

AN EXTENDED REVIEW OF BOYD'S *CRUCIFIXION OF THE WARRIOR GOD*

Nicholas Gausling¹

Abstract: Gregory Boyd's *Crucifixion of the Warrior God* presents an insightful, thoroughly-researched and historically-grounded thesis regarding how Christians should understand the violence attributed to Yahweh in the Old Testament. Drawing on extensive exegetical and theological considerations in dialogue with the historic and ecumenical Church, Boyd presents a treatise that is both academically rigorous and pastorally conversational. While at times he unnecessarily conflates his thesis with other elements of his theology, Boyd's book constitutes a very important monograph in the study of hermeneutics and theology proper at this crucial time in Church history when many Christians around the world are reconnecting with the practices and interpretive example set by the ancient Church.

Keywords: God's wrath, violence of God, divine judgment, hell, hermeneutics, patristic theology, church history

I. INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Since the earliest days of Christianity, believers have struggled with the hermeneutic challenge of interpreting the violent portrayals of God in the Old Testament in light of the New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ as a self-sacrificial and forgiving deity. Furthermore, these same portrayals

¹ Nick Gausling (M.A. in Christian and Classical Studies, Knox Theological Seminary) is Executive Director of the Libertarian Christian Institute (LCI) and works in the financial sector.

are often a stumbling block to unbelievers, with Richard Dawkins' heavy-handed rhetoric in *The God Delusion* providing one of the most cited and representative examples of this critique to come out of the contemporary New Atheist movement. How can the God of the Old Testament, who is often portrayed as wrathful and jealous, be squared with the nonviolent, enemy-loving ministry of Jesus Christ? Theologian and pastor Gregory Boyd attempts to answer that question in his latest scholarly monograph, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God* (hereafter "CWG").

CWG holds impressive endorsements from diverse scholars like Scot McKnight and Walter Brueggemann. The book is divided into two volumes. The first volume, subtitled "The Cruciform Hermeneutic," lays out the theological and historical basis for Boyd's interpretive strategy. The second volume, "The Cruciform Thesis," provides specific exegetical and theological analysis of many key passages from the Old Testament which portray Yahweh acting violently. While readers interested in the topic will find the entire work worthwhile, the most important hermeneutic argumentation is found in the first volume.

The footnotes in CWG are extensive and appear on nearly every page. No one could justly accuse Boyd of either a superficial engagement with opposing views or shoddy research; he continuously cites relevant scholarly material throughout the entire book, and he lucidly explains his disagreements with scholars from opposing schools of thought. The topically-organized bibliography ("Suggested Readings") at the end of Volume 2 goes on for an impressive 37 pages.

Boyd realizes the enormity of his task, and consequently he goes through great pains to emphasize his orthodoxy and commitment to the authority of Scripture. Eventually, the reader who is open-minded to Boyd's thesis begins to tire of how much he belabors this point. However, it is understandable why he feels the need to do so given what is so often the tragically uncharitable and vitriolic state of intra-Christian polemics.

Boyd's conversational rhetoric makes the book accessible to educated laity as well as scholars. It is clear that Boyd views the role of theologian

not merely as publishing for the sake of publishing; all theology must ultimately be for the edification of the Body of Christ. In fact, Boyd often takes his conversational approach a little too far, padding the crux of his argument with lengthy introductions on what he intends to demonstrate, or recapitulations of what has been demonstrated, or homiletic tangents which sound like sermonizing. While this all provides a more accessible monograph for non-experts, it also stretches out the length of the book for a couple hundred pages longer than was probably necessary.

Volume 1 is the most valuable part of the book, in which Boyd explains the foundation for his hermeneutic: a theological, biblical, philosophical and historical case for why the violent portraits of Yahweh in the Old Testament are not representative of how God actually is, while at the same time upholding the inspiration and authority of the entire canon. Without Volume 1, the specific analyses of Old Testament passages that Boyd delves into in Volume 2 would be void *ab initio*. Yet if one accepts the thesis of Volume 1, then there are multiple perspectives and insights which could be applied to the Old Testament's violent portrayals of Yahweh, with Volume 2 of CWG simply being Boyd's own perspective. Consequently, this review will focus heavily on Volume 1.

II. "THE CRUCIFORM HERMENEUTIC" (VOLUME 1)

The first volume opens with a concise introduction to Boyd's herculean task. He explains that when he began researching ten years ago for what became CWG, his thesis was that God actually did engage in all of the violence attributed to him in the Old Testament. Even for many of those in the Anabaptist, Mennonite, or Peace Church movements, and others who espouse a fully-nonviolent ethic for Christian behavior (as does Boyd), it is often believed that while humans are prohibited from engaging in violence, God himself exercises violence against his enemies. In short, Christians can and must refrain from all violence in imitation of Christ's earthly ministry, and are able to do so precisely because God will

ultimately either redeem their enemies through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, or else he will eschatologically destroy them.

Yet as he continued to research, Boyd says he came to a different conclusion: that the character of God is intrinsically and eternally nonviolent, and all violent depictions of God in the Bible (particularly the Old Testament) must be interpreted through that lens. Instead of subjecting the Bible to scientific inquiry like any other text in order to discern the meaning, Boyd argues that we must read the Old Testament through what he calls the Cruciform Hermeneutic. This is itself an outcropping of the theological interpretation of Scripture which was mainstream in Christian thought prior to the Enlightenment.

In Chapter 1, Boyd discusses the practical dynamics and implications of struggling to understand violent portrayals of God in light of the cross. He explains his commitment to the θεόπνευστος (“God-breathed”) nature and authority of the entire Bible, but he places it within the context of ancient Jewish thought, including the struggles of doubt and crises of faith that almost invariably strike every believer at some point and which are replete throughout the Old Testament narrative. Instead of psychological assent or certainty, says Boyd, biblical faith is “about retaining covenantal trust in one’s covenant partner in the face of uncertainty.”² He thus shows readers that they should feel free to explore their faith and pursue God through their questions and doubts, rather than reflexively approaching controversial or challenging theses from a defensive posture. This preface constitutes a balanced and helpful representation of the inviting and pastoral approach Boyd brings to the entire subject.

Boyd explains the significance of how we understand the character of God, especially as it pertains to how we behave towards others. He briefly explores the history of religiously-motivated violence and how Christians

²Gregory A. Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 13. For additional exploration of this theme, see also Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty* (New York: HarperOne, 2016).

have tragically been no exception. Indeed, throughout Christian history, leaders inspired by misappropriated biblical stories have used them to defend the killing of suspected witches, Muslims, and even fellow Christians; to stir up nationalistic military fervor for war; and sometimes to commence wholesale genocide. In contemporary Christianity, Boyd cites post-9/11 militarism as an example of what happens when any modern country is equated with Old Testament Israel.³ Boyd ends the chapter with a discussion of how taking the violent portrayals of God at face value can hurt the Church's witness to the world. Skeptical readers may rightly retort that such practical considerations do not affect objective truth, though it could also be said that if Boyd's thesis is correct, then practical considerations pertaining to what happens if we have an improper perception of God become immensely relevant.

In Chapter 2, Boyd begins to lay out the primary crux of the Cruciform Hermeneutic. Citing Hebrews 1:1-3, he argues that the revelation of God in the person and work of Christ is superior to any revelation found in the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews affirms that God spoke through the Old Testament prophets, but "the author views these previous revelations as inferior to the revelation of God in Jesus – indeed, as inferior as a mere shadow is to the substantial reality that casts it (Heb 10:1; cf. Heb 8:5; Col 2:17)."⁴ In other words, any and all revelation prior to Christ is necessarily incomplete and therefore subject to authoritative interpretation (or reinterpretation) through the lens of Christ.

After additional exploration of this theme in Hebrews and some parallel passages in the epistles, Boyd turns to Jesus himself. Since Jesus said John the Baptist was greater than all the Old Testament prophets (Mt 11:1), and yet also claimed to supersede John (Jn 5:36), it follows that Jesus supersedes the Old Testament prophets. In fact, the entirety of the Old Testament points to Jesus (Lk 24:25-27, 44-45). Thus, Boyd argues,

³ For more on this topic, see also Boyd's earlier work, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

⁴ Boyd, CWG, 38.

interpreters of the Bible must “read backwards”—in the words of Richard Hays—and interpret the Old Testament in light of Christ. Citing Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians 4, Boyd reasons that “Not only is the revelation of the OT not on the same level as the revelation found in Christ, but when the OT is read in light of Christ, Paul is claiming, we can no longer legitimately speak of ‘two’ distinct sources of revelation.”⁵

Boyd acknowledges that there is still significant continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Yet while Jesus himself cites the Old Testament as God-breathed, it nevertheless pales in comparison to the perfect and final revelation of Christ himself, who is the exact image of the Father, the fulfiller of the covenant, and the bringer of the eschaton. In discussing John 1:18, Boyd argues that “it is unlikely that John is speaking merely of a physical perception when he denies that anyone has ever ‘seen God.’ ... John rather seems to be insinuating, in a hyperbolic way, that no one truly knew God prior to the Word becoming flesh.”⁶ While the Old Testament narrative features numerous theophanies, no human truly knew God until the advent of Christ, and those who have seen Christ have now seen the Father (Jn 14:7-9).

Boyd then works through various epistles, such as Colossians 2, 1 Timothy 2, Ephesians 1, 2 Corinthians 3, and more to demonstrate the presence of this theme throughout New Testament theology. He then discusses some ways in which Christ overturns certain Old Testament precepts (cf. Deut 6:13; Mt 5:33-37, 12:1-8; Lev 1, 15:25-27; Mk 7:19; Luke 8:43-47; Ex 34:21). Boyd observes that “though the earliest Christian disciples regarded the OT as God’s word, they subordinated its authority to the authority of Christ and were thus okay with setting aside whatever ‘seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to [them]’ (Acts 15:28).”⁷ According to Boyd, the most important example of this which pertains to the Cruciform Hermeneutic is the *lex talionis* (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:19-20; Dt 19:21)

⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷ Ibid., 69.

which is supplanted by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Even more radically, obedience to this command is expressly tied to the character of the Father, and thus the enemy-loving character of God is the grounds for the ethic he demands of his children (Mt 5:45).

Answering the major objection of Jesus stating that he came not to abolish the Law but rather to fulfill it, Boyd argues that Jesus meant he would perfect and complete the Law. Since the entirety of the Law and the Prophets hinges on loving God and neighbor (Mt 22:37-40), love is the true fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10). The essence of *agape* thus provides the framework through which we must reinterpret and supersede the deficiencies of the Old Testament law in light of the fuller revelation we have in Christ. Yet perhaps Boyd glosses over Matthew 5:17-20 a bit too quickly. The two great commandments of Matthew 22 draw from Torah, so while we rightly may say the Old Testament law is deficient, its core still holds a central place in New Testament ethical thinking.

Boyd also exposit the story of James and John seeking to call down fire from Heaven against the Samaritans (Lk 9:54), which they probably thought was a thoroughly prophetic action (cf. 2 Kgs 1:10-12). Instead, Jesus rebukes them. Writes Boyd, "The desire of James and John to replicate Elijah's miraculous destruction of Samaritan foes with fire 'from heaven' reflected a 'spirit' that was antithetical to that of Jesus ..." ⁸ While the gospel narratives draw many positive parallels between Jesus and both Elijah and Elisha, on this specific point, Jesus rejects the example set by Elijah in favor of a more excellent way.

Perhaps most importantly, Jesus did not follow the assumed script for the Davidic Messiah, who was largely-assumed to be a nationalistic political savior against oppressing earthly powers and who would restore the glory of geopolitical Israel. In contrast, the New Covenant brought by Jesus has sharp differences with the Old Covenant (cf. Deut 28:4, 7, 10-11; Lk 6:20-26; Mt 5:9). Boyd remarks, "Far from enforcing the covenant, as

⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

people assumed God’s messiah would do, Jesus seems to have completely subverted it.”⁹

Boyd’s assessment is perhaps not an entirely balanced reading of the Old Covenant. The author of Hebrews, drawing on Jeremiah, does not discard the Old Covenant as something bad to be subverted; rather, it is depicted as something good which was replaced by something better. As the Beatitudes intensify the demands of the Old Testament law from outward compliance into inner obedience, it can also be said that the New Covenant enforces the heart of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel by reorienting against the true enemies (sin, *ha satan* and death) and reinforcing the true purpose of God’s people (a renewed humanity, a covenant family, and a royal priesthood, to draw imagery from both Pauline and Petrine theology). It would be more accurate to say that Jesus subverted the misshapen and worldly expectations that Israel had for Messiah and the Old Covenant.

Boyd also draws attention to Luke 4:16-27, or what he calls the ‘Scandalous Inaugural Address’ of Jesus. While reading the messianic announcement from Isaiah 61:1-2 and proclaiming himself its fulfillment, Jesus deliberately omits the second portion of the passage: “the day of vengeance of our God.” With Israel under Roman rule and looking back on centuries of failed precedent to militarily establish a geopolitical state, Jesus instead teaches that to live by the sword is to die by the sword (Mt 26:52). Boyd sums up by stating that “while Jesus affirmed the divine inspiration of the whole OT, its [sic] apparent that in the process of offering people this nonviolent kingdom, Jesus reflected an authority that superseded the OT and that allowed him to radically reframe its meaning.”¹⁰ Alleged endorsements of violent action by Jesus receive additional treatment in Appendix II. The temple cleansing is discussed later in the main body of the work.

⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰ Ibid., 89-90.

Moving into Chapter 3, Boyd explores the use of the Old Testament by the New, and considers what principles we post-apostolic interpreters can draw from that example. The section is largely reminiscent of Peter Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation*, with Boyd predictably arguing that the creative interpretive hermeneutic of the New Testament authors in their use of the Old Testament is also normative for interpreters today. However, Boyd pushes the point farther than most by saying that "when we study the manner in which NT authors cite and allude to the OT, it becomes clear that finding Christ in Scripture was a far more pressing concern for them than discerning an OT author's originally intended meaning."¹¹ Boyd thus departs strongly from the post-Enlightenment emphasis on grammatical-historical exegesis as being the bedrock of Scriptural study.

While Boyd's view is far outside the contemporary western mainstream, to an extent he is utilizing hermeneutic methods which were prominent in both the Middle Ages and ancient Christianity. However, it would behoove us to not push this claim too far lest we wind up with some form of the Four Sense model of medieval interpretation. Careful scholarship and grammatical-historical exegesis are extremely valuable tools (a statement with which Boyd would almost certainly agree); the danger of which we should steer clear is the temptation to make them primary at the expense of the deeper theological meaning.

To develop his case, Boyd begins by discussing how the gospels (especially Matthew) portray Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's story; Boyd loosely links such an interpretive framework to the *peshet* method of hermeneutics. As one example, Matthew 2:17 draws on Jeremiah 31:15, though the latter text was not predictive; Matthew reinterprets it and applies it to Herod's massacre. Boyd also cites the use of Psalm 69:21 by John 19:28-29 to prove the same point: while the Old Testament text is not predictive, the New Testament authors are reinterpreting portions of the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

Old Testament in light of Christ. Boyd also highlights Paul's oft-cited allegorical interpretation of the Israelites in the wilderness found in 1 Corinthians 10, as well as the argument of Hebrews that the Old Covenant only provided a shadow for which Christ and the New Covenant are the substance.

Closing out this section, Boyd acknowledges that his interpretive strategy will probably not land well on readers today, and he distances himself from the allegorical excesses of certain strands of ancient and medieval interpretation which contrived hidden meaning in virtually every passage. Nevertheless, Boyd argues, that is no reason to discard the guiding principle of this ancient hermeneutic: that we must read the entire Bible through the lens of the person and work of Christ. He then proceeds to consider how various theologians throughout the ages have handled such interpretive issues.

Boyd says that while the proto-orthodox Christians utilized a wide range of hermeneutic methods, "most shared the willingness of NT authors to go to creative extremes to find Christ in the OT.... While early Christian thinkers did not generally consider the original meaning of passages in the OT to be irrelevant, they nevertheless considered it to be merely 'preparatory' for the fuller meaning that was unlocked when these passages were interpreted in the light of Christ."¹² An early Christian tradition, Boyd notes, viewed the scroll of Revelation 5 as the Scriptures, with writing both inside and out. The reader must cross over the outer writing (the letter) to reach the inner writing (the spirit). From the early Church onward through the Middle Ages, theologians assumed that all of Scripture is summed up in the person and work of Christ.

Boyd references Gregory of Nyssa, John Cassian, and Origen as examples of significant early theologians who believed that violent Old Testament portraits of God which did not evidently look like Christ were "unworthy of God" (or, in Boyd's terms, "sub-Christ-like portraits of

¹²Ibid., 116.

God”), but which nevertheless were God-breathed and somehow pointed to Christ. He also discusses how both Justin Martyr and Irenaeus explained such portrayals as a result of progressive revelation. Through these and other interpretive strategies, the early Christians—increasingly isolated from Judaism—held firm to the Old Testament as inspired Scripture while also insisting that supreme hermeneutic priority must be given to the person and work of Christ.

Boyd also briefly explores theological interpretation in the works of Martin Luther and John Calvin, and while he wisely does not press this argument too far, there is certainly something to be said for Luther’s claim that Moses and the Old Testament prophets are like a wax candle which fades into insignificance compared to Jesus. Yet far more important in the Reformation section of Boyd’s historical analysis are the Anabaptists, whom Boyd argues were driven by a Christocentric narrative theology. The Anabaptists foreshadowed what has become in contemporary theology the interpretive principle that “where a passage is located within this grand narrative is essential to determining the meaning it has for we who know the grand narrative as a whole, and this meaning may go well beyond, and even be quite different from, the meaning the passage had at the time it was written.”¹³

After briefly discussing the Anabaptist principle of the hermeneutics of obedience, Boyd moves into the modern era, citing Karl Barth as the major factor in reviving Christocentrism in the twentieth century. He proceeds to reference other notable modern theologians who have expounded this thinking, including Brevard Childs, Peter Leithart, Vern Poythress, Miroslav Volf, Kevin Vanhoozer, Pope Benedict XVI, Thomas Torrance, and Graeme Goldsworthy. He then follows up with a brief refutation against the charge of Christomonism.

In Chapter 4, Boyd begins to hone in on how we actually utilize Christocentrism. In other words, specifically what about Christ forms our

¹³ *Ibid.*, 126.

interpretive lens? The cross, Boyd argues, must be primary, for it is not necessarily good news in and of itself that Jesus is the perfect revelation of God; the news is good because the God revealed by Jesus is of beautiful character. One may observe that Boyd's point here suffers from tautology; if God is the source of all that is true, good, and beautiful, then how can God's character be judged by some outside standard of beauty? Herein lies a key problem with large swaths of progressive evangelicalism which often seek to define 'love' or 'looking like Jesus' apart from the narrative of the New Testament itself. How can we know the character and person of Christ apart from the apostolic witness? Boyd himself certainly does not advocate for such thinking, but his statements on what constitute beauty and goodness at times inadvertently walk that fine line.

Boyd then briefly expounds the Johannine teaching that God is love. We cannot view God's love alongside things like his justice or wrath; love is intrinsically part of God's very being. "If God's eternal essence is love, then to experience God is to experience perfect love."¹⁴ The sin in the heart of the wicked is what causes them to experience God's love as wrath. Therefore, reasons Boyd, we should be immediately skeptical of Old Testament portraits of God's wrath as volitional violence as somehow being consistent expressions of the intrinsic love of God. Yet while it may be true that love is intrinsic to God's being whereas wrath is not, does that prove that God would not be angry (and in some sense, violent) against evil on account of his love? After all, if God's loving purpose for creation is worship, then it follows that God's love would lead to anger at the anti-creational forces of idolatry and chaos which threaten *shalom*. Anger does not necessarily equate to violence, but perhaps Boyd assumes his conclusion here a bit too quickly, though he discusses his take on God's wrath in much more detail later in the book.

Boyd identifies Augustine as the primary origin of the alleged misinterpretation of the love of God. While Augustine's 'Rule of Love'

¹⁴Ibid., 146.

hermeneutic had good intentions, it was misapplied on account of Augustine's Platonism. Philosophically committed to the pre-Christian idea that a supreme being must be immutable, impassable, and timeless, Augustine reasoned that love was an internal disposition which could be separated from external action. Therefore, both God and Christians could love their enemies internally and still destroy them externally. Augustine extended this even to intra-Christian ecclesiastic disputes, using Luke 14:16-24 as justification for inflicting violence on alleged heretics.

With Augustine's view as a foundation, the post-Constantinian Church became much more comfortable with viewing the Old Testament's violent depictions of God as co-equal revelations alongside Christ, which also had the unfortunate effect of inspiring church-sanctioned state violence. However, the last century of renewed Christocentric theology has brought with it a sharpening of Augustine's Rule of Love by specifically orienting it around the cross. 1 John 3:16 teaches that we know what love is by looking at Christ crucified, and that this necessarily connects to how Christians must live. For God to step down from his glory and suffer the abuse, torture and spiritual agony of the crucifixion for his enemies (Rom 5:8-10), to become our sin (2 Cor 5:21), and to become a curse for us (Gal 3:13; Mt 27:46), is what best represents the love of God. Thus Boyd, turning a phrase from Anselm, writes that "the cross is that revelation beyond which none greater can be conceived."¹⁵

In Chapter 5, Boyd continues to discuss his theology of the cross. The gospels, particularly the synoptics, function as a narrative build-up to the climax of Jesus' crucifixion. Again returning to Luke 24, Boyd cites Jesus' own claim that the Old Testament pointed to the suffering of the Messiah prior to his glorification. This theme is also expounded in 1 Corinthians 15, Acts 3, and Acts 26. The cross is then set forth as an example for Christian living in Luke 9:23, Luke 14:27, 1 Peter 2:20-22 and elsewhere.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

This way of life is so counter-intuitive, it challenges all of the world's conventional wisdom and flips it on its head. Indeed, the very concept of a crucified messiah was foreign; a crucified messiah would be assumed a failed messiah.

Boyd explores ways in which Jesus' public ministry carried this cruciform character: exorcising demons, touching lepers, socializing with prostitutes, engaging the poor, welcoming Samaritans and Romans, and other such actions which were abhorrent to many customs within Second Temple Judaism. He then moves into the Gospel of John and its focus on the intra-Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son culminating in Jesus' voluntary submission at the cross. Through this action, Jesus also drives out Satan and liberates his people from bondage to sin.

In addition, the cross is also central to Pauline theology. It is the focus of Philippians 2:6-11, is critical to numerous passages in Galatians, and is equated with the gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:17-23. For Paul, Christ crucified was the very heart of Christianity (1 Cor 2:2), and Pauline theology holds it out as the preeminent display of God's love (Rom 5:8; Eph 5:1-2), the means of evil's defeat (1 Cor 2:6-8 ; Col 2:14-15), the basis of atonement for sin (Rom 3:15, 5:9; Eph 1:7), the foundation of human reconciliation (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:14-21; Col 1:20 ; Eph 2:14-16), the means by which people are healed and made righteous (Rom 5:15-19, 6:6; 2 Cor 13:4; Phil 3:10), and the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18, 24). It also provides the example for Pauline ethics (e.g., Eph 5:1-2; 1 Cor 16:14; 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:4-5). The allegation that Paul endorsed violence in certain portions of the epistles is addressed in Appendix III.

Discussing Revelation, Boyd says the cross is the interpretive key to the book. Reasoning from Revelation 5:1-10, he highlights that it is specifically the slaughtered Lamb of God who is worthy to open the scroll. Christ is worthy because he paradoxically resolved the cosmic conflict by laying down his life. He conquers his enemies by the sword that proceeds from his mouth, that is, his word (Rev 1:16, 2:16, 19:15, 21). When he

appears soaked in blood (Revelation 19:13), it is his own, not the blood of his slaughtered enemies. His heavenly army imitates his cruciform leadership (Revelation 14:4) and thus triumphs over darkness with love (Revelation 12:9-11). Revelation therefore subverts and reinterprets violent imagery in light of the cross. Boyd treats this subject in greater detail in Appendix IV.

Boyd briefly returns to Hebrews, as well as 1 Peter, for some additional discussion of how they highlight the centrality of the cross, followed by a concise treatment of how the ordinances of communion and baptism bear witness to the cross. He then conducts an analysis of the ethics of Christian nonviolence which, while not the subject of this book, he certainly could not get away without mentioning. Boyd's discussion here is balanced and helpful, but readers specifically wanting an in-depth and contemporary scholarly analysis of Christian nonviolence would be better off consulting the work of Richard Hays, Stanley Hauerwas, or Walter Wink.

Boyd then turns to the cleansing of the temple. He notes the scholarly consensus is that Jesus' actions were symbolic and prophetic. While Jesus was righteously angry and made a whip (Jn 2:15), there is no exegetical basis for thinking he must have actually used the whip on humans or animals, and the most plausible reading is that the whip was used for its common purpose of driving out animals through the sound of the cracking. Also, if Jesus had actually whipped any temple officers, he would have been immediately arrested. Lastly, considering this episode in light of the nonviolent ethic of the rest of Jesus' ministry, it becomes clear that the temple cleansing was a nonviolent yet staunchly-prophetic action, and Jesus links it to the cross and the coming atonement which would take place in his own body rather than in the temple (Jn 2:19-22).

Boyd briefly treats the slightly more dubious subject of verbal violence in the ministry of Jesus (such as the way he spoke to the Pharisees in Mt 23), arguing that Jesus' statements were never intended to ridicule or embarrass someone, but rather to call them to repentance. For example,

even amidst verbal rebuke, Jesus’ emotional depth towards the lost Israelites is evident in Matthew 23:37-38. While this is all well and good, Boyd may come a bit too close for comfort to the caricatured idea of an ‘easygoing Jesus’ who would never want to offend or upset anyone. This is not Boyd’s view, and it is granted that he expounds what he means by arguing that all of Jesus’ (even harsh) words are ultimately for a godly and loving purpose, but even raising the question of ‘verbal violence’ will likely strike some readers as questionable.

Boyd closes the chapter by discussing eschatological violence and the supposed necessity of violence for true justice. Those who interpret the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18:21-25) to conclude that God will ultimately slaughter his enemies miss the point, Boyd argues, because the core principle of the parable is to teach the disciples to forgive not just seven times, but seventy times seven. We cannot conclude from Luke 18:1-8 that God is an unjust judge, or from Luke 16:1-9 that we should be dishonest managers. The parables are intended to teach powerful spiritual truths, not to illustrate a 1:1 equivalence with reality. Boyd also says we must anchor our concepts of justice and wrath in God as supremely revealed on the cross, not what we think justice should mean; this subject is treated more later on.

Chapter 6 is a rejoinder to two specific criticisms which may be raised against the previous chapters. First, Boyd takes on certain (non-Christian) scholars who claim that the cross and a theology of redemption were not particularly relevant in Christianity until after Constantine; he makes quick work of such a view. Next, he takes up the objection that the history of Christian interpretation has not focused on the centrality of the cross as much as one would expect if it were so obvious. He already demonstrated the relevant historical and scriptural precedent in earlier chapters, and while this section does contain some new material, it is not entirely clear why he chooses to bring the subject up again at this point in the book. Unfortunately, Boyd also hitches the Cruciform Thesis to a somewhat canned depiction of the determinism/free-will debate (specifically in

reference to Augustine acting as a watershed in patristic thought), and offers very brief criticism of the work of some Reformed theologians. This section is a bit clumsy and sparse on argumentation, and Boyd's pressing on it will likely alienate some otherwise-sympathetic readers from the Reformed camp; after all, even Barth and Moltmann—cited as influences on Boyd's thesis—hail from the Reformed tradition. Overall, the chapter does bring some new material to the table, but it is material that could have been better incorporated into other chapters or an appendix, and some other parts still should have been left out altogether.

In Chapter 7, Boyd broadly discusses the Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh's violence. He begins with a helpful reminder that contrary to the skewed representation of people like Richard Dawkins, the normative portrayal of Yahweh in the Old Testament is as a relational God who, on account of *hesed*, relentlessly pursues *shalom* between God and man. Boyd draws on some of the relevant scholarship to demonstrate why we cannot interpret Torah merely as a *suzerain/vassal* treaty (although it does carry those elements); in contrast to the pagan gods of the Ancient Near East, Yahweh's covenant with Israel is intrinsically familial, paternal, and matrimonial.

Moving into specific controversial texts, Boyd reminds us to eschew any sort of Neo-Marcionism. Paraphrasing Kenton Sparks, Boyd instead says that while we must respect the entire Bible, "we are not respecting the Bible when we try to minimize, rationalize, justify, or otherwise soften its offensive material..."¹⁶ He pastorally says to the uncomfortable reader that "the God we are called to wrestle with is one who puts the highest priority on honest authenticity..."¹⁷ and that in the fashion of the ancient Jews, a mark of true faith involves candidly wrestling with God. Boyd also prepares readers for his rhetorical descriptions of Old Testament violence in extremely negative terms, referencing similar rhetoric by John Calvin,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

John Stott and others to make the point that his wording is neither novel nor sacrilegious.

Boyd first discusses the *herem* commands, weaving in ethical considerations, comparing Yahweh's depicted actions with those of other Ancient Near Eastern deities, and demonstrating that divinely-sanctioned holy war was a common view of pagan nations. The pagan gods demanded blood sacrifice and the destruction of whole people groups, and so also Yahweh is sometimes depicted in the Old Testament. In this section and repeatedly throughout *CWG*, Boyd cites and offers refutations of Paul Copan's work; he later explains that this is because Copan provides the strongest contemporary defense of the view that Yahweh actually did (righteously) engage in the acts of violence attributed to him in the Old Testament.

Boyd next considers various acts of violence that Yahweh is said to have ordered Moses to carry out, as well as other examples of delegated violence from books like Joshua, Judges, and 1-2 Samuel. Boyd then summarizes key violent prescriptions from the Old Testament law, followed by a myriad of other examples of divine violence including the Genesis flood, the judgments on Egypt, sending angels of destruction or deception, the striking down of Uzzah, consuming the sons of Aaron with fire, sending nations against other nations as instruments of divine judgment, causing acts of cannibalism and mass slaughter, and imprecatory Psalms. Boyd concludes the chapter by saying he hopes to have demonstrated the vast gap between the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament and the perfect revelation of Yahweh found in Christ crucified for his enemies, and that it is incumbent upon us to search deeply for how these Scriptures bear witness to Jesus.

In the next two chapters, Boyd analyzes and offers responses to other schools of thought on how we should interpret Yahweh's violence as depicted in the Old Testament. Chapter 8 is a lengthy refutation of Neo-Marcionism, including a defense of the infallibility (but not the inerrancy) of the entire Bible. The key principle, Boyd argues, is whether we

approach Scripture theologically or historically-critically. He does not discount the historical-critical method and even acknowledges its relative necessity, but he argues that it can only take us so far; if we are to rightly understand the Scriptures, we must move beyond the surface meaning and into the deeper theological meaning. Drawing on Barth, Boyd says we must take the text as 'literal' within the world of the biblical narrative, which is a different question from whether it 'actually happened' in history. Regarding the assertion that Jesus cited the Old Testament as 'actual history,' Boyd responds that this is an anachronistic, post-Enlightenment assumption being imposed on the text. For interpreters in ancient Judaism, the Scriptures were God-breathed, and that had nothing to do with the modern concept of historical consciousness.

After a brief discussion on the differences between ancient and modern views of history, Boyd offers a theological defense of the idea that God could inspire a text which records events that did not 'actually happen.' His argument ultimately centers on the historical Jesus: because Jesus was the literal, historical, crucified and risen Son of God, and because Jesus—as an ancient Jew steeped in ancient Jewish methods of interpretation—treated the Old Testament as God-breathed, we must treat it the same way. Inspiration, Boyd argues, applies to the text of the Old Testament, not to its conformity to 'actual history' as judged by post-Enlightenment standards. The chapter closes with a helpful discussion of the limitations of what contemporary evangelicals consider 'biblical inerrancy,' and Boyd's preference for 'infallibility' understood within the context of God's covenant faithfulness.

In Chapter 9, Boyd presents an argument for why synthesizing violent portrayals of God with Christ is unworkable. He begins with Romans 9:14-24, drawing on pre-Augustinian theology to counter the later Augustinian interpretation. The only Old Testament passage which significantly develops the potter/clay analogy is Jeremiah 18:1-10, and there it refers to the wisdom of God in responding to nations. Boyd also argues that man's ethical intuition is damaged by sin, but it is not completely destroyed; by

natural revelation, we can recognize good and evil with some sort of objectivity. If an action that would be considered evil if done by anyone else somehow becomes good when done by God, then man could not possibly have any real natural law basis for objective ethics. To fall into a might-makes-right approach to ethics, Boyd says, is to endorse the moral philosophy of Nietzsche. Boyd also briefly attempts to bring psychology into the argument, but he clearly steps outside his area of expertise and it is not done particularly well. Thankfully, he then turns back to the primary theological argumentation of the book, and observes that the depiction of Jesus as 'divine emperor' only appeared after the time of Constantine.

Boyd briefly raises the issue of the necessity of God judging sin, reaffirming that the wrath of God is real; what it actually entails, however, is another matter. This subject is dealt with more in Volume II. Boyd also briefly considers the claim that God's violence is centered on a greater good, acknowledging some positive points of this school of thought but finding it ultimately unconvincing and inconsistent with Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of progressive revelation and divine accommodation: the idea that God sometimes portrayed himself to be different than he actually is in order to reach finite people, particularly in the context of the Ancient Near East. While Boyd affirms certain portions of this thinking, he reasons it cannot be used to claim that God actually commanded or engaged in violence. To do so, he says, would be another rehashing of pre-Christian ideas about what God must be like. Boyd also observes that the Old Testament trajectory does not consistently minimize or lessen violence as we should expect of a truly progressive revelation and, most importantly, to say that God engaged in any violence (albeit it in progressively decreasing degrees) would necessarily qualify the supreme revelation of God's character found in Christ crucified. Boyd also observes that to whatever extent people do not have a true understanding of God, they logically must be embracing a false

understanding; looking to Christ crucified as the supreme revelation of God solves these difficulties. Nevertheless, Boyd holds that progressive revelation and divine accommodation, when understood not as God accommodating his character but as his breaking through man's sinful perceptions, is a necessary component of the Cruciform Hermeneutic. Readers may here think of Peter Enns' dictum that "God lets his children tell the story."

In the subsequent chapters, Boyd begins to exposit a specific framework for the Cruciform Hermeneutic. Chapter 10 is a detailed discussion of Origen, and the fact that Boyd utilizes his thought so heavily is guaranteed to draw criticism; while Origen is undoubtedly one of the most influential theologians in all of Church history, he is not without controversy and detractors. However, Boyd also reminds the reader that the principles of this hermeneutic are firmly grounded in a wide range of Christian interpretation stretching back to the ancient world, and do not rely solely on Origen. In fact, Boyd tells us, allegorical exegesis was often used against Marcionism, Gnosticism, and other early sects which were skeptical of the Old Testament's authority.

Chapter 11 opens by discussing the modern theologians Boyd considers the most important forerunners to the Cruciform Hermeneutic: Thomas Torrance, Anthony Thiselton, Richard Hays, George Knight, John Goldingay, and Jürgen Moltmann. Boyd then moves into an analysis of the relational aspects of a God-breathed Scripture, arguing that God does not mechanically overtake the human authors, but rather the Holy Spirit worked through them to produce texts which bear the imprint of both the divine and the human.

To those who would then question the New Testament authors on the grounds that God may have divinely accommodated to their understanding as he did the Old Testament authors, Boyd acknowledges that there is also divine accommodation in the New Testament, yet he reminds us that the center of divine revelation is the historical reliability of the person and work of Christ himself. The reason there are conflicting

views within the Old Testament, Boyd says, is because God’s method of inspiring the biblical authors is noncoercive and dialectical, whereas in the person of Christ there was no sinful resistance or conflict with the Father’s will. And as it takes faith to see beyond the outwardly human appearance of the cross to discern the supreme revelation of God, so also it takes faith to look beyond the violent portraits of God in the Old Testament to see Jesus. While Boyd’s explanation is plausible, he does not really flesh out the question of how divine accommodation may work in reference to the apostolic writings, that is, authoritative writings by men who are not Christ and hence who do have some sinful resistance. The latter part of the chapter features a discussion on direct versus indirect revelation, and concludes with additional analysis of how the New Testament (particularly Paul) utilizes the Old Testament. In short, we must look beyond the veil (2 Corinthians 3) to find Christ in the text.

In Chapter 12, Boyd provides more detail on the rise of historical-critical exegesis, as well as the contemporary revival of theological exegesis that was inspired by Karl Barth. Because the Bible uniquely is the written Word of God, it cannot be treated just like any other text; it requires the Holy Spirit and the Church (as the community of faith) to correctly interpret. As such, it is impossible to objectively understand the Bible simply by using historical-critical methods. However, historical-critical exegesis still plays an important (though qualified) role for the Church; our theological exegesis should begin by considering how the original audience would have probably understood the text, but should not attempt the *prima facie* impossible task of analyzing the author’s psychology to objectively uncover his intended meaning. Boyd refers to this as his “Conservative Hermeneutical Principle.”

Boyd then discusses the Bible as a record of God’s covenant faithfulness—the bedrock for conducting theological interpretation—with the cross serving as the ultimate example of that faithfulness. Also critical to conducting theological exegesis, Boyd writes, is an acknowledgment of *sensus plenior*, with the cross serving as the key to a text’s ultimate

revelatory meaning. He thus holds that “whatever a passage might have meant to its original audience, we should be able to directly or indirectly discern in it the same cruciform character of God that was revealed on the cross...”¹⁸

Borrowing from Richard Hays, Boyd says it requires a conversion of the imagination to discern the *sensus plenior* of violent portraits of God in the Old Testament through the lens of the crucified Christ. We must also, contra much of the secular application of the historical-critical method, read the Bible as a united narrative about Christ, not merely as a collection of books. By seeing Christ crucified as the central revelatory act around which the entire Bible revolves, we are able to rightly understand it, reject sin, and to grow in faith and Christ-like character. Furthermore, we can do so while upholding the inspiration and authority of the God-breathed texts of violence, while also renouncing their surface depictions based on the authority and lens of Christ crucified.

Thus concludes Volume I. By this point, Boyd has laid down a very plausible thesis that essentially runs thus: Christ crucified for sinners is the supreme and unqualified revelation of God’s true character; prior revelations are authoritative, but to a lesser degree, and consist in elements of God’s true character mixed with obscured portraits of God discolored by man’s sinful nature; all interpretations of the Bible and God’s being must be filtered through Christ crucified for his enemies as the final interpretive authority; and as such, the violent portrayals of Yahweh in the Old Testament cannot depict God as he truly is, for this would conflict with the supreme revelation of Christ crucified. While some of the particulars suggested by Boyd suffer from various weaknesses—several of which have been discussed in this review—the core of the thesis remains essentially historically-based and exegetically sound.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 534-535.

III. “THE CRUCIFORM THESIS” (VOLUME 2)

I mentioned at the outset that this review would spend less time on Volume II insofar as the primary argumentation for Boyd’s thesis occurs in Volume I. The lengthier Volume II consists mostly of Boyd’s theological exposition—assuming the validity of the Cruciform Hermeneutic—of how various depictions of Yahweh’s violence in the Old Testament point to Christ. The introduction to the second volume begins with a metaphorical illustration involving Boyd witnessing his beloved wife of many years attacking a homeless man, totally out of her normal character. He returns to this metaphor multiple times throughout Volume II to illustrate the point that if we see depictions of God that do not evidently look like Jesus, then we need to examine them more deeply to find the true meaning within those depictions.

Chapters 13 and 14 are a broad preface of how to understand the portrayals of Yahweh’s violence in the Old Testament. If God is supremely revealed in his stooping to the cross, then stooping to accommodate finite humans must somehow be intrinsic to the being of God. Furthermore, this accommodation ultimately brings us (relationally, not ontologically) into the loving fellowship of the Trinity itself. Boyd writes that paradoxically, “the more a scriptural accommodation *conceals* God’s true nature on its surface, the more profoundly it *reveals* God’s true nature in its depths.”¹⁹ Such a conclusion could possibly be deduced from a number of specific examples, but stating it as a blanket truth is a rather aggressive proposition that Boyd does not definitively prove.

Using Aquinas’s Aristotelianism as his example, Boyd explores and critiques classical theism’s conception of God’s being. Rather than reasoning from philosophy what we think God must be like, Boyd argues we must start with Christ crucified as the authoritative and perfect revelation of God. After additional discussion regarding Luther and the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 651.

literary masking of God's being within the text of the Bible, Boyd then draws (with heavy qualification) on Rene Girard's insights that Jesus, as the perfect and sinless man, was the ultimate scapegoat, and his sacrificial death thereby exposes and disarms the forces of evil and all the violence they entail.

God is the heavenly missionary, argues Boyd, who assumes an appearance that resembles other Ancient Near Eastern warrior gods to accommodate the sinful hearts of his people until the coming of Christ. The peoples' violent portrayals of Yahweh, often so similar to the pagan gods of the surrounding nations, "reflect the culturally conditioned mindset of their authors more than they reflect authentic spiritual insights into the true character and will of God."²⁰

Boyd says the ability to see Christ in Scripture goes beyond study alone; it also depends on the heart (Jn 5:39-42). If the words of Jesus are not clear, it is because the listener is unable to hear (Jn 8:43). In other words, God's appearance is conditioned by the heart of the observer (2 Sam 22:26-27; Ps 18:25-26). Sometimes, God withholds knowledge that his people are unable to bear (John 16:12; Mk 4:33-34). Like Yahweh hiding Moses in the cleft of the rock as his glory passed by, so also God accommodates to our level of ability to discern spiritual truths. Nevertheless, God's true character breaks through even obscured portraits, including the eschatological hope of *shalom* (Mic 4:3; cf. Isa 2:4; Ps 46:9-10; cf. Hos 2:18), and the deficiencies of the world's ways of war (Ps 146:3-5; Hos 10:13-14; Isa 31:1). The rest of these chapters constitute detailed discussion of other alleged accommodations of God to Ancient Near Eastern culture, as well as comparisons of Yahweh to the pagan gods.

Chapters 15–20 are an extensive, book-length discussion of the mechanics of God's wrath, which Boyd refers to as "Divine Aikido." The Japanese martial art *aikido* (合気道) does not initiate force against an

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 703-704.

enemy; instead, it turns the enemy's own force back on him, not only to neutralize the violence, but also to show the attacker the destructive evil within his heart. The wrath of God is dreadful and fierce, Boyd acknowledges, but it consists not in God directly crushing his enemies, but rather withdrawing his protective presence and allowing them to crush themselves under the weight of their own evil, or to be crushed by the cosmic forces of darkness which are only restrained by God's hand. The purpose of all God's judgments (except for final judgment), Boyd says, is redemptive in intent. The *aikido* analogy is certainly not perfect, but Boyd also does not treat it as such.

Of course, Boyd's theology of judgment has implications for how we understand the atonement, and Boyd here argues for the Christus Victor view over and against the penal substitution view. The former is probably a more evident fit with Boyd's understanding of Divine Aikido, and while Boyd himself seems to imply that penal substitution cannot be squared with the Cruciform Hermeneutic, a plausible response could be made that even if we understand God's judgment as Divine Aikido, that doesn't necessarily preclude Christ standing in the place of sinners as having a penal dimension. As N. T. Wright has persuasively argued in *The Day the Revolution Began*, God condemned Sin in the flesh of Christ (Rom 8:3); this is not the same thing as saying God punished Christ instead of punishing sinners, but it is nevertheless a penal act.²¹ In any case, a thorough study of atonement theory is certainly relevant to the Cruciform Hermeneutic, but outside the scope of CWG.

Boyd also briefly discusses the theory of Christocentric ultimate reconciliation (or universal redemption), and explains why he instead sides with the annihilationist (or conditional mortality) view of final judgment. While the Cruciform Hermeneutic could clearly fit with the ultimate reconciliation view, and potentially with the annihilationist view (as Boyd holds), one could also argue that the Cruciform Hermeneutic is

²¹ See N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion* (New York: HarperOne, 2017).

compatible with the eternal conscious torment view, so long as that torment is understood as God giving over the unredeemed to cosmic chaos and/or the misery of their own sin rather than directly afflicting them. A thorough analysis of the doctrine of final eschatological judgment is also outside CWG's scope, though Boyd presents a plausible (yet relatively short) argument for why he takes the annihilationist position. In fact, one of the key deficiencies of the book is that Boyd does not explore this specific (and most important) judgment in greater detail. For example, however one understands final judgment, how does Boyd reckon with those New Testament texts which seem to show God acting coercively (cf. Mt 8:11-12, 13:41-42; Jn 15:6; Rev 20:15)? The academic theological community would be well-served by Boyd exploring his understanding of God's eschatological wrath in greater depth, particularly in dialogue with leading scholars from the annihilationist and ultimate reconciliation camps.

Also in these chapters, as he has elsewhere, Boyd delves into the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man, including a discussion of what God does versus what God allows. Again, Boyd seems to argue that a Reformed or Augustinian view of God's sovereignty is incompatible with the Cruciform Hermeneutic, but the ethical tension of the theodicy problem that he purports to resolve by emphasizing man's free will is not actually solved at all; if God is sovereign, and makes a man knowing that he will sin and not be ultimately redeemed, then God is in some sense still the ultimate metaphysical linchpin of that person's damnation (however 'damnation' is understood). In this respect, Boyd's own thesis on divine sovereignty and free will also pairs well with his open theism, but that likewise does not solve the theodicy problem: even if one accepts a partly-open future as it pertains to God and time, because Boyd (as most open theists) affirms that God is sovereign, he still needs to contend with the fact that an omnipotent God set off a chain of events knowing that at least some humans would not be redeemed, or at least plausibly may not be redeemed. Holding to ultimate reconciliation would resolve this problem,

but Boyd is an annihilationist, hence his own take on the matter suffers from just as many apparent problems as the Reformed view. Despite Boyd’s protest to the contrary, squaring the Cruciform Hermeneutic with a Reformed understanding of divine sovereignty is entirely plausible, though it requires heavy nuance and undoubtedly has implications for how we view other subjects such as atonement and final judgment.

It is important to remember that Volume II consists of Boyd’s specific application of how he understands the Cruciform Hermeneutic developed in Volume I. While the second volume contains tremendous and well-researched insights, it is nevertheless very possible to embrace the principles of the Cruciform Hermeneutic without adopting Boyd’s specific interpretations. One could adhere to the central tenets of the Cruciform Hermeneutic and also believe in some form of eternal conscious torment at final judgment, or some type of Reformed understanding of divine sovereignty, or a variety of the penal substitutionary view of atonement. If one accepts the Cruciform Hermeneutic, they will likely find that their doctrine on these (and other) topics at the very least require reconsideration as to the specifics, but not necessarily their wholesale abandonment. The reader would do well to study Boyd’s work and make their own judgments regarding how it may apply (or not apply) to other elements of their theology.

Chapters 21-24 discuss how Boyd applies the Cruciform Hermeneutic to spiritual warfare, ranging from the creation motifs of Yahweh bringing order out of chaos, through the Old Testament portrayals of Yahweh doing battle against the pagan gods, on into the life and ministry and Christ, and ultimately culminating in the eschaton. Those who have read Walter Wink’s *Powers* trilogy will encounter a lot of familiar themes in these pages. Boyd presents a strong case for understanding the biblical narrative as reflecting the fundamental, overarching spiritual battle between God and the forces of evil, while also demonstrating why such a view is not Manichaeism. He covers many of the major topics one would expect to be raised concerning the Old Testament narratives of God’s

violence, shows how we can understand them against the backdrop of spiritual warfare, and explains his take on how they point to Jesus. Among other things, this includes the Great Flood, the conquest narratives, Job, imprecatory Psalms, Korah's rebellion, the Exodus plagues, the drowning of the Egyptian army, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Chapter 25 is a discussion of positive intra-biblical references to Old Testament heroes who were known for inflicting divinely-empowered violence, such as Elijah destroying the prophets of Baal, Elisha summoning bears on his detractors, and Samson's various adventures. Boyd ultimately attributes this to the concept of semi-autonomous divine power in Ancient Near Eastern thought: the idea that a god's power could be imbued into objects or people without the god itself directly controlling every use of that power. As a primary example, Boyd discusses the power which apparently dwelt physically within the Ark of the Covenant. The chapter is filled with valuable insight, though it does seem odd that it was made the last chapter of the book.

IV. POSTSCRIPT AND CONCLUSION

The postscript is a concise and well-written recapitulation of Boyd's argument. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is revealed as the slaughtered Lamb who conquers his enemies by dying for them (Rev 5:5-6, 19:11-13). The Lamb's sword is the word which proceeds from his mouth, and he conquers not by destroying flesh and blood (Eph 6:12), but by speaking truth that sets the captives free (Rev 19:15, 21; Jn 8:32). The lens of the crucified Christ reveals that God triumphs over evil and rules the world with cruciform love (Rev 5:5-6).

The breathing of God, through which he speaks to us in the Scriptures, is dialectical rather than unilateral, and the stooping of God on the cross reveals the love which is intrinsic to his nature. The crucifixion also supremely reveals the ugliness of sin and the judgment which Christ took upon himself. Because the cross is both God acting towards man and

allowing himself to be acted upon by man, the cross is the consummate example of dialectic revelation, and the 'sub-Christlike' portraits of God in the Old Testament therefore display both the beauty of Christ and the ugliness of human sin. Just as the supreme revelation of God is found by looking beyond the surface appearance of a crucified malefactor, so also we must peer deeply into the entirety of Scripture through this lens, and this is only truly possible when we grab hold of the lesson that God is completely and supremely revealed in Christ crucified. To do anything less is to exchange the clear and perfect revelation of God in Christ for an obscure, clouded revelation which has been made obsolete by the advent.

The cross is the supreme accommodation of God to reach sinful men, and contrary to any preconceived philosophical ideas of what we think God must be like, the cross shows us exactly what God is like. If a previous portrayal of God conflicts with this perfect revelation, it must be judged an accommodation to God's people at an earlier point in redemptive history.

The judgment of God consists not in violent affliction at the Lord's hand, but in the withdrawal of God's protecting and life-sustaining presence, wherein sinners are left to suffer the consequences of their evil and/or the destructive influence of the forces of darkness. God always triumphs over evil in this manner, and at the cross he turned the tables on Satan to cause the kingdom of darkness to seal its own demise. Spiritual warfare undergirds the entire biblical story. God's intent for judgment, furthermore, is redemptive rather than vindictive, and the final annihilation of the wicked is ultimately a merciful act.

Lastly, the Ancient Near Eastern principle of semi-autonomous divine power means that at times, God's people may have been able to use his divine power improperly and without his ethical consent; God is not directly causal when sinners use this power in ungodly ways.

Considering the whole scope of the biblical narrative and the unqualified supremacy of the revelation of God's character in the person

and work of Christ crucified, Boyd argues that we can and must see in that revelation “the permanent crucifixion of the warrior god.”²²

CWG is thoroughly-researched, deeply rooted in historic hermeneutics, and firmly oriented towards the edification of the Church. While there are certainly some weak or unnecessary points throughout the book, that is to be expected of any work of such length and depth. Boyd’s overall thesis is strong, historically-based, and steeped in biblical theology. No one could honestly dismiss its core conclusions without serious, ecumenically-informed study and consideration.

²² Ibid., 1261.