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GOD'S TIMELINE: An Introduction to Theology for Laypeople By Rick Meyer

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GOD'S TIMELINE: An Introduction to Theology for Laypeople. By Rick Meyer. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013. Paper. \$18.00.

In *God's Timeline: An Introduction to Theology for Laypeople*, Rick Meyer seeks to engage the reader in a theological journey that spreads across the whole of history, pointing to the presence of God's divine will as it moves from the garden of Eden to the present church and beyond. God's Timeline is a brief, well-rounded look at the three-part structure of the biblical narrative: creation, fall, and restoration. The book is intended as a theological aid for laypeople, and as such, it is structured in an easy-to-read, highly accessible format. In his own words, Meyer primarily seeks to "provide a foundation, a framework, a picture of how Scripture holds together" (xix). Secondly, he suggests that the book can be used as a tool for theological education and a springboard for an individual's journey into God's word.

God's Timeline opens with a succinct three-chapter sequence that outlines the main themes of the biblical text, beginning with creation and moving quickly through the fall to renewal/restoration. Meyer then proceeds to mark significant theological points-of-interest that emerge from these themes including eschatology (pegged as ultimate restoration), prophecy, Christology, and ecclesiology. Rather than approaching these topics as individual silos, however, Meyer consistently draws these topics into conversation with each other and aligns them with the greater trajectory of God's purpose in history.

The strengths of *God's Timeline* are manifold. First, the book is theologically astute yet accessible to the Christian layper-

son that may or may not have any formal theological training. Meyer's conversational tone permits a certain comfort level, even when discussing somewhat profound (or difficult) topics like death and sin. Meyer also includes some helpful diagrams that serve to elucidate particularly tricky principles as well as a glossary that is surprisingly substantial. Second, the discussion questions Meyer includes are excellent and wide-ranging. Not only do they intelligently address the chapter's most important material, they often probe significant philosophical questions that the Bible introduces particularly in the early chapters. For example, Meyer poses questions like, Is human progress possible today? What does the problem of evil say about the nature of God? Such questions allow a layperson to entertain not only the biblical narrative, but also to converse with the important philosophical conundrums that have shaped the theological-philosophical landscape (Hegel, Hume, etc.) in the past five centuries. *God's Timeline* encourages the reader to grapple with these ultimate questions from a biblical perspective, providing the resources to confront secular postmodernism on several philosophical fronts.

While Meyer hits his wheelhouse with rich chapters on Christology and ecclesiology, the quick pace of each chapter (especially early in the book) leaves the reader, in some instances, begging for more information. The chapter on the fall is one such instance. If Christians are to frame justification within the broader context of God's purpose in history, the depth of the sin and its effect on the world needs more complete treatment. Perhaps a catechetical framing of hamartiology (i.e., the devil, the world, and the flesh, per the Small Catechism) may allow

for a more streamlined look at sin's past, present, and ongoing effects without sacrificing the overall character of the book. Yet, Meyer's task is not to provide an exhaustive outline of Christian doctrine; he is serving an appetizer that will frame the Bible in a certain narrative light. The main course, if you will, is the ongoing discipline of studying God's word and wrestling with the questions that only emerge from ongoing contemplation. With this in mind, it seems remarkably appropriate that *God's Timeline* ultimately directs to God's presence in word and sacrament; Meyer rightly directs the reader to the font and table as the culmination of the Christian life.

I would encourage pastors, DCE's, and lay educators to use *God's Timeline* as an aid for catechesis instruction. The current push toward a more narrative understanding of the Bible may be able to draw together the six chief parts in ways that were formerly lacking. Rather than solely seeing each piece of our Lutheran doctrine as a distinct entity worthy of our attention, Meyer reminds us that our Lutheran perspective allows for a rich understanding of the whole cloth. Both micro- and macro-approaches to Scripture are vital as educators continue to press against postmodern resistance to meta-narratives. The Christian response, as articulated in *God's Timeline*, can confidently proclaim a God who is both external to the world as he creates, molds, and shapes his people for his purposes, as well as a God who intimately dwells with us in the word, in the waters of baptism, and in the real presence at the Lord's Table.

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