

Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornall. *Second Thoughts about the Second Coming: Understanding the End Times, Our Future, and Christian Hope*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2023. 180 pages. \$18.00.

For many contemporary Christians whose default framework is shaped by a scientific worldview, the return of Jesus and the notion of life after death remain perplexing and seemingly unverifiable mysteries. Because it is difficult to wrestle alone with questions that lack clear answers, popular understandings of the end times, the Second Coming, and the afterlife often emerge as a blend of fragmentary apocalyptic references and elements of popular culture. In *Second Thoughts about the Second Coming*, Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornwall engage these significant yet often neglected topics within mainline Christianity. They present the diverse understandings of eschatological themes found in Scripture, church history, and theological traditions, situating them within the broader framework of God's ultimate purposes.

The book is organized into twenty chapters across five sections. In the first section, Allen and Cornwall trace the diverse biblical perspectives on the Second Coming as they appear throughout the Old and New Testaments. From the apocalyptic imagery of Daniel to the Johannine theme of realized eschatology, they show how these visions emerged in times of struggle and offered hope in light of God's ultimate purposes, emphasizing Scripture's multivocal witness to the end-time.

The second section surveys how the church has continually reinterpreted eschatological themes across history. As Christianity became integrated into the dominant culture, the early expectation of an imminent return of Christ faded, though apocalyptic movements resurfaced in times of crisis. The Eastern Church envisioned the ultimate end as the universal restoration of all things, while the Western Church, influenced by Augustine's spiritualized eschatology, located hope in experiencing resurrection life in the present. During the Reformation, Luther and Calvin employed apocalyptic language to critique the papacy without anticipating a literal millennium, while more radical reformers sought to inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth through theocratic communities.

In the third section, the authors summarize three major modern perspectives on the coming reign of God: premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Premillennialism anticipates Christ's imminent return to establish a literal thousand-year reign, often interpreting global crises as signs of the end. Postmillennialism, by contrast, envisions the church building the kingdom before Christ's return through the spread of the gospel and the Spirit's transforming work. Amillennialism interprets the millennium symbolically as the present reign of Christ within the church while retaining an open-ended expectation of the Second Coming (91). Each model represents a distinct way of relating divine purpose to human history and remains influential in different strands of Christian thought.

The fourth section explores contemporary theological voices that reinterpret eschatology for the modern world. Rudolf Bultmann's *demythologization* reinterprets the symbols of the Second Coming in existential terms, depicting them as expressions of redemption from the bondage of the old age—a form of realized eschatology (100). Jürgen Moltmann grounds his theology of hope in a relational God who seeks to redeem and heal the cosmos; believers experience “the presence of the future” in the present, living in hope and participating in God's work of liberation and healing through the Spirit (105). Liberation theology highlights the inbreaking of God's reign through human action for justice, while open theism and process theology portray the future as open, relational, and co-created with God. The Eastern Orthodox

vision centers on the Eucharist, and deification as the believer's journey into union with God. Together, these perspectives demonstrate ongoing efforts to articulate Christian eschatology in ways that are both intellectually credible and spiritually transformative for modern readers.

In the final section, the authors trace evolving understandings of death, resurrection, and the afterlife from Scripture to modern theology. The Bible emphasizes human beings as embodied creatures, affirming bodily resurrection rather than disembodied existence. Under Greek influence, however, the dominant view became that the soul ascends to heaven at death and reunites with a new body at the final judgment. Modern theologians variously interpret the afterlife as continued consciousness in God's consciousness or as the enduring influence of one's life beyond personal consciousness.

The authors recognize the deep interconnection between how we understand the future and how we live in the present, and they make complex theological ideas about eschatology and life after death accessible to readers without formal theological training. While the book's strength lies in its clarity and comprehensive scope, it functions primarily as an introduction. Rather than promoting a single viewpoint, Allen and Cornwall allow readers to appreciate the diversity of Christian reflection on the end times and the afterlife, inviting them to deepen their own theological understanding. While the book does not offer a distinctive argument, its restraint is intentional, serving as a theological primer that invites further study rather than offering definitive conclusions. For pastors, students, and lay readers alike, the book's clarity, accessibility, and balanced perspective make it a valuable resource and an excellent entry point into complex theological terrain.

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