

Book Reviews

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Richard Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way* (IVP, 2015), 272 pages, \$20.

In *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, Richard Twiss highlights the growing movement of Native American contextual theology that is committed to decolonizing Native Christianity while embracing a biblically grounded faith that celebrates indigenous cultures. Twiss begins by affirming the presence of God the Creator within Native communities prior to, throughout, and following the colonization of the Americas. He exposes the ways in which Western hegemony has hindered an authentic Christian faith among First Nations populations. Twiss rejects the notion—historically supported by Western missionaries, modern evangelicals, and traditionalist Native Christians—that Native culture and true Christian practice are theologically incompatible. He further challenges as hypocritical the mostly undisputed “counteractive syncretism” of American exceptionalism, economic power, and military dominance (p. 37).

At the heart of the text lie the narratives of those who have been influenced by the contextualization movement and have found freedom in their walk with Christ by embodying the practices of their Native heritage. Twiss’s arguments for the most effective means of decolonization are found in the real stories and experiences of the Native people. Twiss shares his own journey of faith, embedded in his Lakota culture and his subsequent life’s work. He shares personal stories of Christian pow wows, sweet grass and sage prayers, and sweat lodge spiritual experiences.

Twiss catalogs the larger contextualization movement and its influence in the Christian evangelical world, including both confrontations and victories. He also celebrates Native ministers and theologians who have broken barriers in theological education, spoken to the Native community, launched worldwide indigenous ministry conferences, and continued to shape theological discussion in the academy and the church. Such efforts have culminated in the formation of the World Christian Gathering of Indigenous People and the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies.

Yet Twiss questions whether “contextualization” is even an appropriate term for this movement (pp. 208–20). Does “contextualization” fail to break away from a paternalistic framework? Does it reinforce the notion that indigenous peoples are forever doomed to be the *receivers* of the message rather than legitimate *tellers* of the story? At what point do we let go of using the “contextual” descriptor for our theologies and instead embrace the stories that our many cultures bring as equally valid? Twiss’s goal is to tell the gospel story in ways that permeate the Native “soil and soul” (p. 220). How this is achieved and who is telling the story remain key questions.

Twiss also recognizes the limitations he faces in his task of “rescuing the Gospel from the cowboys.” “More than four hundred years of missions cannot be undone,” he laments, especially when resistance comes from conservative Native evangelicals (p. 216). He acknowledges that he must accept opposition and remain committed to listening and honoring another’s story even if it conflicts with his own worldview. Twiss acknowledges that the Euro-American dominant form of Christianity will outlive him—an unfortunately prophetic statement given his untimely passing in 2013 before this book was published. In many ways, this book reads as Twiss’s last words. Yet his hope is to pass on his wisdom and fervor to the next generation of Native Christians working toward an authentic faith grounded in Scripture and their cultural identity.

Christians and ministry leaders, both Native and non-Native alike, will find *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys* a relevant text. Not only has Twiss begun to trace the movement’s history and influences, effectively claiming a spot for the Native voice within the body of contemporary ministry texts, he also challenges us to recognize that Euro-American Christianity is not without its own syncretism. Twiss calls us to seek dialogue over judgment and control by pursuing authentic worship. If we are Christians committed to the corporate enactment of the story of

God in worship, then we must be open to relating that story in ways that bring the fullness of who we are to God and to one another.

Richard Twiss was also called Taoyate Obnajin, “He Stands with His People.” In this good work, he has lived into his name.

ALEXANDRIA MACIAS

Derek Tidball, *The Voices of the New Testament: Invitation to a Biblical Roundtable* (IVP, 2016), 279 pages, \$24.

As part of a seminary course, I once attended a “fishbowl” conversation where I sat as an observer to a panel of experts and practitioners conversing about the theme of the night. It was a broad and informative discussion, as panelists not only brought their own viewpoints but also responded to the perspectives of the others and allowed their own understanding of the subject to be honed through interaction. In the end, what emerged from their conversation was greater than the sum of their initial individual contributions. By hearing these experts in dynamic conversation with one another, the audience received more than simply each individual’s viewpoint; we heard a multi-faceted, collective perspective on the subject. The respondents did not always see things in precisely the same way (which would have produced a flat and bland discussion), but their individual emphases, experiences, and perspectives complemented one another and gave dimension to the subject, even in the midst of the inevitable tensions produced by examining a complex issue from various angles.

In *The Voices of the New Testament*, Derek Tidball invites us to observe such a fishbowl. Traditional volumes on New Testament theology may seek to articulate a single systematic theology or divide the New Testament into various theologies (the theology of Paul, the theology of John, etc.) and so hold them separate from one another. Tidball, on the other hand, attempts to walk a line between these poles, looking for coherence in the New Testament “without imposing a false synthesis on it, squashing its diversity, or distorting the emphasis of any individual writer” (pp. 3–4). To do so, he imaginatively seats the various New Testament authors around a table and hosts a dynamic conversation between them. What emerges is not a monolithic theology nor a scattered survey of various books and passages, but a robust and multi-dimensional understanding of the work of God in Jesus Christ that acknowledges and holds on to the tensions that are present in the New Testament authors’ various

experiences and views on God's work. Written in a transcript format, the conversation is moderated by a "chair," with occasional contextual and historical-theological interludes by an "observer." It addresses standard subjects in New Testament theology: good news, Jesus, salvation, Holy Spirit, eschatology, and more. Tidball seeks to do justice to the unique contributions of each New Testament author, though, for obvious reasons, some of them (such as Paul) receive more speaking time than others (Jude).

While the discussion format of the book often feels contrived and cumbersome for those who may be seeking a more traditional exploration of New Testament theology, it does force the reader to adopt an important perspective on the text: the biblical authors become *conversation partners* rather than mere oracles through whom the divine voice speaks. This is the primary contribution this book offers the reader. It reminds us that the texts of the New Testament did not simply fall from heaven but were the product of an early Christian community seeking to make sense of their experience of the resurrected Christ and to help others walk faithfully in his footsteps by telling of his words and deeds, addressing matters of church and life, and offering the hope of Christ's return.

One could certainly read through Tidball's imagined discussion and find points of disagreement with how he summarizes the New Testament authors' viewpoints. But by presenting the voices of the New Testament in this conversational manner, Tidball urges us toward an approach to the biblical text that is perhaps more in keeping with how these texts were originally intended to be read—an approach that is well within the Covenant's historical roots of reading and interpreting the word of God in community and our current ethos of being "biblical, but not doctrinaire."

Ultimately, Tidball's book will be more appropriate for interested laity, perhaps in small groups or classes, than for pastors and scholars. Tidball does not delve very deeply into theological content; it is the book's arrangement and perspective that are unique and enlightening, as it draws together various threads from across the New Testament. I imagine this book could be particularly useful in conjunction with, or following on the heels of, a project such as the Community Bible Experience, which seeks to foster communal reading of and conversation around Scripture. Perhaps through such efforts and insights we may reclaim the word of God as "living and active" for each of us.

LUKE S. OLIVER