!), yet Scripture does not hedge even one step on the triumph of the cross. The paradox resolves itself, however, in what Blocher prefers to call “inaugurated” eschatology (cf. Ladd, Ridderbos, Marshall, *et. al.*), where evil still serves the purposes of God, who “wishes no other entry into his kingdom than that of faith; not by automatic incorporation” (p. 127). The prayer of the martyrs (Rev 6:11) tells the story.

And Henri Blocher has told the story of evil about as well as it can be told. Read, digest, apply. You will not be disappointed.

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*The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.* By Simon J. Gathercole. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, xi+344 pp., \$32.00, paper.

Simon Gathercole has made a name for himself in NT scholarship by taking on controversial issues and defending the traditional position. His *Where is Boasting?* (2002) attempted to rebut the ascendant New Perspective on Paul. The present work goes against the grain of current Synoptic Gospel studies by arguing that Christ’s preexistence is not a concept limited to the Fourth Gospel (and perhaps Hebrews) but is, in fact, also present throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The intended audience is specialists in NT studies; untranslated Greek, Hebrew, and German are used throughout the book. The work, therefore, would probably be of use only to classes held at a graduate or doctoral level.

Gathercole begins his work by summarizing how recent contributors to the debate over preexistence have seen it as a latecomer to the NT or have accounted for it in terms of a Wisdom Christology that may not entail actual prior existence.

Gathercole responds to the consensus in four stages. First he argues (from Paul, Hebrews, and Jude) that the pre-AD 70 evidence overwhelmingly indicates that Christians widely accepted the doctrine of preexistence. It would be strange, then, if the Synoptic Evangelists were either not aware of this doctrine or did not also hold to it. Indeed, an initial survey of the Synoptics establishes that Jesus is portrayed as “transcending normal human limitations,” so preexistence seems a natural corollary.

Gathercole’s second step is the heart of his argument and also his original contribution to the debate. Here he focuses on the “I have come” (*ἤλθον/ἦκω*) sayings in the Synoptics as the best evidence for preexistence Christology in these works. While some exegetes have explained these as indicating merely prophetic or messianic aspects of Jesus’ ministry, Gathercole contends that they must be taken as indicating Jesus’ purpose for His entire life (not just one event or activity in His ministry) and that the “coming” of which Jesus speaks is thus a coming from heaven to earth. For support, Gathercole adduces a multitude of parallels from early Jewish literature where angels use the same formula to state the purpose for their visit.

Third, Gathercole attempts to show that the idea of Wisdom Christology, sometimes used to argue for and explain preexistence in the Synoptics, is a “blind alley” unsupported by the texts themselves. Fourth, Gathercole concludes his argument by discussing whether the titles commonly applied to Jesus in the Synoptics (Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Lord) constitute evidence for preexistence. He tentatively determines that each of these titles might possibly have connotations of preexistence, especially the “Son of Man” title, which is often linked with a “coming” motif. He does not, however, think that this is as strong an argument as the numerous *ἤλθον* sayings. In a final chapter Gathercole addresses modern theological concerns with the concept of preexistence.

Gathercole is to be commended for producing an engaging and very well-researched work. In my criticisms, I will focus on Gathercole’s primary contention, namely that Jesus’ “I have come” sayings in the Synoptics indicate his preexistence. Gathercole’s logic is this: Jesus’ formula sums up his whole life and ministry and states that he has come from one place to another place for this purpose. Because his whole life and ministry is in view, he must be claiming to have come to earth from heaven where he preexisted. It appears to me that this line of argumentation has several flaws. First, none of the sayings explicitly states that Jesus’ whole life is in view, from birth to death. Why not take the *ἤλθον* sayings as a reference to Jesus’ relatively brief ministry? On this reading Jesus would be claiming no more than to have come from God to Israel on a prophetic mission. The idea of coming from God in no way requires preexistence; in the OT, prophets routinely come from God (the “divine council”) to their own homeland on a mission.

Second, even if we accept that the *ἤλθον* sayings speak of Jesus’ coming into the world, must we necessarily understand this as indicating anything other than His birth (commonly referred to in Jewish literature as “coming into the world”)? In this regard, John 6:14 is relevant, for the crowds expected a prophet “who is to come into the world.” It is highly unlikely that they expected this prophet to be preexistent, yet they used the phraseology which, Gathercole claims, entails preexistence. Were they really expecting anything more than that this prophet will be born? Similarly, John 18:37 seems to identify “coming into the world” with “being born” when it uses the two phrases in parallelism: “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into

the world, to testify to the truth.” Further evidence is John 1:6–7, where John the Baptist is said in v. 6 to have been “sent from God,” which is subsequently restated in v. 7 as, “he came to testify.” Shall we then deduce John’s heavenly preexistence as well?

Third, Gathercole argues that preexistence is the only possible explanation for the ἤλθον sayings. He does not address, however, the problem that no character in the Synoptic Gospels ever gives any indication that he or she takes it this way. Indeed, Gathercole fails to respond (p. 158) to H. Arens’s position that the sayings in their original *Sitz* did not imply preexistence but only came to do so when they were incorporated into the Gospels much later, by which time preexistence had become a presupposition. If Jesus’ original audience could understand the ἤλθον sayings without recourse to a concept of preexistence, then it seems Gathercole’s argument is substantially weakened.

In spite of these criticisms, I found Gathercole’s work helpful in many respects. He provides a succinct and insightful overview of the current debate over preexistence and his exegesis of the numerous relevant passages is thorough and insightful. Especially welcome is his critique of the Synoptic Wisdom Christology hypothesis, which, as he ably shows, is a hybrid of very speculative source-critical theories and maximalist exegesis. Furthermore, his chapter-length treatment of Matt 23:37 does demonstrate the presence of a preexistence concept in this pericope. One might only wish he had made that and similar passages the cornerstone of his argument, instead of the ἤλθον sayings.

Gathercole is yet another voice in a rising scholarly chorus (see, e.g. recent work by Bauckham, Hurtado, and Hengel) asserting that a high Christology developed very early on and was not the result of a Hellenized misunderstanding of Jewish teaching (Bousset’s long-accepted theory). For this trend, and Gathercole’s contribution to it, evangelicals can be thankful.

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*Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Imputation.* By Brian Vickers. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006, 254 pp., \$14.99, paper.

Anyone who has been paying attention to evangelical theology in North America knows that the doctrine of justification has become quite a hot topic. Not only has the New Perspective on Paul offered a challenge to the traditional Protestant formulation (e.g. James Dunn, N. T. Wright), but so have some dissenting voices from within the conservative sector of the evangelical fold (e.g. Robert Gundry).

In 1999, when *Christianity Today* published “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,” Robert Gundry responded by saying, “the doctrine that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believing sinners needs to be abandoned,” and, “that doctrine of imputation is not even biblical.” The opinion that Gundry expressed has become somewhat of a standard view among scholars of the NT, and this departure has caused no little controversy among evangelicals who continue to regard the doctrine of imputation as a crucial biblical teaching (see the exchange between Gundry and Thomas Oden in *Books & Culture* as well as the essays by Gundry and Carson in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates?*).